Maybe You’ve Heard of Her Husband?

Finding Louisa Weinhard

RESEARCH FILES

by Tiah Edmunson-Morton

LUISE WAGENBLAST was born in Germany in 1832. She was four when her mother died, and she traveled to Missouri at fifteen, arrived in the Pacific Northwest at twenty-three, and married a man who would become famous when she was twenty-seven. By the time she died at age eighty-five, she had buried her husband and four of her five children. Her life was punctuated by both sadness and generosity; her legacy is marked by details and silences. This is how I reconstructed the story of the woman who became Louisa Weinhard, wife of Henry.

I am an archivist and educator first, historian second, and the extensive endnotes in this article reflect my intent for it to be both a lesson in historiography and a story about a woman. The chronology of Louisa’s life is set in historical context with details about cultural and ethnic groups, social welfare concerns, and the influence of wealth. Ultimately, the purpose of this article is to examine the longer-term impact and importance of uncovering the stories of women, as well as to empower researchers to find their own Louisas.

Archives and records repositories are filled with voices. We visit them to learn about families, past actions of governments, and activities of private organizations. They are also spaces that reflect power and document a dominant narrative. Creators, archivists, and researchers make decisions about what to include and who to exclude, and the result can be distortion, omission, and erasure. For all the voices recorded in any archive, there are also many that have been silenced. As anyone who has done historical research on women knows, their stories were not actually hidden; more often, they simply were not recorded. The history of nineteenth-century women’s work is often told through the story of husbands and sons. Women were categorized as wives and mothers rather than business partners or owners. When talking about researching women, I often cite the complications surrounding names: if their first name was recorded in newspapers (not just “Mrs.”), actually finding a woman’s surname at birth to track genealogy feels like a happy accident. Further complicating research in the Pacific Northwest in the mid to late nineteenth century was the status of the state and its cities. Oregon Territory records are a challenge to use, for example, because towns were in flux as industries and people migrated to different regions. Tracking businesses, occupations, and

LOUISA WAGENBLAST WEINHARD is pictured here in 1888. She arrived in the Pacific Northwest in 1855. Although married to Henry Weinhard, who was famous for his beer-making, reconstructing her story involved time and patience. The chronology of her life, like many women’s histories, is an example of how historians reveal silenced voices in archives.
movement is difficult when you are researching men; finding details about women’s lives is nearly impossible.

As a part of my work curating the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archives, I document present-day women in the Pacific Northwest’s brewing industries. When I was preparing for an oral history in 2016 with Dana Garves, owner of BrewLab and former brewing chemist at Ninkasi, I found a blog post she had written called “Oregon’s First Women Brewers [1879-1908],” and those stories acted as an interesting historical counterweight to my work with living women. Garves had cited her sources — online genealogy sites and newspapers, the Oregon Historical Records Index, Brewed in the Pacific Northwest — and I used her citations to add names of my own. Most, if not all, brewers in nineteenth century Oregon were men. In my research, I found most women linked to breweries were not making beer, but I suspected they played an essential role in the businesses’ success by completing work such as running the household, childminding, keeping the books, and participating in community events. I also knew that several ran breweries after their husbands died.

But was there a way to determine the jobs they did or the roles they played? I searched in online newspaper databases and conducted on-site research in the places these women lived, and the short answer is: no. Variables in terms of family structure, geographic location, brewery size, and available documentation make generalizations and specifics quite difficult. Henry Weinhard is a pretty familiar name, however, and his business was extremely successful, so I assumed researching his wife Louisa would be simple and good practice for future work on the other women I had identified. I was wrong.

Although she was famous for her generosity and her involvement in local church and aid societies during her lifetime, Louisa Wagenblast Weinhard’s biography had to be woven together with disparate and at times contradictory facts. More generally, I found that records for the Weinhards are scant, mostly limited to newspaper articles and advertisements, census and estate records, lawsuits, and, for Henry, glowing biographies in books about great men. If the subtler details about relationships, motivations, or hobbies are lacking for Henry and his company, important details about Louisa and her experiences are entirely absent. If it is so difficult to tell the story of a famous woman linked to a famous brewer, there is an even greater challenge in accurately telling the story of women in less well-known Oregon brewing families. Researchers and writers must be creative in where they look for biographical details.

Because we exist in the stories people tell about us and the organizations within which we conduct our lives, different sources will tell different stories about different periods. Census records formed the spine of my research into Louisa Weinhard. Although names are often incorrect, the census is valuable for determining age, number of children (living or dead), marital status, birthplace of individual and parents, real estate holdings, literacy, occupation, who else lived in the house, if there were servants, and names of neighbors. Government and court documents such as estate and probate records have information about heirs and are especially valuable if contested. Unlike census records, marriage and death records usually include the correct legal name, but they are less reliable for birthplace information. Business directories and phone books include names, addresses, and advertisements, but also taxes paid, occupations, and marital status. Newspapers are perennial favorites for beer history researchers; beyond articles, advertisements, and obituaries, they include public notices of sheriff’s sales, property or business sales, lawsuits, and estate announcements. Popular magazines, scholarly secondary sources, association records, theses and dissertations, breweriana websites, historical fiction, and reports from historic preservation agencies and architectural remodel firms gave me lines of inquiry to follow. I purchased an ancestry.com subscription and used its member discussion boards for links to family memoirs and photographs. “Find-A Grave” was a treasure trove of name variations, links to relatives, obituaries, and photographs and biographies from family members. I used Google translate, sometimes successfully, when I found a name in a German language document. I reached out to staff at the Aurora Colony, Portland Community College, the German American Society and German Ladies Relief Society, and to students who had written graduate school papers. I learned a lot from all these sources; however, besides her will, I did not find anything actually produced by Louisa. What I was able to stitch together about her life reveals a woman who was committed to her family, church, and community, but also a woman who enjoyed the benefits of her wealth and privilege.

**BORN NOVEMBER 30, 1832,** in Waldrems, Germany, a small town about 300 miles southwest of Berlin in Baden-Württemberg, Luise Wagenblast was the tenth of eleven children of Eva Catharina Bohn Wagenblast and Johann “Michael” Wagenblast. She was baptized on December 2, 1832, in a larger town to the north, Backnang, which was known as “Gerberstadt” or Gerber City for its prevalence of tanneries, leather factories, and wool and cloth mills. Eva’s fifth and eleventh children died before their first birthdays, and Eva herself died in April 1836 when she was forty-four years old.

The years following Eva’s death were likely personally difficult, but life in Germany was also generally challenging. Dorothea Knadler, a descendant of Christine Wagenblast, wrote in her 1939 “Family History of Michael Wagenblast” that continuous wars, high taxes, and limited opportunities drove people to leave. Friends and relatives who had emigrated shared “glowing accounts of America with its constitutional representation of the people, this freedom of speech, press, action and religion, its great rich, undeveloped resources.” Two of Louisa’s brothers, John and Gottlieb, left Germany in 1840 and lived in Pennsylvania for a few years; Gottlieb married, and John worked for a baker before they both moved to Missouri. In
IN THE 1850 CENSUS for Marion, Missouri, Louisa Wagenblast is listed as “Lewis,” an eighteen-year-old male. She lived with her father Michael, a farmer whose property was valued at $1,000, and siblings John, Jacob, and Christina. They lived next door to Gottlieb, a farmer whose property was valued at $1,200, his wife Christenta, and their four children, ages one to seven years old. Louisa moved west in 1855, the year her father died. Her brother Gottlieb and his family traveled with the 1855 wagon train led by Wilhelm Keil, founder of Christian communal settlements in Bethel, Missouri, and Aurora, Oregon. The History of Wasco County, Oregon offers clues about both the journey and how Louisa arrived in Oregon. Gottlieb had three wagons and nine yokes of oxen at the start and one yoke of oxen and two cows on reaching the coast, . . . His brother Fred and sister Louisa went around the Horn [by ship] in 1855 and met the family in Willapa. The Wagenblasts made a brief appearance in Jane Kirkpatrick’s historical fiction novel, A Tendering of the Storm, where it was noted they were “German Americans traveling to the Bay with Keil, not members of the colony.”

Aukjen Ingraham offers different details in her 2001 Oregon Historical Quarterly article, for which she interviewed Louisa’s great-grandson, William Wessinger. In his telling, Louisa settled in Bethel, Missouri, with relatives and had “companions” who joined the group traveling west to settle the Aurora Colony. Because Louisa “suffered the effects of a childhood illness, which made walking long-distances difficult,” she avoided the arduous overland journey and “travelled down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, where she and a family named Giese took a boat to Panama, crossed the Isthmus, and boarded a ship to Astoria.” After living through a difficult winter with the Aurora colony in Willapa Bay, according to Ingraham, Louisa left the strict religious life and moved to Oregon City to live with relatives, but “maintained close ties with members of that community throughout her life.”

The years between Louisa’s arrival in the region and her marriage to Henry Weinhard are unaccounted for; it is unclear where she lived, what she did for the next four years, or how she met Henry. On January 27, 1859, just weeks before Oregon became a state, she and Henry were married by William Arm-
reach their Vancouver home following their nuptuals.¹⁵

The 1860 U.S. Federal Census registered a “Louisa Weinghart,” wife of brewer Henry, living in Vancouver in Clark County, Washington Territory. They lived with two young brewers: John Brown, a Norwegian, and Ernest Weingster, a German.¹⁶ They lived fairly prosperously in Vancouver, and the combination of their personal and real estate assets were valued at $3,000 in 1860, which is almost $100,000 today. According to the 1860 Clark County, Washington, census, Louisa and Henry lived alone in a house valued at $2,190 and had two horses.¹⁷ Of the 546 households registered, 61 reported real estate and property value of more than $2,000; the average was approximately $850, and many households reported no assets at all.¹⁸ Their son Christian Henry was born on March 29, 1861, and the following year, Henry sold his Vancouver brewery and moved to Portland. Their daughter Emma Augusta was born on March 30, 1863. The next few years were full of personal loss. Christian died soon after Emma was born, on September 23, 1863, and Emma died on August 12, 1864. Anna Catherine was born on November 28, 1864, and she was an only child for years until her sisters Bertha Carolina (Bettie) and Louise Henrietta were born in 1869 and 1872.¹⁹

By the time of the 1870 census, thirty-eight-year-old “Eliza Weinhardt” lived in Portland, where she is listed as “keeping house.” She was married to “H. Weinhardt,” a brewer who reported combined real estate and personal assets totaling $15,000 (approximately $300,000 in 2021) and they had two children (Anna and Bertha). Two employees from Germany also lived with them: Lizzie August, a domestic, and Charles Keyot, a teamster. Living next door were three brewers, two from Prussia and one from Württemberg. And four doors down was William Dellinger, a “beer brewer” from Pennsylvania who was Henry’s business partner from 1865 to 1870. Dellinger lived with his wife Mary, their infant son, and a laborer, H.J. Morse from New York. This block represents a microcosm of Portland: Germans living near each other in an urban environment and working in skilled trades. Germans comprised a large proportion of immigrants to both the country and Oregon and one of the largest foreign-born ethnic groups in Portland. By 1870, an estimated 30 percent of Portland business owners were German; they were known for having superior craft skills, success in food industries, and solid educations.²⁰ Although many German immigrants settled in the southeast section of the city, the Weinhards lived next to their brewery at Thirty-Three Thirteenth Street (now the Southwest corner of Northwest Couch and Northwest Thirteenth streets).

The Weinhards’ story illustrates data Roberta Lee Schmalenberger gathered for her 1983 Portland State University thesis “The German-Oregonians, 1850-1918.” Using census data and the 1920 book Oregon and its Germanness: a history of the state, its German pioneers and their descendants (which is in German), Schmalenberger studied how Germans integrated into their new community during the decades before
IN THE 1870 CENSUS, Louisa was listed as “Eliza,” living in Portland with her husband “H. Weinhardt. Her occupation was listed as “keeping house.”

World War I.21 Specifically, she looked at whether they spoke English, the cultural groups they formed and churches they founded, how they educated their children, what they did for employment, the location and later migration patterns of settlements, and the overabundance of German-language newspapers.22 She found that Germans assimilated into their new home (such as by learning English) but also maintained strong internal cultural ties (such as living near and marrying other Germans, or forming German-only clubs). With a growing population, Portland Germans offered each other religious, social, and financial support. Within the community, Louisa and Henry were not unusual: most brewers were German, and the majority of Germans were Lutheran.23 The Weinhards, especially Louisa, were involved in the German Reformed Church, which was organized in 1874 with twenty-five members, including the Weinhards. As was common for German churches, all services were conducted in German.24 The church was a central component of Louisa’s life, but it is clear that both Weinhards were involved in the church community. Henry helped pay for construction of a Lutheran church at nearby Tenth and Oak streets, which was certainly a benefit for his workers.25

The rapid settlement of the Northwest meant that clubs formed quickly to meet the immediate needs of communities but also dissolved or evolved with the same speed. They organized around commonalities such as ethnicity, religion, or community concerns, and most were dependent on volunteers and fundraising efforts. In her book Organized Womanhood: Cultural Politics in the Pacific Northwest, 1840–1920, Sandra Haarsager looked at the activities and influence of women’s organizations, offering examples of their involvement in issues such as labor rights and job training, social welfare, food safety, consumer rights, and settlement houses. Clubwomen combated saloons, provided education for new immigrants, established orphanages, and built libraries.26 While clubs benefited those in need, they also benefited those involved. They gave women space in public affairs and increased their confidence in their power through activities such as public debate and committee management; ultimately, they led many to lobby for changes in public policy and gender-based rights. While a significant portion of women in Portland from a variety of backgrounds were involved in such organizations, it is important to note that membership, benefits from social services, and increases in rights were not shared equally by all women. In other words, wealthy white women, like Louisa, continued to have more opportunities and rights than poor women or women of color.

It is difficult to determine how involved Louisa was or if she pursued leadership roles in organizations; however, it is clear that she donated time and money to women’s organizations and causes.27 This was the case with the Deutscher Frauen-Hilfsverein, or German Ladies Relief Society (GLRS), founded in 1886 for women interested in charitable work. Given her position in the German community, it is not surpris-
LOUISA WEINHARD was active in the First German Evangelical Reformed Church, which was founded in 1874. The church, located at Southwest Tenth Avenue between Oak and Stark streets, is pictured here.

ing that she was a member of this group. But was she an active member? Club records dating to 1912 are housed in the German Aid Society (GAS) building. Earlier records have not yet been located, however, and most of the information about this club comes from newspaper accounts and President Irmgard Ohm’s November 12, 1981, speech given at the 95th anniversary celebration of the GLRS. In the meeting minutes for 1912 to 1932, Louisa is mentioned only a few times for activities such as paying her dues. She and Henry were also both members of the GAS, a related but organizationally separate group founded in 1871 by well-known German men in Portland. The simple answer appears to be that Louisa was not particularly active in either society, but that she valued their work and gave money to their causes.

The morality of members and their causes were at the forefront of public statements. It was noted that members were all American citizens and “ladies of integrity and good will,” and that the organizational mission was to help women with good character find work in locations they deemed respectable and provide them with support supplies rather than money. It is notable that while there were GAS men at the first GLRS meeting, nowhere in the constitution are men or the GAS mentioned; it was a separate organization. An article written in 1914 by GAS members, however, situated the GLRS as an auxiliary group within the GAS. It claimed the GLRS was founded because women were more “approachable” and that “many phases of relief work could be best looked after by sympathetic women. Many women who would be too timid to appeal to men for help have received assistance from this organization.” While the women’s organization could be both independent and classified as a “support” group, this later reflection on the founding of the GLRS omits intentionality or action on the part of the organizing women. They were not waiting for other women to ask for help; rather, they had assistance, and perhaps morality, to bring to the women in need.

By 1914, the GLRS work focused almost entirely on the Altenheim, the eldercare facility dedicated in 1912. The way the German community envisioned the facility is valuable context for Louisa’s beliefs (there is additional discussion about her monetary contribution to building the Altenheim at the end of this article). Mirroring the GLRS constitution’s language as related to vulnerable women and children, the eldercare policy at the Altenheim was a reflection of German cultural values, including the importance of a shared responsibility for taking care of all community members. Fundraising events were key to the GLRS from financial and social perspectives, and newspapers reported on activities such as teas, musical events, and bazaars. GLRS members also donated items directly to the home and left money in their estates.

Several other women’s social and civic organizations reflected a generalized anxiety about the dangers facing “vulnerable” people in the city, which included the old, young, sick, or poor as well as those who did not have strong ties to a specific ethnic community, church, or club. Of significant concern to the myriad social welfare organizations in Portland was the influx of job-seeking young women, who were confronted by dodgy individuals and immoral activities. Groups and programs that addressed such concerns...
included the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), Women’s Refuge for Fallen Women, and later, the Portland Florence Crittenton Home, the Women’s Protective Division, and traveler aid programs. Three of these intersected with Louisa’s life: the Portland Women’s Union (PWU), Ladies Relief Society, and Travelers’ Aid Association.

The PWU was formed in 1887 by women interested in social, civic, and moral reform, including overhauling city employment agencies to stop the placement of young women in jobs “of questionable reputation,” which was not explicitly defined but I presume was code for sex work. There was a diverse membership, with wealthy and working-class women serving on a variety of boards and working at institutions such as the Children’s Home, Travelers’ Aid Association, and Albertina Kerr and Florence Crittenton homes.

Louisa donated to all these programs, and the PWU sent her condolences after Henry died. Without further on-site archival research (currently impossible due to COVID-19 restrictions), I am unable to confirm her membership in any of these groups.

This is also the case for Louisa’s involvement in the Ladies Relief Society, an organization with similar goals as the PWU. Founded in the early 1880s at the First Congregational Church of Portland, the Ladies Relief Society established in 1888 the Baby Home, which cared for children whose parents had died on the Oregon Trail, and continued to offer shelter, food, and parental care to needy children. Louisa’s specific involvement is again difficult to determine without on-site research, but she was a patroness and advisory board member for a 1913 theatrical production fundraiser for the “Baby Home Thanksgiving Week” at the Armory, and she left $1,000 to the facility in her will.

In 1896, the Portland chapter of the WCTU hired a woman to meet the “unprotected girls” who arrived by train and direct them to “appropriate housing and employment.” In advance of the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition, a “cross-religious and cross-cultural” group, including the GLRS, formed the Travelers’ Aid Association to ensure the moral safety of transient women and girls arriving for the fair; they believed authorities had turned a blind eye and that they, as middle-class White women, were best equipped to guide and protect other women. With the motto “Protection for Girlhood,” the association hired Lola Greene Baldwin (later Portland’s first policewoman) to direct the operation.

The Travelers’ Aid Association crossed paths directly with the Weinhard family. One notable tenant was Peter Wagner, a bookkeeper from Baden, who was left money in Louisa’s 1918 estate. There were house staff as well, including two servants, one from Hanover and the other from Switzerland, and a coachman from Prussia. I imagine this as a golden time, a home full of family and people supporting a thriving business, but that changed in 1882, when Bettie died of appendicitis on a family vacation in Seaview, Washington. Henry and Anna traveled to Stuttgart, Germany, where Henry had not been since emigrating to America; Anna stayed there with relatives and met her future husband, Paul Wessinger. The two returned to Portland in 1885 and were married at the...
IN THE 1880 CENSUS, Louisa’s name was listed correctly, but her age was incorrect. At that time she also had three children, Anna, Bette, and Louisa.
ERICKSON’S SALOON, pictured here in an undated photograph, stood in contrast to German saloons in Portland that tended to be more family friendly. Located down the street from Weinhard’s brewery, Erickson’s had five bars, a drunk tank, and a ban on women in certain sections.

“could not afford to alienate them.”

Other Oregonians held more flexible attitudes. Portland lawyer Charles Wood said Oregon was “where we think that it is the right of every American to go to hell and be damned if he wants.” Furthermore, he said the people who settled here created a “civilization founded on the mine and the camp,” and they believed “the saloon and the theater has as good a right to be open on a Sunday as the church and the school.”

Concurrent to public debates about their vice or morality, the Weinhard’s continued to live their lives. The 1900 census incorrectly recorded Louisa’s date of birth (a year off) and date of immigration (five years later than when she arrived). It documented that Henry was a brewer who owned his own home freely, meaning he had no mortgage. Two servants lived with them: Lizzie Raz from Switzerland and Gustave Wanna from Germany. Two doors down, Anna and Paul Wessinger lived with their two children, Milla and Henry, and with Babette Kleger, a servant from Switzerland.

In August 1904, Henry filed a lawsuit against a county judge, commissioners, and a clerk in Aberdeen, Washington, arguing that the local option banning alcohol sales was illegal. He did not live to make his case in court. On September 20, 1904, Henry Weinhard died of kidney disease. Obituaries noted his early years in Germany, growth as a brewer, undefined “progressive” perspective, business successes, wealth, family, and community involvement, but nothing to suggest ties to prostitution, liquor, or gambling. On September 21, 1904, the Morning Astorian said “Henry Weinhard had for thirty years been the chief brewer of the Northwest, and by his wise investments in city property and his public-spirited course in improving his holdings had won recognition in the business world.”

The Morning Astorian stated that “although Mr. Weinhard became one of the richest men in the Pacific Northwest, he was always genial and approachable, especially among his countrymen, and was a liberal contributor to benevolent enterprises.” An article in the Oregon Daily Journal from the same day led with “Death claims man of wealth: Henry Weinhard, millionaire brewer and philanthropist, passes away,” and wrote that “throughout his career Mr. Weinhard was noted for his generosity. If it was a pleasure to him to make money, it was a pleasure no less great to do good with it.”

His will was brief, fewer than 300 words, and was drawn up by son-in-law Henry Wagner. Henry left $10,000 in trust for his three grandchildren and wrote “all the rest, residue and remainder of my estate, real, personal or mixed, I give, devise and bequeath one-half unto my beloved wife, Louise [sic] Weinhard and the other half equally unto my beloved daughters, Anna Wessinger and Louise Wagner and Paul Wessinger and Henry Wagner, my sons-in-law.” The five were executors of an estate worth $2 to $3 million, which translates to approximately $60 to $90 million in 2021. It is notable that the estate also distributed more than $35,000 to charitable organizations such as St. Vincent and Good Samaritan hospitals, the Boys’ and Girls’ Aid Society, the YMCA and YWCA, Salvation Army, Volunteers of America, City Board of charities, Baby and Children’s Home, and Mount Saint Joseph’s Home for the Aged.

Additionally, all brewery employees were given a bonus of $100 or more, depending on their length of employment; most received $1,000. He also instructed his family to pay off the mortgages of widows of past employees.

This vice-versus-virtue narrative is one I could not reconcile. Henry was the patriarch of the family and the business, but what was Louisa’s role in these split narratives? Did she balance his vice with her virtue? Michael Strelow’s 2013 historical fiction novel Henry: A Novel of Beer and Love in the West imagines Henry as a double man, scraping together business deals, establishing beer halls and houses of prostitution — one part conservative husband, father, and upper-crust businessman, the other part an adulterer who had an affair with his head prostitute, sold beer and flesh, and did dirty deals. Strelow echoes the implications in the 1890s vice-squad rhetoric, albeit with more twenty-first-century spice in his language. I reflected on the interviews Ingraham conducted with Louisa’s great grandson, who said theirs was a close-knit family that lived within a few blocks of each other and gathered for Sunday dinners. Was Louisa ignorant of Henry’s alleged vice?
Edmunson-Morton, Maybe You’ve Heard of Her Husband?

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Moreover, although we are accustomed to thinking of the early Euro-American settlers as trailblazers, the predictability of women’s domesticity led to stability and continuity. There has been a “gentle tamer” myth of White women in regards to their influence over the masculine Northwest of the 1840s and 1850s; however, rather than perpetuate the myth, I echo Armitage’s conclusion that the image of women quietly influencing men was a fiction. Furthermore, and significant to Louisa’s history, Armitage argues that the informal work of women in community building, as they pressed for churches or schools to be built, was vital but largely invisible and absent from the historical record.

For Louisa, this identity as an early immigrant was combined with her identity as a German. Traditional roles of German women may have influenced her life in Portland, her community involvement, or her personal reaction to accusations leveled at Henry. In other words, “Germanness” may have set the Weinhard family relationships in a different context than those of non-German Americans. In Germany, the majority of women lived in the home, a private sphere, and many believed women were naturally fated to be wives and mothers. Immigrants carried these gender roles to America, where women cared both for their families and the German community. In the home, a woman’s obligations included cooking, cleaning, and raising children, duties Louisa may have delegated, at least in part, to staff. But in “the bustling young town of Portland, where families often arrived from the Midwest with little money, and adventurers down on their luck were in abundance, a generous German woman was an asset.” Regardless of whether this stereotype held true for the majority of women in Oregon, it certainly held true for how Louisa’s family regarded her. Her great-grandson said “she was known as a soft touch. Virtually anyone ringing her doorbell could be assured of a dime from the pocket of her apron,” which she would periodically renew from the cashier’s till in the brewery office; however, he also noted that while she gave significant financial aid and was a generous soul, “she had a keen memory for repeaters [at the door] whom she sent away with a scolding in mixed German and English.”

Just over a year after Henry died, daughter Louise died of heart disease at thirty-two. She had had heart issues for years, but her death was surprising. Her obituary gave biographical details and noted she had a wide circle of friends, and also that she “remained constantly in the city, with the exception of a honeymoon trip to California on the occasion of her marriage to Mr. Wagner 12 years ago.” Although Anna attended Mills College in California for a year before returning to Portland to travel to Germany, Louise was educated in public schools in Portland. Historically, education was highly valued in Germany, and establishing a German-language school was a top priority for GAS. I imagine it is likely the Weinhard’s daughters attended those as well.

THE 1900 CENSUS lists Louisa’s birth year incorrectly as 1833 (she was born in 1832). Her date of immigration from Germany is listed as 1854, which is five years later than when she arrived.
By the time of the 1910 census, “Louise Weinhard” was seventy years old and the head of her house. Census records reported she had four children, one fewer than before, but her immigration year was correctly listed as 1847. She had three servants living with her: two Swiss women (Johanna Schpielman and Anna Anderick) and a man (Godfrey Berger) born in Oregon but with Swiss parents. At this point in her chronology, I was left with more questions that could not be answered without personal documentation. Was she lonely without her husband? How did she cope with the loss of her children? Did she support prohibition? How did she feel about the suffrage movement? What did she think about her legacy?

For the years following Henry and Louise’s deaths, it is difficult to determine how involved Louisa was in the brewery and family estate business, perhaps no more than as an executor of the estate. What is clear is that she continued to support her German community. The most significant demonstration of that support was her donation of a twenty-acre lot in Southeast Portland, valued at $20,000, to build a retirement facility for elderly Germans to spend their final years “among their own people.”

The cornerstone was laid on August 6, 1911, and it housed pictures of Louise and Henry, as well as copies of Portland’s German and other daily newspapers. Louisa’s great-grandson remembered a picture of her in the newspaper at the May 1912 dedication: he said she rode in an open carriage with the mayor of Portland, and looked like Queen Victoria, “very short and very fat.” Putting aside the comment about her appearance, this link to Victoria does bring to mind a woman clad in black, in perpetual mourning. In the picture itself, however, she looks happy and engaged with life. I learned more about Louisa from the news coverage for the Altenheim than in most articles about Henry or the business: she valued work, self-sufficiency, and cultural traditions, but she also was part of a community that felt isolated from the rest of Portland. What we do not hear are her words — in all the press coverage regarding the Altenheim, there is not a single quote from Louisa.

Still, these newspaper articles gave me other, disparate glimpses into Louise’s life by recording her community activities. She sent roses to the 1903 Portland Rose Society annual rose show and thirty pounds of sugar to support unemployed men at the Gipsy Smith Tabernacle. She donated $100 to a benefit fund to purchase artificial legs for Marjorie Mahr, an actress who lost both legs in a railway accident, and $150 to the People’s Institute after a forest fire in Washington. During the last weeks of her life, she gave money to a woman whose husband was in prison in California so she could visit him. Interestingly, despite earlier concerns about alcohol and immorality, nowhere in this news coverage were the Weinhards associated with the “vice trade.” This held true in the obituaries that followed her death.

Louisa died in Portland on April 23, 1918, and was buried at the River View Cemetery. She was eighty-five years old, had been in America for seventy-one years, and Portland for sixty-three. W.G. Maclaren, General Superintendent of the Pacific Coast Rescue and Protective Society, wrote a letter to the editor that was an unfeigned tribute to her good works and the hidden nature of her charity. Maclaren said that during the hard times of 1907, Louisa bought $100 worth of tickets for the Portland Commons and distributed them among “men who were out of work and in need of food and lodging. She gave me orders that I was not to allow any unfortunate person to go away hungry and agreed to meet the expenses of feeding them.” He continued, “there never was a case of a mother or child in sickness or distress...
that Mrs. Weinhard knew of where she would not give assistance” and concluded she was a “good woman with one of the best hearts where human suffering was concerned that I have ever known. I believe that the people of Portland should know something of what she did during her long residence in this city for the benefit of Humanity.” This last sentence feels like a final reminder that she gave freely to charitable causes and individual people, not necessarily for personal recognition (and maybe not for our historical record) but for the purpose of bettering others.85

Other papers followed with praise. The Morning Oregonian obituary was titled “Portland Woman Resident of Oregon Since 1855; Charitable Works Aided: Donation of Large Tract Provides Site for Home for Aged — One Daughter Survives — Funeral Set for Tomorrow.” It detailed her migration to Portland in 1855, marriage to Henry, charity, and “interest in civic enterprises,” but also commented on her wealth, saying she “had lived continuously at the family residence on North Thirteenth Street since 1878 . . . a dwelling at that time was regarded as among the most pretentious and substantial houses in the city.”86 The East Oregonian obituary called her “one of the best-known pioneers of Portland” and noted that her philanthropies were boundless.87 The following day, the East Oregonian noted she had “died in her old home,” which stood at the edge of the woods when it was built and was one of the first brick residences in the city.88 The Morning Oregonian noted funeral services were to be held at her home, and there was an advertisement in the Oregon Daily Journal from the GLRS requesting members attend.89 The day after Louisa’s funeral, the Daily Journal noted the event had been “attended by many friends and by all the residents of the Old People’s Home which had been established largely through her generosity.”90

As with the Altenheim property donation, Louisa’s estate provides important details about her values and relationships. It was valued at over $1 million, about $18 million today, and although she had $3,500 in savings, most of the value was in promissory notes and mortgages.91 The Oregon Daily Journal carried details about the distributions of her estate: $100,000 each to Anna, Paul, and Henry; $300,000 total in trust to her three grandchildren; $1,000 each to the Waverly Baby Home, Good Samaritan Hospital, and foreign missions of the Reformed Church in the United States; and $2,000 to the Open-Air Sanitarium near Milwaukie.92 She left $1,000 each to her sister-in-law, Adeline Wagenblast, and niece, a stenographer named Louisa. She left $500 each to two nieces and a nephew living in Missouri and Kansas, as well as $200 each to nieces living in Germany. She recognized three “faithful servants” who had worked at the brewery by giving each $5,000, and left $500 each to Gottfried Berger and Henry Bohlman.93 It is perhaps notable that she did not leave money to the GAS of the GLRS.

In researching Louisa, I found a handful of touchingly personal details I could not confirm. The Weinhards supposedly had a house in Astoria and a farm of 620 acres in Yamhill County. An Oregonian article, written in 1954 when Louise Weinhard Wagner’s home was being demolished, noted a four-foot stained glass window with a woman sipping from a wine glass, which was said to be given by Louisa as a gift with the house.94 There were other details about clothing that fill in a different texture to this narrative, and also speak to wealth, culture, and notice taken by society columns; for example, a description of “typical clothing” worn by members of the GLRS (crisp silk purchased in London and a full-bodied dress made by Portland dressmaker) or fancy clothing worn by Anna and Mila to the opera (blue embroidered chiffon draped over white satin, watermelon pink chiffon and white lace over crepe).95 More concrete details are found in genealogy (the names Henry and Louise/a were handed down to subsequent generations) and planning documents (Brewery Block Two, a high-rise building on the location of the Weinhard brewery, is called “Louisa”).

After months of research, several in the midst of a pandemic that precluded additional on-site research, I was left with many questions and new directions for research. The lack of records for the Weinhards and the brewing company during Louisa’s lifetime limits my ability to review primary source documents. There are, however, additional archival collections related to women’s organizations at...
the Oregon Historical Society, materials at the Aurora Colony Historical Society, and microfilmed German newspapers at university libraries. Apart from travel restrictions, my language limitations present a barrier. The more I researched, the more I wondered if there were materials in German language newspapers and books or early organizational records for the GAS and GLRS that I simply cannot read. Although the 1900 and 1910 census records document that Louisa spoke English, German-language records might offer a different or more personal representation of her.

Two bright spots light the end of this article: I found pictures, and I connected with a descendant. In my initial research, I was surprised I had not come across a picture of Louisa. When most of my writing was done, I spent an afternoon “free form” searching online — in other words, using random search phrases I cannot remember. It worked. I found a 1915 reference to 1888 portraits of Louisa and Henry housed in the Portland Community College’s (PCC) administrative offices, which were located in the old Altenheim building. PCC’s Community Relations manager sent me a picture of the portrait, which I printed and still sits on my desk. Despite all I had learned about her, it was the picture that made her seem real. Later, searching the newspaper databases for “Mrs. Weinhard,” I also found the picture of her at the Altenheim dedication described by her great-grandson. While I waited for reviewer feedback, I continued my research. On ancestry.com, looking for information about Louisa’s daughters, I found one of her descendants, Elizabeth Louise Hart, who had uploaded a picture of Louisa’s granddaughter. I messaged her to say I had a photograph of Louisa, who had written an article about her family, and was happy to share both. Fortunately, her reaction was delight rather than trepidation, and through our ongoing correspondence, she filled in some gaps on the Weinhardt family. But she also shared the personal impact of having a family history told through the men in her family, writing “for every one of these fathers, there were women whose triumphs and tragedies, ideas, works, words, dreams, pregnancies, births, desires, fears, ways of expressing love . . . all of it, were simply not recorded in our family’s oral history.”

I cannot end with words from Louisa but can with words from Elizabeth that sum up why filling in the silences to more fully reconstruct the story of women is so vital. She wrote that “the recovery of women’s stories, painstaking as it may be to grapple in the dark room of the dominant narrative, is an important task to undertake on behalf of our futures.” For her, the story of Louisa holds meaning because she asks how she thinks about where she fits in her family and why she continues to “do the work of uplifting the heart of women in a sea of stories about men.” Sometimes filling in the silences in the historical records means knitting together the small bits left behind.

NOTES

1. She was most commonly called Louisa or Louise, confusing since her daughter was named Louise, but also “Eliza” with a last name Wagenblast, Waggenblast, Waggenblast. Her married name Weinhard was Weinhart, Weinhardt, and Weinhart.
4. Garves listed Mary Allen from Monument; Frederickers Wetterer from Jacksonville; Theresa O’Brien from Astoria; Mary Mehl from Roseburg, Coquille, and Bandon; and Marie Kienlen from Grants Pass. I identified and did preliminary research on women married to brewers Catherine Stahl and Frances Kastner from eastern Oregon; Margaret Beck from Capital Brewing in Salem, and Louisa Kiefer from Albany, who was Fredericksa Wetterer’s sister.
9. His full name was John Caleb Gottlieb Wagenblast. I will refer to him as Gottlieb for simplicity, but sources also use Caleb. See U.S. Census Bureau, “Free Inhabitants in Marion Township in the County of Salem, State of Oregon,” United States Census, 1870, October 31, 1870, accessed via FamilySearch.
18. Ibid.
19. Bertha Carolina (Betty) was born January 20, 1869, and Louise Henrietta was born November 4, 1872.
23. Ibid., 42.
32. There are archival collections for the Portland Women’s Union, Ladies Aid Society, and 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition at the Oregon Historical Society I was unable to consult due to COVID-19 closures.
38. In 1908, emerging from her work with the Portland Women’s Union, Lola Greene Baldwin was hired to lead the Women’s Protective Division. For more on Baldwin, see Gloria E. Myers, A Municipal Mather: Portland’s Lola Greene Baldwin, America’s First Policewoman (Corvallis, Ore.: Oregon State University Press, 1995). For more on female police officers, see Dorothy Moses Schulz, “Preventive justice: Fears Over Female Immorality in the USA Lead to Police Positions for Women, 1887 to the First World War.” International Journal of Police Science and Management 4:3 (2002).


69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.


72. Ibid.


76. There is scant evidence regarding the Weinhards and suffrage; Louisa and Anna were listed on a potential donor list for the National Woman’s Party, although I suspect because of their wealth rather than public support.

77. “Lay Cornerstone of German Home: Haven for Aged People from Fatherland to be Erected at Cost of $20,000,” Oregon Daily Journal, August 7, 1911, p. 3.


80. “Lay Cornerstone of German Home,” p. 3.


85. Ibid.


87. “Mrs. Louise Weinhard is Dead in Portland,” East Oregonian, April 24, 1918, p. 2.

88. Ibid.


92. “Mrs. Weinhard’s Will Filed: Estate of $1,000,000 Bequeathed to Children and Grandchildren,” Oregon Daily Journal, August 9, 1918, p. 5.

93. “Last Will and Testament of Louise Weinhard, A Selection of Wills,” Title and Trust Company, 1925, in CN 347-6 G628s, OHS Research Library. Brewery workers were: Peter Wager, brewery bookkeeper and an officer at the Turnverein; Balthasar Adams was the brew master; and Charles Bloechle (Blakeley or Blakley), the brewery engineer. Bohiman was a member of the German Reformed Church and served as secretary for the German Aid Society. Louisa’s brother, Christian married Bohiman’s sister, Johanna, and Bohiman married Augusta Von Der Luhe at the Weinhard home.


97. The portraits are due to be transferred to our Oregon State University collections once campuses open and services resume.


99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.