


A Religious Conversion Story

family history reconstruction based on
newspaper, oral, church, and weather data
sources

By Craig Rhombs

Outline

- Who am I and why tell this story?
- The people
- The story
- Backdrop
- Analysis
- Conclusions
- A copy of the story in pdf format can be found at https://281connections.us/281connections_Wiki/South_Dakota_Families/Rombs-Kessler/JRstory-abbreviated.pdf
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Who and Why

- Craig Rhombs

Craig Rhombs is a retired “software guy,” who has worked off and on since 1973 to collect family history information about his ancestors. His ancestors consist of Colonial CT settlers and immigrants from Scotland, Baden, Norway, and Russia. He is consolidating what he has collected at a website: <https://281connections.us> .

- Interests: sharing research and documentation techniques; computing technology

- Contact

- 281connections@gmail.com

The People

- Johannes Rombs – protagonist from Selz in South Russia
- Joseph Rombs – son, present at the time of the story
- Robert Rhombs – grandson, conveyor of the story, researcher
- Craig Rhombs – great grandson, researcher

The People (continued)



Johannes Rombs,
protagonist



Joseph Rhombs,
son

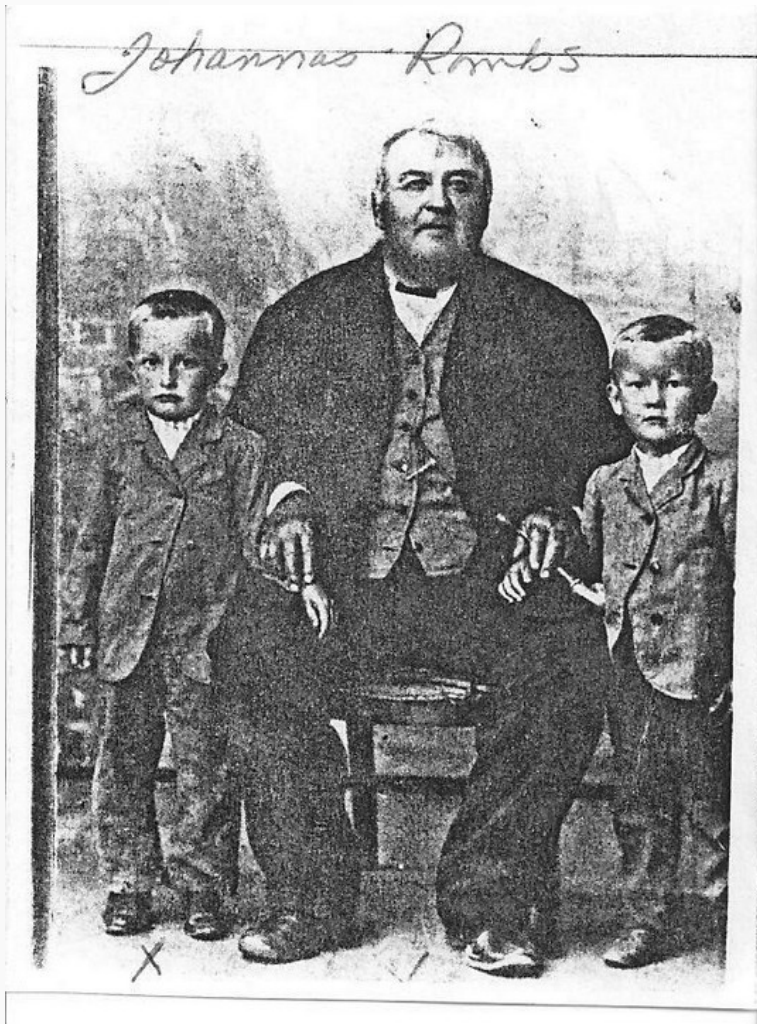


Robert Rhombs,
grandson



Craig Rhombs,
great grandson &
author

South Dakota Photos



October, 2020



Rhombs

6

Back in Alsace



SOUVENIR DE KESSELDORF

October, 2020

Rhombs

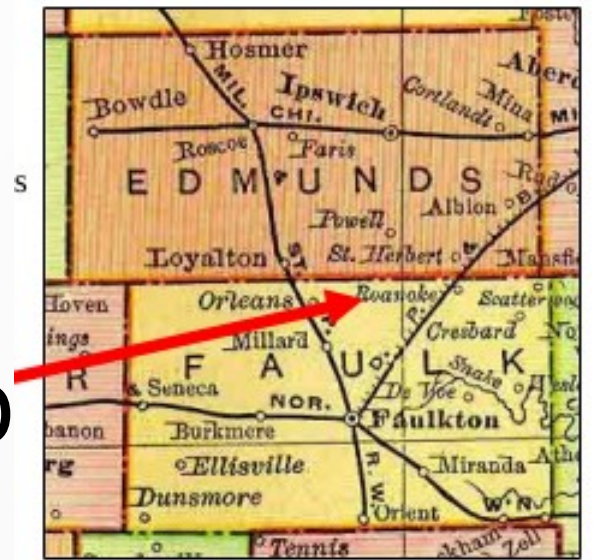
The Story

Barbara (Kessler) Rombs was Johannes' wife. She was dying and on the day of her death the Catholic priest refused to attend. This angered my great grandfather, who transferred the family to a local Lutheran church, in whose cemetery Johannes and Barbara are buried.

So, this is a Catholic to Lutheran conversion story with few details as handed down to me from my father, who I assume must have received it from his father.

Backdrop

- Barbara Kessler: born in Selz (Russia), June, 1848
- Johannes Rombs: born in Selz (Russia), August, 1845
- Marriage: November, 1866
- Emigration: Fall, 1884
- Homestead in Faulk Co., SD



Backdrop (continued)

- Children in Russia: Lulu, Carrie, Nick, Lizzie
- Children in South Dakota: Joe, Kathryn
- Household at the time of Barbara's death in 1896:
 - Barbara, age 47
 - Johannes age 50
 - Lulu, age 29 (probably not present as she had married Reuben House about 10 years earlier)
 - Carrie, age 21 (about 3 years from marrying Bert Austin)
 - Nick, age 19
 - Lizzie, age 14
 - Joe, age 11
 - Kathryn, age 9

Analysis - newspapers

- Newspapers
 - “Faulk County Times,” pg. 3, March 12, 1896. It indicates that she died of consumption on March 10, 1896.
 - “Republican Record,” pg. 8, March 12, 1896. This indicates that she was buried on Friday, March 13, 1896.

LOCAL AND PERSONAL.

David Smith, of Ellisville, is in the city today making contest on a tree claim.

P. Deits, of Roanoke, was in town yesterday and dropped in to visit us a few moments.

Teacher's school warrants bought by the Faulk County Abstract Company.

C. C. Moulton has charge of the City Drug store during the absence J. M. Lockey in the east.

Mrs. Rhombs died at her home near Millard Tuesday. Funeral services will be held on Friday.

PEOPLE AND EVENTS.

J. M. Lockey is in Minneapolis this week.

Geary Bach came down from Bowdle Wednesday afternoon.

Attention is called to the new "ad" of Darby and Son, in this issue.

Hon. Alex Miller of De Voe, was in town yesterday on business.

J. H. Treat was doing business at the county seat on Saturday.

P. E. Knox and wife, of De Voe, were in the city yesterday.

Clarence Whitton and family have moved to their farm near Crestard.

DIED:—At her home near Millard on Tuesday, March 10, 1896, of consumption, Mrs. Jenn Rhombs.

Analysis – burial site

- Immanuel Lutheran Church Cemetery
- Near Wecota, SD
- Headstone dates are wrong.



Analysis – church records

- Immanuel Lutheran Church
- Johannes was voted into the congregation in June, 1896.
- Immanuel Lutheran had a confirmation record for Lizzie (Elisabetha). It indicated that she was born on 6/24/1883 in Langut Wirro-Gretski, Sud Rusland, baptized in Colonie Selz, Sud Rusland, and confirmed on 4/8/1897.

Mon. 7-27.

Dear Mr Rhombs.

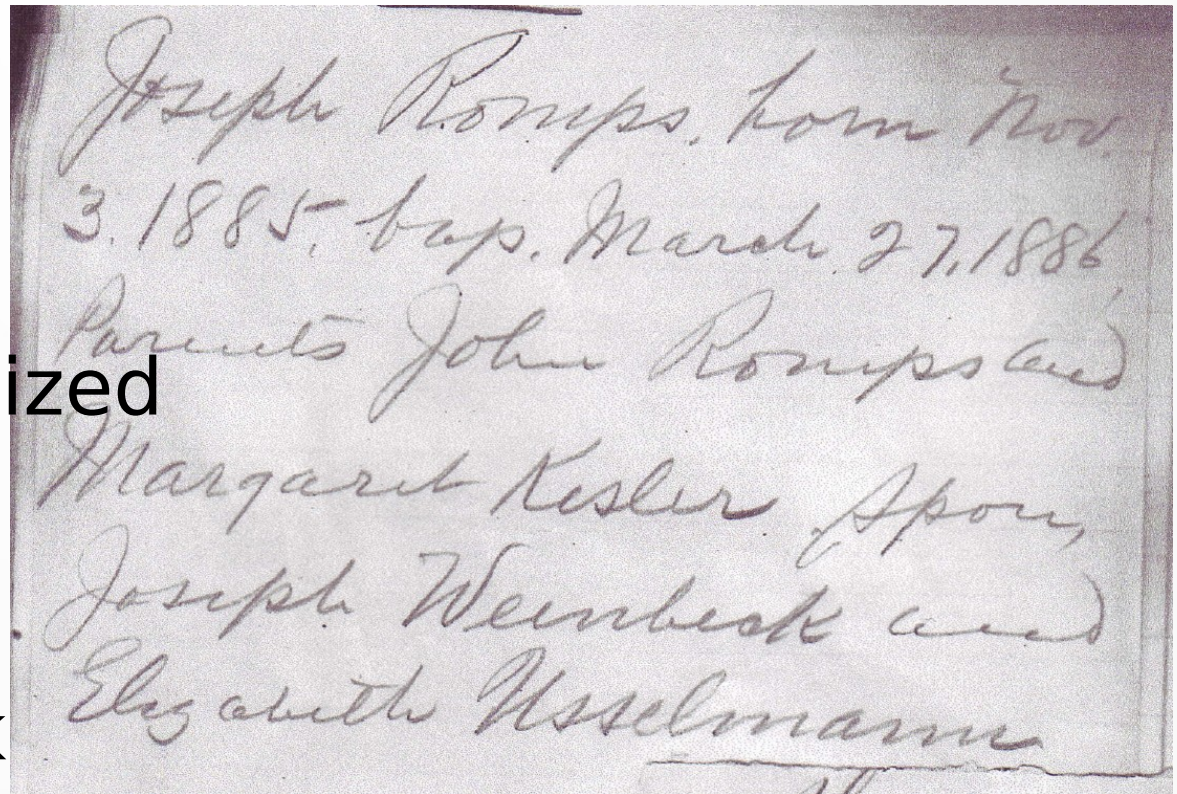
In regard to your tele call - I have gone over Immanuel Church Records quite thoroughly - and the only thing I can tell you is that the Voters Meeting record of June 1896 - mentioned that Johannes Rombs was voted in as a member. There was nothing in the Death records - but you already have those dates. I did find this recording in the Confirmation record.

Elisabetha Rombs born 6-24-1883.
in Langgut Wirro-gretski, S. Rusland
Confirmed Apr 8 - 1897 -
Place of baptism Colonie Selz
Sud Rusland.
Father Johannes Rombs.

The address makes me think that they emigrated from Russia. Do you have a Elisabetha on your list. She was evidently a daughter was 14 yrs old when she was confirmed, but her name did not show but for the one time.

Analysis – church records

- Holy Cross Catholic Church
- Ipswich, SD
- Joseph was born 11/3/1885 & baptized 3/27/1886
- Margaret Kesler
- Joseph Weissbeck
- Elizabeth Usselmann



Analysis - weather

- NOAA records for Aberdeen, starting on 1893.

<https://ncdc.noaa.gov/>

- See weather for March 10-13!

<https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cdo-web/datasets/GHCND/stations/GHCND:USW0014929/detail>

Aberdeen – March, 1896

U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service Current Location: Elev: 1297 ft. Lat: 45.4433° N Lon: -98.4130° W Station: ABERDEEN REGIONAL AIRPORT, SD US USW00014929						Record of Observations These data are quality checked and are believed to be identical to the original observations. Generated on: 10/20/2020 10:08:00 AM			
Year	Month	Day	Temperature (F)			Precipitation			
			24 Hrs. Ending at Observation Time		At Observation	24 Hour Amounts Ending at Observation Time			
			Max.	Min.		Rain, Melted Snow, Etc. (in)	Flag	Snow, Ice Pellets, Hail (in)	Flag
1896	03	01	3	-12		0.00		0.0	
1896	03	02	4	-10		0.00		0.0	
1896	03	03	11	-2		0.00		0.0	
1896	03	04	23	-12		0.18		1.0	
1896	03	05	36	0		0.75		3.0	
1896	03	06	18	3		0.60		2.5	
1896	03	07	15	-8		0.00		0.0	
1896	03	08	28	0		0.00		0.0	
1896	03	09	18	4		0.00		0.0	
1896	03	10	16	5		0.40		1.8	
1896	03	11	4	-15		0.00		0.0	
1896	03	12	3	-18		0.00		0.0	
1896	03	13	14	-28		0.48		2.0	
1896	03	14	24	-15		0.00		0.0	
1896	03	15	28	-11		0.18		0.5	

Conclusions

- Things that we know
 - The Rombs family was from a mostly Catholic community in South Russia before coming to the US in the Fall of 1884.
 - The Rombs family was associated with Holy Cross Catholic Church (in Ipswich, SD) in the winter of 1885-6.
 - Barbara (Kessler) Rombs died in March of 1896 in Faulk Co.
 - Johannes was accepted into the Immanuel Lutheran Church, near Wecota, SD, in June 1896.
 - The weather at the time of Barbara's death and burial was miserable, even by South Dakota standards.
- None of this proves the veracity of the family story explaining the reason for the transfer from Catholic to Lutheran churches in 1896. Probably that can never be done. However, the evidence does support the story and gives it some believability.

Questions/Comments?

Reading - SD weather:

- **Foster Children Tragedy (1873)**

https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMCRF_Foster_Children_Tragedy

- **Children's Blizzard of 1888**

<https://hclib.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1125075109>