

## Martha Seeberger (1864 – 1899)

Martha Koch was born in Germany in 1864. She married Charles F. Seeberger (1858 – 1900), and they immigrated to the U.S., where he found work as an electrician with the B&O Railroad in Baltimore. While in Baltimore, Martha gave birth to her first four children.

Around 1895, Charles was transferred from Baltimore to Brunswick, which had recently become a major center of operations for the B&O Railroad. Because of his skills, he was put in charge of the dynamo which provided electricity for the roundhouse.

The Seebergers built a home in the east end of town on Sandy Hook Hill (later known as High School Hill, or 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue), one of the steeper inclines in this hilly town.

Martha gave birth to three additional children in Brunswick. The last child was stillborn and, due to bleeding complications related to that birth, Martha died a few hours later. That was on January 4, 1899. Her son Albert, who was five years old at the time, recalled later seeing her in a casket “with a tiny baby tucked in her left arm.”

Martha was buried in the Old Burying Ground in Brunswick, with the intent that her remains would later be removed to Germany, but there is no evidence to confirm that this ever occurred. Charles was left with 6 young children to raise.

After Martha’s death, their next door neighbor Annie Swartley, who had 7 children of her own, took an interest in the orphaned children and helped to look after them while Charles was at work. An article in the Jan 19, 1900 issue of the Brunswick Herald describes the tragic death of Charles one year later: “Charles F. Seeberger, electrician at the B&O power house in this town was shot and fatally injured by Jerome R. Swartley, a B&O conductor, at the latter’s home on Sunday morning [Jan 14] about 1:30 o’clock. Swartley, it seems, had for some time suspicioned an undue intimacy between Seeberger and his wife, brought about largely by her interest in Seeberger’s children and home after the death of his wife about one year ago.” Charles was transported to Baltimore where he underwent emergency surgery for “a perforated intestine and internal hemorrhages.” The surgeon also reported that one bullet pierced Seeberger’s heart. Amazingly, he lived 60 hours after the shooting, but finally succumbed to the injuries. He was buried in the Western Cemetery in Baltimore (and *not* in Brunswick beside his wife.)

This left the 6 children as orphans. Charles had a brother living in Philadelphia. Upon hearing of his brother’s death, he took the children to an orphanage in Baltimore. Shortly after that, Martha’s brother Rev. George Koch, who was a minister serving in Petersburg, Illinois, came back east to help with the disposition of the children. Albert, in his autobiography, described in detail what happened to each of his siblings, which is summarized here:

- Carl E., the oldest, was adopted by his uncle Rev. Koch. When he was 14 years old, he fell down an elevator shaft and broke his arm. The wound became infected, and he died of tetanus in June 1903. (This was before the day of childhood immunizations.)
- Viola C. stayed in Baltimore with friends of her parents. She eventually married George Adkins of that city, who was working for the B&O Railroad. They established their home in Glen Burnie, MD. They had two daughters and one son.
- Grover Cleveland (1893 -1976) initially went to Illinois and lived with a farming family by the name of Rapp. He eventually moved to Iowa where he started farming on his own. There he met Ella Lade, whom he married and they had five sons.
- Albert S. (the source of much of this information) was placed in three different homes before he found a permanent home in October 1901 with Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Beck, a childless couple in Decatur, Illinois. They were ecstatic about finally having a child. Their affection for him was obvious, and it soon became easy for him to refer to them as “Mom” and “Dad.” Albert later graduated from Concordia Teachers College where he became organist and music director at the college. Following family tradition, his son Theodore Beck was a teacher for over 50 years, and his grandson Tobin Beck is currently (2020) Assistant Professor of Global Studies (English, communications, and theater arts) at Concordia University. Tobin came to Brunswick in 1996 to visit his great-grandmother’s grave and had a wonderful visit with David Macintosh which was written up in the Brunswick Citizen at that time.
- Julia P. was placed with the family of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Stier who had a farm near Petersburg, IL. She later married farmer August Goetting of Petersburg, IL, where she raised three daughters.
- William was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Bachmann, farmers of Pleasant Plains, IL. He married Lena Blumenstein of St. Louis, MO. They had three daughters and established a farm in Pleasant Plains, IL.

And what became of Jerome Swartley, the next door neighbor who shot Charles? The Frederick News reported on Jan 16 (1900) that “before being taken to Baltimore Seeberger made a deposition before Justice Gardiner exonerating Swartley.” A month later, the same paper reported that the grand jury “refused to find a true bill, and the case against him was dismissed.” However, Swartley didn’t stay in Brunswick very long. The 1900 federal census that was taken on June 6 (5 months after the shooting) found him in Cumberland, MD, with his wife and seven children, living next door to his brother Oscar and still employed as a conductor on the B&O Railroad. The family moved to Baltimore in 1926, then back to Cumberland around 1932, where he died in 1939. He and his wife are buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in Cumberland.

*Final note of interest:* On Martha Seeberger’s footstone, under her name, is inscribed, “A. Jovenal.” There was a stone mason by the name of Aloysius Jovenal in Washington, D.C., at that time and he may have been the one who carved her footstone (and head stone). His father, Rudolph Jovenal, was also a stone mason, and was the one who carved the capstone of the Washington Monument.



Inscriptions on Martha Seeberger's tombstone and footstone read: " Martha E., wife of Chas. F. Seeberger, born May 16, 1863, died Jan 4, 1899, aged 35 years, 7 mons, & 19 days. Gone but not forgotten," and "M.E.S. / A Journalist, Wash'n DC."