

Alessandra Garofalo

AUSTERLITZ SOUNDED TOO MUCH
LIKE A BATTLE: THE ROOTS OF FRED
ASTAIRE FAMILY IN EUROPE

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In copertina: Envelope sent by Hildegarda “Zella” Kolh
(Astaire’s governess) to the Astaire family
in California from Vienna. 1949, author
collection.

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*To my grandmother
who taught me that history
is as big as future*

NOTES TO THE READER

The author have made all the possible to contact the owners of the copyright of the information contained in this book even if not always it has been possible to trace all the holders to ask permission. For this reason, in the case you would notice some lack or you would be the owner of the documents here mentioned I kindly ask you to advice me at the e-mail address:
fritz_1899@yahoo.it

Errors and omissions will be corrected in the second edition of the book.

Please, consider also that my research in not yet ended, I will search in particular more information about the commercial activity of the Austerlitz family in Austria and in the Czech Republic as well as of Fritz Austerlitz in the USA, and I will welcome every new information that will certainly be a precious help for the advancing of the

research and that will be added to the new edition of the book too.

Please, refer to the upon mentioned address if you wish to contact me.

Thank you!

INTRODUCTION

If we make a search for a Fred Astaire biography today we will notice that most of the texts would start with phrases like: “son of an Austrian immigrant”, “son of a brewer”, “Viennese blood”, etc.

But who was actually Frederic Austerlitz, Fred Astaire’s father?

Being born in an ex Austrian city, I was always fascinated by those brief mentions of Astaire’s Austrian background that unfortunately weren’t explained in depth enough as I wished so I decided to collect all the information I could find and try to see if I was able to find something new.

It appeared that the greatest source of information that I could trust were true, was the photo published in 1959 in *Steps In Time*, Fred’s autobiography, in which was portrayed Ernest Austerlitz. As explained in the book, Ernest was Astaire’s uncle, his father’s elder brother. In the picture he is

portrayed in his Austrian uniform so my researches started by study Austrian uniformology.

Understanding the meaning of each badge has been the most difficult and the longest part of my work but it has been also the most productive because with these information I have been able to trace Ernest Austerlitz in the Austrian War Archives and the finding of all the other documents came as a consequence.

By today, the researches are arrived at a good point that permitted me to make a resume of the most important events that characterized the Austerlitz family in Austria but the work is still not ended and maybe in the future will be found new interesting anecdotes.

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