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Peter John Ott: From Gymnastics to Geraniums

Barbara A. Ross

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From Gymnastics to Geraniums

Local Research Project
Summer 1976.
Barbara A. Ross

Coming from a family of civicly and commercially active individuals, himself having been a leader in the youthful German community, Peter John Ott chose for himself a quieter world. The mature Ott found his happiness in his own home, in the joys of his children and the beauty of his flower garden.

A native of Monback, Germany,¹ George Ott and his family settled in Savannah in or about 1841.² Within his first five years in the United States, George, jointly with Nicolas Wolfe, purchased a farm on the Thunderbolt Road (Wheaton Street),³ property through which ran a road soon to be named Ott in George's honor.⁴ The farm, an apparent success both financially, as evidenced by the loans extended by George,⁵ and agriculturally, as evidenced by the twenty-eight pound cabbage grown there,⁶ was the home of the Ott family for a number of years, this being their residence at the time of Sherman's occupation of Savannah. That occupation touched the lives of the Otts directly as the soldiers of that army allowed the family a specific period of time in which to carry what they could into the house after which ^{the soldiers} took the vegetables and livestock left behind, never entering the house.⁷

The Ott family which immigrated from Germany consisted of George, his wife Catherine Siegfried,⁸ and their two small daughters, Barbara, born in 1839,⁹ and Anna, born in 1840;¹⁰ another child, Julia, was born in Georgia in 1847.¹¹ After Catherine's death on February 2, 1853, at the age of 37,¹² George returned to Germany where he married Elizabeth Siegfried, the younger sister of his first wife.¹³ This couple had two children, Peter John, born November 13, 1856,¹⁴ and Elizabeth A. (Lizzie), born in 1859.¹⁵

The world in which Peter (the principal interest of this paper) grew up was one with many ties to his parent's native land. George's name appearing on the papers selling the

property of the "Coffee Pot Church" indicates an affiliation of the Ott family with that ill-fated effort by a group of Lutherans to have services conducted in German.¹⁶ Peter himself spent a number of years in Germany where he learned to read and speak German as well as to speak French.¹⁷

The social education of the youthful Peter was also centered in his German heritage, as he participated in the activities of the Schuetzen Gessellschaft, a group of military origin¹⁸ which paid particular attention to the use of firearms.¹⁹ Peter's particular strength was his skill in shooting at creedmore targets, his marksmanship winning him both recognition and prizes.²⁰ He was also ~~quite~~ active in both the German Volunteers²¹ and the Turnverein Society, being elected an officer of that social organization²² and winning first prize in May 1878 and in July 1880 for his performances in the gymnastic competition²³ which was a prominent feature of the organization.²⁴

Peter's mother, Elizabeth, died November 17, 1864, four days after Peter's eighth birthday.²⁵ Ten years later, on October 27, 1874, his father, who suffered from bronchitis went out on the back stoop of his daughter, Barbara's home; and in an accident for which the newspaper gives George's nearsightedness credit, he fell over the bannister, fracturing his ribs. The fall proved fatal,²⁶ and George Ott died at the age of sixty-two years and five days leaving an estate consisting primarily of real estate and stocks to be divided between his children.²⁷

Mr. F.J. Ruckert, husband of George's eldest, Barbara, served as administrator of the estate which, no will having been

left, was divided equally between Barbara (Mrs. F.J. Ruckert), Anna (Mrs. Henry Sack) and Peter J. Ott,²⁸ the surviving children of George Ott at the time of the distribution of the estate in 1879: Julia (Mrs. John Christian) having died in 1873,²⁹ prior to the death of her father, and Lizzie having died of yellow fever in 1876,³⁰ between the death of George Ott and the final settlement of his property.

By the settlement of that estate Peter received:

10 shares of Central Railroad and Banking Company of Georgia.

15 shares of Atlantic and Gulf Railroad Company

2 shares of Coastline Railroad³¹

Lot 4 Sloper Tything, Percival Ward

40 lots in Kelly Ward

White Bluff second section Farm Lot 5 Tycornell Tything, Derby Ward (property referred to in later documents as lots 36, 37, 44, 45, 52, 53, 60 Cummings Ward)³²

Between the death of his father and his marriage, Peter worked as a clerk and a grocer, boarding in three different locations, Bryan, Congress, and Bolton Streets.³³ The Congress Street address being that of the lock and gunsmith establishment of Christian D. Sack.³⁴ And in 1883 Peter began a three year career with that establishment³⁵ learning during that time to repair locks and guns and to make keys.³⁶

The year 1883 saw another beginning in Peter's life, this one of a more lasting and romantic nature; for on the second of December 1883, after obtaining a license in Chatham County

on November 28, A. W. Clisby married Mr. Peter J. Ott and Miss Emelie O. Thieme in the Presbyterian Church of Macon, Georgia.³⁷

The Otts boarded with Christian D. Sack for two years; then in 1885, the same year in which the Sack business is changed in its listing from Christian D to Henry Sack, they moved to the home of Henry Sack on Second Street.³⁸ The couple moved again in 1886 to board at 198 President ^{Street} for three years, one of those years, Peter working in 1888, in the restaurant, saloon, of George Schwarz at 172 Broughton Street.³⁹

Changes of both residence and employment came in 1889 as the Otts, who now had a daughter Amelia Marie,⁴⁰ moved to 23½ Montgomery where they remained for two years as Peter operated a billiards and pool establishment at 174 Broughton Street.⁴¹ However, in 1893 that address was occupied by the Women's Christian Temperance Union and W.H. Tarver.⁴² Peter's occupation is, in 1893, not recorded, and so it remains until 1899 with the exception of 1897 when he is listed in the City Directory as being retired.⁴³ During this period the Otts, a family of five by this time, George Ott having been born on March 29, 1891⁴⁴ and Elizabeth Georgia having been born October 10, 1892,⁴⁵ lived first at 109½ York;⁴⁶ then in 1897 they moved to the three story brick house Peter had built in 1892, at 17-19 York Street, upon the Percival Ward property he had inherited from his father.⁴⁷

In 1899 Peter became the manager of the saloon and cafe of Gustave Fox located at 21 Broughton Street. He continued at this occupation for the next nine years, losing in 1902 the title of manager as the occupant of the property ceased to be

listed as Gustave Fox, his name being replaced by that of Peter Ott.⁴⁸ This establishment, called by the Ott family a tavern, offered a meal prepared by Emelie Ott with the purchase of a nickle beer.⁴⁹ In 1908 Peter left this occupation relying upon his real estate investments as his source of income for the remainder of his life.⁵⁰

The financial status or economic activities of Peter Ott are only partially completed by an account that fails to record his dealings in real estate for both investment purposes and as a medium of exchange used in the securing of loans. The first of the loans secured, however, required no transfer of land, Peter being allowed to borrow \$5500 from the Germania Bank in 1897. The reduction of this debt over the next eleven years to a sum of \$1100 made it possible for Peter to borrow an additional \$2000 in November 1908, the year in which his trade in the Broughton Street tavern was terminated.⁵¹

The Cummings Ward property, lots 36, 37, 44, 45,⁵² 53; 60, was frequently used in the securing of funds for short periods of time. Lots 53 and 60 were sold for \$600 in 1886, in a deed of debt, for that purpose,⁵² the property being repurchased in 1890 for \$800.⁵³ In May of 1906 the property was divided and was again sold through a deed of debt, lots 44, 45, 52, 53 going to the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Georgia⁵⁴ and lots 36, 37, and 60 going to the Ladies Diocesan Missionary Aid Society of Christ Church.⁵⁵ Each of the portions of real estate were sold for \$537.50,⁵⁶ and both debts were repaid in July of 1910.⁵⁷ The Kelly Ward property, a portion of the original

farm property bought by George Ott⁵⁸ was sold to the Savannah Land Company on April 18, 1890 for \$18,000.⁵⁹

On lot 4 of Sloper Thything, Percival Ward, Peter chose to build a home for his family; in what was assessed as a \$1250 improvement on that York Street Property,⁶⁰ Peter built a three story brick structure⁶¹ in which he and his family were to live forseventeen years.⁶² They moved from this home to take up residence at 18 Brady Street in 1914⁶³ after the 1913 sale of the York Street property to George Miller,⁶⁴ an attorney⁶⁵ who dealt in real estate,⁶⁶ for "\$100 plus valuable considerations."⁶⁷

Among his investment purchases was that of seven lots of the newly divided property of the Forest City Gun Club for \$560 on November 10, 1919;⁶⁸ he sold that property two months later on January 16, 1920 for \$1000.⁶⁹

Giving up the tavern as a means of support, Peter invested in rental property in order to assure himself of an income.⁷⁰ The first such purchase was that on July 25, 1913 of lots 7 and 8 Law Ward for \$1400.⁷¹ The purchase was made from Samuel K. Platshek⁷² a man who was party to a number of real estate transactions with George H. Miller,⁷³ the man from whom Peter was to recieve valuable considerations.

His other investment was made jointly with John Ernst, as they payed \$6750 to Kena Falligant Travis on January 9, 1914 for lot H Falligant Ward.⁷⁴

Behind, and in many ways beyond, these ventures in business stood Peter Ott, the son of a German immigrant, married to a

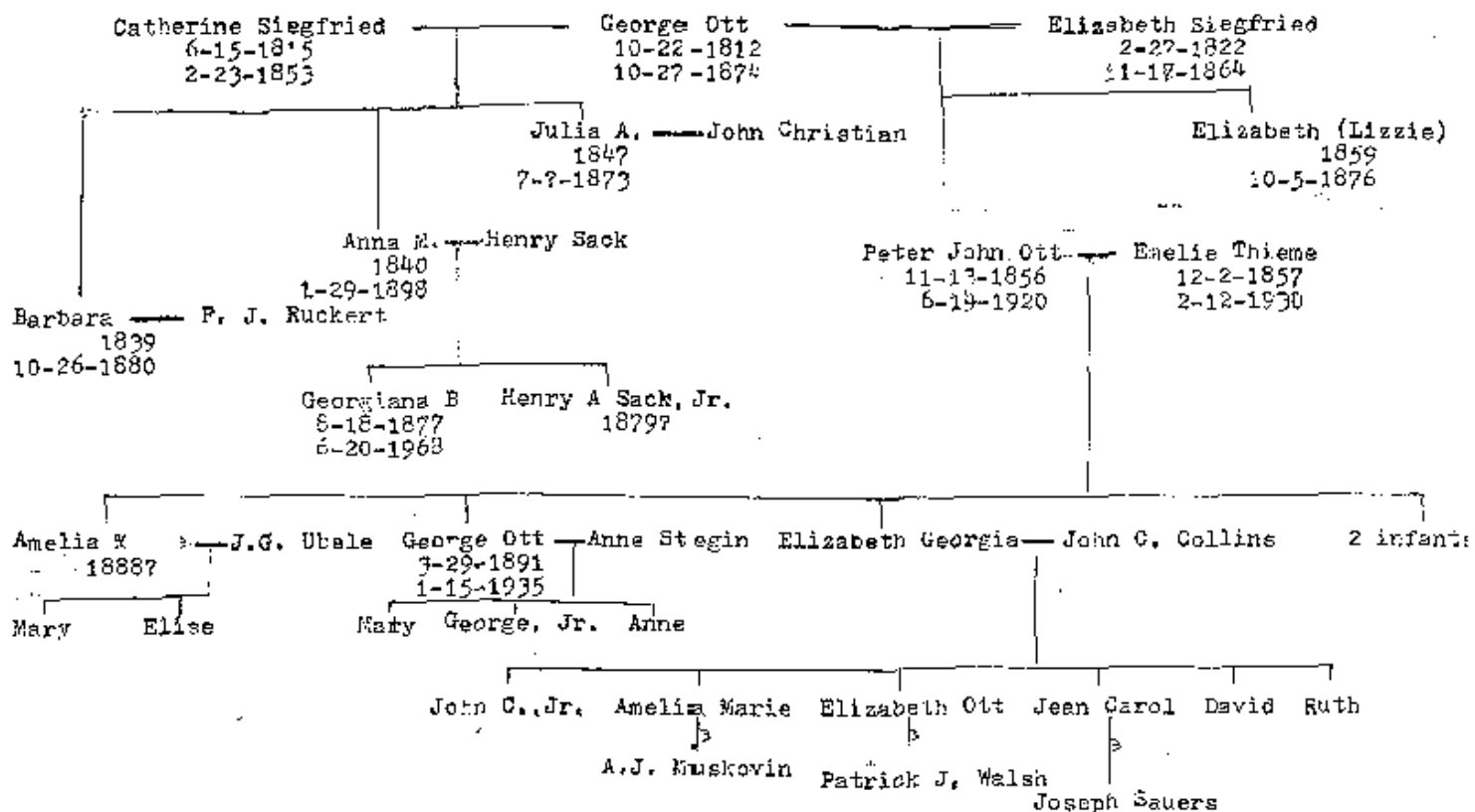
Woman of similar background, Emelie's parents, Albert and Marie Thieme, being German immigrants like the Ott's,⁷⁵ for only through his private associations, as he carries the influences of his childhood throughout his life and as he reaches out to embrace his family, is the man Peter John Ott revealed. Continuing his interest in the use of guns, Peter enjoyed hunting and was an active member of the Forest City Gun Club.⁷⁶ He also continued his association with the Turnverein Society, he and Emelie being members of the Turnverein Singers.⁷⁷

However, the Ott's principal interests were to be found within their own home as Peter spent time reading or working in his flower garden, with its wide variety of geraniums, its ladyslippers, begonias, cacti, ferns and herbs- the herbs going to use in the Ott kitchen, in Emelie's cooking which their daughter Amelia remembers as being excellent, while Emelie found her leisure hours happily spent with handwork, particularly crocheting.⁷⁸

Yet beyond these were interests of far greater importance to the Ott's, their three children, Amelia, George, and Elizabeth⁷⁹ (two of the ^{5 children} borne by Emelie were stillborn).⁸⁰ Birthdays and holidays were given special attention as Easter saw eggs dyed and hidden for an Easter Egg hunt and Christmas with a tree and its gifts followed by a New Years of "church bells, fire songs, boat whistles, and the noisy fire works and pistols" ~~was~~ the source of many happy memories for the Ott children. Much of Peter's time was spent with his children, no special occasion being necessary, as he taught them to play dominoes, checkers, and the new games to be found in the stores.⁸¹

The Otts, moved in 1920 from Brady Street to 103 Thirty-first Street, this move being that of two, not five, people, all the Ott children having married between February 1918 and June 1919.⁸³ Here, at the Thirty-first Street address, after suffering a stroke which rendered him unable to sign the document giving his remaining property, lots 7 and 8 Law Ward and lot H Falligant Ward, to Ecelie,⁸⁴ Peter died of a cerebral hemorrhage on June 14, 1920.⁸⁵

Appendix I



Appendix II

Chronology of Property Dealings and Important Loans Of Peter John Ott

7-7-1879	inherited property and stocks from George Ott
12-9- 1897	borrowed \$5,500 from the Germania Bank
10-21-1889	sold lots 53 and 60 Cummings Ward to George Schawz for \$600.
4-18-1890	sold Kelly Ward property for \$18,000
9-8-1890	bought back lot 53 and 60 Cummings Ward with repayment of loan -\$800
3-5-1906	sold Cummings Ward property to the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Georgia and the Ladies Diocesan Missionary Aid Society of Christ Church vor \$1057
11-3-1908	secured another loan from the Germania Bank, this one for \$2000
7-14-10	borrowed \$3000 from Sheldon
7-7-1910	payed the Episcopal Church institutions gaining ownership of the Cummings Ward property
10-4-1911	sold the Cummings Ward outright for \$4,500
1-22-1913	sold Percival Ward property for \$100 plus valuable considerations
1-23-1913	pay off the Germania Bank loan
7-25-1913	bought lots 7 and 8 Law Ward for \$1,400
1-9-1914	bought lot H Falligant with John Ernst for \$6750
11-10-1919	bought Forest City Gun Club property for \$560
1-16-1920	sold Gun Club property for \$1,000
5-10-1920	gave remaining property to Emelie

Endnotes

- ¹Laura Grove Cemetery Records, Ott, George, lot 1057.
/What appears to be a discrepancy between this source and the 1860 Federal Population Census is explain by the fact that Hessen-Darmstadth, the Census listing is the name of the larger area of which Monback is a part./
- ²Amelia Ott Ubele, letter containing personal recollections.
- ³Deed Book 3Es, Chatham County Superior Court, p. 411.
- ⁴A. O. Ubele
- ⁵Deed Book 3Ns p. 464; 3Rs p. 38; 3Ss p. 372; 3Ss p. 526; 3Ps p. 44.
- ⁶Savannah Morning News Digest, 1853, p. 100.
- ⁷A. O. Ubele.
- ⁸Ibid.
- ⁹Federal Population Census, 1850.
- ¹⁰Federal Population Census, 1850; marker Bonaventure Cemetery, sec. D, lot 8.
- ¹¹Federal Population Census, 1850.
- ¹²marker, Laura Grove Cemetery, lot 1057.
- ¹³A. O. Ubele.
- ¹⁴Final Returns of estate of George Ott, file 86 Office of the Ordinary; marker Bonaventure Cemetery, sec A, lot 23.
- ¹⁵Keeper's Records Bonaventure Cemetery, Ott, Lizzie, sec D lot 8.
- ¹⁶Mildred Gartelmann, oral interview. / Miss Gartelmann is the historian of the Lutheran Church of the Ascension./
- ¹⁷A. O. Ubele.
- ¹⁸Marianne Kunnmann, oral interview. /Mrs. Kunnmann is a native German./
- ¹⁹M. Gartelmann.
- ²⁰Savannah Morning News Digest vol 32. pp. 379, 533, 573.

- ²¹Ibid. vol. 30 p. 701; vol. 32. p. 380
- ²²Ibid. vol. 30. p. 703.
- ²³Ibid. vol. 30.p.776; vol. 32. p. 568.
- ²⁴M. Gartelmann.
- ²⁵Laura Grove Cemetery Records, Ott, Elizabeth, lot 1057.
- ²⁶Savannah Morning News, October 28, 1874, 3/1.
- ²⁷Court of the Ordinary, file 86.
- ²⁸Ibid.
- ²⁹Keeper's Records Bonaventure Cemetery, Christian, Julia. sec.D lot 8; Savannah Morning News Digest, vol25. p. 213. /Mrs. Ubele recalls Julia as being one of the surviving children, producing a conflict in information./
- ³⁰Keeper's Records Bonaventure' Cemetery, Ott, Lizzie; Mrs. Ubele.
- ³¹Court of the Ordinary, file 86.
- ³²Deed Book 4Ws pp. 342-3.
- ³³Savannah City Directory 1878, 1879, 1881, Ott, P.J.
- ³⁴Ibid. 1879, 179 Congress Street.
- ³⁵Ibid. 1883, 1884, 1885, Ott, P.J.
- ³⁶A.O. Ubele.
- ³⁷Marriage license, Court of the Ordinary Book D, p. 523; Sunday Morning News, December 16, 1883, 8/8. /Discrepancies exist between the license which gives a date of December 1 for the marriage and spells the minister's name Clisby and the newspaper which gives the date as December 2, (Mrs. Ubele concurs) and spells the minister's name Slisby. Beyond this information regarding the wedding I have nothing. Thus I can not explain why two Chatham County residents, whose family lived in Savannah (Albert Thieme being in the 1884 Savannah City Directory) and to whom family ties appear strong, the Otts living with the Sacks, Peter acting as F.J. Ruckert's Attorney at Law years after Barbara's death. (Deed Book 8Us p. 26.), and August Thieme living with the Otts (City Directory 1890), would go to Macon to be married in a Presbeterian church./
- ³⁸Savannah City Directory, 1883, 1884, 1885, Ott, P.J.; ss. Second Street.

³⁹Ibid., 1888, Ott, P.J.

⁴⁰M. Gartelmann. / Miss Gartelmann found a record of Amelia Marie Ott's baptism at the Lutheran Church of the Ascension on October 14, 1888; however, other than a record of Amelia acting as sponsor for Catherine Marie Redman in 1889 this baptism is the only record of any church affiliation on the part of the Otts until the marriage of Amelia in 1919.

⁴¹Savannah City Directory, 1889, 1890. Ott, P.J.

⁴²Ibid. 1893. 174 Broughton Street.

⁴³Ibid. 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898. Ott, P.J.

⁴⁴marker, Bonaventure Cemetery, sec. N lot 129.

⁴⁵Ibid. sec.D lot 8.

⁴⁶Savannah City Directory, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896. Ott, P.J.

⁴⁷Ibid. 1897, 1898, 1899, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913. Ott, P.J. / Mrs. Ubele remembers the Otts living in their York Street home for twenty-one years not the seventeen indicated here./

⁴⁸Ibid. 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907. Ott, P.J., 21 Broughton Street.

⁴⁹Mrs Elizabeth Ott Walsh, personal interview on her family's history.

⁵⁰Savannah City Directory, 1908; E.O. Walsh.

⁵¹Deed Book 9Us; p. 193.

⁵²Deed Book 6Ps, p. 347.

⁵³Deed Book 6Vs, p.143

⁵⁴Deed Book 9Xs, p.384.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 385.

⁵⁶Ibid. pp. 384-5.

⁵⁷Deed Book 10Cs, pp.284-6.

⁵⁸Deed Book 3Ds, p. 144

⁵⁹Deed Book 6Ss, p. 365.

⁶⁰Savannah Tax Digest 1892, Ott, P.J.

⁶¹A.O. Ubele.

- 62 Savannah City Directory, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913. Ott, P.J.
/ See note 47./
- 63 Ibid. 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918. Ott, P.J.
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- 77 Ibid.
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- 80 Laura Grove Cemetery Records, Ott, infant, lot 1142.
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- 82 Savannah City Directory, 1920. Ott, P.J.
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