

## Antonio Leonetti and Maria Wilhelmina Winkler

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### Antonio Leonetti

Antonio Leonetti was born on 10 February 1852 in Casino, Catanzaro, Calabria, Italy. Today the village is known as Castelsilano in the province of Crotona. He was the oldest of



seven children born to Saverio Leonetti and Maria Teresa Rotundo<sup>1</sup>. We know from census data that he emigrated from Italy in 1883 at the age of 31. There is one immigration record of "A. Leonetti", born abt. 1852, departing from Naples and arriving New York on 13 April 1883. This may indeed be the immigration record for Antonio Leonetti. In several documents he is described as about 5 feet 5 inches tall, with a dark complexion, blue or green eyes, and black hair.

Little is known about his early years in the U.S. and the first evidence of him in America that has been found is his voter registration of July 13, 1893 which shows him living and working as a laborer in the city of Napa, California. This is also the date of his naturalization in the California Superior Court in Napa. Being from Italy it is possible that he was working in the vineyards of the Napa Valley. The next event in his life was obtained from the 1900 Federal Census in which he declared that he had been married for 6 years thereby placing the date of marriage to about 1894. His wife was listed in the census as Mary M. Leonetti. At some point Antonio moved to San Francisco and it is possible that he met his future wife there. There was no listing for him in the 1894 city directory of San Francisco so he was either still in Napa or moving to San Francisco later in that year.

In 1895 Antonio opened a fruit and vegetable shop at 121 Second Street in San Francisco<sup>2</sup>. His residence was just around the corner at 69 Minna Street which he and presumably his new wife shared with his brother Joseph. It appears that Joseph worked for Antonio as a salesman when he first started his shop but the following year he was not listed with them in the city directory. In 1896 Antonio moved his store to 1338 Mission Street between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, about a mile from the first location. Since there was no separate residence shown he probably lived above the store. He moved his shop once again to the Hayes Valley district at 721 Laguna Street in 1897. In the same directory we see Joseph working as a shoemaker at 73 ½ Minna with his residence at 44 Minna. The 1898 Voter Registration of San Francisco<sup>3</sup> shows Antonio at the Laguna street address, 46 years old, occupation as a "Fruiterer" (fruit store owner), 5 feet 5 inches tall, dark complexion, green

<sup>1</sup> Registro de Nacimientos en Casino, Church of LDS, births 1849-1865 in the village of Castelsilano, Film (microfilm) 1799766 ( Items 1 - 3)

<sup>2</sup> Langley's San Francisco Directory for the year 1895, published by J.B. Painter Company, 518 Clay Street, San Francisco

<sup>3</sup> Voter Registration Register – precinct 10 assembly district 38, San Francisco County, 1898

eyes, dark hair, scar on chin, and born in Italy. He was still at this address in 1899 and then moved once more to 301 Octavia Street in 1900 which was also within Hayes Valley. It is curious that he moved his business 4 times in the first 5 years of living in San Francisco. Perhaps he was looking for the right location or the landlords kept raising the rents and he moved on.

## Maria Wilhelmina Winkler

According to members of the present day Leonetti family Antonio's wife's name was Maria Wilhelmina Winkler. She was born in Germany on 21 June 1860<sup>4</sup> and immigrated to the United States in 1883 when she was 24 years old<sup>5</sup>. The only immigration record found thus far that fits her birth and immigration dates is for a Margarete Winkler, arriving New York on 16 June 1883, born about 1859 who was from Prussia and departed from the port of Bremen, Germany. It appears she was traveling alone. A member of the family<sup>6</sup> had written in a notebook that she was from Bautzen, Germany, a town about 50 miles east of Dresden in the state of Saxony which was indeed part of Prussia when she left. There is other evidence that she could have been born in Baden-Württemberg however, no further research has been undertaken to determine which is her correct birthplace.

It must be stated for the record that there is no original documentation for Maria's surname or birth place. No birth certificate has been found and her date of birth is only known from information that her husband provided for the death certificate. No actual verifiable immigration document has been found either and there are no census data other than one in 1900 when her name was already Leonetti. No bible record has been located and her death certificate shows her name as Maria Leonetti with no parents names. She wasn't naturalized as of 1900 and probably didn't become a citizen before her death.

Besides the death certificate, the only evidence we have of her first name is the 1900 Federal Census and in that document she is listed as "Mary M." Leonetti. In other instances it is spelled Marie. Her middle and last names are known only from oral family history and even within the family there are slight inconsistencies. In addition, the middle initial of "M" in the census does not match Wilhelmina as a middle name although census data were frequently inaccurate. There is sufficient evidence proving that Maria had children with another man so we don't even know if Winkler was her married or maiden name. In the 1900 census she states that she was 40 years old which does seem to confirm her birth year to about 1860.

Her first child after her marriage to Antonio was Rosalie Josephine, known as Rosie or Rose for most of her life, born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1896. About 18 months later Maria gave

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<sup>4</sup> Death Certificate, California State Board of Health, St. Lukes Hospital, San Francisco

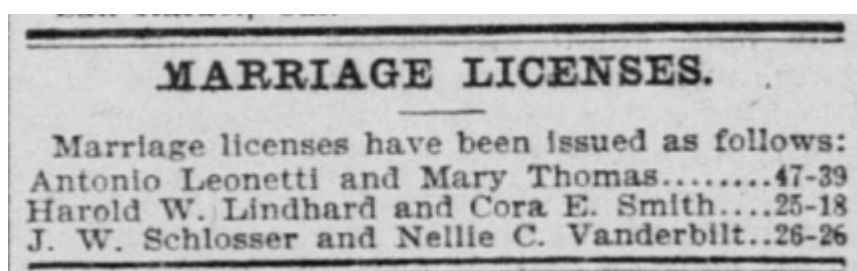
<sup>5</sup> 1900 U.S. Census San Francisco, California, Assembly District No. 37, 4 June 1900 – year of immigration was stated as 1883.

<sup>6</sup> Written in a notebook by Nolan Butcher, the husband of Marie Leonetti, a daughter of Antonio and Maria Leonetti

birth to Marie Theresa on November 9, 1898, most likely at the Laguna Street address. Maria had been in the U.S. for about 10 years before marrying Antonio and the 1900 Census shows that she had given birth to 6 children but only 3 were still alive. In addition to "Rosie", age 4 and "Mary", age 2 as their names were written in the census, there was also George, age 13. He is shown in the census with the same last name of Leonetti but It is obvious that he could not have been Antonio's son. The census indicates that George was born in California and both his mother and father were born in Germany.

If Maria is to be believed then she did in fact have 4 children by another man but three had died and only George survived. But, were the other children born in Germany or after she arrived in the U.S.? She was 23 or 24 when she arrived in the U.S. so she could have been married already and that at least some of the children might have been born in Germany. The census indicates that George was born in February 1887 in California. It is possible that she did give birth to the other three children while in the U.S. between 1883 and her marriage to Antonio in 1894. But what tragedy took away three of her four children in such a short time span?

Research into Maria's former marriage was conducted off and on over the last few years without success. No Maria Winkler could be found living in San Francisco in the period of 1880 to 1900. Then research conducted in 2012 revealed a marriage license announcement in the San Francisco Call newspaper that finally provided a breakthrough.



This notice shows that a marriage license was issued to Antonio Leonetti and Mary Thomas. The numbers 47-39 are the respective ages of the

two people. The date of the newspaper edition was March 11, 1899. But was this the Antonio and Mary who are the subjects of this paper? Subtracting the ages from the date of 1899 we find that this Antonio was born in 1852 and Mary Thomas was born in 1860. The dates match perfectly! In addition, our Antonio Leonetti and his brother were the only two Leonettis in San Francisco in 1899. This is definitely the marriage license notice of Antonio and Maria.

What this finding also means is that Rosalie and Marie were illegitimate for the first few years of their lives! It also suggests that Antonio and Maria had lied to the census taker about their marriage year of 1894. Why had they not married before Rosalie was born? Why wait for 5 years? Assuming that Mary's husband died could she have been receiving some social welfare assistance from the city or a German society and a new marriage would have stopped those payments? Was she waiting for a divorce to become final before marrying Antonio? This is not likely since divorces only took a matter of months in those days. Unless someone in the family has some other information we will probably

never know the answer to these questions. Presumably they followed through and were married shortly after they obtained the license but no announcement of marriage has been found to date.

This marriage license notice still does not prove whether Thomas was her maiden or married name. Later, we will show that her son George did use a surname of Thomas thereby suggesting that Maria's married name was Thomas. Her husband's nationality is only known from the census in which Maria states that her son, George had parents born in Germany. Does this mean that her maiden name must be Winkler? Probably, but there are no primary sources or citations to prove this fact.

Researching her under a married name of Thomas has not been successful. Searching newspaper articles for a Maria, Mary, or Marie Thomas has yielded some announcements but nothing substantial enough to tie her to a Mr. Thomas or her three children who presumably died.

The city directories of the years just preceding her marriage to Antonio 1894 were also examined. Operating on the assumption that her husband might have died we may find her listed as a widow. The 1893 city directory lists only two women by the name of Mary Thomas. One is a teacher who shows up in future directories and can be ruled out and the other was shown as:

*Thomas Mary V., widow, r. 2510 McAllister*

If Maria Winkler's middle name was indeed Wilhelmina, a middle initial of "W" is pronounced in German as "Vay" or "V". Even today Germans occasionally make that mistake when speaking English. In 1894 this Mary Thomas does not appear in the directory and if she is our Maria Winkler Thomas then she was living with Antonio in 1894 and wouldn't be listed under her own name. Working backwards to find a male Thomas listing in prior years living at 2510 McAllister did not find any potential candidates.

The 1900 census confirms that Antonio and his family were living at 301 Octavia Street near Oak Street, a neighborhood in Hayes Valley just 2 blocks north of Market Street at the beginning of the Mission District. They were renting the ground level apartment in a two family house. Maria gave birth to her third child, Walter Anthony Leonetti on 22 December 1901, probably at the Octavia Street address.

Almost one year after giving birth to Walter Maria had another child named Levesio who died on January 8, 1903<sup>7</sup>. Considering the short 11 month time span between the birth of Walter and Levesio it is likely that he died at childbirth or shortly thereafter. The funeral was held at the mortuary chapel of the Golden Gate Undertaking Co. at 2475 Mission Street and he was buried at the Laurel Hill Cemetery.

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<sup>7</sup> San Francisco Call Vol. 93, No. 40, January 9, 1903, Death Announcements

In 1902 Antonio purchased a lot on the northeast corner of 25<sup>th</sup> and Harrison Streets in the Potrero Hill area of the Mission District. The lot measured N 104' x E 50' and he bought it from the Commercial Insurance Company of California for \$2,450. By 1904 Antonio and his family had moved to 3086 25<sup>th</sup> Street on the corner of Harrison. From this information we can conclude that Antonio constructed a building on the lot and it was assigned an address of 3086 25<sup>th</sup> Street. In the 1905 city directory his fruit business was listed as 2899 Harrison Street which is the same corner. Therefore the store entrance was on Harrison and his residence entrance was on 25<sup>th</sup>. It appears that they were living above the store and this would be Antonio's home and business for the next 15 years.

Just six weeks before the 1906 earthquake Maria was arrested in Hale Brothers for shoplifting. The following is the newspaper account:

*San Francisco Call, February 28, 1906: "In the possession of Mrs. Marie Leonetti, arrested for shoplifting in Hale Bros. department store, were found some plunder and a book showing that \$800 is deposited to her credit in the Union Savings Bank. She is middle-aged, attired in cheap and gaudy apparel, and says she lives on Twenty-fourth street. Judge Mogan will sentence her today for petty larceny."*

The \$800 in her savings account would be the equivalent of about \$20,000 in 2010, so she and Antonio were not destitute which makes the shoplifting offense all the more puzzling. But the description of her clothes by the reporter was unnecessarily cruel, to say the least. No record of her court appearance or sentence has been found. Perhaps Judge Mogan let her off with just a fine. Also, either Maria got her residence address wrong or the reporter did because she was living at the 25<sup>th</sup> Street address in 1906.

Maria was admitted to St. Lukes Hospital on the day of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire – April 18<sup>th</sup>. Ten days later she died on April 28, 1906 at 5:00 p.m. The vital records index of San Francisco listed her as "Marie" Leonetti and confirmed the date of her death as 28 April 1906. The cause of death was myocarditis and chronic parenchymatous nephritis complicated by pulmonary edema. Parenchymatous nephritis can be either acute or chronic. Since the doctor stated it was chronic, we can assume that Maria was suffering from this condition for a while. The pulmonary edema probably was a result of the poor conditions of the temporary hospital after the earthquake. Left untreated it can cause death within a few days. Since Maria had myocarditis as well, it was probably inevitable that she would have died whether she was treated or not.

Two stories about Maria's death have circulated over the years through the family's oral history. One states that she was killed by a wall of the hospital that collapsed during the earthquake and the other claims that she died of pneumonia. Since she had this chronic kidney condition and a heart problem I think it would be safe to conclude that she was very sick when she was admitted to the hospital. The cause of death didn't mention any

trauma therefore, the "wall story" can be ruled out. Dr. Kenney attended to her from the day of the earthquake until she died on April 28 at 5.00 p.m. He also stated that her death occurred two days after the onset of the pulmonary edema.

Since much of St. Luke's had been destroyed they moved patients into tents on the grounds of the hospital. It is likely that Maria was moved outside into one of the tents and that the April weather of San Francisco contributed in some way to her developing pulmonary edema. Later the hospital set up temporary facilities for patients in the Pacific Jockey Club of the Ingleside Racetrack on Urbano Drive, close to Stonestown and San Francisco State University, but by that time, Maria had already died. Maria was buried on 30 April 1906 at Mt. Olivet cemetery in Colma, 1601 Hillside Blvd., San Mateo County. Today it is known as Olivet Memorial Park. St. Luke's Hospital was eventually rebuilt and is still located at Cesar Chevaz Street (formerly Army Street) and Valencia in the Potrero Hill district, about 10 blocks from Maria and Antonio's home at 25<sup>th</sup> and Harrison Streets.

The death certificate is the only document that has been found to give her exact date of birth and the length of residency in California. We can't be certain that this is her actual birth date since the information was provided by Antonio. He also stated that Maria had lived in California for 17 years which seems to contradict the information in the 1900 census which states that she was already in the U.S. for 17 years in that year. Antonio had trouble with dates in a number of documents. Without immigration documents there is no way to determine which of the two declarations is true.

In June Antonio placed a wanted ad in the San Francisco Call newspaper seeking to rent a dairy farm of 150 to 200 cows. It is not known why he did this but we can speculate that he wanted to leave the city because of the recent earthquake and was concerned about the safety of his children.

Four years later Antonio, a widower with his 3 children, is still living at the same address<sup>8</sup>. Also living with him is his sister-in-law, Carolina Marino, age 44 and his nephew Samuel, age 18, both of whom had emigrated to the U.S. from Italy in 1908. The census of 1910 also showed that Antonio owned the home and that he had a mortgage.

In the years following Antonio continued to run his fruit business and to raise his children. Rosalie left home in 1916 when she married Allan L. Lindskog and began a family with him in San Francisco. The following year, Walter married Ann E. McDermott, a woman some 7 years his senior.

By 1920 Antonio had moved his residence to 2722 24<sup>th</sup> Street, just 6 blocks from his old home and business. The building that exists there today was built in 1900 and as of 2009 it was still a fruit store as seen in the picture<sup>9</sup> on the following page. Unfortunately, today in

<sup>8</sup> 1910 U.S. Census San Francisco, 32<sup>nd</sup> District, 13<sup>th</sup> Precinct, 15 April 1910

<sup>9</sup> Google street view from 2009.

2012 it is a rather tacky "Nails and Waxing" shop rather than the quaint little fruit store that Antonio had constructed.



Living with him in 1920 was Walter, his wife and their two children. Marie had moved out by this date and was living by herself at 205 Vicksburg. Today, this street is a charming leafy section of the Mission District. The apartment building where she lived was built in 1902 and still exists. Marie was working for Woolworth & Co. as a comptometer operator.

The comptometer was the first commercially successful key-driven mechanical calculator and was used in back office operations. In 1921 Marie married Nolan W. Butcher.

By 1923 Walter and Anne along with their two children had moved out and were living in their own apartment at 1128 Sutter Street leaving Antonio alone at his home; except he wasn't alone. From 1923 to 1925 he was living at the same address with Carmina, also spelled as Carmillia in a different city directory. It is not known whether she was a companion or a relative who was staying with him. After 1925 she does not appear in the city directories living with Antonio.

Antonio continued to run his business from the shop for the next five years and then on July 3, 1930 he died at French Hospital in San Francisco. No death certificate has been obtained as yet which would tell us the cause of death. Antonio's will was entered into probate on July 16 by his son, Walter who was referred to in the document as Antonio. The inventory indicated a worth of \$6,750 or about \$87,000 in 2010. This did not include the real estate which was listed separately in the probate document. There were a number of claims against the estate but most were for small amounts primarily from his wholesale fruit suppliers. These seem to be current account balances due since Antonio was still running his business at age 79 right up until the time of his death. On December 1, 1930 the probate court issued an order to sell the property. Services for Antonio were held at the Chapel of the Halstead Mortuary where his son Walter was working and he was interred at Mt. Olivet Cemetery on July 5, 1930.

Much is known about the lives of his descendants, many of whom are alive as of the date of this paper and they may be discussed in a future paper. However, there is virtually no knowledge within the family of the life of Antonio's step-son, George. The following is an attempt to examine and record his life.

## George Thomas

This brief biography was written before the marriage license of George's mother and Antonio was discovered and therefore some of the information may be superfluous. However this material does show the research process that was followed before his surname was known.

As described earlier George does appear in the 1900 Federal Census which listed him incorrectly as George Leonetti, born in February 1887 in California. The names of the other 3 children that Maria claims she had prior to marrying Antonio have not been found. It is not known if they all died before her marriage to Antonio or whether some of them died between the time she met Antonio and the census in 1900.

An earlier effort to find any George Leonetti within the United States born in California with a birth year of 1887 +/- 2 years (1885 to 1889) yielded no candidates (except for Maria's son in the 1900 census) suggesting that he never kept the name of Leonetti nor was he formally adopted by Antonio. It has been assumed for several years now that his name, George Thomas which appeared in the obituaries of Antonio and Walter Leonetti were his first and middle names. A closer examination of both obituaries however showed that the last name was mentioned for each surviving family member. The first paragraph of the obituary of Antonio reads as follows:

*In this city, July 3, 1930, Antonio Leonetti, beloved father of Mrs. Harold T. Maitland, Mrs. Nolan W. Butcher, Walter A. Leonetti and George Thomas, brother of Joseph Leonetti of McCloud Calif.*

If he had taken the last name of Leonetti then the announcement should have read, "....., Walter A. and George Thomas Leonetti, ....." . But, it didn't. Therefore we must conclude that Thomas was George's last name, not his middle. His name in Walter's obituary from July 15, 1953 was also George Thomas and since it didn't say "*the late George Thomas*" we can assume he was alive on the date his step-brother died. Research was then begun based on the assumption that Thomas was his last name.

We know that George was still at home in 1904 when he appeared in the City Directory as Leonetti, George T., a "lab.", laborer or worker listed just below his father, both at 3088 25th Street. This listing is not helpful because the initial "T" could be for a middle name or perhaps his last name. Perhaps the editor of the directory assumed that Thomas was his middle name and simply abbreviated it. He would have been about 17 years old at that time and obviously working for his step-father in the fruit store. He may still have been living at home in 1906 when his mother died. From the recently discovered marriage license of Antonio and Mary we finally know that his surname was Thomas.



The key to finding George after he left home was to first examine the 1910 census to find any George Thomas, age 22 to 24, born in California with both parents from Germany. Restricting the search to these parameters and only within San Francisco revealed one suitable candidate out of 41 George Thomas records. Amazingly, there were George Thomas candidates with parents born in Greece, France, Portugal and as one would expect, from Wales and England as well. One can only imagine what their original surnames were and why they chose Thomas as an anglicized name.

The only viable candidate from that census was George Thomas, age 24, born in California, both parents born in Germany, married to Elizabeth, age 40, with 10 children! The surname of 9 of the children was Westerhouse and obviously they were the children of Elizabeth from a former marriage. They were listed correctly by the census taker as the step-children of George. The census also revealed that they had been married for 3 years and that this was the second marriage for Elizabeth. The 10th child, named George was their son and he was 2 years old.

In 1910 George and his new family lived at 2722 24th Street only 5 blocks from the home of Antonio Leonetti at 3088 25th Street. This is the identical address where Antonio was living and running his business from about 1917 until his death in 1930. We know from the 1920 Federal Census that Antonio owned the building at the 24<sup>th</sup> Street address but did he already own it in 1910 when George and his family were living there? There is no evidence found thus far to answer this question with the exception of the 1920 census and the "real estate" mentioned in the probate documents. However, it must be more than a coincidence.

There was one additional person living in the household in 1920. His name was Rocco Leonetti, age 25, from Italy, emigrated to the U.S. in 1902 and he was working at a fruit store. With a last name of Leonetti it is not likely that Rocco would be working at any other fruit store than Antonio's. This must be a relative, perhaps a nephew, but why was he living with George instead of Antonio? The most probable answer comes from the 1910 census of Antonio where we see that in addition to his 3 children he had his sister-in-law, Carolina Marino and his 18 year old nephew Samuel living with him. They arrived from Italy in 1908 and Carolina was most likely helping Antonio with his young family after his wife died and George had moved out. Perhaps Rocco was staying with Antonio prior to Carolina arriving but then had to leave to make room for her and Samuel, but it still must have been a bit crowded at George's place as well.

One of the first questions that comes to mind is why did George marry a woman with 9 children? First, let's examine how he might have met Elizabeth. She and her first husband were both born in Germany and George's parents were from Germany and I could see them meeting perhaps at a German Society somewhere in San Francisco. I can imagine that George grew up speaking both German and English. It is also possible that they met somewhere in the neighborhood. In 1900 Elizabeth's surname was not Westerhouse. She

was found in the census for that year with 6 of her 9 children along with her husband, John F. Wachterhauser. They were living at 2661 22nd Street, just 5 blocks from where Antonio and his family were living.

Elizabeth married John F. Wachterhauser in Germany in 1886 and their first child, Henry was born there in 1887<sup>10</sup>. They immigrated to the United States in 1891 and as mentioned we find them in San Francisco in 1900. By that time they had had 5 additional children and John was working at a sugar refinery. John continued to use the spelling of his original name until sometime between the end of 1902 and 1904 when he became John Westerhouse. He and his family were living at 736 Andover Avenue in the Bernal Heights district in 1905. On December 7, 1906 John Westerhouse died at the age of 48. The newspaper death notice listed his wife, Elizabeth and their nine children; Henry, Annie, William, Lizzie, Conrad, Frederick, Katherine, Frank and Herman. It is assumed that he and his family were still at the Andover address when he died but since the city directory was only published for businesses in 1906 we can't be absolutely sure.

Elizabeth with 9 children to clothe and feed could not afford to waste any time in remarrying. We find that a marriage license was issued in Oakland on August 27, 1907 to George Thomas, 21 and Elizabeth Westerhouse, 32, both of San Francisco. Elizabeth's birth year, in this instance of 1875, is different than in other sources and seems to fluctuate depending on the document and it appears the circumstances as well. In the 1900 Census she stated she was born in 1867 and in the 1910 and 1930 census she reported that she was born in 1870. There can be little doubt that this is the same woman in these different documents who perhaps wanted to conceal from George how old she really was.

In 1907 George was listed in the city directory as living at 736 Andover Avenue but was he living there at the same time the Westerhouse family was or did he move there after he married Elizabeth? Since Elizabeth was now the head of the household after her husband died she was listed as Elizabeth Westerhouse in the 1907 directory. This would suggest that George was already living there and knew the Westerhouse family. If the reader will permit the author a slight indiscretion and some speculation, Elizabeth may have played the role of a distraught lonely older woman and cunningly seduced George in order to have a bread winner for herself and her 9 children. It is not entirely unrealistic to assume that this might have happened. Their child, George (Jr.) was born the following year.

George was an electrician in 1907 but the following year he was a lineman for the telephone company and that job, because of the danger involved in it has always been highly paid. After their marriage they may have lived at the Andover address but in 1908 they had moved to 27 Bernal Heights Blvd and again in 1909 to 2722 24<sup>th</sup> Street. As mentioned earlier this was the exact address that Antonio would move to in 1920 and it is

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<sup>10</sup> 1900 U.S. Federal Census, San Francisco, California, 33rd Assembly Dist. - John F. Wachterhauser & family

thought that this building may have already belonged to him and he allowed George and his new family to use it.

Before moving further in the research, all available documents which included newspaper articles, city directories, and census were once again examined to make sure that there wasn't some evidence of a George Leonetti or George Thomas Leonetti with the correct age and birthplace parameters that may have been overlooked. In addition a search was carried out for any George Winkler that met the same criteria. As of the date of this paper, no person meeting those criteria for either surname has been found. Although the evidence presented here is not absolutely conclusive due to the paucity of primary sources of data, there is nonetheless strong circumstantial evidence as well as some secondary source documentation to suggest that this George Thomas found in the 1910 Federal Census is indeed the step-son of Antonio. It is doubtful that given the destruction of records in the 1906 fire that a birth certificate will ever be found.

George and his family didn't remain long at the 24<sup>th</sup> Street address because by 1911 they had moved to 3127 26<sup>th</sup> Street where they stayed for a few years. George was still working for the telephone company as an electrician and cable splicer. The family did gain some room in their home in 1912 when the oldest child, Henry was married to Catherine McErnerney, age 20, also from San Francisco<sup>11</sup>.

But in 1914 they had moved yet again to 2316 Humboldt Street. Today there is only a two block remnant of Humboldt Street left in the Central Waterfront district near Dogpatch. However in 1914 Humboldt extended west across the city to San Bruno Avenue straight through the Potrero District. This Humboldt address could be fairly close to where they were living in 1911.

Oddly, Elizabeth is listed in the 1914 directory under her own name of Westerhouse living at the same address as is her son, Fred who is now an ironworker. Henry, now married is a meter man, presumably for one of the utility companies and is living at 2821 Harrison, half a block away from Antonio and his family.

In 1915 George continues to work as an electrician and is still living at 2316 Humboldt Street with his family. However, in 1916 George and his family moved yet again to 32 Dame Street. This street no longer exists but it was in the Fairmont Tract at 30<sup>th</sup> Street near Church and extended south to Randall.

Then suddenly in 1917 we lose the paper trail for George. In the 1917 city directory at the 32 Dame Street address is "C. Westerhouse". This is Conrad Westerhouse and in this year he would have been 18 years old. His brother Fred is living at the old 2316 Humboldt address and Henry and Catherine are living at 1141 Treat Avenue. William is now married and living at 3463 Mission Street in San Francisco. But there is no listing for George and

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<sup>11</sup> Sausalito News, vol. 28, no. 24, 8 June 1912

Elizabeth. If they were separated or divorced and Elizabeth didn't want her name in the city directory, it makes sense that Conrad be listed since he was the next oldest still remaining at home.

There were 21 individuals by the name of George Thomas living in San Francisco in 1917 but it is impossible to trace our George without Elizabeth's name and or his occupation. There are two George Thomas with wives named Elizabeth, but these were in previous directories and were entirely different families. In 1918 only two of the brothers are living in the City; Fred at 2183 Mission and Henry & his family at 1141 Treat Avenue.

However, Conrad Westerhouse's World War I draft registration was recently discovered and it gives us an important clue as to what happened to the family. In the document which he signed on 12 September 1918 he gives his mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Thomas, as his primary contact. Her address is 1124 Magnolia Street, Oakland, California. We also see that Elizabeth's oldest son, Henry was also found in Oakland in 1918 living at 969 10<sup>th</sup> Street, just 4 blocks from his mother's home. The next year he and his wife, Catherine moved back to the Harrison Street address in San Francisco. They would remain in the City for the rest of their lives.

The next step was to check the 1920 Federal Census to give us more information about where the family might be living. Unfortunately, the name of George Thomas and even George H. Thomas is so common that the probability of finding our George without some other piece of data is very low. Searching for Westerhouse using every conceivable name variant of the name was unsuccessful. The Polk City Directory of Alameda County was not published in 1918 or 1919 so that was also a dead-end. Then suddenly in 1921 three of the Westerhouse men show up in the city directory for that year living at 825 Filbert Street in Oakland. Checking the listings for the surname of Thomas resulted in finding George living at the same address. He was now working as a "cranemn", crane operator, Conrad as a boilermaker, and Frank and William were ship fitters. Their occupations all dealt with ship building and it is likely that they worked for the Moore Shipbuilding company in the Oakland shipyard area. Their residence on Filbert Street is very close to the docks. Two of the girls, Bessie and Catherine were living on their own and working together in a box factory, also in Oakland.

This information confirmed that the family was still together and that neither divorce nor death had intervened in the "missing" years. Over the next 6 years George would have as many jobs; salesman, ship worker, "burner" (probably welder), boiler maker, auto mechanic, auto worker, and truck driver. In that same time period the family would move three times; from Filbert Street to 1309 8<sup>th</sup> Street to 1610 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 936 Adeline Street, all within the same area of Oakland. No explanation has been found to give any insight as to why George change jobs so often or the family moved every two years.

In 1926 we finally find George and Elizabeth's son, George in a document. He is now 19 years old and appears in the 1926 Polk Alameda City Directory as George Thomas, Jr., driver, living with his parents at the 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue address.

In 1929 we lose track of George once again. The city directory of that year was never published, probably because of the stock market crash. The 1930 Federal Census lists Elizabeth Thomas who is shown as the head of the household and a widow. Living with her are three sons, William, Charles, and Frank as well as three granddaughters, Anna Mohr, age 18, Dorothy Mohr, 14, and Eileen Westerhouse, 10.

The obvious question is what happened to George? Had he died as Elizabeth indirectly stated when she described herself as a widow or had he abandoned the family? Although it is certainly possible that he did die it does not seem to fit with the fact that George appears to be very much alive at the time of Antonio's death in July, 1930 as well as still living at the time of his half-brother, Walter's death in 1953. Of course, the obituary notice cited earlier could have simply listed the children of Antonio without regard to whether they were alive or not, but it would be highly unusual if that were the case. Furthermore, a search of the The State of California Department of Health database did not reveal any George Thomas who died in San Francisco or Alameda County during the period of 1927 to 1931 and that would suggest that he was still alive, perhaps divorced, but certainly not living with his family.

The most likely explanation is what has been seen many times before in census records during this time period and that is, rather than admit to a census taker that the person was divorced, they usually lied and said that they were widowed. This little white lie avoids the stigma of being a divorced woman whose neighbors might gossip about. "Grass widow" was also a term used during this era to describe women who are separated, divorced, or living apart from their husbands. Perhaps Elizabeth didn't lie at all; she just conveniently left out the adjective, "grass". There are various theories as to the origin of the term but there is such a diversity of opinion that they hardly bear repeating here.

This disappearance of George could be answered definitively if we could find him in the 1930 census or in a voter registration list or some other document, but unfortunately, once again the name of George Thomas and even George H. Thomas is so common that the probability of finding him is very low.

Elizabeth and her family continued to live and work in Alameda County and Contra Costa County for the rest of their lives. They moved their home a few more times over the years but always stayed in the same part of Oakland. We know that at least three of the men married and had children. William died fairly young at age 45 as did Frank at age 44. It is possible that they never married. Death records for most of the men in the family indicated that their mother's maiden name was Mohr.

It was hoped that by tracing the lives of Elizabeth and her children after 1928 that some clue would emerge that might give us additional information about George, but unfortunately, nothing conclusive was found. The 1900 census of Antonio and Maria indicated that George was born in February, 1887. The California Death Index (1940 – 1997) would have been useful since it usually provides mothers' maiden names but unfortunately there were no candidates that met our criteria. However, a George Thomas was found in the Social Security Death Index with the birth date of 1 February 1887 whose last residence was in Moraga, Contra Costa County, California who died in Los Angeles in August 1966. His social security number was issued before 1951 in California. There were 26 individuals in the SSDI database by the name of George Thomas who were born in 1887 in the U.S. and only 3 were from California, one born in June and the other in September. Although Moraga is in a different county, it is only 12 miles from the area in Oakland where Elizabeth and her family lived. It is also interesting to note that William is buried in Contra Costa County and Frank died there as well. It is possible that this George Thomas, born 1 February 1887 is our George Thomas but without more evidence it is not possible to conclude that he is the correct one.

During this investigation it was possible to track the lives of most of the Westerhouse men during the 1930s and 1940s but it is not the intent of this paper to expand on their lives. A summary of their vital statistics can be found in the appendix.

## George Thomas Jr.

George and Elizabeth's son was never found in any document prior to 1926 simply because he was too young. He would have been in the 1920 census but as already mentioned neither Elizabeth nor George was found in it. He was probably raised by his mother and grew up and went to school in San Francisco for most of his life. He would have been about 16 when the family moved to Oakland and he may have finished school there.

George Thomas Jr. is found in the 1930 Census living at 1218 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Oakland which is only two blocks from where his mother was living on 10<sup>th</sup> Street. The census indicated that he was 22 years old, born in California with a father born in California and his mother born in Germany, married at age 21, and was a truck driver for a fruit company. His wife was Catherine, age 21, married at age 20, born in California to parents who were both from Germany. They had a 2 year old daughter named Rose Marie.

As mentioned already, Elizabeth's maiden name was Mohr. George Jr's birth record indicates he was born November 8, 1907 to a mother with a maiden name of Mohn. The name Mohn is believed to be a misspelling of Mohr. The social security death index tells us that a George Thomas with the exact same birthday died at the age of 67 in November, 1974. His last residence was San Leandro, Alameda County, California. No further research

was conducted into his life but when the 1940 Federal Census becomes available later this year, we may find additional facts.

## Appendix

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### Henry John Westerhouse

- b. 11 May 1887, California
- d. 9 January 1957, San Francisco
- m. 1912 to Catherine McErnerney
- b. 23 September, 1891, Colorado
- d. 2 July 1970, San Francisco

### William Henry Westerhouse

- b. 7 May 1895, California
- d. 11 September 1940, Alameda County, California
- i. Sunset View Cemetery, El Cerrito, Contra Costa County



### Fred Westerhouse

- b. 9 September 1898, California
- d. 31 May 1976, Miranda, Humboldt County, California
- m. 1916 to Goldie M. Kaurin
- b. 2 June 1894, Wisconsin
- d. 21 March 1955, Contra Costa County, California

### Charles Westerhouse\*

- b. 10 April 1900, California
- d. 6 November 1978, Alameda
- \* This is probably Conrad who changed his name or it is his middle name.

### Frank Westerhouse

- b. 19 September 1904, California
- d. 15 December 1948, Contra Costa County, California
- e. 2 Sep 1942, Private, U.S. Army
- i. Golden Gate National Cemetery, Section J Site 89 San Bruno, California

### James (Herman) Westerhouse\*

- b. 15 April 1906, California
- d. 21 June 1967, Alameda
- m. 1929 to Frances (unknown)
- b. 1912, Pennsylvania
- \* This is probably Herman who changed his name or it is his middle name.

