

German Speaking Immigrants in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin

Katie Dippel Reilly



Gottschalk's Meat Market on Michigan Avenue in Sheboygan, undated

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On May 4, 2024, the Friends of the Max Kade Institute will hold their annual meeting in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin. For more information see page 2.

In Wisconsin, the region along the Lake Michigan shore from Kenosha to Manitowoc County was the first to be settled by Europeans. This included immigrants from German-speaking lands who arrived in the mid-nineteenth century. On the northern edge of this line of settlement, the largest concentration of German settlers were to be found

in two rows of towns: Russell, Rhine, Herman, and Mosel in Sheboygan County, and Meeme, Centerville, and Schleswig in Manitowoc County.

In 1860 there were 10,284 German-born residents in Sheboygan County, 2,724 of whom lived in the city of Sheboygan. They represented a cross-section of the German-speaking states, such as Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, Hanover, Baden, and many others.

Immigrants who settled in in the towns of Sheboygan and Plymouth

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Friends of the Max Kade Institute

Annual Meeting 2024

Sheboygan County, Wisconsin

Saturday, May 4, 2024

This year, the Friends will explore the rich German American history of Sheboygan County. Join us for our annual meeting at the Riverdale Country Club in Sheboygan, with a warm lunch buffet and a presentation by Katie Dippel Reilly, researcher at the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center (SCHRC). Afterward we will visit the SCHRC in Sheboygan Falls and view unique German American documents from their collection. We will also take a tour of the Waelderhaus in Kohler, built in 1931 in the architectural style of the Bregenzerwald region of Austria, the ancestral home of the Kohler family.

PROGRAM

- 11:00 – 12:00 **Riverdale Country Club** 5008 S 12th St., Sheboygan, Wisconsin
— Registration
— Annual Business Meeting of the Friends (snack platters, beverages, cash bar)
- 12:00 – 12:15 Socializing; Board of Directors Meeting (election of officers)
- 12:15 – 1:30 **Luncheon**
(warm buffet: tenderloin tips (GF), herbed chicken (GF), pasta primavera (V))
— Presentation by Katie Dippel Reilly
- 2:00 – 4:00 **Tours:**
— **Sheboygan County Historical Research Center**, 518 Water St., Sheboygan Falls
— **Waelderhaus**, 1100 W. Riverside Dr., Kohler

Cost per person: (lunch and tours): \$44

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED by Wednesday, April 17, 2024

Register online at: <https://mkifriends.org/annual-meetings/>

BRING A FRIEND – MAKE A FRIEND

Dinner purchase includes Friends of the MKI membership for the year 2024 for *new* Friends.

Questions? Contact Antje Petty: apetty@wisc.edu

For other sites to visit and things to do in Sheboygan County before or after the annual meeting, see the MKI Friends website: <https://mkifriends.org/annual-meetings/>.

Greetings Friends and Readers!

We are now past the mid-way point of the spring semester and looking forward to our MKI Friends Annual Meeting in Sheboygan County, WI, on Saturday, May 4. The lead article in this issue of our newsletter by Katie Dippell Reilly from the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center in Sheboygan Falls provides a wonderful overview of the history of German-speaking immigration to the county. Katie's luncheon presentation on this topic promises to be a highlight of the annual meeting, at which we will mark the 40th anniversary of our Friends organization. This is a major milestone!

Since the MKI's founding in 1983, public-facing events like the Friends Annual Meeting, lectures, workshops, and symposia, have been at the center of our work. I recently tallied the number of in-person, hybrid, and virtual outreach talks that MKI Associate Director Antje Petty and I have given since the start of the 2023-24 academic year and it is currently **thirty-two**. That is an average of more than one presentation per week since September, including during the winter holiday season. An important complement to our outreach activity is our MKI Virtual Lecture Series, which we inaugurated during the pandemic. This series has expanded our reach exponentially in terms of numbers and locations of attendees, who join us from across North America, Europe, and, on occasion, the Southern Hemisphere.

Most of our virtual lectures are made accessible on our YouTube channel and draw many views.

Earlier this year Antje and I offered a two-part virtual workshop, "Learn to Read the Old German Script." As I have shared in past newsletters, the ability to decipher handwritten documents produced in *Kurrentschrift* is increasingly rare. I am grateful to MKI Friends Board member Maria Sturm for inspiring us to start the MKI *Kurrent* Transcription Group in 2022, which she and Antje co-lead. The group of about a dozen people from the U.S. and Germany, which meets most Fridays, has done a fantastic job of making many gems from the MKI Archive accessible to researchers. This is a great example of scholarly crowdsourcing.

I mentioned above that this year we celebrate four decades of the Friends of the Max Kade Institute. All of us on the MKI staff are deeply

grateful for the many ways you support our work, including through financial contributions and donations of books and other materials for our library and archives. Just as important is the moral support and encouragement you provide us. It happens frequently that a research query or a question at one of our outreach events inspires us to pursue new lines of inquiry, which in turn benefits all our patrons, students, scholars, and community-based researchers.

Thank you so much, dear Friends, for all you do to sustain our work. I hope to see many of you in Sheboygan County on May 4!

With gratitude,
Mark

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were artisans and craftsmen of all kinds, as well as university graduates, and a few men of capital. Their experience as carpenters, wheelwrights, masons, tailors, butchers, grocers, tavern owners, and in many other occupations was in high demand. They established their own German-language churches, cultural societies, and newspapers. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the county had seven German language newspapers: six weeklies and one daily. Other newcomers took the opportunity to buy affordable land and attempted to live off the soil.

One example is a group of immigrants from the principality of Lippe, today in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, who settled in the town of Herman. On May 4, 1847, 112 persons—comprising 24 families, 13 unmarried men, and 2 unmarried women, mostly from the village



The German Bank of Sheboygan building, 1934

of Langenholzhausen—embarked from the port city of Bremen. Their leader was Friedrich Reineking. Their small sailing vessel, the *Agnes*, was overloaded with 400 passengers, taking them on an eight-week passage of

misery, sickness, and death. Thirteen or fourteen of the passengers died at sea, three of them Lippers. The vessel was supposed to land at New York, but it carried more passengers than regulations allowed and had to divert to Quebec instead, where the immigration authorities were less strict. From Quebec the party embarked on another harrowing journey on land and waterways to Milwaukee. Here the group split in two, with some continuing to Iowa and others heading north to Sheboygan,

Sheboygan was then a small fishing village surrounded by dense pine forest. Several hundred Native Americans—Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Potawatomi, and members of other tribes—still lived in the area on ancestral lands that they had been forced to relinquish in 1833.

In Sheboygan, the new arrivals from Lippe took wagons and ox teams, furnished by land agents, and proceeded north along the Green Bay

GERMAN BANK

Etabliert 1856

Kapital = = = \$250,000.00



Ueberschuß = = = \$350,000.00



Fr. Karste, Präsident,
Francis Williams, Vize-Präsident
Geo. Heller, Kassierer,
O. Kaufmann, Hilfs-Kassierer.

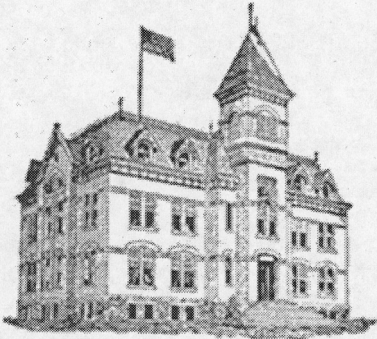
Diese Bank bewirbt sich um Ihre Kundschaft. Jede Anstrengung wird gemacht, um den Kunden durch zuvorkommende persönliche Aufmerksamkeit die besten Dienste zu leisten.

Advertisement for the German Bank of Sheboygan, undated

Road to the center of section 15 in the town of Herman. The date was July 25, 1847, — eleven weeks after they had left Bremen. Each family selected forty acres or more of land and began the process of clearing brush and trees and constructing shelters. Unlike most other pioneers who quickly built log cabins as their first dwellings, the Lippers constructed more labor-intensive frame houses made from hewn and sawn lumber, reflecting the architecture of their home region.

Cash was in short supply on many of the new farms. Thus in the early years, young men and girls often left home to work for others. Some men worked as laborers in nearby towns, others helped with building canals in Illinois. Young women mostly worked in Sheboygan as domestic help. Not only was pay meager, but money itself was scarce and laborers frequently had to accept their earnings in property rather than cash. Some came home with an ox or two to show for their labor, one came with a wagon, and another with only an extra shirt, for which he had worked three months.

Das Missionshaus



Empfiehl sich besonders solchen christlichen jungen Männern, die eine deutsch-englische Ausbildung wünschen, und solchen Eltern, die ihre Kinder nicht gerne in die vielerlei Gefahren und Versuchungen einer Großstadt schicken.

Unterricht, Kost, Wohnung, Hausrat, Bett, Licht, Heizung, Wäsche,

Kurzum alles, was der Student außer Kleidung und Büchern gebraucht, hat man hier für **nur \$100.00 das Jahr,** und solche, die als Prediger oder Lehrer der Kirche dienen wollen, **haben dieses ganz umsonst.**

Um näheres anzufordern, wende man sich an den **Inspektor H. A. Muhlmeier, D. D.,** Franklin, Sheboygan Co., Wis.

Advertisement for the "Mission House" school, ca. 1885. "The Mission House is recommended especially for Christian young men who wish to receive a German-English education, and those parents who do not want their children to experience the dangers and temptations of a big city." Tuition was \$100 a year and free for those who would preach or teach in the Reformed Church.

In 1853, C. F. Arpke built a dam and saw mill at Franklin, which greatly improved the economic condition of the settlers by giving employment to many and furnishing a more accessible market for logs. In 1855–56 Mr. Arpke and Henry Dickhoff erected a flour mill at Franklin. During the 1850s more immigrants from Lippe-Detmold joined the original settlement.

In 1862, immigrants from Lippe founded the "Mission House" school near Franklin, in the town of Herman. The Lippers were devout members of the German Reformed Church, and the school was established to educate young men for the ministry. By the end of the 1800s enrollment was no longer limited to pre-theological students, and the college had developed strong programs



Mission House campus in Franklin, Sheboygan County, ca. 1899

of study in a wide number of disciplines. Today the campus is known as Lakeland University.

The settlers from Lippe had founded their first congregation in Herman, the Immanuel Congregation, in 1848, just a year after their settlement in the town, and built their first place of worship in 1850, but they had no permanent minister until 1854, when Dr. J. J. Bossard became their spiritual leader.

In the early years, many German congregations in Sheboygan County, no matter the denomination, were served by traveling ministers. One such person was Carl Renatus Wilhelm Erbe (1810–1887), an immigrant from Saxe-Meiningen (Thuringia). His name appears on county records as the officiant for 1,418 baptisms, 275 marriages, 361 burials, and 567 confirmations, — usually with his title “Minister of the Gospel.”

Beginning in 1892, a very different group of German-speaking immigrants arrived in Sheboygan: Germans from Russia. They were the descendants of people who had moved from German lands to Russia in the 1760s where they established over one hundred colonies along the Volga River near Saratov. Special privileges accorded to them by the Russian Empress, as well as geographical isolation meant that they had preserved their German language and German traditions, albeit infused with Russian customs. In the 1880s, when these privileges were withdrawn, and crop failures hit, many Volga German decided to migrate to America. The first small group from the colony of *Reinwald* arrived in Sheboygan in 1892: Gottlieb Maerz,

his wife, and their young son (whose names are unrecorded), and two cousins, both named Henry Jurk, and the cousins’ wives (also unnamed). A steady stream of *Landsmänner*, or fellow countrymen, followed between 1908 and 1913. Some came as late as the early 1920s.

The Volga Germans were different from earlier German immigrants. Their speech included Russian words, and German Americans considered their German archaic. Along with their English-speaking neighbors, Sheboygan Germans referred to them as Russians and to their neighborhood as Russiantown.

Russian German men found jobs as carpenters, masons, or painters, and many labored in Sheboygan’s factories. New arrivals were actively recruited and quickly hired to produce enamelware at the Polarware and Vollrath companies, velocipedes and coaster wagons at Garton Toy Com-

pany, mittens and stockings at Hand Knit Hosiery Company, and furniture in a number of different plants. In the nearby village of Kohler, they made bathtubs and sinks for the Kohler Company, which became the largest employer of the new immigrants. Women often supplemented the family income by working as domestics.

Volga Germans joined Lutheran churches in Sheboygan, especially Trinity Lutheran Church. In 1903, they founded their own congregation, St. Stephan’s, with twenty-four charter members.

Today, German names are found throughout Sheboygan County, bearing witness to the rich and complex history of German immigration to this part of Wisconsin. 🍷

Katie Dippel Reilly leads the research team at the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center in Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin.



Brothers Leopold and Francis Gutsch established Sheboygan’s Gutsch Bros. Brewery in 1847. This ad is from the Prohibition era, when the company was still producing a near beer.

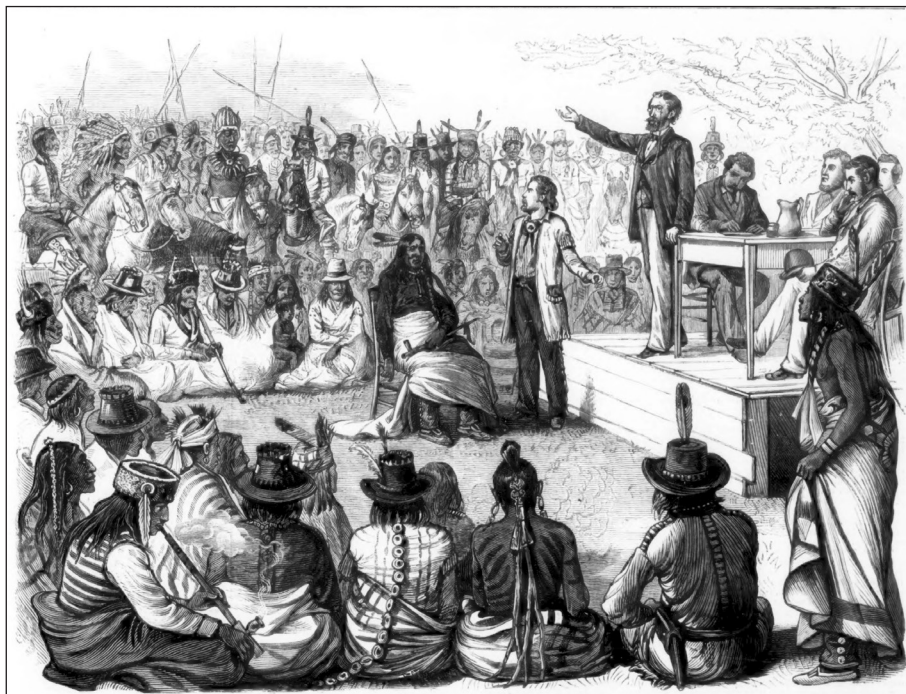
Carl Schurz and America's Indigenous Peoples

Julius Wilm

German American politician Carl Schurz (1829–1906) is often seen as a progressive force in U.S. policy toward Indigenous nations. However, his record as United States Secretary of the Interior (1877 to 1881) is more ambiguous.

In the summer and early fall of 1879, during his third year as United States Secretary of the Interior, Carl Schurz and a group of fellow travelers embarked on a journey to visit Indian nations in Nebraska, Dakota Territory, Wyoming, Colorado, and Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma). *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* produced an illustration of one encounter that is displayed at right. The drawing depicts Schurz at a Lakota gathering at the Rosebud Agency in the Dakota Territory on August 29, 1879. Spotted Tail, the Brulé leader, sits on a chair while most other listeners sit enraptured on the ground. Schurz raises his right arm in the air as he speaks. The depiction is reminiscent of Moses figurines or Communist Era statues of Lenin: a revered higher being brings salvation to the people, which they gratefully receive.

The depiction is skewed not only because the sketch artist worked from a newspaper report, having never left New York; Spotted Tail, who spoke at the pictured meeting, clearly opposed Schurz's ideas of privatizing reservation lands. Strong opposition was also voiced in early



Secretary Schurz Addressing the Grand Council Held on August 29th, from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, October 4, 1879

October at a similar meeting in Indian Territory. Despite the distortion, the image of Schurz as a savior of Indigenous nations—with or without reference to this specific illustration—has had a remarkable persistence in popular historical accounts. While earlier narratives sought to show that Schurz had in fact improved the situation of Indigenous people, more recent research is somewhat more skeptical about the results of the assimilation policies he advertised. Nevertheless, it is argued that a good philanthropic intention should be distinguished from its more questionable long-term effects. As I will try to show, this view is still too generous in assessing Schurz's policy toward Indigenous people.

In the late 1860s, Carl Schurz's St.

Louis newspaper, *Westliche Post*, had sympathized with the idea of affording Indigenous people equal rights under U.S. laws. It was thought that this would facilitate the continued westward expansion of the U.S. at the expense of independent Indigenous polities, but the principle was that Indigenous people should be integrated into society as legal equals (see, for example, the issue of the *Westliche Post*, November 4, 1867). By the time Schurz came into office as U.S. Secretary of the Interior in 1877, he had fundamentally changed his views, if indeed he had been the author of the earlier editorials. Upsetting numerous reformers, he now stated that there could be no talk of legal equality in the foreseeable future. Instead, Schurz argued, Indian policy must be guided

by the interest of U.S. citizens in opening up more Indigenous lands. “The Western country [...] is required for agricultural settlement and [the] mining industry,” his annual report of 1879 stated flatly.

Philanthropists [...] do not themselves believe, if they are sensible, that twenty-five years hence millions of acres of valuable land will, in any part of the country, still be kept apart as Indian hunting-grounds. The question is, whether the Indians are to be exposed to the danger of hostile collisions, and of being robbed of their lands in consequence, or whether they are to be induced by proper and fair means to sell... (*Present Aspects of the Indian Problem*, July 1881.)

To facilitate the takeover of their lands—to which Schurz saw no realistic alternative—Indigenous nations were to be completely transformed. Already upon taking office, Schurz therefore proposed establishing boarding schools, where Indigenous children would be subjected to a program of total re-education in separation from their families and cultures. With his support, in 1879,

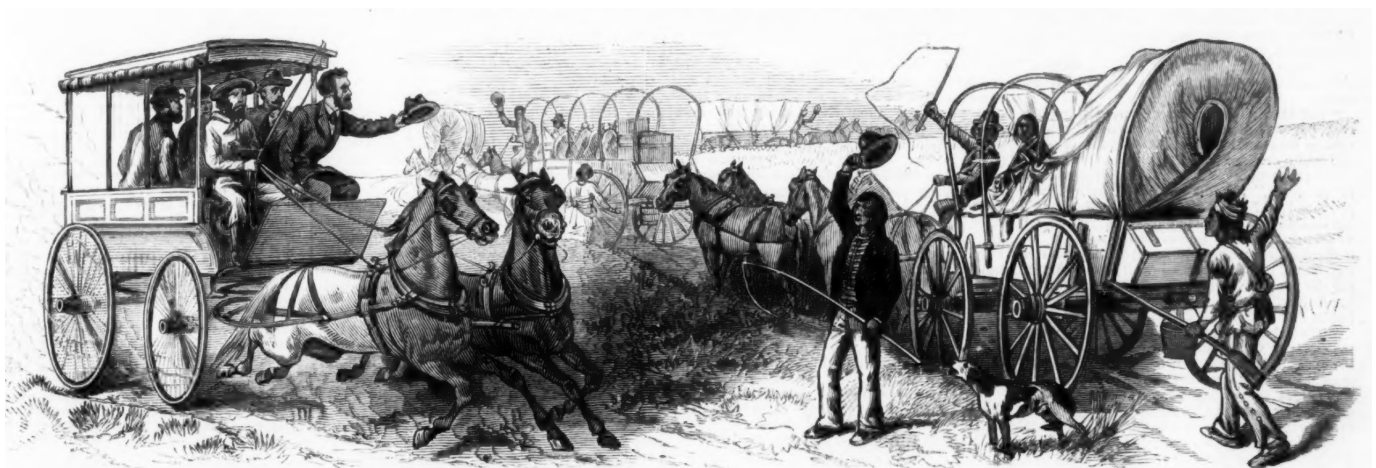
the Carlisle Indian Industrial School was founded in Pennsylvania as the first of a projected network of schools to re-train Indigenous children under a strict regimen. The intention was to integrate Indigenous youths into the lower ranks of U.S. society: “We can never make anything of an Indian but a [reservation] policeman or a second-rate farmer. By the system which we have so successfully inaugurated we may confidently look forward to absorbing the Indians until they will totally disappear in the great white family.” (Schurz interviewed in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, November 1, 1879)

Starting in 1879, Schurz also pressed aggressively for “allotment” legislation. According to a bill he sent to Congress, the interior secretary would be authorized to “allot” individual parcels of communal reservation lands to Indigenous individuals and sell the remaining “surplus lands” to white settlers. As a result, reservations would be dissolved as distinct Indigenous political entities.

Schurz presented “allotment” as a way of securing Indigenous land ownership, as allotted land in his view would somehow be more secure from white encroachments than communal

lands guaranteed by the U.S. government under treaties. Indigenous interlocutors he met during his trip in the summer of 1879, however, had little appetite for the privatization of their lands. Spotted Tail explained, “his people wanted to remain in the lands now in their possession, and wanted the whites to be kept from encroaching upon them. When settled upon their farms, the Indians would rapidly increase in numbers, and would need all the land which was set apart for their use.” (*New York Times*, September 15, 1879). In Indian Territory, the Muskogee *Indian Journal* reported that widespread “disgust [was] produced by Secretary Schurz’s talk” (October 9, 1879). The Cherokee Council spoke out in a resolution against “any change in the tenure of our land title.” It warned, “a violation to our Treaties can but result in disaster and ruin to our people.” (*Indian Journal*, November 27, 1879)

Only after Indigenous youths would have been re-trained in boarding schools, reservation lands privatized and opened to white settlers, and Indigenous societies thoroughly dissolved could there be talk of affording equal legal rights to Indige-



Secretary Schurz on His Tour of Indian Nations, from *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, October 4, 1879

nous people, Schurz maintained. Until this had been achieved—and it would take a long time, for the General Allotment Act was only passed in 1887, long after Schurz left office—the U.S. government would recognize only limited legal rights for Indigenous people.

While Schurz argued that his approach to Indian affairs would lessen the need for repressive military force, he also relied on it during his tenure. Causing much controversy after the so-called Meeker Incident in western Colorado in late September 1879, Schurz ordered the withdrawal of food rations to the White River Utes to compel the surrender of fighters implicated in an attack on an Indian Agency. Along with other papers and prominent reformers, the *Washington Post* bristled at Schurz's use of starvation as unnecessarily brutal:

If we can't catch the Ute murderers we can starve their

grandmothers to death. For that reason we cut off the rations due to a tribe under a treaty stipulation—a contract of which the Utes fulfilled their part years ago. The Indian bureau is brave. It holds on to the food due to and paid for by these Indians, and says to the old men, the women and the babies, "You can have something to eat when you have caught and surrendered twelve murderers." We ought to be a proud people. (January 26, 1880.)

Almost forty percent of the White River Utes perished between 1879 and 1881 as a result of armed fighting, the ensuing forced relocation, and likely starvation. The Uncompahgre and Southern Utes had nothing to do with the conflict and continued receiving their rations, but they were also forced to relocate. Almost thirty

percent of their populations died.

As Secretary of the Interior, Carl Schurz claimed to pursue his old universalist project of equal legal rights for Indigenous people—but with a longer time horizon. He opposed "those who think that 'the only good Indian is a dead Indian,' and who denounce every recognition of the Indian's rights." (*Present Aspects of the Indian Problem*, July 1881) On the way to his long-term goals, however, he found it legitimate to disregard even fundamental life interests as well as countless well-formulated objections by Indigenous people. 🦋

Julius Wilm is a postdoctoral historian at Leipzig University, Germany. He is the author of the forthcoming book Ein deutscher Revolutionär im Amt: Carl Schurz und der Niedergang der Minderheitenrechte in den USA der 1870er Jahre (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024). For more information on his work, see juliuswilm.com

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- Membership covers the calendar year (January–December). Payments received after November 1 of the current year will be credited for the full succeeding year.

Some Recent Acquisition Highlights

Kevin Kurdylo

Since its founding, MKI has relied on generous individuals donating physical materials such as books and handwritten documents to build our remarkable collections. But in 2023, we applied for and were awarded \$5,000 from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education's *Library Collections Enhancement Initiative* (LCEI). Flush with cash, as they say, we set off on the adventure of purchasing books to enrich our holdings. Because the majority of items we collect were published in the 19th century, we had to continually search used-book sellers for desirable items, and purchase them before others did. Randi Ramsden, our Administrative Manager, was indispensable in communicating with sellers and ensuring we complied with all University regulations. We made our final purchase just a few weeks ago, and our library and archives is now richer by more than ninety (90) items relevant to the German immigrant experience in the US and Canada. The diversity of materials we acquired will enhance research in many areas, such as history, immigration studies, linguistics, music history, literary studies, and gender and women's studies. Below are a few examples of newly acquired materials.

As our "spending spree" coincided with MKI's exhibit about the history of German American singing societies (itself inspired by the 2023 National S ngerfest held that summer in Madison), we purchased several items to display, including a handwritten

ten *Ledger and Scrapbook* that details the inner workings of the committee charged with organizing Connecticut's 1914 state singing festival. A bonus of this purchase was the discovery of a folded 40" x 30" poster advertising the 1914 S ngerfest, with text in vivid red block letters. The poster was in such good condition we had it framed and it now hangs in the MKI Library. As a black-and-white photo would not do it justice, we invite you to stop by and view the poster in person!

We made several purchases related to Pennsylvania Dutch, a language still spoken today in the United States. One of these is *Dreiguds un Noschens. Neue Edischen mit Impruvments*. Published in 1898, the book contains writings by Meik Fuchs, a pseudonym of Michael Lochemes (1860–1924). Born in New York, his parents brought Lochemes to Wisconsin as an infant. He grew up in Milwaukee and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1883. He taught history and literature at St. Francis Seminary, later serving as its director (1895). In 1910, Lochemes joined the Dominican Order in Racine. He wrote poetry, prose, and drama in a stylized form of Pennsylvania Dutch.

We acquired a few works of poetry written by German American women, including Emma (Pelz) Poesche (1827–1911), a writer, playwright, and German language teacher who lived for many years in Washington, DC; and Marie Puls, who was the lyricist for "Sleep, O my baby!" ("Schlummerlied"), composed by Christoph Bach



The poster announcing Connecticut's 1914 S ngerfest

(1835–1927) of Milwaukee. Information on Marie Puls is scarce; we would appreciate any clues from our readers!

We were also able to acquire a collection of writings by Berthold A. Baer, *Nette Geschichten: Amerikanische Humoresken und Novellen*, that was published in Leipzig. Berthold Arnold Baer (March 3, 1867 in Bruchsal, Baden – October 18, 1924 in New York City) was a German American ophthalmologist, writer, and translator. He became known for his writings on the subject of death, which included advertising copy for funeral home pioneer Frank E. Campbell, and for writing a popular song, "Say Good Night But Not Good-Bye?" Baer also translated detective and mystery novels from English into German. In 1897 he married Francisca Leah, n e Schwartz, in San Francisco. Their daughter Francisca was born in 1898, and she later took the married name Basch. For more, see: "I Write About the Beauty of Death So You May Enjoy More Beauty in Life": Dr. Berthold A. Baer, 1857–1924," in the *MKI Friends Newsletter*, Summer 2022. 

Documenting Socialism in Milwaukee

Randi Ramsden

When Victor Berger arrived in Milwaukee in 1881, the city was already home to over 30,000 German-speaking immigrants and at least 17 German-language newspapers. The young Berger had arrived in the United States from Austria-Hungary four years prior and his future in Milwaukee held not only a career in publishing but also in politics. He became a founding member of the Socialist Democratic Party of America (1898) and later the Socialist Party of America (1901). In 1910, he was the first socialist elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Undoubtedly, he was on the crest of the socialist wave surging in the German Athens of North America at this time. Milwaukee famously elected three socialist mayors and numerous Socialist Common Council members, and boasted active labor organizations advocating for workers' rights and municipal reforms to improve



"Wasted Effort," from *Vorwärts*, July 27, 1912

the lives of all Milwaukee residents. It was a practical and constructive approach to socialism, later coined "sewer socialism," that transformed the city of Milwaukee between 1892 and 1960.

Berger's newspaper was called *Vorwärts!* (Forward!); it was published weekly on Sundays between 1887 and 1932 and became a platform for socialist ideas and activities. On April 3, 1904, for example, it printed the clear vision socialists had for their city. A public natatorium in every ward and public toilets throughout the city were supposed to make sanitary facilities accessible to all, while the city was to work on building the infrastructure to provide every house with running water and a sewer connection.

For nearly five years, from 1893 to 1898, Berger also published the daily *Wisconsin Vorwärts*, providing readers with an additional four pages of news, summaries of socialist speaker

GREENFIELD NATATORIUM IS INSTITUTION OF WHICH MILWAUKEE MAY WELL BE PROUD



Public pools, one of Wisconsin socialism's success stories, *Milwaukee Leader*, December 19, 1917

events, labor union activities, and calls for action Monday through Saturday. Although both papers focused heavily on labor and social issues, they also covered non-political international, national, and local news. While the March 21, 1893, issue of the *Wisconsin Vorwärts*, for example, detailed an accident at the construction site of a new ice house for the Cudahy [Meat] Packing Company—the collapse of the scaffolding had caused 20 workers to fall, four of whom suffered serious injuries—it also covered the sinking of an international steamer, the discovery of an underground river in Augusta, Illinois, and a devastating fire in Athens, Alabama.

Despite the fact that many Milwaukee socialist leaders had a German American background, the movement and support of it was by no means limited to the confines of German-speaking immigrant communities. In an effort to reach a larger audience and further spread socialist ideals, Berger launched an English-language newspaper in 1911. In the first issue published on December 7, he addressed the need for and the goals of the *Milwaukee Leader*:

The rank and file of the Milwaukee Social Democracy got tired of the hateful misrepresentation of the socialist administration, and of socialism generally, made by the capitalist press and particularly *The Milwaukee Journal*. [...]

And a leader it will be, THE MILWAUKEE LEADER – undoubtedly the best equipped and foremost labor paper in the English-speaking world. [...]

The most important fact in Milwaukee is the resolute men and women who are determined to lead the world into new channels. [...]

We shall reach out the brotherly hand to all who want to work with us to free our people from mental, moral and economic bondage, no matter to what class any man may belong.

With its progressive municipal reforms, Milwaukee was setting an example for cities across the nation and the *Leader* aimed to set the record straight on who was truly responsible for the positive changes people witnessed:

Milwaukeeans may pride themselves of having at least one public institution which is considered one of the best of its kind in the United States. The place in question is the public natatorium, which is situated at Greenfield avenue and Union street, near Twelfth avenue.

Although the idea of having a new bath house on the south side had been long considered and a Democratic alderman introduced the resolution, it was [socialist] Edmund T. Melms, former president of the common council who did the real fighting for the carrying out of the idea. [...] the complete plans for the institution were formulated by former Public Works Commissioner Briggs, also a Social-Democrat. (December 20, 1912)

The public reception of the *Leader* was not uniformly positive. Especially during World War I, the publication's anti-war stance was criticized and condemned. The paper temporarily lost its second-class mailing status and was barred from receiving any mail. The Department of Justice raided the *Leader's* office and Berger was eventually convicted under the Espionage Act. Despite the federal government's intervention, however, the *Leader* continued publishing until 1938.

The Wisconsin Historical Society has digitized the *Vorwärts!* (available issues: 1893–1913), *Wisconsin Vorwärts* (1893–1898), and the English-language *Milwaukee Leader* (currently available issues: 1912–1916; coming soon: 1911 and later issues into the 1920s). Freely accessible in the Chronicling America database (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov), this collection offers researchers a plethora of political cartoons, historical opinion pieces, and the opportunity to trace Milwaukee's socialist past. 🗡️



From the *Milwaukee Leader*, July 29, 1912

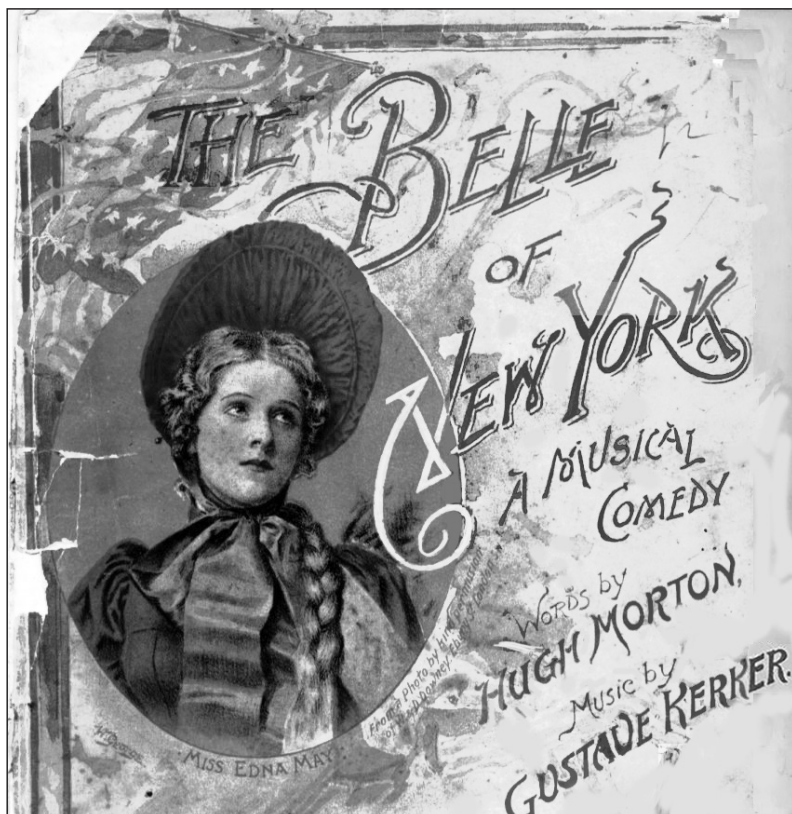
Around the World and Back: Kerker's Belle of New York

Alan Lareau

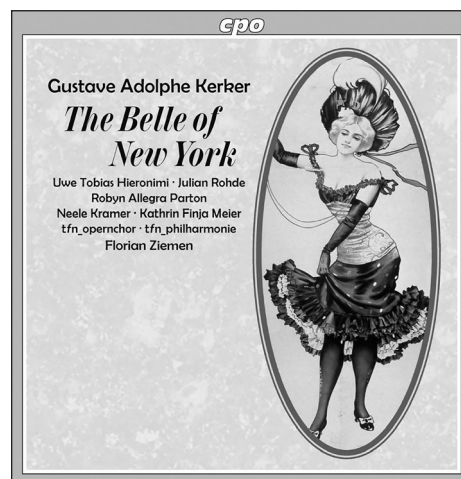
Gustave Adolphe Kerker: The Belle of New York. Soloists, Opera Chorus and Philharmonic Orchestra of the Theater für Niedersachsen, cond. Florian Ziemen. 2 CDs with 32-page booklet (texts in German and English). Georgsmarienhütte: cpo, 2023. Order no. 777 129-2.

Immigrant composers helped shape the American musical theater tradition: operetta stars Sigmund Romberg (*The Student Prince*, 1924) and Rudolf Friml (*Rose-Marie*, 1924) both hailed from Austro-Hungaria; Victor Herbert, though born in Ireland, trained in Germany and

arrived in America at the age of 27. In 1924, Frederick Loewe (of Lerner and Loewe fame, producing *My Fair Lady* and others) came to America from Berlin at twenty-three, while Kurt Weill arrived in 1935, as an exile from Nazi Germany, to create hits for Broadway (*Lady in the Dark*, 1941; *One Touch of Venus*, 1943). One early international blockbuster by a fellow German-American pioneer of the Broadway musical, though today all but forgotten, can now be heard complete on a two-CD set from Germany: *The Belle of New York*, an 1897 musical comedy in two acts.



Cover of the London edition of the piano-vocal score



CD Cover (jpc.de)

Composer Gustave Adolphe Kerker, whom the theater historian Kurt Gänzl dismisses in his *Encyclopedia of the Musical Theater* (2001) as a “prolific illustrator and botcher of Broadway shows who popped out one worldwide novelty hit show, among reams of the merrily utilitarian,” was born in Herford in Westphalia in 1857 into a musical family. At the age of ten, he moved with his parents to Louisville, Kentucky, where he began his career as a cellist, composer, and conductor. At 22, he sent his first operetta on tour across the South, and he soon moved to New York, where he conducted and wrote for the Bijou and Casino theaters, where European operettas were the rage. He adapted popular operettas, adding new music from his own pen, but also scored new shows, some thirty of them by his death in 1923. Admittedly, *The Belle of New York* was not a great success on Broadway, closing after just 56 curtains, but when it was imported



Ad for *Die Schöne von New York* in Berlin
(Vorwärts, 1 Jan. 1901)

lock, stock, and barrel to London, it was hailed as a tremendous American novelty and ran for 697 performances. Thereupon it took Europe by storm: Vienna, Paris, Berlin, and Budapest, even Australia all saw productions, and the *Belle* returned to Broadway. The show remained popular with light opera companies through the 1960s but then dropped out of sight. Countless 78 rpm discs and piano rolls had preserved individual melodies and potpourris at the turn of the last century, but the only modern recording contained just a selection of six numbers in 1958. (The 1952 film of the same title, starring Fred Astaire and Vera-Ellen, sported an all-new script and up-to-date songs by contemporary American composers.)

For the rediscovery of Kerker, credit producer Burkhard Schmilgun, head of the small classical label cpo (Classic Produktion Osnabrück), who hails from Herford, the composer's birthplace. Schmilgun was determined to honor the city's forgotten émigré son. He worked with the Theater for Lower Saxony (theater für Niedersachsen or tfn), a multi-faceted, touring ensemble based in Hildesheim, to mount two concert performances of the *Belle*

in May 2022. The show's leads were cast from the tfn opera ensemble, while the musical theater artists took on the supporting roles of comic and character parts; they were joined by the troupe's chorus and orchestra under the baton of Florian Ziemen. The show was performed in English with dialogue, trimmed to connect the numbers and provide the basic story line. Out of that performance came this live recording on two CDs.

The Belle of New York is a farcical spectacle of the metropolis in the gay 90s, with a huge cast, costumes, dancers and elaborate sets. You could term it a variety operetta, for its simple romantic plot is broken up by revue elements, comedy, and show numbers. Gänzl calls it "a ragbag of comedy scenes and characters from the stockpot of the 19th-century American musical theatre, all illustrated by some bright if undistinguished songs." The script and lyrics are by Hugh Morton (the pseudonym of the London-based playwright Charles Morton Stuart McLellan). When a young playboy squanders his wealth on drink and countless affairs, his moralist father disinherits him and settles the family fortune on a Salvation Army girl, with whom the bounder ultimately falls in love. Eccentric characters move in and out of this story line: a gold-digging comic opera diva, a French vixen, a pair of twin Portuguese counts, a pugilist, a drunken sailor, a smattering of theatrical performers, and a mad but extremely polite assassin—and of course a boisterous chorus of dancing girls. One London reviewer called the work "bizarre." The frantic show is spiced with topical humor throughout its class conflicts and its struggles between vice and self-professed

virtue, as the veil is lifted on the moral hypocrisy of the "Gilded Age." Much amusement comes from the wild hodgepodge of ethnic characters that made up the modern melting pot of New York City, including Germans. Today, however, in the age of political correctness, such ethnic humor and national caricatures can be touchy.

Belle's motif of the Salvation Army girl who reforms the dissolute young man resurfaced on the musical stage a few years later with fellow German composer Victor Hollaender's *The Charity Girl* (1912), an even more pronounced flop with just 21 performances. In Berlin, Elisabeth Hauptmann parodied the convention with *Happy End*, featuring songs by Brecht and Weill; the 1929 premiere was a scandalous disaster, though the songs remained immortal and the musical has since been rediscovered for the modern stage. Finally, the great hit in this vein was *Guys and Dolls* (1950) with words and music by Frank Loesser.

Kerker's music is not as ambitious as that of his predecessors Offenbach or even Sullivan; it is direct and catchy, full of dance rhythms, especially waltzes and marches. The 24 musical numbers include two "naughty" French-themed songs, a jaunty paean to the bathing beauties, the anthem of the "Anti-Cigarette Society," vaudevilian song-and-dance numbers, and a patriotic hymn to the American flag; in its day, the hits of the show were the flirting waltz duets "Teach Me How to Kiss" and "When We Are Married." A grotesque Chinatown number, on the other hand, is impossible to perform today due to its belittling lyrics, which are like "Chin-Chin-Chinaman" on LSD, so it is just delivered instrumen-



In 1909, Kerker was asked by authorities to leave Germany for having failed to perform military service in his youth. The order of expulsion was later revoked when it was determined Kerker had left for America at the age of ten.

tally without comment on its potential offensiveness. The diversity of Kerker's musical voice is striking, as well as his talent for infectious dance showpieces.

Germans have long had an ambivalent relationship with American musicals, many scorning the form as foreign, commercial, and trivial. This concert recording ennobles the work with the genteel stroll of a comic opera, not a raucous comedy romp. Kerker, of course, builds on the operetta tradition he knew well from his work as musical director at New York's Casino Theater, but he is also spoofing it throughout the show. The lyrics are full of irreverence and ridiculous rhymes, yet the concert singers do not always seem to ap-

preciate how silly and provocative the words are; they deliver things a bit too straight. Several of the tempi are too slow and romantic to ignite with the frivolous wit they deserve, and the dialogues, though condensed, can lumber. As is to be expected, some topical humor and references in the script are lost today or no longer funny, such as a running gag that the father stems from Cohoes (a textile manufacturing city in New York), but the concert proves that thanks to its infectious score, *Belle* can be more than a museum piece. The audience responds with loud delight.

Unfortunately, given the stilted operatic diction and the concert hall acoustics, as well as the limited skills of several non-English speakers, many of the lyrics and even spots of the dialogue are unintelligible in the recording. The booklet contains a plot summary but no song texts, but the back page features a link and a QR code through which one can access and download the vocal score online and read (or sing!) along. Incidentally, the complete performance materials, including the score, vocal and orchestral parts, and the manuscript prompt book (script), are preserved in the Tams Witmark Collection in Mills Music Library at UW-Madison, and they have all been digitized and are freely available online for anyone who wants to get to know the work better. (The performance edition used for this concert, by Dario Salvi, was drawn from manuscript materials in the Shubert Archives in New York.)

In 1909, the director of Berlin's stylish Metropol Theater commissioned a fashionable "American Dance Operetta" from Kerker, who

returned to Germany to create *Die oberen Zehntausend*, which was a happy success. (After the opening, Kerker was reportedly evicted from Germany for failing to fulfil his military service in his youth.). Burkhard Schmilgun and his CD label cpo already rediscovered and recorded this work of overlooked native composer Kerker in 2012—even more so than *Belle* a recording marred by overly "classical" aspirations that left the work sounding stuffy and dull. That 2-CD set included a 13-minute orchestral selection from *Belle*, for which the producers were still trying to locate and assemble the full performance materials.

Over ten years later, following considerable research and efforts, this new recording of *The Belle of New York*, available in CD or digital download format and also posted in its entirety on YouTube, is a mostly delightful document of an enthusiastic live performance, and it demonstrates that the German American Broadway pathbreaker Gustave Kerker was far more than a mere hack, indeed that he is deserving of recognition and performances. But it took the determination of dedicated Germans and a small record label to rediscover him as part of our common transatlantic heritage. 🍷

Thanks to JoAnn Tiedemann for research assistance.

Alan Lareau is a retired Professor of German in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, and a former member of the MKI Friends Board of Directors.

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