



MAX KADE INSTITUTE

FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

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Protect Yourself from Loss by Fire! Policies of the Mutual Farmers' Fire Insurance Co. of the Town of Newton, Wisconsin, 1870–1888

Antje Petty



The German Fire Insurance Company was a stock company founded 1865 in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1918, the directors of the company voted to change its name to Central Fire Insurance Company of Baltimore.

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One of the unique and rare items in the Max Kade Institute's digital collection is the ledger of a fire insurance agent in Wisconsin who between 1870 and 1888 used it to record all his policies by hand in the old German script. Today, as we examine these policies, we can envision the insured properties and peer into houses and barns in late nineteenth-century rural Wisconsin.

Fire was one of the biggest catastrophes that could befall settlements

in the nineteenth century. Firestorms destroyed large sections of New York in 1835, burned down over three square miles of Chicago in 1871, and erased the town of Peshtigo in Wisconsin that same year. When fire struck on a farm, it took no time for wood-framed houses, barns, and their contents to burn to the ground. In order to protect themselves from potentially devastating financial loss, people took out fire insurance.

While relatively rare in the first half of the nineteenth century, personal

fire insurance became ubiquitous in the last decades of the 1800s, and the number of insurance businesses around the country exploded. There were essentially two business models for organizing insurance companies: as shareholder-owned stock companies or as mutual companies. The latter was particularly popular in rural areas. Farmers and local businessmen organized on the community level, and the mutual companies were owned and directed by the very people who purchased the insurance policies. This guaranteed local control and service and kept the rates down, but it also required a deep knowledge of the community, risk assessment, stewardship, and ultimately trust in all members.¹

It is thus not surprising that mutual insurance companies as well as other aid societies were formed along ethnic lines in immigrant communities. There were dozens of “German mutual” organizations in Wisconsin alone. Their records, however, have rarely been preserved, and if they still exist today, they are frequently overlooked because they are written in German. It was only in 1919 that the Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Insurance ordered all Wisconsin insurance records to be written in English.²

The ledger in MKI’s digital collection is not labeled, and we do not know the name of the agent, but on page 394 we learn that it belonged to the “Town Newton gegenseitige Farmer Feuer Versicherungs Gesellschaft” or the *Mutual Farmers Fire Insurance Company of the Town of Newton*, Manitowoc County, Wisconsin.³ According to a preface in the annually printed constitution of the

company, it was founded “on the 16th day of January 1860 [when] a number of farmers of the town of Newton and vicinity organized themselves for the purpose of forming a mutual fire insurance company,” making it one of the earliest mutual insurance companies in Wisconsin. The original constitution was handwritten in German. In 1882/1883, according to the *Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Insurance of the State of Wisconsin*, the company had \$729,319 in assets, insured property valued at \$88,058, and paid \$1,526 in damages.⁴ On February 13, 1969, *Mutual Farmers Fire Insurance of the Town of Newton* dissolved after having been in business for over a hundred years.

Newton was (and still is) a rural township, bordering the city of Manitowoc in the northeast and Lake Michigan in the southeast. European settlement began in the late 1840s, with Irish families making their homes predominantly in the southwest corner of the township, and immigrants from German-speaking states settling everywhere else. Most of the ledger’s policies are held by people living in Newton Township, but residents of the adjacent townships of Manitowoc Rapids, Liberty, and Centerville are also included. In 1878, Newton had 2,073 inhabitants, Liberty had 1,420, Manitowoc Rapids had 2,074, and Centerville had 1,604.⁵

The first ledger entry for a new policy was created on February 1, 1870, the last one November 10, 1884. Policies ran for five years. When they were renewed, the updated information was simply written under the original entry or in the margins. The last renewal was

entered on June 25, 1888.

Beginning in late 1875, property plat map locations were added to the record, and the start and termination dates of the policies included a time of day: “mittags” (noon). That same year, a more formal property assessment process must have been put in place. Now many entries contain the line “aufgenommen von Assessor” (record provided by assessor) and the assessor’s name, as well as the dimensions of most insured buildings.

Premiums tended to be about 1% of the assessed value, and almost all policy holders paid the entire amount up front. Amendments were made if new items were added to a policy, if values changed, or if the property changed hands. In the latter case, the remaining insurance was almost always transferred to the new owner.

Farmers constitute the bulk of the insured. A good example is the very first entry: Friedrich Wehausen, born 1830 in Hanover, had immigrated as a child to Liberty Township where his parents were among the first group of German landowners. Now he himself owned 200 acres of farmland in three separate sections there.⁶ On February 1, 1870, he insured the following property for a total of \$2,802:

1 wall clock \$3, 1 cooking stove \$12, 1 heating stove \$10, 4 featherbeds \$30 each, 1 wardrobe \$8, 1 dresser \$6, 1 kitchen cabinet \$6, a dozen chairs and a rocking chair \$20 total.
All grain on the farm \$200, all hay on the farm \$80, 3 horses \$400 total, 6 dairy cows at \$25 each,

Continued on page 4

Greetings Friends and Readers!

The 2023–24 academic year is well underway and the Max Kade Institute is abuzz with activity. We have sponsored two lectures so far, “Hessians: German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War,” which was presented by Prof. Friederike Baer of Penn State Abington, and “Text Mining America’s German-language Newspapers” by Dr. Jana Keck, who is a research fellow at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC. Prof. Baer’s talk is now available on our YouTube channel. We look forward to our next lecture, by Prof. Stefan Rabanus (University of Verona, Italy), on the topic of “German-Romance Language Contact in the Italian Alps,” December 5, 2023, 6:00 p.m., UW Memorial Library, Room 126. Watch your email for an invitation to join us either in person or on Zoom for this hybrid presentation.

This issue of our newsletter features some of the research our staff have been engaged in recently that draws on the resources of the MKI Library and Archive and historical German-language periodicals. Antje Petty’s lead article on some of the information to be gleaned from a ledger created by a German-speaking fire insurance agent underscores how fascinating details about community life in earlier times can emerge through the study of primary source documents, of which our library/archive is home to many. We are grateful to community scholar and MKI Friends Board member Karyl

Rommelfanger for donating this ledger. Randi Ramsden’s article on German American culinary traditions as documented in digitized newspapers and Kevin Kurdylo’s analysis of the content of a German Catholic periodical likewise bring to light aspects of American history that are inaccessible to many because the sources were produced in a language other than English. Indeed a primary goal of our Institute is to engage in this kind of “archaeology” to add to our understanding of history and how that history informs the present.

Most of our library and archival materials have been donated over the years by generous supporters of MKI who share our interest in ensuring that German-language print and handwritten documents produced in America are preserved and made ac-

cessible to the patrons we serve. This year we are especially grateful to our Friends for their campaign to raise funds for the restoration of some of our most fragile materials. Thanks to you, MKI received \$1,350, which enabled us to restore eight books and a collection of handwritten letters.

Vielen herzlichen Dank!

And heartfelt thanks to every one of you for all the important ways you demonstrate your support for the Max Kade Institute. Your financial giving and your gifts of time and energy enable us to continue our work and for that we are deeply grateful. On behalf of the entire MKI staff, I wish you and your families a healthy and restful holiday season!

With gratitude,
Mark

Two Virtual Workshops: Learn to Read the Old German Script with Mark L. Loudon and Antje Petty

Saturday, January 27, 2024, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
First Steps of Learning to Read the Old German Script

Saturday, February 3, 2024, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Learn to Read Documents in the Old German Script

Details and registration information will be posted in late November on the MKI website (mki.wisc.edu/events).

If you have questions, contact Antje Petty at apetty@wisc.edu.

Other people insured pigs and sheep as well as farm implements and tools such as ploughs, threshing machines, and hay balers. Household items included clothing, cookware, sewing machines, and bookshelves. In 1875, Ernst Strube, born in Prussia in 1830 and a minister, even listed a whole “Bibliothek” (library) for \$200 as well as a “Melodium” (home organ) for \$80 [p. 132]. And in 1870, 65-year-old Gottfried Hebecker, a shoemaker from Prussia, insured his

No			fl	kr
1	Friedrich Schauen			
	1 Wanduhr 2. 1 Posten 12		15	
	1 Geyl'sche 12. 4 Eisenkettchen u 36.		130	
	1 Blei aufschraub 8. 1 Bouteille b. 1 Dinschiffschraub b.		20	
	1 Dinschiff Schlüssel nebst Manganstift		7	
	Sammler'sche Nierenschiff auf der Tonne		200	
	Sammler'sche Horn auf der Tonne		80	
	3 Messer 400. 6 Messer u 25.		550	
	Messersch 300. Leichschiff 150.		450	
	hantball 70 Schiffsch 120.		190	
	1 großer Magen 50. 1 kleiner 40.		90	
	1 Schiff Tonne's Tonne			
	Messersch 180. Leichschiff 150.		330	
	2 großer Hülle 100. Nierenschiff auf der Tonne 180		250	
	Horn auf der Tonne		80	
	1 Schiff Tonne's Tonne			
	1 großer Tonne's Tonne 150. kleiner Messer 100.		250	
	Nierenschiff auf der Tonne		100	
	Horn auf der Tonne		60	
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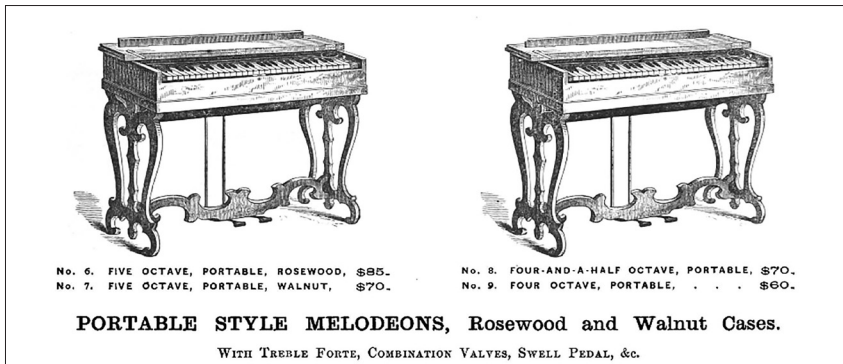
First entry in the *Mutual Farmers' Insurance of the Town of Newton* ledger. The top two lines read "Insured from February 1, 1870, to February 1 1875. Friedrich Wehausen. A complete translation begins on page 2

cobbler tools for \$25 as well as beehives with bees for \$40 [p. 35].

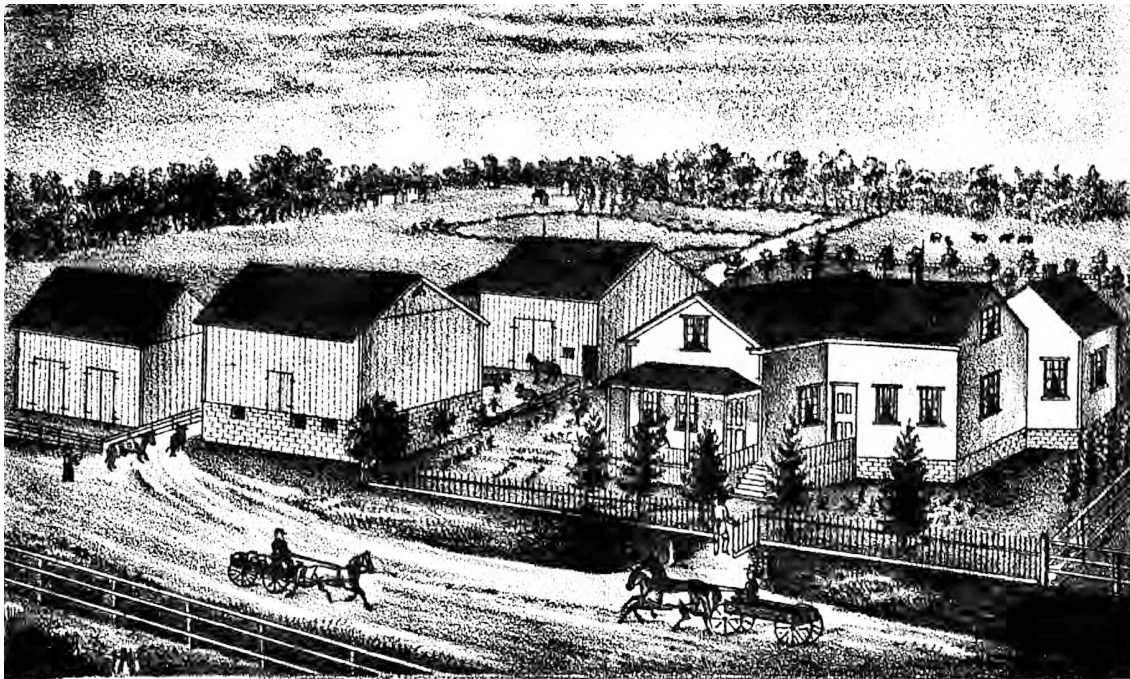
Over nearly three decades, we can also observe how technology progressed and society changed. In the early years, farmers had horses that pulled ploughs and threshers, all listed separately in the ledger. On September 18, 1880, the first power tool appears when James Taugher in Liberty, an immigrant from Ireland, insured a “Heckselsmaschiene mit Horsepower”

(chaff chopper with horsepower) for \$40 and a “Dampfmaschine” (steam engine) for \$300. Only a month later the page is amended with a new entry for a business called “James Taugher & Co.” The only two items insured for the company are a new “Dampfmaschine” valued at \$500 and the old “Dampfmaschine” taken out of the previous policy [p. 167]. Was James Taugher going into business providing services with the machines to his neighbors? In the following years, many more farmers insured tractors, threshers, sowing devices, and mowers “with power.”

The vocabulary in the ledger also evolved, over time, with English words and expressions beginning to appear, solidifying the writer as a member of a German American community. Some English words are written phonetically in German such



Three people in the ledger insured “melodiums” (home organs) similar to the melodeons advertised in Mason & Hamlin’s 1868 catalog, above.



The farm of Ludwig Haupt as depicted in the "Index of Manitowoc County Land Ownership Maps, 1860—1918," p. 50. In 1882 his widow Wilhelmine insured the property for \$5,360.

as "Kultiväter" (cultivator), Launsch (lounge chair), "Frehmstall" (framed barn), and "nachaßeßt" (re-assessed). Later, entries include more English words spelled in English, such as "Reaper," "Cutter," "Mower," "Toy-buggy," and of course "Power."

Only three women, all widows, took out insurance policies in their own names: in 1870, Wilhelmine Blumenstein, born in 1833 in Saxe-Weimar, insured property valued at \$2,500 [p. 13]; in 1871, Christina Koffel, born in 1820 in Prussia, insured her house and its contents for \$979 [p. 31]; and in 1881, Wilhelmine Haupt, born in 1822 in Hesse, took out insurance for her house and farm for \$5,360 [p. 297].

Incidentally, Mrs. Haupt's policy was also the highest recorded in the ledger. Her husband Ludwig had died two years earlier at the age of 56, his obituary in the *Manitowoc Pilot* remembering him as "a wealthy farmer of the town of Manitowoc Rapids and one of the proprietors of the Wiscon-

sin central mill."

Most policies, though, ranged between \$900 and \$1,500. The lowest value was recorded in July 1877 for Johann Prohso who insured a single log cabin for \$125. Only one policy in the entire ledger was cancelled by the Directors for failure to make a payment. This is also the only time that the company Directors are listed by name: Christian Hacker, Gottlieb Vollbrecht, Joseph Schmeda, H. Vogelsang, and Ernst Rodewald, as well as Charles A. Franken, Secretary.

Mutual Farmers and Fire Insurance of Newton did not insure just farm properties, though. Four cheese makers got coverage for their buildings and cheese making equipment; the "Supervisors of the Town of Newton" spent \$400 for their town hall (called "Townhouse" in the ledger) [p. 64], and the "Liederkrantz Newton" listed its "Sängerhalle" (hall of the singing society) for \$200 [p. 258]. There are also three churches, including the "German Methodist Church of

Newton," which took out two separate policies in 1872, one to cover the church building for \$150, and one for \$550 to insure a "Frehmhaus" and a barn for its minister [p. 36, 40].

Seven public district schools (five in Newton, two in Liberty) held policies with *Mutual Farmers*. One example is the "School House of the School District No.1 in Newton in Section No. 4 Town 18 Range 23" which in 1878 covered a "Brick School House 24 x 36" valued at \$700 [see image on p. 10]. Five years later the renewed policy also lists "school benches, a map, a globe, school-books, and an oven," for an additional \$100 [p. 261].

On only four occasions did *Mutual Farmers* pay for damages during this period. In all cases, the information was scribbled on the page with the original policy. One recipient was Friedrich Krüger, who in 1877 received \$112 for "Brandschaden"

Continued on page 10

Culinary Traditions in German-Language Newspapers

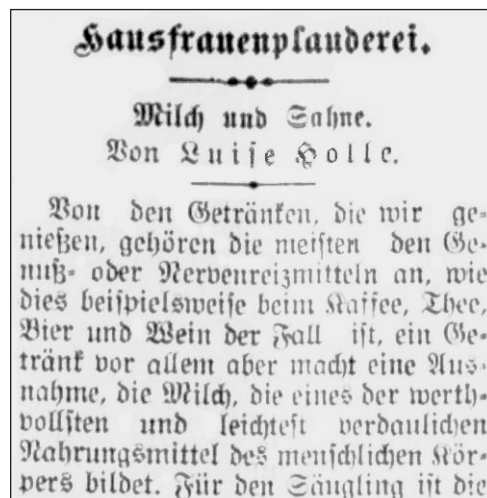
Randi Ramsden

Whether it be tips on how to treat flooring or a recipe for chocolate soup, newspapers have historically addressed a plethora of household matters in addition to current events and community happenings. German-language publications were no exception, with household columns and recipe sections offering kitchen tips to the German-reading public.

Some of this content was imported directly from Germany. The Baltimore newspaper *Der Deutsche Korrespondent*, for example, printed a column called “Hausfrauenplauderei” (housewives chat) between 1912 and 1913. The author of the column was Germany-based author and editor Luise Holle, who not only wrote her own books but also worked on later editions of Henriette Davidis’s well-known *Das Praktische Kochbuch* (The Practical Cookbook), a kitchen staple

in both Germany and the United States. In her weekly column in the *Deutscher Korrespondent*, Holle provided, for example, information on how to determine the quality of meat and ways to keep it fresh (June 1, 1913), the importance of dairy and how to preserve it (July 28, 1912), and recommendations for ways to garnish food (March 30, 1913). Holle’s advice for home cooks illustrates the workings within German immigrant kitchens and provides a strong culinary connection to the homeland that carried on well into the 20th century.

Not all recipes were imported from Europe. Some newspapers, such as the La Crosse, WI, *Nord Stern* printed recipes submitted by their readers. A section called “Briefkasten des Landraths” (mailbox of the county administrator) became a library of locally enjoyed dishes, as well as



Luise Holle’s “Hausfrauenplauderei” article on the salutary benefits of milk, from *Der Deutsche Korrespondent* (Baltimore, Md.), July 28, 1912

kitchen and gardening advice. Here, readers could find instructions for Bertha M.’s elderberry wine (August 4, 1916) and Anna W.’s sourdough pumpernickel (April 27, 1917). Unlike imported recipes, local submissions were attractive to the readership because they had been adapted

Briefkasten des Landraths.

Auf Landwirtschaft bezügliche Anfragen werden hier bereitwilligst beantwortet. Alles weiß der Landrath natürlich nicht, aber mit dem, was er weiß, will er seinen Bauernbrüdern gerne zur Seite stehen, und hat er dabei die freundlichste gewährende Mithilfe der gesamten Fakultät unserer neuen Landwirtschafts-Schule, einer der allerbesten des ganzen Landes. Anonyme Zuschriften werden nicht berücksichtigt. Adresse:

Landrath, „Volkspost“, La Crosse, Wis.

Frau S. M. in L., Wis. Nachstehend also nochmals ein Rezept für Hollunderblüthenwein. Man nimmt 3 Gallonen Wasser, fügt 9 Pfund weißen Zucker hinzu, ferner ein gut zu Schaum geschlagenes Eiweiß und ein Quart Hollunderblüthen (ohne die Stengel). Die Blüthen müssen fest	das Wasser lauwarm, so hebt man den Dedel ab und gibt zwei mit Rinde und Fleisch geriebene Apfelsinnen und drei ebenso geriebene Zitronen nebst drei Eßlöffeln frische, kräftige Hefe in den Topf zu der Flüssigkeit, rührt alles zwei Minuten durcheinander, deckt den Topf und läßt ihn	der Flaschen mit kaltem Wasser. Langsam läßt man dies nun heiß werden und im Siedepunkt an 10 Minuten kochen. Da die Frucht zusammenfällt, so muß man nachher eines der Gläser dazu verwenden, die übrigen damit aufzufüllen. Der Kessel wird dann vom Feuer genommen und das Wasser abgeseiht.
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“Mailbox of the county administrator,” from the La Crosse, Wisconsin, *Nord Stern*, Aug. 4, 1916. The Landrath’s introduction: “Agriculture-related inquiries will receive prompt responses here. The Landrath wishes to support his farming brethren by sharing his knowledge, and while he of course does not know everything, he is kindly supported in his efforts by the collective faculty of our new agricultural school, one of the very best in the entire country. Anonymous letters will not be considered.”

to locally available ingredients and seasons. Before modern global supply chains and rigorous cold storage solutions, people depended much more on locally grown ingredients and growing seasons. This by no means meant people exclusively ate local. Imported ingredients were not uncommon. Fresh coconuts, for example, were being advertised for sale in Wisconsin as early as 1857 (*Mineral Point Tribune*). The supply could be sporadic though, and not all ingredients available to a professional recipe developer in Germany were necessarily accessible across the United States. If a recipe was shared by a fellow community member, on the other hand, ingredients were more likely to be available locally.

Although the previous examples all boast a byline, most recipes and kitchen columns around the country actually did not cite their sources or include the name of the author, making it difficult to track the origin of featured dishes. Turn-of-the-century newspapers with limited resources to produce content increasingly made use of syndicates, which sold the same articles, cartoons, and features (such as cooking columns) to hundreds of different papers around the country. Seemingly not too concerned with copyright, many publications did not identify syndicated content as such. In an effort to understand whether there was a nationwide network of German American culinary newspaper content, one can take a look at the different cooking sections printed across the country. Columns with identical titles appeared in various papers and states. For example, a column titled “Haus und Küche” (house and kitchen)

en) started appearing in the South Dakota *Staats-Anzeiger* in the fall of 1910. A column of the same name was also printed in the Wisconsin *Sonntagsbote*. When comparing the content though, it becomes clear that individual printings of the columns were not identical. However, there is overlap in individual recipes.

The same recipe for “Gesalzene Ochsenzunge” (salted ox tongue) appeared in the *Scranton Wochenblatt* (Pennsylvania, March 28, 1912), the *Washington Journal* (D.C., March 30, 1912), and the Missouri *Herman-ner Volksblatt* (May 10, 1912). Ox

tongue must have been a popular dish that year as a similar recipe for “Ochsenzunge mit Reis u. Tomaten” (ox tongue with rice and tomatoes) was printed in Baltimore, Scranton, and Washington, D.C. North Dakota readers and Baltimore home cooks were offered the same recipe for a “Kohlrübenauflauf” (rutabaga casserole) six months apart in 1911/1912. Whether these recipes were developed and distributed by syndicate companies or just happened to make their way from newspaper to newspaper, the recurrence of the same dishes indicates a culinary exchange among

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This exhibition is given in our store free to all. A pleasure to spend an hour or two to learn the art of scientific cooking.

—NAQUIN'S—

Advertisement for a week of demonstrations of the Great Majestic Family Range by Prof. Jos. Becker at Naquin's mercantile store in Globe, Arizona (*Daily Arizona Silver Belt*, May 5, 1908)



One of several models of ranges advertised by the Majestic Range Company from around 1915 to 1919. Perhaps 83 dainty pastries were made by Chef Becker on one similar to this.

German immigrant communities across the country. German-language newspapers fostered the preservation of German cooking traditions and recorded a culinary canon of German American recipes.

German immigrants were not the only ones enjoying German cooking and baking. Rather than drawing on imported recipes and household tips though, some English-reading Americans hired cooks from Germany, as described in the *Snowflake Herald*, Snowflake, Arizona, on February 5, 1912: “Fred Bushman recently imported his German cook, Miss Lena Closses, who was shortly afterward carried away to Salt Lake by Uncle Zack Decker.” Another German chef growing in popularity with the English-speaking population was Joseph Becker. According to a 1922 article published in the *Utah Ogden Standard Examiner*, Becker had been born in Germany in 1840. At the age of 13, he had started cooking.

By the time he was 17, he had boarded a steamboat as a pastry chef eager to travel and expand his culinary horizon. While it is not clear when he arrived in the United States, his name appears in numerous newspapers across the country between 1900 and 1922, placing him in St. Louis, MO, and later Spokane, WA. Hired by the Majestic Manufacturing Company of St. Louis, MO, to advertise their cooking stoves, “the great German chef,” as he was referred to by the Georgia-based *Americus Times-Recorder* (April 25, 1911), traveled to hardware stores in Idaho (1900), Montana (1906), Arizona (1908), Washington (1909), North Dakota (1910), Georgia (1911), and Utah (1922) to demonstrate cooking on and baking in Majestic wood and coal ranges. The following recipe for Spice Cake, was among the many recipes he shared with his audience.

Spice Cake (*The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, November 19, 1922)

One egg
One and one-fourth pints milk
Ten ounces sugar
Lemon and vanilla
One teaspoon cinnamon
One-half pound flour
Three level teaspoons baking powder
Three tablespoons melted shortening

Mix together the egg, one-fourth pint milk, sugar, flavoring, cinnamon. Stir and add remainder of milk, stir again and add flour, baking powder and melted shortening.

Guten Appetit! 🍴



A taste of autumns past -- Becker's Spice Cake recipe, baked by the author

Edward Langer Awarded Lanškroun Town Medal

Antje Petty

On September 8, 2023, Edward Langer, a long-time member and former President of the Friends of the Max Kade Institute, was awarded the Town Medal of Lanškroun, Czech Republic, in recognition of fifty years researching the history of Czechs and Germans who emigrated from the Lanškroun area in the nineteenth century and settled in Wisconsin. Today, Lanškroun is a community of 10,000 inhabitants located about one hundred miles east of Prague, on the border of the historical lands of Bohemia and Moravia. Mayor Radim Vetchý bestowed the medal on Langer in the Ceremonial Hall of the Lanškroun Château, a centuries-old castle-like building.

Langer's work has focused on the people who left Bohemia for the United States in the years 1850–1890, a wave of emigration that included his own ancestors. At the time, Lanškroun was part of the Austrian Empire and was known as Lanskrón to German speakers. Langer has shared his research in presentations and has published several articles, some of which have been translated into Czech and German. He also led three tours to Lanškroun for Americans who wished to visit their ancestral homeland. Langer himself has visited the region eleven times since 1979.

In September 2022, Langer was instrumental in organizing the “Sude-

ten German Weekend” in Waterloo, Jefferson County, Wisconsin, a public event that focused on the settlement history of rural Waterloo. As it turns out, many of the early European settlers here were immigrants from Bohemia's Sudeten region. Participants in the “Sudeten German Weekend” were treated to presentations about the history and experi-

ences of those immigrants on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as tours of two original pioneer structures, St. Wenceslaus Church (the so-called “Island Church”) and the log home of Vincent Faultersack.

Congratulations, Ed, on this well-deserved honor! 🇨🇪



Edward Langer, left, and Mayor Radim Vetchý, right, in the Ceremonial Hall in Lanškroun

Continued from page 5

(fire damage) [p. 137]. Given that Krüger had contributed \$3.09 to insure \$309 worth of property, the policy must have been a financial lifesaver. Two years later, John Bull's two barns and a thresher fell victim to fire, and he was reimbursed \$325. Johann Ossick was paid \$12 for five sheep killed by "Blitzschlag" (lightning strike) [p. 248], while Ludwig Frosch's barn also suffered lightning damage for which he was paid \$20 [p. 249].

The above entries afford us a few glimpses into the lives of citizens in rural southwestern Manitowoc County in the late nineteenth century, but they are just a fraction of the information that the ledger of the *Mutual Farmers' Fire Insurance Company* holds. We are grateful to the volunteer members of MKI's *Kurrent* Transcription Group who have transcribed about a quarter of the ledger pages from the old German script to standard type. And above all, we thank Karyl Rommelfanger, Manitowoc, who donated the ledger to the MKI digital archives.

If you are interested in scans of ledger pages and the available transcriptions, contact Kevin Kurdylo at mki@library.wisc.edu. 



Students posing in front of their school in Newton, District 1, in 1898. Fifteen years earlier the building was insured for \$700 and its contents of "school benches, a map, a globe, schoolbooks, and an oven" for an additional \$100. Photographer: Hermann Benke. (<https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AXEYP43FMO6JKU8V>)

Sources quoted and consulted:

¹ Oviatt, F.C. 1905. "Historical Study of Fire Insurance in the United States." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 27 Sep. 1905: 340ff.

² One German mutual fire insurance company in Wisconsin was *Town Watertown Gegenseitige Feuer-Versicherungs-Compagnie* in Jefferson County, founded in 1872. All its minutes are archived with its successor company, Forward Mutual Insurance Company, which still exists today. A detailed company history "By

the Minutes" can be found on its website. The following remark by the author is revealing: "From a historian's perspective, [the English language requirement of 1919] opens up a trove of information to Watertown Mutual, since its records were previously written in German. <https://www.forwardmutual.com/news/2017/04/by-the-minutes/> .

³ *Constitution of the Mutual Farmers' Fire Insurance Company of the Town of Newton in Manitowoc County, State of Wisconsin*, Manitowoc, Wis, 1884. This booklet as well as many other business records of the company are held at the Wisconsin Historical Society, American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Wisconsin Records, Series 918, Part 1.

⁴ *Biennial Report of the Commissioner of the Insurance of the State of Wisconsin 1882/1883*. Issue 1, 64–65.

⁵ *Atlas of Manitowoc County, Wisc.*, 1878, 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷ *Manitowoc Pilot*, January 9, 1879, 3. Source: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95207172/ludwig-haupt>.

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies is published three times a year at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Submissions are invited and should be sent to:

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Kevin Kurdyllo

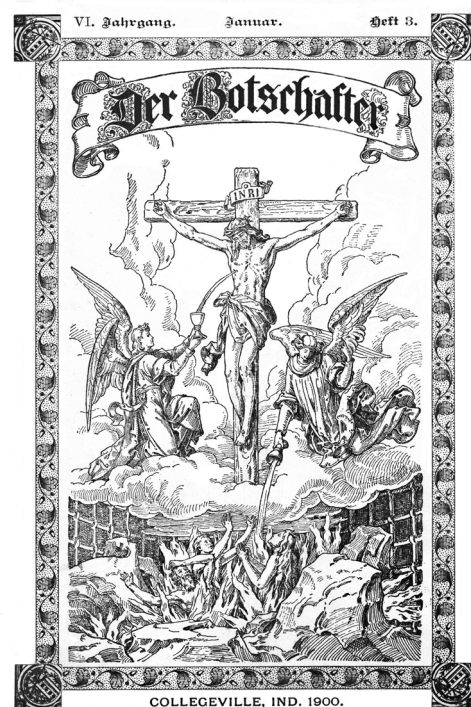
We turn our attention to *Der Botschafter*, a German Catholic devotional published monthly in Indiana from 1894 until possibly as late as 1933. Information is scant, and in WorldCat no libraries report complete holdings. At the Max Kade Institute, we have a scattering of issues dating from January 1900 to September 1907. Produced by the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood, an association of priests and laymen living in community in Collegeville (now Rensselaer), Indiana, *Der Botschafter* also appeared in English as *The Messenger*, which continued publishing in Carthage, Ohio, as *The Messenger of the Most Precious Blood* until 1968, well after the German version folded.

The Congregation of the Most Precious Blood (Latin: "Congregatio Pretiosissimi Sanguinis")¹ is a religious society founded in Rome in 1815; a Swiss branch came to the United States in 1844, led by Father Francis de Sales Brunner (1795–1859), to serve German-speaking Catholics in the wilderness of the Midwest. At this time, the US was still "mission territory" for the Roman Catholic Church, and would continue to be so until 1908. The Society's mission work was to preach to and instruct Catholic followers; it also sought to ease the suffering of "the poor souls in purgatory" through prayer and devotion to the blood of Jesus Christ.

In 1889, the Society took charge of St. Joseph's Indian Normal School

at Collegeville, Indiana, a boarding school which removed Native American boys from their families and cultures in order to forcibly assimilate them into white society.² When the school closed in 1896, the land and buildings were purchased by the Society and a Catholic college, also named St. Joseph's, was founded, initially offering a classical program to train priests and a commercial program for grade school teachers. Publication of *Der Botschafter* and *The Messenger* was the idea of Rev. John A. Nageleisen, who, in 1893, wrote *Der Rettungs-Anker der armen Seelen im Fegfeuer*, which also appeared in English as *The Saving Anchor of the Poor Souls in Purgatory*. Born in 1861 to a German immigrant family in Piqua, Ohio, he taught at St. Joseph's College before becoming pastor of St. Nicholas German Catholic Church in New York City in 1897.

MKI's issues of *Der Botschafter* have reddish-brown covers, perhaps to signify the "precious blood." From January 1900 until June 1901, the covers feature a picture of Christ crucified, with angels pouring His Precious Blood to the anguished souls in the flames below. The issues in hand are all six by nine inches, with an average issue having about 30 pages. The price is given at 50 cents for twelve issues. All have an introductory poem and illustration, followed primarily by writings seeking to deepen readers' appreciation of the Catholic faith, particularly relating to the Congregation



itself and the concept of praying for souls in purgatory. Some writings are attributed, while others are not. Some of the names that appear as authors are A. Gietl, Fr. A. Mueller, Vigilus H. Krull, and, by initials only, G. D. H. At the end of each issue are found the Mortuary, requesting prayers for "priests, religious, and faithful departed"; reading recommendations; and the *Streiflichter* ("Rays of Light," which are editorials). The names of editors appear only in the first few issues of 1900.³

One editorial from the January 1900 issue reveals how Catholics in America viewed the pressures surrounding them: "The *Botschafter* has often shown you, dear reader, how dangerous non-Catholic writings are. . . . [N]ever pick up non-Catholic

books or newspapers. Do not read the 60-page city newspapers unless your position in society requires it, and then only what is necessary. The same is true of most county newspapers. Their content with respect to morality and religion is mostly shallow and wrong. Never buy books on the train, these are not good books, on the contrary, they are bad books. . . .”⁴ An example of good Catholic writing would be *The Christian Mother*, an issue of which was sent for review.

Ganz gerne empfehlen wir solche Schriften. . . . In Amerika ist es höchste Zeit, dass man die Mütter an ihre Pflichten erinnert, sonst laufen sie uns davon und werden Polizisten, Prediger(innen) und Staatsvorsteher und wir Männer müssen dann Kaffee und Suppe kochen und das Haus hüten.

We are happy to recommend such writings. . . . In America it is high time that mothers were reminded of their duties, otherwise they will run away from us and become police officers, preachers, and heads of state and we men will then have to make coffee and soup and look after the house.

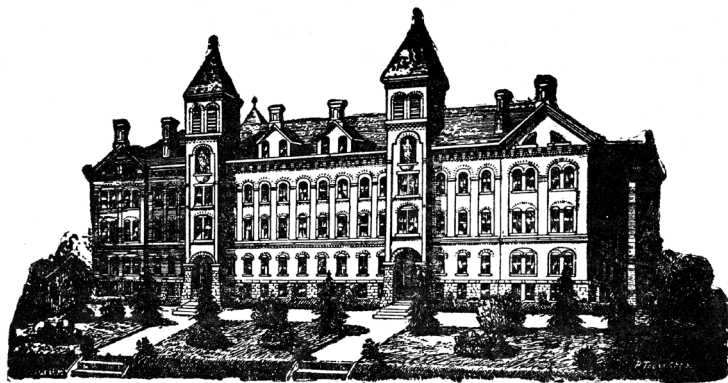
Other topics of concern for these writers are the dangers of socialism, Freemasonry, religious indifference, physical exercises for women (housework and a walk to church should suffice), and other forces operating outside and against the dictates of Catholicism. By June 1904, issues begin to include more “human interest” pieces, such as a report on a recent excursion made by 176 people, primarily

members of the Catholic Order of the Knights of Columbus, to Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. Brother Sylvester Rapier of New Haven, Kentucky, suffered a bad fall in the cave and was hospitalized. In the December 1904 issue is a report on Chicago’s reopened Iroquois Theatre, which suffered a horrific fire one year earlier on December 30, 1903, claiming the lives of nearly 600 people.

*Wo vor einem Jahre gar
mancher weinend und voll
Reue über vergangene Sünden
starb, da ergötzen sich nun die
geistig Toten in Witz und lautem
Lachen, und da lacht der Teufel
hämisches mit.*

Where a year ago many people died weeping and full of remorse for past sins, now the spiritually dead delighted in jokes and loud laughter, and the devil laughed along maliciously.

And then, in January 1905, we find the first attribution to G. D. H. on a work of religious fiction called “Die Grossmutter.” The story runs in installments to May 1905 and is about a Catholic family (mother, father, two children, and a grandmother) that immigrates to America. It begins with the family enduring a storm at sea, during which another passenger slaps the grandmother “because she was praying too hard.” The rest of the story contrasts the pious devotion of the grandmother against the harsh realities of life in America, such as worker strikes, socialism, abuse of alcohol, parties and dances for the young (including some held at a nearby Turner hall), Protestants, attempted rape, sabotage of factory equipment using dynamite, and a false accusation that puts the grandson, Lorenz, in jail. Enter Wilhelm Wildenmuth, an American-born



St. Joseph's Collegium,

unter der Leitung der Väter vom kostbaren Blute.

Eine Lehranstalt, in welche nur katholische Studenten aufgenommen werden. Ein voller Cursus mit einer wissenschaftlichen, klassischen und geschäftlichen Abteilung (classical, scientific and commercial course.) Das Gebäude ist mit allen modernen Einrichtungen ausgestattet.

Für Katalog und nähere Auskunft wende man sich an den Präsident der Anstalt:

REV. A. SEIFERT, C. PP.S.

St. Joseph's College, under the direction of the Fathers of the Precious Blood. A school admitting only Catholic students. A full curriculum with a scientific, classical, and commercial course. The building is equipped with all modern facilities. For catalog and more information, contact the president of the institute: Rev A. Seifert, C. PP. S. (Back cover of *Der Botschafter*, March 1903)

lawyer of German descent, a good Catholic who works to help German immigrants. The story concludes with a detailed trial scene in which Lorenz is cleared of the charges; his sister, Gretchen, then joins a convent.

G. D. H. offers a new serialized story in the June 1905 issue. “Der jüngste Tag,” a meditation on death as experienced by German immigrant Henry Merkl, begins compellingly:

It was November, it was the month of death. . . . It was November, it was the month of silence. . . . It was night within the big city. . . . For most folks in a big city, life is never really real, and reality never quite alive. They go through life like children walking along an abyss. They live without knowing how serious life is. The mists around their souls part only when fate deals them a harsh blow, and then they continue their way through the mists.

Before this story has ended, G. D. H. begins another, “Tawasentha. Das Tal der Toten” (Tawasentha, the vale of the dead, in Albany County, New York), in which two Catholic missionaries are brought as captives to a village of Huron Indians.

Beginning in July of 1905, the *Streiflichter* entries are now also attributed to G. D. H. These editorials illuminate the concerns of Catholics in early 20th-century America, pressured as they were by nativist sentiments and distrust of papal control; the failure of Catholic youth groups to thrive within a culture of pleasure; a Masonic ritual at the setting of a cornerstone for a post office in Flint, Michigan; attacks

against Catholic parochial schools (which were viewed as a form of separatism that kept Catholics from becoming loyal Americans); prohibitions against attending Presbyterian marriage ceremonies; the death of Carl Schurz (“A foolish son is his mother’s heartbreak” can be applied to Karl Schurz, the apostate son of the Catholic Church”); Santa Claus; efforts to erect a statue to General Meade (“We’re afraid the effort will not succeed, as Meade is a Catholic”); and the work of Dr. Duncan MacDougal in Haverhill, Massachusetts, to determine the weight of a soul.

An obituary from January 1916 reveals the identity of G. D. H. as the Rev. George D. Heldmann, C. PP. S., “long identified with the publication of *The Messenger* and *Der Botschafter*.”⁵ Heldmann was born in Chicago, Illinois, on August 4, 1858, the son of German-speaking immigrants who had arrived in America from Bavaria the year before. After receiving an education in classical, philosophical, and theological studies at St. Francis Seminary, Milwaukee, Wis., he was ordained in June 1881, and is considered the first Chicago-born Catholic priest. In 1884 he was selected to organize the parish of St. George, at Wentworth Avenue in Chicago. During the stockyards strike of 1886, Heldmann worked with Father Maurice Dorney, known as the “King of the Stockyards.” In 1887, Heldmann visited condemned German-born anarchist Louis Lingg in his cell shortly before his suicide. In 1888, Heldmann left St. George’s and went to St. Paul’s. There he initiated construction of the parochial school building in 1892, using the German American firm of Schlacks



G. D. Heldmann

Rev. George D. Heldmann, *Encyclopaedia of Biography of Illinois*, Vol. 3. Chicago: Century Pub. and Engraving, 1902, pp. 289-291.

& Ottenheimer for the design. During the smallpox epidemic of 1893–1894, Heldmann was praised for continuing to minister to the “spiritual needs of the stricken” even when “all other religious attendants deserted the smallpox hospital.” In 1896, Heldmann traveled to California to seek land for the establishment of a Catholic colony.⁶ Heldmann was “in great demand” as an orator: “He has read much, traveled much, speaks with power and fine choice of words, either in English or German, and has a thorough understanding of art, architecture, music, and natural sciences. . . . and at one time [1899] was considered for Representative of his congressional district.”⁷

With the completion of the St. Paul parochial school, Heldmann again employed Schlacks to begin the

church, which was designed to “appeal to the affections of the congregation by presenting something similar to those churches they had seen in the old country.” In an effort to cut costs, German American parishioners were used as laborers for part of the building process. Unfortunately, the construction put the parish into serious debt, and in 1903 Archbishop Quigly removed Heldmann as pastor. Heldmann then entered the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood, assuming a leading role with its two sibling publications. Overwork led to a physical breakdown, and in the year before his death Heldmann spent time at the Kneipp Sanitarium in Rome City, Indiana. It is believed his grave is in Carthage, Ohio.

Heldmann is mentioned, as one of two “Malodorous Pedagogic Samples,” by Jeremiah J. Crowley, an Irish American Catholic priest who was excommunicated for writing about alleged corruption and decadence in Chicago’s diocese.

In the autumn of 1903 a priest of international repute disappeared. He had robbed his parish and Archdiocese of about \$750,000, largely through forging the name of his Archbishop. . . .

In 1901 Rev. George D. Heldmann [ex-rector of St. Paul’s parish, Chicago, and a leader among the German and German American priests] offered to donate fifty thousand dollars [to not be exposed], and promised that he could supply, if necessary, irrefutable evidence against Cardinal Martinelli, Bishop Mul-

doon, and other high ecclesiastics. . . . At that time he was living in adultery with a married woman whom he had estranged from her husband and established in a palatial home.⁸

Such allegations, particularly the more salacious of them, cannot be proven, and may be but another example of anti-Catholicism in America’s history.

We conclude with one of Heldmann’s “Rays of Light,” in which he reacts to an article about assimilation that appeared in the Buffalo, New York, *Aurora und Christliche Woche* in June 1907.

Was hat die Kirche gewonnen? Was die deutsche Bevölkerung betrifft, war die Assimilation kein Segen. Vor 30 Jahren hatten wir blühende Tages- und Wochenblätter, kraftstrotzende Vereine von Männern und Jünglingen und wachsende Gemeinden. Jetzt liest unser Volk in seiner grossen Mehrheit englisch und die deutschen Blätter gehen langsam ein, wie das nicht anders sein kann. Wir fügen hinzu: Entweder ist die Aufrechthaltung der deutschen Sprache, die Aufrechthaltung der deutschen Tugenden und Sitten hier in Amerika etwas Gutes oder etwas Nachteileiliges. Das Gute, das aus demselben entsteht, ist aber unbeschreiblich und wird von den grössten Geistern dieses Landes anerkannt.

What has the Church gained? As far as the German population is concerned, assimilation was not a blessing. Thirty years ago we had thriving daily and weekly papers, vigorous associations of men and young people, and growing congregations. Now the vast majority of our people read English and the German papers are slowly dying, how can it be otherwise. We add: Either the maintenance of the German language, the maintenance of German virtues and customs here in America is a good thing or a bad thing. The good that comes from it is beyond description and is recognized by the greatest minds of this country. 

Notes

¹ Members of the Congregation add the letters “C. PP. S.” after their names, an abbreviation of the Latin, with the double “PP” indicating that “Most Precious” is one word.

² For more information on St. Joseph’s Indian Normal School, see: Stacey, Madison. “Uncovering the Brutal History of Native Boarding Schools in Indiana.” 13-WTHR, 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/vj7zfvmu>. Also: Weber, Carolyn A. “Caught Between Catholic and Government Traditions: Americanization and Assimilation at St. Joseph’s Indian Normal School.” *American Educational History Journal*, vol. 40 (1/2), 2013, pp. 75-91.

³ Circulation numbers for the German edition are given at 7,000 in 1923; 4,950 in 1932; and 8,000 in 1936. Numbers for the English edition were higher, though provided only for later dates: 29,450 in 1948; 22,328 in 1950; 23,080 in 1955; 25,349 in 1960. It is noted that “the German . . . was not a mere translation of the English but the latter did set the standard.” Willging and Hatzfeld. *Catholic Serials of the Nineteenth Century in the United States*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962.

⁴ Canon law required that any religious text directed at a Catholic audience be reviewed by “competent ecclesiastical authority” and found to be free of any conflict with Catholic doctrine. MKI’s issues of *Der Botschafter* are endorsed by the Congregation’s leadership in Carthagen, Ohio, and by the Bishop of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

⁵ “Father Heldmann, A Noted Missionary,” [Rensselaer] *Evening Republican*, vol. 20, no. 20, January 24, 1916.

⁶ “German Catholics Will Colonize. Rev. George D. Heldmann’s Mission to California, to look for the land. About three

hundred families to come here from the East. They will grow sugar beets, fruits, and more.” *The San Francisco Call*, August 2, 1896, p. 32.

The colonists were to come from Chicago and St. Louis “to a fertile California valley, to improve the destiny of a people who naturally drift into cities under the influences of present social and economic conditions. Only Germans, members of the Catholic church, can be admitted to the colony.”

⁷ Sutherland, Douglas. “An All Brick Church. St. Paul’s Cathedral, Chicago,

Unique in the United States — Built Without Wood or Nail.” *The Clay-Worker*, vol. 39, no. 3, Mar. 1903, pp. 335-337.

⁸ Crowley, Jeremiah J. *Romanism: A Menace to the Nation*. Aurora, Mo: Menace Pub., 1912.

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