



MAX KADE INSTITUTE

FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

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Old Wine in New Bottles, or Is *Heimat* Portable?

Johannes Strohschänk



Wisconsin landscape, for many German immigrants an echo of home

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From time immemorial, human life has revolved around the management of space. For the peasant it is the land that has an indisputable hold over virtually every facet of his life. Just as man cultivates the land by coaxing it into increased food production, the land cultivates man, not only by providing him with food but also by instilling in him a sense of purpose tempered by success and failure. This experience, accruing year after year, provides the seed for knowledge and, ultimately, culture, defined as the endowment of one's environment with meaning. A meaningful natural environment, combined with its translation

into social customs, defines what the Germans call *Heimat*.

To what extent were the German immigrants of the middle of the 19th century, mostly farmers, able to transplant their *Heimat* into the woods of Wisconsin? When thinking of their home village, we must not only imagine a small cluster of houses huddled around the church, their shape and architecture determined by the natural surroundings. We also have to consider how the village's character imprints itself on the farmer's mind. For example, in flat country a hedgerow, planted to break

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Introducing a New MKI Outreach Project!

In our last newsletter we shared the good news that we had just received a Major Grant of \$10,000 from the Wisconsin Humanities Council to fund a new outreach project titled “Neighbors Past and Present: The Wisconsin German Experience.” Antje, Kevin, and Mark set to work creating content for 14 retractable poster-banners addressing major themes related to the history, culture, and language of German-speaking immigrants to Wisconsin and their descendants today. Each poster is 7.5 feet high and 3 feet wide and includes about 400 words of text complemented by 5 to 6 images, many of which are from the MKI Library and Archives. We had the good fortune to work with Sue Medaris, a gifted graphic designer here at UW-Madison, to finalize the actual posters.

For this project we drew on our experience in outreach work and serving researchers who have utilized our collection holdings. While it was impossible to cover every topic of interest, we feel pleased with the scope of our 14 themes: A New Home; 100 Years of Immigration; Language; Published in German; Beliefs; Amish and Mennonites; Education; Traditions; Music, Theater and Visual Arts; Rural Life and Economy; Urban Life and Economy; Civic and Political Engagement; In Times of War; and Local Is Global. Each poster features

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Neighbors Past and Present

The Wisconsin German Experience

A New Home

If you live in Wisconsin, there's a good chance that you or a neighbor has a surname like Janke, Krueger, or Schmidt. In fact, 40% of state residents identify themselves on government surveys as having ancestral ties to German-speaking Europe.

Organized German immigration to Wisconsin goes back to 1839, when a group of 20 Old Lutheran families from Eastern Pomerania founded the community of Freistadt, located in Ozaukee County, north of Milwaukee. Many of Freistadt's current residents are descended from the 20 original families, and the congregation founded by Freistadt's settlers, Trinity Lutheran, is today still the only church in the community. Since Freistadt is unincorporated, no official statistics on its population are available. However, it is perhaps similar to nearby Germantown, which is among the most German of all Wisconsin communities, with about 54% of its residents claiming German ancestry.

The earliest arrivals in Wisconsin came by way of the Mississippi River or Lake Michigan, through Milwaukee, Sheboygan, and other ports. After the Civil War, most immigrants to the Badger State came by railroad. German settlers looking for farmland settled heavily in the eastern and central hinterlands of Wisconsin, forming a German Belt within the state. Others, including merchants, tradesmen, and artists, made their home in Milwaukee, which became known as America's German Athens (Deutsch-Athen). Today, in every Wisconsin county a sizeable percentage of the population claims German ancestry, from nearly 24% in Douglas County to just over 57% in Washington County.


From the start, German settlers in Wisconsin were in close contact with people from other backgrounds, including Native Americans, and this resulted in interchanges on many levels. German immigrants and their descendants did not seek to live in geographic or social isolation from their neighbors. Many did feel it important to conserve elements of their European heritage, such as their language and religious and cultural traditions, but their experiences as part of the multiethnic tapestry of America meant that the Wisconsin German identity they developed was a profoundly hybrid one, blending influences from the Old World and the New.




Map showing the national origins of Wisconsin's population. Based on research by UW-Madison sociologist Professor George W. Hill. It was created in 1941 by Phyllis Taggart for the Milwaukee Journal. Wisconsin Historical Society added to poster.



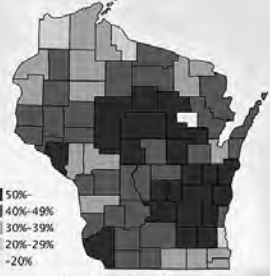
Wisconsin State Historical Marker at Freistadt, Wisconsin, recognizing the state's first German settlement.



The Journey from Mecklenburg to the Town of Middleton in the 1850s

- 2-3 Days by Horse and Wagon from Picher, Mecklenburg, to Hamburg or Bremen
- 8 to 10 Weeks by Sailing Ship from Hamburg or Bremen to New York
- 3 to 5 Weeks by Train, River Boat, and/or Lake Schooner from New York to Milwaukee, Plus Two Days by Wagon to Middleton


Map illustrating the journey of several members of the Collin family who emigrated in the 1850s and 1860s from the German Duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin to settle in the Town of Middleton, Wisconsin. Map by Max Kade.





Percentage of Wisconsin Residents of German Stock, 2015

Map by Max Kade. Lower count of area than the US Census Bureau. Available at statecensus.com

- 50%-
- 40%-49%
- 30%-39%
- 20%-29%
- 20%



J. Buniman's store in Sheboygan in an 1896 photo taken by Herman Conrad Brown. Copy, retouched, and American flags are displayed in the window, while the local German paper, the Sheboygan Zeitung, is advertised on the wall. Photo: Wisconsin Historical Society.


Greetings, Friends and Readers!

Greetings to all our Friends! We were pleased to see so many of you at our recent annual meeting at Old World Wisconsin. The weather was beautiful and we were especially grateful for Johannes Strohschänk's engaging banquet address on the topic of *Heimat*, a version of which is featured in this newsletter. Many thanks to Antje Petty and Kevin Kurdylo for their hard work, as always, in preparing for this event.

Looking back on the past academic year, we have much to be thankful for. A major highlight was of course our new outreach exhibit, "Neighbors Past and Present: The Wisconsin German Experience," which is already on its way across the state. Part of the inspiration to submit a grant proposal for this project to the Wisconsin Humanities Council came from our hosting the German Iowa and the Global Midwest exhibit that was created by colleagues at the University of Iowa. While Neighbors Past and Present is focused on the heritage of German speakers in Wisconsin and will be shared with communities across the state, there is interest in bringing it to other states as well. To that end, we have leveraged funding to produce a second set of poster-banners later this summer. In the long term, we see this project as a model for other traveling exhibits on German-American themes that are of interest both in Wisconsin and across the nation.

To say a little about the work involved with Neighbors Past and

Present, I want to underscore that this has been a team effort for Antje, Kevin, and myself. Our work has included securing funding (preparation and management of the WHC grant), developing content (writing text and selecting images), working closely with our wonderful graphic designer, Sue Medaris, and most of all, building connections and forging collaborations across the state to identify communities that are interested in showing the exhibit.

Another important highlight of the past year has been building our relationship with the Society for German-American Studies, the leading professional organization for our field. Former MKI Director Cora Lee Kluge is nearing the end of her two-year term as SGAS Vice President and will become President this summer. I agreed to be nominated to succeed her as Vice President. MKI Friends and past and present board members Karyl Rommelfanger and Josh Brown are serving as Membership Coordinator and Newsletter Editor, respectively. This means that for the next couple of years, MKI will have an important role in shaping the agenda of the SGAS and its annual symposia. After having organized this year's symposium in Madison, we are already planning next year's event in Washington, DC. All of us on the MKI staff are looking forward to helping advance the work of SGAS both nationally and internationally.

We thank you, our Friends, for your help and support of our many endeavors! You have opened doors for us across the state and your generous financial support has allowed us to pursue projects that otherwise might not have been feasible. For

example, your donations enabled us to pay for the graphic designer of the above-mentioned exhibit panels beyond what the WHC grant allowed, ensuring a much higher quality final product. Another investment will be a large-bed, high resolution scanner, which will be crucial for our library and outreach work as we scan more and more documents for physical exhibits, virtual exhibits, and collaborative digital projects.

Your donations to the Max Kade Institute General Fund at the UW Foundation support these and other research and outreach activities as well as the MKI Library and Archives. In addition, we continue to build up the endowment for our librarian/archivist position through the MKI Librarian Support Fund at the UW Foundation. And of course, all donations made to the Friends benefit the Institute, and we are deeply grateful. And please remember, all donations to any of these funds are tax deductible.

Thank you, our Friends, for the support you give us in so many ways and all the best for an enjoyable summer!

— Mark

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the wind and enclose a field, assumes the quality of an aesthetic adornment. Thus, what had initially been a simple protective measure against the vicissitudes of nature grew into a cultural tradition. Or biblical fresco paintings on stuccoed walls of an Alpine village designed to protect the house dwellers from fire or disease transcend their utilitarian purpose by lifting the passerby from his daily toils to a level of spiritual meditation and aesthetic pleasure, while at the same time giving the entire village a unique artistic quality. These qualitative shifts between materials and artifacts occur mostly on the subconscious level, but they distinctly mark not only the exterior appearance of a place but also the mental landscape of its residents.

While *Heimat* in today's German mind tends to conjure up affectionate thoughts of cozy houses in quaint villages, reverberating from laughter and mirth, it was first and foremost the grinding regime of daily chores that determined the farmer's life. What made this hard life bearable was its predictable rhythm characterized by the swing of the arm broadcasting the seed, the swipe of the scythe, or the fanning of the hearth's flames. As in music, repetition means confirmation, predictability, reassurance, but also resonance for the biological rhythms of the body. Yes, there was also the larger rhythm of the annual holiday calendar providing well-earned relief from daily toil. In the end, all was embedded in the ultimate rhythm of life, into the cycle of youth, adulthood, and age, each involved in its characteristic interplay between the generations.

In reality, then, *Heimat* meant not so



Giving environment meaning: Frescoes in Mittenwald, Bavaria, Germany

much the folkloristic traditions that we today admire in small town museums; *Heimat* was rather a metaphysical concept that ensured the hardships on earth could be tolerated before a better life awaited one after death. This concept was built on ritualistic cycles of activities on different temporal scales—daily, seasonal, annual. By raising their initial purpose and meaning into the realm of aesthetics or art, they reach a higher level of expression that the British historian Simon Schama calls ritualized memory.

Once we have grasped the rigid structure of village life captured in the term *Heimat*, we understand why a question like the following is meaningless: What if one wanted to break out of this structure, choose a different profession, marry a person from a

distant town, or not marry at all? First, we must remember that the Old World villagers did not have the opportunity to explore the world beyond their narrow horizon. Acceptance of one's station in life was the norm. After all, what could be better than stability in a community of like-minded people whose collaboration ensured that life's basic needs were met and dangers staved off? The rare individual who attempted to break out of this system was quickly ostracized; a woman might be marginalized within the community or a man expelled.

Despite all the pressing factors that eventually contributed to emigration, we can now imagine how difficult it must have been to sever the strings that tied the Germans to their *Heimat*. It may be no coincidence that it was during the onset of larger emigration waves in the

early 19th century when the *Heimat* concept began to emerge in public discourse. Could there be a connection between leaving one's home and developing a strong sense of home, as expressed through the *Heimat* idea? If true, *Heimat* is not a conscious experience while one lives it, it only rises to consciousness once it is lost. If we could go back in time and interview the old farmers and villagers about their relationship with their social and physical surroundings, they surely would not have waxed melancholic about the breathtaking landscape and the beautiful artifacts or about their harmonious community of family and friends. Those surroundings simply were here yesterday, are here today and will be here tomorrow; unthinkable that one day they would be gone. But then the unthinkable happened—

people were leaving behind a life of certainty, of cyclical recurrence, of security. Suddenly memory and longing, until now subconscious, began to raise the concept of home, or *Heimat*, to the level of acute awareness. In other words, we now understand *Heimat* as the product of alienation.

This brings up the question if one can reconstitute true *Heimat* in another place. Has home or *Heimat* become a portable commodity, something you carry with you in a backpack, so to speak? When the German immigrants began to build their new dwellings in the woods of Wisconsin, home for them was what they remembered from the place they left behind. To build a new home in the wilderness meant—consciously or subconsciously—to replicate as closely as possible the place that had determined their earlier

life. It was not a question of settling a newfound frontier, as for the Yankee moving west. On the contrary, if they had been able to, no doubt the Germans would have carried their houses and farmsteads on their backs. As a result, one might say that what had at best been felt latently in the homeland became real *Heimat* abroad; the arduous process of recreating, if only in part, a traditional physical and cultural setting in the wilderness proved to heighten the awareness of what this *Heimat* actually consisted of and what obstacles encumbered its realization.

In general, there is no doubt that the act of rebuilding one's home in a new environment not only crystallizes the cultural values that had been instilled at home but actually reinforces and accentuates them. So, to go back to our initial question, "Is *Heimat* portable?" the answer is a resounding "Yes!" In fact, we can say that the Wisconsin Germans have raised their *Heimat* experience to a level of consciousness unknown back home. Following this concept, one might even conclude that our German emigrants (despite as well as because of their privations) may have lived more fully than their brothers and sisters they left behind! *Heimat* then, is not only portable—*Heimat*, through its transfer to other places, actually comes to life! 🍂

This is an abridged version of a talk given at the Annual Friends of MKI meeting in Old World Wisconsin, May 5, 2019. Johannes Strohschänk teaches German language, culture, and literature at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire and is the co-author of The Wisconsin Office of Emigration, 1852–1855, and Its Impact on German Immigration to the State.



Friends Annual Meeting 2019 at Old World Wisconsin: *Gemütlichkeit* and an Educational Experience

Antje Petty



Heirloom garden at Old World Wisconsin

Old World Wisconsin (OWW), the largest outdoor museum of rural life in the United States, opened its gates in 1976, mainly due to the efforts of German immigrant Hans Kuether and architect and preservationist Richard W. E. Perrin. With its vision of showcasing the different stories of Wisconsin's immigrant past in a setting of historic structures, OWW proved to be a perfect place to hold the Friends of the Max Kade Institute's 2019 annual meeting!

On a beautiful May Sunday, Friends from all over the state came

together for a guided tram tour that took us past many of the sixty historic OWW structures, heirloom gardens, livestock, woods, and fields tended in traditional methods. We saw the Scandinavian area with Danish, Norwegian, and Finnish farmsteads, where we marveled at different building styles and fence-types, the tiny one-room Raspberry School house, and a Finnish sauna. The "Life on the Farm" area included a Polish immigrant home from 1900, the 1870 cabin-style house of a Hessian immigrant, and two farms of Pomeranian immigrants from 1860

and 1880. It was striking how different these farmsteads were from each other, reflecting not only the builders' ethnic backgrounds, but also their economic status.

At the Hessian farmstead, we were met by Director Dan Freas who told us about OWW's history. All buildings are originals from across the state. Piece by piece, workers dismantled the old structures, numbering bricks, boards and logs, and moved them to Old World Wisconsin, where they were painstakingly reassembled precisely as they had once been built. Keeping the buildings from



Disembarking from the tram to tour the grounds



Learning about threshing

falling into disrepair requires a lot of maintenance and occasionally a complete renovation, which we were able to observe at a barn on this farmstead. Afterward, we explored the museum on our own. Some of us sampled freshly brewed ginger ale at the Four Mile House, others checked out new plantings at the Pomeranian garden



Linda Kleinschmidt, Ed Langer, and James Kleinschmidt



Getting up close with the livestock

or enjoyed a scoop of traditional ice cream at the creamery.

The Friends annual business meeting was held at the Clausing Barn, an octagonal two-story structure built by German barn builder Ernst Clausing in 1897 in Mequon, Ozaukee County. Luanne von Schneidmesser gave the Treasurer's report. Mark Loudon, Kevin Kurdylo, and Antje Petty summarized the MKI's activities of the past year, and President John Pustejovsky introduced the Board of Directors. He noted that three members rotated off the Board because of term limits. Thank you very much Karen Fowdy, Steven Geiger, and especially John Pustejovsky, for your time, energy, humor, and amazing support over the last six years! Three new Board members were elected by acclamation: Alan



John Pustejovsky and Johannes Strohschänk

Lareau, Susan Marshall, and Dorothy Smaglick. See page 10 for a more detailed introduction of all three.

After our group had enjoyed a hearty dinner of *Rouladen* and *Wiener Schnitzel*, Johannes Strohschänk,



Resting on the porch of a historic home

Professor of German at UW–Eau Claire and a former Board member, presented a lecture on “Old Wine in New Bottles, or Is *Heimat* portable?” You can find a summary of his thought-provoking talk as the cover story of this newsletter. A wonderful day was rounded out by John Pustejovsky with parting words and the reading of a poem by Jane Kenyon: “Let Evening Come.” 🍷



Our youngest guest, Ellie von Schneidmesser, with her parents Erika von Schneidmesser and Todd Ehresmann

Remembering Todd Michalek

We are very sad to report that Friends of MKI Board of Directors member Todd Michalek passed away on June 18 at the age of 62. A lifetime member of the Friends, Todd joined the Board in 2017 and immediately sprang into action to help the Friends and the Institute. He was the Friends’ liaison at German Fest Milwaukee, organized our annual presence there, and initiated the Friends’ participation in the German Fest passport program. In addition, he tirelessly promoted the MKI wherever his many volunteer activities took him, and arranged for MKI presentations and collaborations in Milwaukee.



Todd’s passion was to spread awareness of Wisconsin’s rich multicultural heritage and connect with people of different backgrounds. He was an active member of the Institute of World Affairs at UW–Milwaukee, SOKOL Milwaukee (Czech Society), the Polish Heritage Alliance, the Italian Community Center, the Swedish American Historical Society of Wisconsin, the Nordic Council of Milwaukee, the Pabst Mansion, Historic Milwaukee, the Milwaukee County Historical Society, and the South Milwaukee Historical Society.

We will miss Todd and his enthusiasm, wellspring of great ideas, laughter, and genuine kindness. 🍷

Board of Directors, Friends of the Max Kade Institute

- Joshua Brown** *Eau Claire*
- Kay Gruling** *President, Wausau*
- Alan Lareau** *Oshkosh*
- Mark Louden** *ex officio, Sun Prairie*
- Fran Luebke** *Brookfield*
- Susan Marshall** *Phillips*
- William Petig** *Secretary, Watertown*
- Antje Petty** *ex officio, Fitchburg*
- Dorothy Smaglick** *Brookfield*
- William G. Thiel** *Eau Claire*
- Luanne von Schneidmesser** *Treasurer, Madison*
- Don Zamzow** *Vice President, Schofield*

Welcome to Alan Lareau, Susan Marshall, and Dorothy Smaglick, New Members of the Friends Board of Directors

Antje Petty

We are delighted to have three new members on the Friends Board of Directors: **Alan Lareau** is Professor Emeritus of German at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh. After earning his PhD at UW–Madison (1990) and studies in Munich and Mainz, he taught for six years in the German total immersion program of Concordia College in Bemidji, Minnesota. Then he moved to Oshkosh, where he taught German language, literature, cultural history, and mass media until retiring in 2017. Al’s research focuses on German cabaret, musical theater, and popular entertainment of the early twentieth century. His publications include *The Wild Stage: Literary Cabarets of the Weimar Re-*



Sue Marshall and her husband Bruce



Alan Lareau

public (1995) and the *Kurt Tucholsky-Discographie* (1997), as well as the edited memoirs of composer Victor Hollaender, *Revue meines Lebens* (2014). He is now finishing an English-language biographical study of author-composer Friedrich Hollaender (Frederick Hollander). His research on the Hollaenders (father and son) involves German culture in Milwaukee and Chicago before WWI, and German exiles in Hollywood in the thirties and forties. Al has also contributed articles to the *Friends of MKI Newsletter*, as well as *Monatshefte*, the *International Feuchtwanger Society Newsletter*, and others.

In Oshkosh, Al worked with the county historical society to bring the Max Kade Institute’s exhibit on Ger-

man Americans in World War I to town. He is currently organizing the presentation of MKI’s *Neighbors Past and Present* exhibit for a showing at the Oshkosh Public Library in early 2020. Al has served on the boards of Minnesota Singers Theater and Bemidji Community Theater and on the Events and Exhibitions Committee of the Winnebago County Historical and Archaeological Society. He is also a docent at the historic Morgan House in Oshkosh. At home in both Minnesota and Wisconsin, Al’s interest in our local history is complemented by his academic background in popular culture and social history. Though not having any German heritage of his own, as a member of the Friends Board of Directors, Al would like to support MKI’s outreach

to local communities and networking with regional organizations and institutions.

Susan Marshall is a second- and third-generation German American, depending on which side of her family you look at. While in high school, she traveled to Germany with her family and met her German second and third cousins, with whom she has maintained contact ever since. Sue studied German at Lawrence University in Appleton, WI, including a semester abroad in Boppard am Rhein and in Munich. After graduating with a B.A. in German and a teaching certification for grades seven to twelve, Sue worked for the Molkerei Werne (the Werne Dairy) in Werne-an-der-Lippe in Nordrhein-Westfalen as the contact person between the dairy and their English-speaking clients: the American, Canadian, and British armed forces stationed in Germany. Back in Wisconsin, Sue taught one year at the Milwaukee German Immersion School as a paraprofessional aide while taking classes at UW-Milwaukee

toward an elementary teaching certification. In 1985, Sue and her family moved to Phillips, WI, where she “retired” for 13 years to stay home with her three children.

In 2000, two weeks before school started, both Spanish teachers in the Phillips School District left, and the high school principal and district superintendent called to ask Sue if she would like to start a German program. This was the beginning of a very successful high school German program in Wisconsin. For 15 1/2 years Sue taught German in Phillips, which was the only world language offered at her school. During that time, she took students on trips to Germany on four occasions, and fifteen times to the Concordia Language Villages in Bemidji, MN, for four-day German immersion weekends. Sue also served as a Goethe Institute trainer for twelve years. Two of her own children majored and one minored in German in college.

A long-time member of the Friends of the Max Kade Institute, Sue has enjoyed reading the newsletter and

attending annual meetings and MKI workshops. She is making slow progress on learning to read the old German script. Sue is very interested in history in general and her family’s German-American history specifically. In the current era of disappearing German programs in secondary schools and colleges, she sees the Max Kade Institute as an important resource for German educators. She also appreciates MKI’s efforts to preserve our collective German-American heritage through its outreach programs, classes, and collection of German-American materials. She is thrilled to contribute her time and passions for most things German to our organization by serving on the Friends of MKI Board of Directors.

Dorothy Smaglick grew up in a bilingual (or tri-lingual if one considers “Bayrisch” its own language) household. Her father, Fritz Keller, was one of the founders of the German Language and School Society (*Deutscher Sprach- und Schulverein*, DSSV), established in Milwaukee in 1956. Dorothy and her brother experienced firsthand the passion the founding members of the DSSV had for promoting the study of German in Wisconsin. She has made it her mission to keep that vision alive. Dorothy has served as treasurer of the DSSV, has run its \$21,000/year scholarship program, and has coordinated the society’s Student Essay Contest and High School Career and College Fair. In 2010, Dorothy arranged for the early records of the DSSV to be transferred to the Max Kade Institute Archives, where they are preserved and made accessible to students, scholars, and

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Dorothy Smaglick (fourth from left) and her family at her daughter’s wedding

Kranken-Unterstützungsverein Saxonia: A German Health and Death Benefit Organization in Milwaukee

Antje Petty

German Americans' love for social clubs and heritage societies is legendary. However, much less is known about the mutual aid organizations they founded to provide a limited safety net for participating members.

In the 1880s, as part of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's social legislation, Germany became the first nation in the world to adopt nationwide and mandatory workers compensation and health insurance (1883), accident insurance (1884), and old age and disability insurance (1889).

In America no such public programs existed, and there were few private insurance options. The country's first property insurance company, Benjamin Franklin's "The Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insuring of Houses from Loss by Fire," had been founded as early as 1752, but by the late nineteenth century, there were still very few options for people who wished for a financial cushion in case of hard times caused by illness, untimely death, or loss of work and income.

As a result, in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, mutual aid organizations sprang up all across America. Some were fraternal orders, others were affiliated with churches, and many were established in ethnic communities, sometimes as adjuncts to already existing cultural organizations. Each group provided a limited set of benefits, and it was not uncommon for people to be members of

more than one mutual aid society.

German aid societies in Wisconsin—just to name a few—included the *Deutsch-Katholischer Kranken-Unterstützungs und Jünglingsverein* (German-Catholic mutual aid society for sick people and young men), which had branches throughout the state; Wausau's *Deutscher Arbeiter Unterstützungs Verein* (German workmen's aid society), founded in 1883 and lasting until 1972, with a change in name to the Wausau Benevolent Society; and, one of Wisconsin's larger benefit societies, the *Gegenseitige Unterstützungs-Gesellschaft Germania*, founded in 1888 in Milwaukee "for the purpose of mutual aid in cases of sickness, accident and death of its members or their families." In 1923, it had 8,000 members in 60 chapters, over \$500,000 in assets and an additional \$100,000 in sick benefit funds held by local chapters. Membership was open to men ages 18 to 50 of good moral character, regardless of their religious or political affiliations. However, they did have to pass a medical exam.

An example of a much smaller benefit organization is the *Kranken-Unterstützungs-Verein Saxonia*, founded in Milwaukee in 1883. Its history, mission, and membership are in many ways typical of the small mutual aid societies that were founded in the 1880s.

According to a chronicle published in German by the club in 1908 on the occasion of its 25-year anniversary,



Saxonia's story began when a group of immigrants from the German state of Saxony who had lived in Wisconsin for decades wished to form a club that would allow them to socialize in conviviality with their fellow countrymen. This desire soon became reality, as in the fall of 1882 several compatriots gathered at Heinrich Pönisch's apartment and decided to found a "Saxony" society. No time was wasted, the first constitutional assembly was held on January 28, 1883, [...], by-laws were written, officers were elected, and "Saxonia" was founded [...] At the time of its first public meeting, the Verein already had 31 members. [...] Because of the strong interest, it was necessary to move the third meeting to Lenz's Restaurant. There, future social activities were discussed, and after a

lively debate, it was agreed to have an evening of entertainment as the first event. [...] A Women's committee was formed to help with the organization (translated by the author). In the following weeks, festivals, music performances, and several outings were planned.

Then, at the April 1883 meeting, one member suggested the formation of an affiliated health-benefit organization, a suggestion that garnered a lot of interest, but also raised questions and concerns. The 1908 booklet describes the deliberations: *A lively discussion ensued over the mutual-aid society proposal. Herr Kobler pointed out that such an organization would hinder the actual mission of the Saxonia, that it might even put in jeopardy its very existence. He preferred to support every deserving compatriot to the fullest extent, but strictly voluntarily.* [...]

At the September meeting the issue of a mutual aid society was brought up again. The ensuing debate focused on the question of whether there was even a need for such a group. It was pointed out that many members already belonged to lodges and clubs that offered health benefits, and that people joined Saxonia primarily to have a good time among compatriots. Finally Mr. Gustav Lyser rose and offered a simple solution: if members of the Saxonia wished to form a mutual aid organization, they should go ahead. If enough members signed up, and if enough money was raised for a self-sustaining fund, then Saxonia would amend its by-laws and incorporate the mutual aid society. A special committee was formed to explore options. Later in the month, they brought forth a number of sugges-



Three of the 21 founding members of the Saxonia Verein

tions, and the Board voted 19 to 6 for the establishment of an *Unterstützungsverein*. Any member of the Saxonia could join provided he was under 55, paid the special dues, and received a majority vote of the other members.

The *Unterstützungsverein* proved popular and membership grew steadily. In 1901, *Saxonia* opened its doors to people who were not from Saxony, a move that dramatically increased membership. Now any German male between the ages of 18 and 45 could join the *Unterstützungsverein*. In 1885, the aid society had 35 members, 125 in 1890, and 200 in 1908. Nevertheless, that year, as Bernhardt Gutermuth—the author of the anniversary booklet—laments, membership had become stagnant due to slowed immigration, hard economic times, and less interest in general [in this kind of mutual aid society].

Initially, participants had to pay \$1 per month into the fund. In 1894 this was changed to \$1.50 per month,

but now members received free care from a physician under contract with the society. This first *Vereinsarzt* (club doctor) was Dr. Wilhelm Schorse, who was paid \$100 a year by the *Saxonia*. The society's Treasurer was responsible for administering the fund, which included investing and saving membership contributions.

From Mr. Gutermuth we learn that members received the following benefits: *Before 1886, the Verein paid \$3 per week for a sick member after his second week of illness. In 1886 the amount was increased to \$5 per week. In 1900, the rules were changed to allow benefit collection after one week of illness. A member now was paid \$0.70 per day. But the Verein was always careful whom they paid, since unfortunately, some members had collected benefits while they continued to work. After 1887, the family of a deceased member received a death benefit. The amount was that of the number of members of the society. In 1891 the death benefit for members was capped*

at \$100 and for their spouses at \$50, which was increased to \$150 and \$75 four years later. The booklet includes a detailed table of the expenses of the *Unterstützungsverein* over the years.

Beyond its health and death benefit obligations, the *Verein* helped members in need in other situations and made contributions to a variety of causes. This included anti-temperance actions in 1895, support of workers who participated in the streetcar strike of 1896, and contributions to the *Schiller-Goethe Denkmalgesellschaft* in support of building a monument to these German icons. In 1907, *Saxonia* joined the *Deutsch-amerikanischer Nationalbund* (National German-American Alliance).

The *Kranken-Unterstützungsverein Saxonia* decided to celebrate its 25th anniversary with a number of festivities, including a parade that was to

include all German societies of Milwaukee. On the list of participants were several other German *Kranken Unterstützungsvereine* (KUV). Four, like *Saxonia*, served Milwaukee immigrants from specific German regions: Swabia, Baden, Austria, and Bavaria. There were also the *KUV Vorwärts* (Forward) and *KUV Zufriedenheit* (Contentment), as well as the Chicago *KUV Saxonia*. 🍷

NOTE:

The Max Kade Institute thanks Astrid Adler (Tiefenort, Germany) for donating a copy of the *Festschrift zum Silber-Jubiläum des K.U. Vereins "Saxonia"* to the Max Kade Institute Archives.

Hauptquartier des K. U. Vereins Saxonia

und von 28 anderen Vereinen

Saloon,
Bowling Alley
und
Sommer
Garten

Phone
Grand 2618



Sängerkheim
298-300 FOURTH ST., MILWAUKEE

Grosse
und Kleine
Halle zu
vermieten
an
Vereine,
Hochzeiten,
etc., etc.

298-300 Vierte Strasse

JOHN CATEL, Eigenthümer

Mitglied des Vereins

An advertisement from the *Festschrift zum Silber-Jubiläum des K.U. Vereins "Saxonia"* for the *Sängerkheim*, home to *Saxonia* and 28 other *Vereine*

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anybody else interested in the history of this German-American organization.


Being a board member of the Goethe House is another way for Dorothy to keep German culture and language relevant in Wisconsin. In addition, she has served on the board of the Elmbrook Education Foundation and on several committees in the Elmbrook School District, as well as in her church, St. Joseph. For two years, Dorothy was a high school math and German teacher in Milwaukee. Since 1980 she has been working for U.S. Bank, where she currently is Vice President for Technology and Operations and Wealth Management Shared Services.

Dorothy and her late husband Paul have three adult children and two grandchildren. All her children studied German from Saturday school through high school and college. Dorothy's second love (after all things German) is travel. Dorothy now looks forward to the opportunity to learn from and contribute to the work of the Max Kade Institute, especially as it relates to research and outreach about the German language in America, dialects, and heritage.

Welcome on Board, Dorothy, Sue, and All! 

Continued from page 2

a QR code where viewers can access additional information on the themes covered.

Starting this summer, Neighbors Past and Present will travel to diverse locations across the state where the poster-banners will be exhibited and connected with programming tailored to the specific interests of each venue. The communities where we have already scheduled events through spring 2020 are Athens, Wausau, Spring Valley, Kiel, Milwaukee, Oshkosh, and Eau Claire. Please check the events page on our website (<https://mki.wisc.edu/events/all-events>) for details. And contact us with suggestions for other places where we can bring Neighbors Past and Present. Our goal is to reach as many of Wisconsin's seventy-two counties as we can! 

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Kevin Kurdylo
Friends of the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies
432 East Campus Mall, UW–Madison, Madison, WI 53706–1407
Phone: (608) 262–7546
mki@library.wisc.edu

mki.wisc.edu