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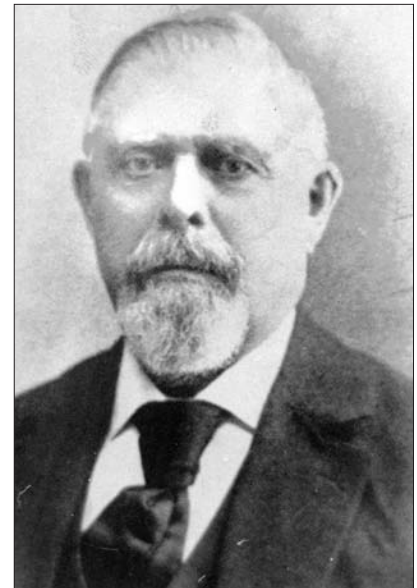
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German Settlers of Marathon County, Wisconsin

by Gary Gisselman, MKI Friend

The earliest German settlers began to arrive in Marathon County in 1855, having found this central Wisconsin region both attractive and welcoming. They played a vital role in the development of the county, settling in the county seat of Wausau, in small villages such as Marathon City, and on farmland further west. The German population increased and became one of the major influences on the culture, religion, commerce, politics, music, and general everyday life of the area. The German immigrants came from throughout the German lands, especially those in the northeast, such as Posen, Brandenburg, and Mecklenburg. However, the largest group that established itself in Marathon County was from Pomerania, a part of former Prussia that lies along the coast of the Baltic Sea.



August Kickbush
1828-1901.

*Courtesy of the Marathon
County Historical Society.*

In the early years Marathon County's German settlers came to work in the sawmills and the lumber camps; but with time the trees were cleared away, and they began to turn to farming and to working in the area's cities and villages. Farmers found cheap land and rich soil, and they were able to plant and harvest crops that were familiar to them from their former homelands. The seasons, too, were like those that they had known before. Furthermore, as they chose where to settle, they were attracted by the fact that the area was home to others from German regions. Their neighbors spoke German, newspapers were printed in German, and church services were held in German. Wherever they went, Marathon

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Director's Corner

by Cora Lee Kluge, MKI Director

Greetings, Friends and Readers!

As the year 2007 ends, we at the Keystone House are making plans for what promises to be a busy year ahead. In mid-October we will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of MKI, and we will continue to celebrate with commemorative events throughout the academic year 2008–2009. Please watch for announcements of the details!

Meanwhile, the holiday season is here once again. The American traditions we knew in our childhood and will pass on to future generations evolved over many years and bear the marks of our country's ethnic diversity. Ancient practices set the rebirth of the sun toward the end of December as a time of celebration; the druids kissed under the mistletoe; Washington Irving's Dutch St. Nicholas flew through the sky and entered houses through the chimney; German-American artist Thomas Nast's Santa Klaus is a descendant of St. Nick, but also of many other European figures who brought gifts or sticks; and the indispensable Mexican poinsettia appears everywhere. We try

to spend time with family—before the fireplace, if possible; we cook and eat dishes whose foreign (and sometimes corrupted) names we cannot understand; and we wrap gifts, shovel snow, and watch football games on television.

We are thinking of you, and no matter what you are doing, we wish you light in the darkness of winter, love with your friends and family, and the blessings of health, hard work, contentment, and happiness now and for the New Year ahead! Stay in touch!

—Cora Lee

Notes from the Board

by JoAnn Tiedemann

In this season of holidays, it is impossible to miss the influences of German-American heritage all around us. From giving thanks for a successful harvest and the bounty in our lives, to decorating the *Tannenbaum*, hearing musical works of German composers that have been performed in the United States since the first appearance of singing societies and instrumental groups, and celebrating the New Year with fireworks, our culture reflects those traditions, beliefs, language use, and activities that German-speaking immigrants have brought with them.

Our *Friends Newsletter* gives the Max Kade Institute's staff and researchers the opportunity to share specific examples of this—such as Henry Nehrling's celebration of North American birds or Captain Herman Schuenemann's development of the Christmas tree trade. Additionally, the Friends support the Institute's speaker series, book and sound recording preservation efforts, educational outreach, publishing projects, and more. Take advantage of the Max Kade Institute's many offerings to learn a little bit more about German Americana than just "O Tannenbaum," and invite others to join you and the Friends in appreciation of their work!

Happy holidays to you and yours!

—JoAnn

Max Kade Institute

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Marathon County continued from page 1

County seemed to be a familiar land. Things were not so unlike the situation they had left in Europe—except that they did not face the economic problems and military struggles they had known before.

Among the first German-speaking settlers in Marathon County was a group of Catholics who had originally put down roots in Pittsburgh but decided to leave the industrial city for the promise of a new life on the land. They formed a settlers' society, pooled their money to buy land in this heavily forested area, and in 1857 came to Wisconsin, making their way up the Wisconsin and Big Rib Rivers to what is now Marathon City. They built Marathon City and with it the local St. Mary's Catholic Church.

In 1857 August Kickbush and his brother Frederick left Pomerania for America. According to legend, August Kickbush walked from Milwaukee to Wausau (then called Big Bull Falls). Soon engaged in trading, he eventually owned a large wholesale business dealing for the most part in groceries and hardware. Because he quickly realized that Marathon County would benefit from a continuing influx of immigrants who could help the economy to grow, he returned to Pomerania in 1867 and persuaded 702 more people to come to America. Word of the area's possibilities spread, and a major Pomeranian immigration to Marathon County was underway. Immigration from German lands continued through the rest of the nineteenth century. According to the 1900 Census, there were 8712 people of German birth in Marathon County, which then had a total population of 43,256.

The history of German immigration and settlement in Marathon County richly illustrates the stories and situations of the largest ethnic group that settled in Wisconsin. And to this day the area's inhabitants still know and treasure their German heritage.

Gary Gisselman is a librarian with the Marathon County Historical Society.

News Briefs

MKI Annual Meeting and Dinner in Wausau, Wisconsin

The Pommerscher Verein of Central Wisconsin is making arrangements for the MKI Annual Meeting and Dinner in Wausau, Wisconsin in May, 2008. Marathon County attracted many German-speaking immigrants over the years, and it will charm us as well! Details will come soon, and—again—your guests will be made Friends of the MKI for a year. We will see you in Wausau!

German-American Heritage Web Site and PBS Series

Please note the new German ORIGINALity project (<<http://www.germanoriginality.com>>), recently launched by the German Information Center USA and the German National Tourist Office. The "Heritage" section of the Web site examines cultural influences of Germany on America (language, traditions, etc.) and provides genealogy resources, information about famous people, and an emigration timeline. Check your local listings for the new four-part television series about German immigrants in the U.S., scheduled for PBS stations across the country in the Spring.

2008 Wisconsin Englishes Presentations

Sunday, February 24 at 2 p.m.
in the Balkansky Community Room
of the Manitowoc Public Library
(707 Quay Street)

Monday, April 21 at 2 p.m.
in the Conference Center
of Gateway Technical College
(3520 30th Avenue), Kenosha

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A Stranger in One's Own House

by Robert Reitzel

Translated by Cora Lee Kluge, MKI Director

Robert Reitzel (1849–1898) was known and revered among German Americans as a protestant minister turned freethinker, publisher of the Detroit-based newspaper Der arme Teufel, radical socialist thinker, literary and political commentator and critic, and gifted writer of poetry and prose—some say the best among all the German Americans; today, especially in Germany, he is experiencing a revival of sorts. In the summer of 1889 he was in Germany, where he visited many friends, including his father. Upon his return to Detroit after this first and only trip to Germany since his emigration to the United States in 1870, he published the following piece in Der arme Teufel (vol. 6, no. 8, 18 January 1890). In it he reflects on the uprootedness, the feelings of displacement and lost homeland that have troubled many immigrants, both long ago and still today. Note the biblical language, his impassioned defense of the political and social ideals that had brought so many German natives to America, his criticism of American materialism, and his dim view of the possibilities of survival of “German America.” Most poignant is his complaint that he and other immigrants feel at home neither in their land of origin nor in their new homeland. Rejected by their parents and their children alike, they are the lost first generation, disappointed that they cannot preserve their Old World ideals and heritage in their New World homes.

If a cousin in Germany calls us homeless¹ beings—either with sympathy or with scorn—we can respond: If we have no home, then you have no freedom. But oh! the cousin has the advantage, for while the absence of freedom causes him no discom-

fort, and he has long sat down in comfort to the echoes of regimental music before the fixed-price meal of servitude, we can only confirm with a sigh from our deepest and innermost being: Yes, we are homeless!

Pains of homelessness do not exist for people who enjoy animal comforts wherever they drive their herds and can eat the best of the manger, or for religious or other fanatics; but whoever develops no appetite for serving or for ruling; whoever has wishes that remain unsatisfied when things are “going well”; whoever is not completely absorbed in a program of his time, but rather [...] preserves his individuality—such a person only gets rid of his ache for his home (his *Heimat*) when the pale brother of sleep² extinguishes his flame.

I have learned what it means to have become a stranger in my own home, which stood before me so green and beautiful in my nighttime and daytime dreams, as happens when even in the house of one's father the stone of misunderstanding is offered instead of the bread of love!³ How gladly would I dribble

enthusiasm for my adoptive fatherland as balsam into the wounds of my heart! I am bound to be unsuccessful, for I cannot love America. I know that we homeless ones never put down deep roots in this soil, never bloom forth in complete joy in this sunlight. We are strangers not only in our father's house, but also in our own house—the one we built here—and in the family that should be the harbor of rest and hearth of strength for us who scorn the public struggle for material goods. And if you had the best and truest wife at your side, between you and your children there stands



Robert Reitzel

an invisible barrier—you are and remain a German; they are and become more and more Americans; in other words and so that no one should accuse me of national weakness: they do not understand the best in you; they do not speak the language of your heart; and you cannot leave to them your most noble treasure, the inheritance that no one can tax. [...]

The situation is of course worst with mixed marriages. Where there is a German mother and an American father, German traits disappear almost completely in the descendants. Where there is a German father and an American mother, the process does not proceed so quickly, but the influence of the daughter of this land is the prevailing one, and the barrier between the father and the children is from the outset insurmountable, if only because of the language. However, if both are immigrant Germans, the children will nevertheless be different from the parents, and while the mother adjusts to the nature of the children, the father remains alone in his thinking and his feeling. [...]

My heart bleeds for you [= religious Christians], you honest and pious people, when you see your children chasing after treasures which moth and rust corrupt, and even more for you, for I understand you completely, you independent freedom fighters, who, renouncing rewards, recognition, and success, carried hope in your hearts that in the fruits of your body also the fruits of your mind would come of age, and that your children would conquer that for which you fought in vain.

O abominable barrier! Your daughters have no tears for freedom's martyrs; they are calculating but empty minded; they strive to please, but they cannot love; they have neither antipathy toward nor sympathy with their sisters in squalor, nor contempt, because they are convinced that they will reach the noble goal: a marriage that will provide for them.

O abominable barrier! You are the children with a child's blissful belief in a world victory of justice, in a morning of freedom for all who are suppressed; your sons are the elders who smile at your folly, because they know with American certainty what in this world leads to success. Do you still know how we resisted the knowledge required for earning one's living, how we nevertheless in secret drank eagerly at the springs where human love and the belief in the

ideal streams forth; how we rhapsodized through forests where the wind blows freely in the treetops and the flower of the romantic blooms beside the foaming wild brook! [...]

I have followed the careers of so many sons of stalwart fathers and freedom-loving mothers. Only the cult of the true and beautiful surrounded their youth; they attended only the best and freest schools. But they could not be taught understanding and love for the ideals of their parents, hatred for all suppressors, yearning for the liberation of the poor and miserable. For a time they were compelled by childlike piety to be interested at least outwardly in the endeavors of their parents—indeed there was now and again pleasure in this, and that was something they could take away from the experience—but soon they moved in other circles where they found themselves more at home; and after discounting the few hours of often peculiar pleasure, nothing remained but the businessman and the slogan: money, money, and more money.

I have well observed that a certain practical feeling of justice is not lacking in our young people, a desire for elbowroom for everyone, perhaps just because the sense of earning is so strong in them; and I cannot count them among the enemies of social evolution; whether the social revolution will kindle a fire in them, of which we have to this point still discovered no spark, can be a painful doubt for one, a quiet hope for another. This much is certain: German America (das Deutschamerikanertum), which brought to this country in flesh and blood its Lessing and Feuerbach and Börne, dies with us who have lost our home and who are strangers in our own home.

Endnotes

¹The German word is *Heimat*. Its meaning cannot be conveyed by the English "home." It is more physical and less abstract; something that connects a person to his or her roots, to his or her very being. Perhaps Reitzel's essay can help to explain.

²In Greek mythology, Hypnos was the god of sleep; his brother was Thanatos, the god of death.

³Reitzel wrote elsewhere of the deep misunderstandings between himself and his father, which went back to the years before his emigration to America and remained much—if not more—in evidence when he visited Europe nearly twenty years later.

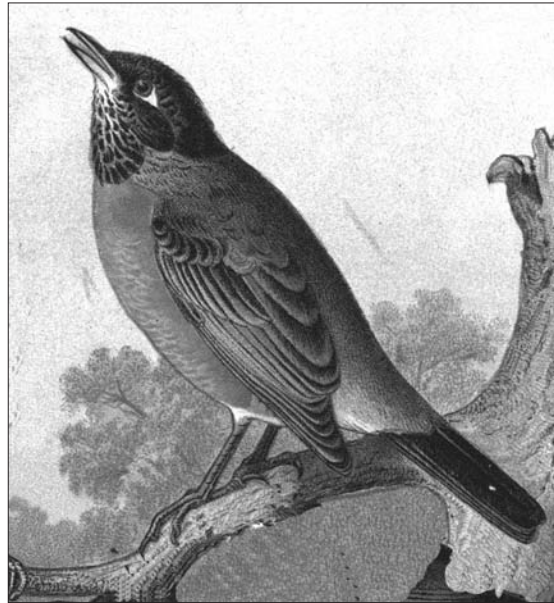
The Robin: Herald of Spring

by Kevin Kurdylo, MKI Librarian

While there is much to appreciate about the winter season in which we now find ourselves, here's a vision of spring to lessen the chill on an icy day!

From Henry Nehrling's *Die nordamerikanische Vogelwelt* (Milwaukee, Wis.: 1891).

The first flowers of spring are still slumbering beneath snow and ice; the bitter north and west winds continue to rage and roar over the northern parts of our country. All of nature appears desolate, devastated. Only solitary feathered visitors of the north can be seen moving about among the low bushes. Kinglets, crossbills, and redpolls sway on the snow-covered branches of firs and spruces. Then, completely unexpectedly, a loud and jubilant song resounds from the top of a nearby elm. There on that beautiful dark-green silver fir sits another of these singers! The robins have returned home, and despite the ice and snow they sing with exultation to announce the approach of spring. One can rightfully call these beautiful thrushes the heralds of spring, as they are the first arrivals to come from the South. They sometimes make their appearance in the north before mid-March, although most appear at the end of that month. Sometimes the rough weather continues for weeks, and food shortages force them to retreat again. Usually, however, they endure despite the wintry weather, seeking nourishment in places free of snow and enlivening their habitats with loud singing. In the north of the Union, all of April can be a raw, changeable month. Not until May, which is still quite chilly, do better times and plentiful insects come for these early returning birds.



Nehrling provides six names for this bird: *Wanderdrossel, Robin, Rotbrust, amerikanische Amsel, Krammers- und Kranzvogel.*

Perhaps none of the indigenous birds is so beloved of the American people as the robin. The first immigrants to Massachusetts, the “Pilgrim fathers,” named them Robins (or Robin Red-breasts), reminded of the wonderful robins of their English homeland. In the New England states the robin is highly esteemed and protected in every way. Because of this protection robins not only greatly multiplied, but also settled in large numbers in villages and cities. Few birds have so wide a distribution; they are found from the plateaus of Mexico to the northern polar region, from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the coast of the Pacific. None of the other thrushes can be found in so many areas.

With the tolerable weather of mid-April, pairs of robins in Wisconsin begin to build their nests; in southwestern Missouri [. . .] they are at it by the end of March or the beginning of April. In Wisconsin I have found nests at heights of two to thirty feet from the ground in the most diverse positions and locations: in trees and high stumps, among the roots of trees knocked down by storms, on the beams of uninhabited houses, in old barns and stables, on all types of fruit and ornamental trees, amid the wild vines and climbing plants covering arbors, and so on. The loud, shrill, and eagerly and rapidly emitted call—sounding like “pips, pips”—warns equally of the cat carefully creeping about, the skunk snuffling under the bushes, the raccoon clambering among the branches, and the thief approaching on wing. But that is not the end of it. A robin

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A Walk in the Garden of Words

by Jack Thiessen, MKI Friend

[Editor's note: This garden is a minefield of earthier terminology, and readers are advised to watch where they step.]

The occasional novel becomes marrow to the human soul; one such is Rudy Wiebe's *Sweeter than all the Earth*. The final paragraph describes Adam, the elder, and Trintje the young, sharing a sliver of potato, presumably a wafer of the Eucharist, thereby arresting time and space, and setting matters between man and God right.

The author reflects on the etymology of the Mennonite Low German term *Eadschock* (potato); possibly *Ead* + *schock* = sixty, he ponders. "And it was good," one concludes.

This scene took me beyond all borders and back to the only place I know well and for certain: our farm and a day on it. If you are so inclined, please let me take you for a rustic ride into the common past of most of us. Ride? That is: *aul reed* (already ready) *toom riede* (horseback ride).

I grew up a dual citizen amidst the language of my father and that of my mother—and while they spoke the same language the twain rarely met. Into the stable to milk a cow. The cow's teat or tit was a *Tett* to my father but a daintier *Strijch* (digit) to my mother. If a cow occasionally suffered from indigestion, known as diarrhea, my father termed such affliction *Schmerz*, *Schata*, or *Schietarie* with the first two nouns doubling as verbs as *schnerze*, *schattre*, and all as closely related to the shits and shitty as the flow of things warranted nomenclature. My mother said *Derjchfaul*, less stinky. If a child were afraid my father would say, "Dem ess schietrijch" or "Dee haft Schizz(ss)," while my mother pre-dated the current, much-in-vogue term *Angst*, by half a century.

If a cow was in heat, in estrus, my father was delighted to describe the state as *bollsch*. Similar urgency to breed he described by the terms *bursch*

of pigs, *ransch* of dogs and rabbits, and *hinjsch* of mares and forward women. My mother described that delicate state, if at all, as *Janka* and *jankre* as the verb. The breeding process itself was a challenge to my father's explicit vocabulary, which was rich and illustrious; to this my mother responded by lifting an apron to her ears and shaking her head in despair. This merely stoked my father's imagination, and whenever his side-kick,

Arbuse Kloße (Watermelon Klassen), came over—these two fellows holding co-ownership of patent pending to *Peadshock-sproak* (coarse barnyard language)—there was hilarity afoot. A dilemma arose because Kloße came from my mother's village, and she respected him for a fine mind albeit a tongue of brilliantly inventive and *prost* (earthy, more commonly known as vulgar) twist. This in turn made my father realize that he probably held claim to being a *Nippaenja*,

I grew up a dual citizen amidst the language of my father and that of my mother—and while they spoke the same language the twain rarely met.

hardly brilliant but certainly *prost*. These men and women, namely the *Nippaenja*, generally did not give a sweet damn about social or ecclesiastic pressure; they could not be contained by the net of Mennonite morées and were widely and secretly admired but never emulated. Of late, Mennonite scholars have investigated practically every crevice of Mennonitism, but an essay on the *Nippaenja* has yet to be written. Until such time as pen is put to paper on the subject, if ever, the explanation in my dictionary will have to suffice.

Nippaenja was the generic term for behavior and language beyond the pale; these, like my father and Arbuse Kloße, did not call a spade a spade but a bloody shovel and their language was easily on par with the Cossack script delivered to the Sultan attached to Repin's famous painting. "Kobbelmoazh" (mare's arse) was the least offensive of many dozens of illustrious descrip-

tions for someone who had fallen out of favor in their sight. Such linguistic roughhouse vocabulary, known as ribaldry, applied even retroactively all the way to the Old Colony settlements on the Dnieper (Nippa) River *Tus* (back home). When these men described the details of animals breeding behind the barn it was enough, said my mother, “daut de Voda emm Himmel sijch wajchdreid enn em Jesejcht root word, wiels Hee sijch schämd” (that our heavenly Father turned his back to hide his blush of shame).

When my mother referred to a dilemma by various terms my father asked her if she meant “tweschne Groow enn dem Mesthupe”? (inferring “Between a rock and a hard place” but, literally, “between the gutter and a manure pile” in his language of preference). If things on our farm went very wrong, which they did an average of three times a day, my mother stood aside, contemplating and having a word with God. My father chose a different approach. He revved up his temper which served as a hydraulic hose to fuel his strength which in my imagination easily matched that of Samson or Goliath. Then he cursed the circumstances which had brought him to southern Manitoba. His text read, “Hiea sett wie aum Oaschloch vonne Welt, woa jieden Dach aules mett dem Hinjarenj veropp moazhenn jeiht.” (“Here we sit in the asshole of creation where things daily go ass-end first into the arse.”)

On the way from the stable to the house our dog displayed his playful ways by pretending to choke the tomcat. My father encouraged the dog; “warj ahm auf” (choke him) he said. The term in practice stayed with me like a latency hoping for release. Then one day while studying Beowulf, the term revealed itself in its full portent. The monster Grendel and his mother—not to mention the wolves circling close around the beleaguered mead hall—were described several times by the word *wearg* or its variant, *wearh*. The German form was *warg*—wolf, but also denotes outlaw—someone who has committed a crime that is unforgivable or unredeemable. “Those cast out from their communities and doomed to wander and die alone. *Warg* = corpse-worrier (from Indo-Germanic *wergh*, to strangle = ‘one who deserves strangulation’). The outcast human *warg* could be killed on sight with impunity.”

My mother frequently asked me to bring her a *Komstheeft*, a head of cabbage for borschtch from the garden. The word *Heeft* would not depart from my own head; I sensed that there was more to it than the *Komst*, *Kapusta*, etc. that it bore. One day, many years later, I was introduced to a scholar and poet of the Mennonite dialect in Edmonton. He complained of “mie ritt daut Heeft,” a headache. *Heeft* invited research and it provided more than I imagined. We have it in “O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden,” a German hymn known to every Christian. But there is more: “*Haupt*, n., ‘head, chief, leader’ from MidHG. *houbet*, *houpt* (also *hööubet*), n., OHG. *houbit*, n., the Oteut. word for ‘head,’ supplanted in the 16th cent. by *Kopf* in all the G. dialects. (*Kohlkopf*, *Krauthaupt*, almost the only existing forms, are dialectal), while E. and Scand. have retained the earlier form—as *heááfod*, E. head (for *heafd*). Since all the Teut. dialects point to an old diphthong *au* in the stem, of which *ff* in OHG. *hffba*, ‘hood’ is the graded form (comp. *Haube*).”

It is in Mexico where one can find thousands of *Altkolonier* women wearing laced bonnets called *Huw* or *Hüüw* (*Huwe* in the plural) and all related to *Haupt*, *Heeft* and meaning *Haube* (hood); since the OHG. *huba* becomes *Huw* in Mennonite Low German, these Old Colony women wear a Sunday headdress that is almost as old as time itself.

When Mennonites decide to clean up a messy house or a messy moral record they do so with unabated vigor and they all call this process of dirt and sin to be cleansed in its many forms as *Rosmack hoole*. It is not known when this process first was so called but it was already known in their West Prussian home. What is known is that a *Rozsomak* is a wolverine in both Hungarian and in Russian; what we also know is that the wolverine is the most ferocious animal alive and wherever he has rampaged, there is much to be cleaned up or nothing at all. The last thing that is known is that when Mennonites attack dirt in its various forms, be it in church or kitchen, it is done once and for all, and when the dust settles,

will also courageously attack intruders as soon as they approach the nest. Usually the male's cry of fear will bring other robins brooding nearby to join in the fight. They attempt by means of loud cries, slashing bills, lightning-quick fly-bys and other maneuvers to frighten and drive away the enemy. As a small schoolboy in Wisconsin, I once climbed a twelve-foot-high tree stump in order to inspect a robin's nest there. As soon as I began climbing upwards the furious couple flew at my face, loudly shrieking. These cries brought two or three other nesting couples, by which I was now heroically and vigorously assaulted, some flying at my face, others rattling their beaks loudly in passing, so that I had to jump down quickly and run away. Robins that nest far from humans are the most daring in battle, and I suffered their attacks often in the years to come. It is remarkable, though understandable, that one may look into nests in gardens without the birds becoming the least bit fearful or combative. Undoubtedly they become convinced that no one intends them any harm. In addition to the warning call, other characteristic calls are heard in breeding areas: a very quick "Durick-ick-ick-ick" and "Tuck-tuck-tuck" are common.

During this time [mid-April] a robin's melodic and pleasant song is most loudly and eagerly proclaimed, earning him the title "herald of spring." The robin is indeed the first songbird to announce the approach of spring from high atop the trees! His song, though simple and unpretentious, produces a great effect amid the still snow-covered and melancholy landscape; it brings an indescribably joyous sense of life to the desolation of the wintry lands, and delights the hearts of people longing for spring air and the scent of flowers.

In Wisconsin, many Low German settlers know robins only by the name *Krammers-* or *Kranz-vogel*, and unfortunately they are often still hunted and eaten. From my own youth I know that several hundred fledglings were stolen from their nests to be used in kitchens. Such misconduct should be halted everywhere through strict enforcement of laws protecting birds [. . .]

The robin is well-suited to life as a cage bird. A robin in a spacious, curved-dome cage is an attrac-

In Memoriam Christiane Harzig

News has come of Christiane Harzig's death on November 6, 2007. She was a scholar and teacher, colleague and friend of those engaged in German-American studies. After completing a Ph.D. degree at the Technical University in Berlin and a habilitation at the University of Bremen, she lived there, in Canada, and in the U.S., most recently holding an associate professorship in History at Arizona State University. She shared her life, projects, and interests with her husband, Dirk Hoerder, Professor of the Social History of North America at the University of Bremen. Christiane will be remembered for her work on historical memory, including *Migration und Erinnerung* (2006), and on German women immigrants in Chicago and the migration of working class women. She endowed the Emma Goldman fund at ASU for students in women's history and migration studies. Those interested in making a donation in her memory should contact the History Department at ASU. We will remember her and miss her.

tive picture for the eyes [. . .] Wilson reports that a robin raised in a cage lived for seventeen years before being brought to a premature end by a cat. Feed the robin with seed for a mockingbird, mixed with a bit of grated carrot, and provide it plenty of mealworms and some fruit and berries. While a caged robin is an industrious singer, its singing can be rather too loud for a room.

At a pet store such as Mr. Kämpfer's in Chicago, a fine singing robin goes for about ten dollars. The robin is one of the more intelligent and cheerful birds, quite devoted to its caretaker, and after the mockingbird is the most favored cage bird among Anglo-Americans.

Thus ends the section by Nehrling about the American robin, the state bird of Connecticut, Michigan, and Wisconsin. For those who might be interested, I haven't been able to discover any recipes for robin, much to my relief. And in looking for information about robins as cage birds, I discovered this admonishing quote from William Blake: "A Robin Red-breast in a Cage/ Puts all Heaven in a Rage."

Christmas Trees on the Great Lakes

Review by Tom Lutz, MKI Friend

Neuschel, Fred. *Lives and Legends of the Christmas Tree Ships*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007. 276 pp., ill. \$24.95.

In 1912, an aging schooner, the *Rouse Simmons*, vanished in a November gale off Two Rivers, Wisconsin. Such events were not uncommon, but the loss of this vessel gave birth to special stories. Its captain was Charles Nelson, hired for the trip by the schooner's well-know and popular owner, Captain Herman Schuenemann, who was also aboard. Both originally hailed from Ahnapee, now Algoma, Wisconsin, and both claimed Chicago as their residence. Also aboard were over 10,000 bundled Christmas trees and perhaps eleven other German and Scandinavian crew members, about whom detailed information is not available.

Herman Schuenemann and his brother August were two German-American schooner captains from Wisconsin who had long plied the waters of the Great Lakes. They were part of a large group of "Christmas tree" captains, many from Ahnapee, who helped established the Christmas tree trade in ports around Lake Michigan in the 1870s; this was dangerous but lucrative work, undertaken after the regular lake season closed in early November. By the turn of the century Herman Schuenemann had established his dominance in the trade, not only selling trees in Chicago but also shipping them to Germanic populations in St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Louisville. In Chicago, Schuenemann's schooner was dubbed the "Christmas Tree Ship," and he became "Captain Santa." Heavily loaded with thousands of trees from Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, his schooner's arrival in the city was a major event, marking the start

of the Christmas season as much as the unveiling of decorated store windows at Marshall Field's.

The sinking of the *Rouse Simmons* and the death of its popular owner stunned Chicago residents. Many were certain that Schuenemann could not have perished, and reports of the ship's survival and that of its crew surfaced for weeks thereafter, only to be proven false. The disaster quickly entered the Great Lakes' maritime lore, generating tales that to this day rival those about all other Great Lakes vessels, including those of the ore ship *Edmund Fitzgerald*. Over the

years, a number of songs, two plays, a television documentary, and many books and articles recounted the event, and to this day the story has remained as popular as ever. Unfortunately, with the passing of time, the truth became clouded by embellishments and misinformation.

To prepare this monograph, maritime historian Fred Neuschel revisited reports and records to uncover the facts. He succeeds in recreating the world of the ethnic German and Scandinavian

Great Lakes sailors of the late-nineteenth century; and in addition, he demonstrates how Schuenemann became instrumental in introducing and popularizing the Christmas tree tradition in American homes. He includes an insightful history of Ahnapee and its German founders, telling of their difficulties in establishing a prospering port on Lake Michigan, only to do battle with well-financed, better educated "easterners" who followed, trying to dominate the community's economy and control the lives of its residents.

Neuschel's *Lives and Legends of the Christmas Tree Ships* is a meticulously researched, well-writ-



The schooner *Rouse Simmons* before it was lost on Lake Michigan.

Historical Collections of the Great Lakes,
Bowling Green State University, Ohio.

Letters from California: Swiss Immigrant Jakob Otto Wyss (1846-1927)

Review by Cora Lee Kluge, MKI Director

Jakob Otto Wyss (1846–1927): Postmaster in Klau: Letters from California. Edited by Pit Wyss in Collaboration with Paul Hugger. Translation from the German by H. Dwight Page. Rockton, ME: Picton Press, 2006. xix + 315 pages. \$37.50.

This review is the second one in the *MKI Friends Newsletter* this year that features a collection of letters published by the Picton Press, which specializes in historical and genealogical books and CDs; the other one appeared in the Spring issue. The current volume consists of letters and diary entries written by (Jakob) Otto Wyss and other members of his immediate family. Born near Zürich, Wyss was trained as a metal worker; he was an apprentice in Zürich and a journeyman in the Neuchâtel Jura, Paris, and Manchester during years of political unrest in Europe. Unable to find a good position with steady work, he left for the United States in August of 1873; and after only a few months in New York, he headed for California, arriving there in March of 1874.

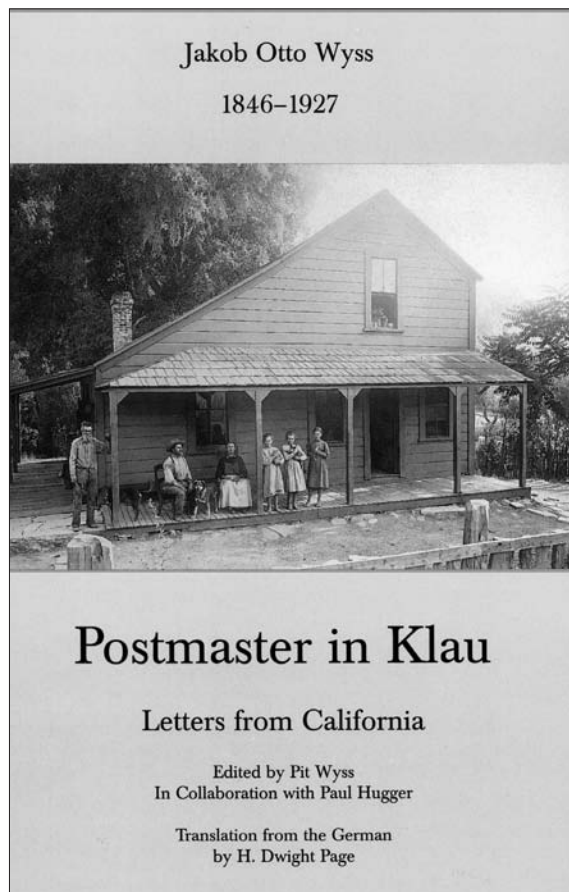
Wyss found employment in a quicksilver mine near San Francisco, both as a technical draftsman and in the machinery workshop. From there he moved further south in California to the Adelaida region west of Paso Robles, where he found work in the technologically sophisticated cinnabar mining industry important for the production of mercury, which was in turn used in mining gold. The let-

ters tell of his marriage in 1877 to Otilie Meyer, whom he had known in Switzerland; his work as a shopkeeper, postmaster, and farmer; and the birth of their five children, the death in 1885 of the three boys, all victims of diphtheria, and finally Otilie's

death in 1888. Wyss's second wife, Seline Streuli, had been hired by his father in Switzerland and sent to California to help the family, and the couple became the parents of more children. The reader learns of their lives, their problems and successes, their plans, and their family. In 1909 Otto Wyss returned to Switzerland alone for a brief visit with his relatives there; and the last years are documented by Seline Wyss's letters.

It is regrettable that more connections are not made to the larger picture of California's history. For example, though individual immigrants from German-speaking areas are mentioned, as well as a group

of German Mennonites, there is no indication of how large the German-speaking contingent in the area may have been; nor is there mention of the two large groups of settlers—the Chinese and the Swiss-Italians. Nevertheless, in documenting the stories of the Wyss family, this volume contributes to our broader understanding and provides material for further investigation. Furthermore, as an added bonus: the volume is enjoyable reading.



propriety prevails for many days and a few nights on end.

My mother sensed that the Mennonite Low German term *äwaroasch gohne*, meaning to walk backwards, contained an indelicate reference, and so she opted for the more refined term *ritjwoats gohne*. Not so my father; he knew that *äwaroasch gohne* meant to walk backwards or “over the arse” and he found occasion to use the term on average three times before breakfast and with mounting frequency throughout the day. If my mother objected, he would mount the pace of walking over the arse and so she held her peace.

Before indoor plumbing became widely fashionable a chamber pot was handy for the weak, afflicted, and those reticent to test the prairie elements in winter. This container, generally of sturdy enamel and with a strong handle to grip the cash and carry contents, was widely known as a *Nachttopp*. Where my father grew up, it was called a *Zielkroos*, and other terms too obvious to mention.

It is difficult to imagine that Mennonite Low German would practice much paraphrasing, leave alone practice euphemisms. Dialects are not politically-correct constructs; they are not meant to explicitly offend or insult but rather to express intent with as few shortcuts as possible. And so it is surprising that when a youngster is called before church authorities to be reined in for being too overt in matters of fleshly lust, he is said to be *Brunstliede*, meaning he is suffering from horniness. *Brunft* and *Brunst* are High German terms describing male animals in rutting season.

Another surprisingly sensitive term is the euphemism for the menstrual flow; it is known as *De Roos bleajcht* (the rose is blooming). Mennonite Low German purists believe they have coined the term but the term *Rose* in the Prussian Dictionary serves up numerous examples of implications and euphemisms relating to virgins using the rose in various forms of semi-taboo language. Frequently, these terms are used in conjunction with the Lord and being pleasing in His sight in whatever afflictions may come to call or visit.

It may be assumed that *Buckweehdoag* (days of belly ache) was the original euphemism for men-

strual pains known to women. However, with the passing of time, the term was misunderstood and today even men, when suffering a momentary stab of pain, complain of stomach ache days, “Etj hab Buckweehdoag.”

Taboo vocabulary is as old as language but is generally closely related to human superstition. Hardly any Mennonite knows that the original term for a bear was *ursus* and even fewer know when the term *Boa* or *dee Jriesa* became commonplace. (In English he is called a bruin, and many other terms of endearment.) This has to do with “call the devil by his name and he will appear” and so, to discourage the bear from appearing—after all, the animal was a dreaded visitor to both cattle and people alike in pre-weapon days—he was called by a supplicating name which he was not meant to understand. Every language practices appeasement towards those posing a threat to farmyard stock, like the devil or wild animals, but no one does it better than the Russians who have an array of vocabulary to keep the bear at bay; *Medved* (honey eater) and *kasalopieja Mischka* (big-pawed bear) are some terms to induce him to stay away. It is not different with the wolf, originally *lupus*, who has been called every appeasing term imaginable but not by his original name. *Warja*, as mentioned, was just one of the terms of appeasement.

It is not different with milk which long ago was called *lactus*. Even in my farming days it was noticed that milk and cream soured very rapidly whenever a thunderstorm threatened. In a pre-scientific age it was assumed that malevolent spirits were at work here, and so milk and cream and other dairy products were called by new or unfamiliar names meant to divert sinister forces. Certainly *Maltjch* and *Milch* are a far cry from the mother term. (Similar euphemisms are in evidence even today: everyone knows that the Canadian prairies are notorious for extreme cold and much snow in winter and yet media announcements refer to snow as the “white stuff” almost as if it were a temporary situation and certainly unusual and most likely a brief transitional accident.)

Before we wander farther afield, it may be well

Outrage Over German-Language Plays Divides Citizens of Milwaukee in February, 1919—Part I

by Cora Lee Kluge, MKI Director

Just two months after the end of World War I, performances of German-language plays scheduled at Milwaukee's Pabst Theater for the benefit of the German actors led to protests from many sides. A resolution passed by the board of directors of the local Rotary Club appeared in the Milwaukee Journal on February 15 (see insert), and the same day a "citizen's [sic] mass meeting" was held at the Pfister Hotel.

The MKI has a copy of a 25-page typewritten document, minutes of this meeting, which we found at the Milwaukee County Historical Society. Recorded by William Schultz, Shorthand Reporter, they are a vivid reminder of the sentiments against German and German-American portions of the population during this time. Only Frank M. Hoyt, a prominent Milwaukee lawyer remembered today for

his role in establishing the Milwaukee Chapter of the Red Cross in 1916, spoke against the adoption of protest resolutions by this group.

The German-language theater performance scheduled for February 16 did not take place; and reports of Milwaukee's difficulties made national news. The Christian Science Monitor of February 19 cited particularly a decision to have soldiers standing at attention at the theater entrance as the reason two German-language theater performances were cancelled.

The German Society of Milwaukee was swift to react, sending a long list of resolutions to Wisconsin Governor Wilson, which appeared on the front page

of the Milwaukee Journal on February 18.

Part I of this article documents the protests against German-language performances. Part II, to follow in the Spring issue, further elucidates the German Society's response and its aftermath.

Excerpts from Schultz's minutes:

"Whereas, It has been brought to the attention of the officers and members of the Rotary club of Milwaukee that certain persons are planning to put on a German play given in a German tongue at the Pabst theater, Milwaukee; and Whereas, Our beloved country is still in a state of war with the German nation; and Whereas, the feeling of Milwaukee residents is distinctly and decidedly against such action, therefore, it is Resolved, that the directors of the Rotary club of Milwaukee go on record in condemning such action, and furthermore the secretary is hereby instructed to see that this resolution is brought to the attention of the public by causing same to be given to the newspapers of the city and in every other legitimate way to make known to the public the resentment felt by all of the American citizens of Milwaukee against such action." Reported by the *Milwaukee Journal*, February 15, 1919, page 1.

JAMES H. STOVER: Ladies and Gentlemen: A number of our civic societies have entered their protest against the giving of German plays in the German language in this city for the benefit of the German actors, and it was thought that the general public should have an opportunity to participate in a meeting where their protest might be voiced in an organized way.

CAPT. JOHNSON: I would move that a committee on resolutions be appointed by the Chair, Mr. Stover.

[This committee, consisting of Mr. Furlong, Mr. Dr. Richter, and Mr. Reynolds was appointed to draw up a resolution and report back as soon as possible. While this committee was deliberating, discussion continued.]

MR. STOVER: Commercial Milwaukee won't be benefited by the reputation that will go over this country, that German plays are being re-established in Milwaukee. A great many people forget that there is only one in five or six or seven in this country that have got German blood in their veins. Now why should a lot of people in our city here get up a benefit performance for a great lot of alien enemies that have

to attempt to resolve Rudy Wiebe's folksy etymology regarding the potato, the *Eadschock*. The conclusion the author arrives at is whimsical but not altogether aberrant. *Ead* we know means earth, the ground, terra. But then the compound *Schock* enters in to confound.

Wiebe ponders "Schock? Sixty potatoes?" *Schock* is related to *Hock*, feminine, a stook of sheaves (as opposed to *Hock*, neuter, a pen in the stable to accommodate a *Hocklinj* = heifer). While a traditional stook in North America consists of five or seven sheaves, similar arrangement of setting up sheaves to dry in Ukraine frequently consisted of sixty sheaves in one stook, thereby facilitating loading onto a hayrack for transport to the threshing machine. A *Schock* is a unit of sixty and in the Hanseatic League was an institutionalized designation used in commercial transactions. In Mennonite Low German the ditty "Doa oppem Boaj sett eene Fru enn backt een Schock Dwoaj" ("there on the hill sits a woman and bakes sixty cheeses") is a well-practiced one to this day. (*Dwoaj* is related to *Zwerg*, dwarf [Russian *twarog*], and while this may be interesting, it is a theme for another day.)

A *Schock* Wiebe recollects is a stook. J. F. Davis in his translation of Kluge's *Etymological Dictionary* states *schock* is a number of sixty, as does Grimm in his definitive dictionary of the German language. And while a *Schock*, strictly speaking, is a sum of sixty, it is also frequently used to denote a large but uncounted number of items.

Poets, prophets, and writers are not to be trifled with; these creators are closer to the Original than any evidence yet produced and so Wiebe (Adam = man of the earth, *Ead*, soil, terra) may well be right when contemplating that occasionally there may be sixty potatoes to a stem, *een gaunzet Pungel aun eenem Stenjel* (a whole cluster on one stem).

Jack Thiessen, emeritus professor of German at the University of Winnipeg, is the driving force behind the Mennonite Low German Dictionary (Madison, WI: Max Kade Institute, 2003). We refer all interested readers to that book for more about the history and present state of this lively language.

ten, and richly detailed historical narrative that is a delight to read. It will appeal to anyone interested in Wisconsin's German-Americans or the ethnic crews of the early Great Lakes schooners.

Tom Lutz is a native of Sheboygan (Wisconsin) and freelance historian in Chicago. His article about the "Historic Maritime Lutz's of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin" won a research award in 2004 from the Association for Great Lakes Maritime History and will be published, starting this winter, in Inland Seas, the journal of the Great Lakes Historical Society. He is completing a major study of early German Catholic families in Sheboygan County.

been living on this community here and none of them have a right to be here, except that we have allowed them to be here. Why should we do that? They loll around here and drink their beer and talk their language and help to carry on propaganda of Germanism here in Milwaukee and then ask us to give a benefit for them in their own language, that they may have some money with which to live a little longer. I am not interested in their living any longer here.

[The committee reported back, and the resolutions were read.]

MR. FRANK HOYT: What I am going to say will be in opposition to the adoption of these resolutions. I do not suppose there is any one here that can question my entire loyalty to this country. Here we are in a community and in a state more than half of the population of which, or perhaps half, are of German blood, —born in German [sic], or German descent. What you do here today is going to have a very wide influence in this state. Of the German-American people in this state, I venture to say that the very large majority of them have been loyal and many of them under feelings that wrung their heart strings. Now what is this proposed meeting that you are protesting against? A benefit performance given for a lot of actors who speak the German tongue, who, I understand, by reasons of their being out of their profession or the practice of their profession for many years are practically penniless. We need here in this country above anything else a united Americanism and you

cannot get it in the state of Wisconsin or anywhere else except that you have people that are heart and soul with you, and you cannot get it by driving them with a club. Now I urge you to think calmly before you throw such a fire brand as these resolutions will be into this city and into this state. It will immediately arouse passions here which will be heard in the elections, which will be heard throughout the state and will prevent what all of you desire, the thorough Americanization of the American people. Now that is the danger that you are running and because I feel and sense that danger—and it has required considerable courage for me to come up here with many of you my warm personal friends, to say what I have said; but in my opinion it is a mistake, it is an affront to the men of German blood and German descent who have sent their sons over, who have fought and some of them have died in support—of this country. This morning I received a letter from a man of German descent who went into the war by the name of Schwab. Does that sound like an American name? He went over and is as brave, as good an American as ever lived.

MR. STOVER: I am going to answer that argument about Emil Schwab. I have been getting letters from that young man all along since he has been over in Europe and he has continuously and persistently called them Huns and Boches and if he was here today I venture to say he would stand guard with Captain Johnson to see that nobody went into that theater next Sunday night.

MR. HOYT: I doubt whether he would stand guard or whether anyone would stand guard, in this country—in this free American country, to prevent any man from exercising his lawful rights. That ain't the way we do things in this country.

MR. STOVER: We stop the language from [going] through the mails....*

MR. HOYT: You can stop the German language from going through the mails. You can do anything that is lawful.

MR. STOVER: This is.

MR. HOYT: You cannot prevent anyone in this country doing anything that is lawful by unlawful means without having it react on your heads.

A LADY: What is there unlawful about this?

MR. HOYT: Nothing unlawful about your protest.

I am talking about what Mr. Stover said, —about men standing there to prevent them from entering the theater. About this protest, you have a perfect right to protest. I say it is unwise, and I think it ought not to pass, that is all, and I thank you.

MR. STOVER: The exigency of the war is not over yet. It is only an armistice. Now who knows how soon the war may break out again and our boys be shot again by orders given in the German language? Who knows how soon?

[The question was called for, and all but two votes were in the affirmative. A group of three was appointed to deliver the resolutions to the directors of the German theater company, who were going to meet that same afternoon. It was mentioned that the Rotary Club had just passed similar protest resolutions, and that other societies were to follow.]

MR. HICKOX: I would suggest as a matter of precaution, in order to be prepared, that you appoint a committee of three to determine who the people are who attend that performance and publish their names.

MR. JACK JOHNSON: Along that line I would like to offer another suggestion. We might have music at the City Hall when the people enter the theater; we might have a band playing the “Star Spangled Banner.”

A VOICE: Why not make that in the Pabst Theater?
[. . .]

A GENTLEMAN: I would suggest that we get enough service men in uniform to form a double line on the sidewalk from the corner of East Water and Wisconsin to the door of the theater and the corner of Edison Avenue to the door of the theater and have them stand at attention and have every German go through a double line of soldiers. If he has nerve enough to go in let him go in.

MR. STOVER: We will let that matter to this committee of three. If they want to do it, it is their business. All in favor of that will signify by saying “aye” and contrary minded “no.”

[A unanimous vote was cast in the affirmative and a motion to adjourn was entertained.]

Endnote

* All publications, foreign and English alike, were subject to possible censure by Albert Sidney Burleson, Postmaster General of the U.S., who was empowered by the Espionage Act of June, 1917, to suppress traitorous materials by banning them from the mails.

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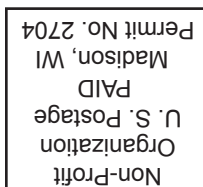
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