

Historical Perspectives

A Semi-annual Journal of
the German American Museum,
Library and Family History Center



Matt Perry, 1918

Issue # 16, Autumn-Winter 2023-2024

German American Museum, Library and Family History Center

Mission Statement:

Preserve the Past

Celebrate the Presence

Embrace the Future

About Historical Perspectives

With the publication of Historical Perspectives,

Historische Betrachtungen, we focus on

**many disciplines including the arts, humanities, history,
literature, and the social and physical sciences.**

German American Museum Exhibit Theme Areas:

Geographic features of the landscape

Indigenous Peoples: removal policies and tribal revival

Europeans coming to Northeast Iowa

Role of religion and the clergy in the community

Importance of education and the teaching nuns

Development of farming and industrial arts

Evolution of family social life

Sports: baseball, basketball, and softball

National defense service and economic change

Preserving and celebrating cultural heritages

**St. Lucas Historical Society
German American Museum, Library and Family History Center**

December 2023

Dear friends of the Museum:

The Summer and Autumn months have been quite exciting with the many visiting families, cultural groups, and the planning and implementation of the Speaker Series. The speakers included Russell Baldner, Sue Kuennen Massman, Lili Rauter Gross, Herbert Riedel, Barbara Ortwein, and James Griesheimer. The public interest and attendance at these speaking events were very impressive and heartwarming.

This Autumn/Winter issue contains articles: on the Matt Perry Diary from World War I, the Origins of the Christmas Tree, a Christmas Memory. a Local Tragedy or Patricide? and Society and Museum Happenings. We hope you find these stories interesting and enjoyable.

Let us know of your historic topics for future issues. We already have articles on Hersey Bulgren: the great baseball pitcher; the History of Ossian and the St. Lukas Gemeinde Finanz Bericht, 1915 bis 1916 for the Spring 2024 issue.

Have a Happy Christmas and an awesome New Year ahead.

Sincerely,

Clair Blong

President

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Diary of Mathew Perry in World War I

Flora Perry McMullen

As I sit down to write this introduction to a World War I story, happening in the year 1918, I am reminded that it is almost the year 2024! My Dad fought in World War One in France, he was born in 1889, and yet I am still around to write about these happenings in the 21st century!

The following personal diary of Mathew Perry gives a short, compelling glimpse of his daily life from the day he entered the service, through his boot camp and then travelled to Europe on a boat to fight in one of the famous battles of World War I. His life in the trenches of France, which included carrying buckets of dinner stew through enemy fire from the mobile kitchen to the trenches, being wounded and sitting among dead soldiers waiting for help to arrive and his final days in the hospital before returning home seem surreal to me even to this day when I read his words. It makes my brother Matt and me (along with thoughts of our family who have passed) very proud to share the exact words of this very personal diary for those of you who are interested in authentic written words from one of the heroes who fought in that historical war.

The original diary was a very small notebook, with notes written in pencil under varying conditions and always carried with my dad during his war years. It is now very tattered, torn, and fragile. Several years ago, my sister Marie and I decided that these words needed to be preserved. It was very difficult to read, but the following transcription had been proofread by several people, so we were confident the following piece was his exact words. Unfortunately, dates of entries were not always used, and sometimes not even known, but usually time references are made such as “after a 3-day ride” or “the next day” etc. give some reference to time passed.

My Dad died when I was six years old and Matt was five, so this part of his life is very precious to us. It makes us very proud to have known him and we always wish we had been able to sit down as adults and share in what must have been an unbelievable experience he had in the war. Matt and I share this personal diary with you --people who are interested in the history of our great country.

April 29, 1918

Left home and went to Oelwein, got there at 9:00 a.m. Was inducted into Service at 10:00 a.m. and departed for Camp Dodge at 5:00 p.m. Arrived there at 12 p.m. and got mustered in and got to bed at 2:00 a.m.

Got up at 5:30 a.m. for revillie, had breakfast at 6:00 a.m. and for drill till 11. Had squad right and left, at 12:00 had dinner and at 1:30 out for drill again till 5:30. Supper at 6—right after supper went to the Y.M.C.A. to play cards and write letters.

Same drill as yesterday but quite stormy, looked like darkies when we got back at noon, from the sandstorm. They certainly are bad here—must wash four times a day. Played wash woman tonight for the first time—had to wash my own clothes--some job. Didn’t do so a good job as there are no washboards here.

Well, today we had a holiday, got our inoculation for typhoid and smallpox—one shot in the back and one in the arm. My arm and back are very lame tonight—can hardly move.

Nobody was able to drill this a.m. but had to get out after dinner. Drilled very easy. Henry Schlichte came and paid me a visit tonight.

Got our complete uniform and looked like soldiers and started to drill harder and harder every day.

Packed up my grip and sent my civilian clothes home. Sent it by parcel post. About two carloads of grips and bundles to be seen at the post office to be sent home by the boys. Received our rifles and belt and bayonet today so the drills become harder every day.

Went out and dug trenches about 2 miles from camp. Here the sandstorms were bad. Had to wear our goggles to keep the sand out of our eyes.

Got our packs and mess kits and canteen, got loaded down more every day and hiked to the trenches again to dig some more.

Received our blue drill barrack bags and 2 blankets and got orders to get ready and pack up to get transferred any time.

Got orders to wash all our clothes and clean up. No drill today.

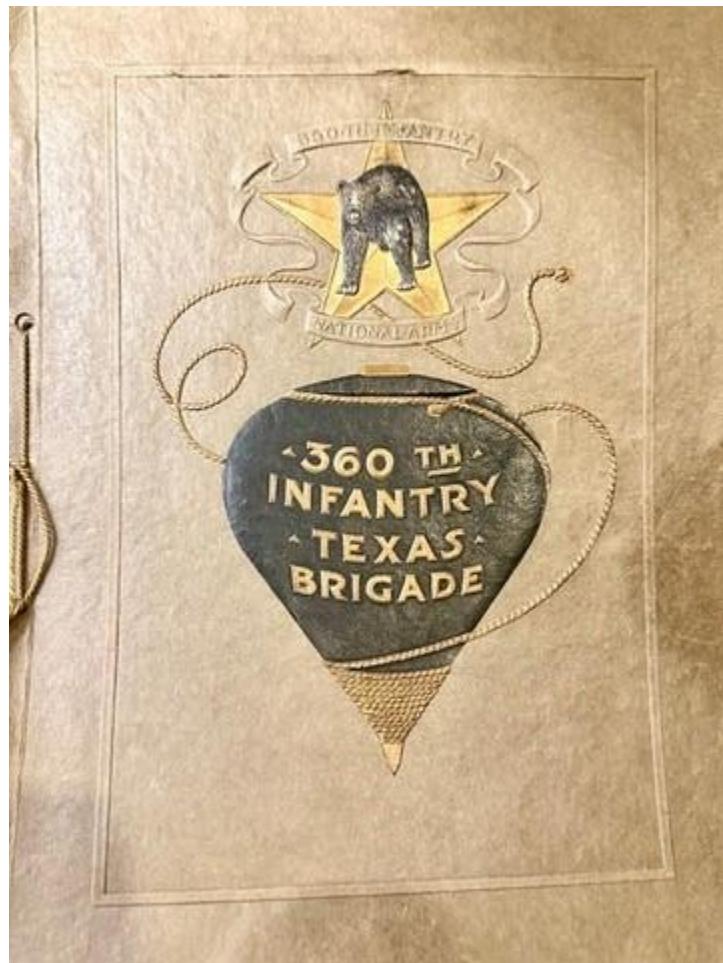
No orders yet to move and no drill but we notice the coaches lining up on the tracks buy the hundreds.



Matt Perry, 1918

Well, this morning got orders to take our bed sacks and take them down to the horse barns and empty out the straw and next we were all checked to be sure we had everything and now were chased all over the camp with those heavy packs and bags for three hours and then we marched down to the tracks and into our coaches. Where do we go from here was the question. Well, we started out and were going south thru southern Iowa and into Missouri and thru Kansas and Oklahoma and still going south into Texas until we reached Camp Travis about 2 miles from St. Antonio. Reached here about 9 p.m. In camp we were put through a lot of RT, till 1 a.m. when we got to the barracks at last and got rest after a 3 day ride with no sleep and all tired out.

We drilled today, we were too tired, so we rested all day. Was attached to Company K, 352 Infantry while at Camp Dodge. Today got assigned to Company E, 360th Infantry 90th Division.



Here we had the manual for arms, how to handle and take care of our rifles. Here the change of climate was too sudden from Iowa to Texas. Looked like half darkies the third day and water all lukewarm. Could not drink it, had to go to the canteen and drink ice cold soda water.

This morning we got orders to pack up everything and go to the shooting range...got packed in big trucks like sardines...35 men with packs, baggage, and rifles on one truck. Twenty-seven miles to the shooting range.

Had breakfast at about six a.m. which was very light. Two slices of bread in our kits which had to do for our dinner...also, a canteen of water. Now we had to march 2 miles to the range...200 target in a line. Here the fun started in...had to put cotton in my ears today. 200 men side by side and 2000 shots popping in about a minute. Surely made some report. Fired 100 shots today. Here we had some trench jumping, orders were to jump over or fall in, some did miss they step and fell.

Today was the same...fired 100 shots again, but gee, its hot here. The rifles got so hot that we were almost unable to hold them in our hands. Here we had some real camp life.... lived in tents and slept on cots.

Went to the long range and fired 100 shots at 500 and 600 yards.

Today we got orders to pack up again and go back to Camp Travis on trucks—the same way we came, crowded like sardines.

No drill today...got rest all day, only had to clean our rifles.

All we did today was checkup—also got another shot in the back which does not feel very good.

Issued another suit and overcoat and one suit of underwear so I guess we are going to move soon.

Today we learned to make our full pack—about 50 pounds on our backs and out for a 2-hour parade. Come back with not a dry stitch on our clothes...simply soaked with sweat.

Got our dog tags today. My number is 2853197. Getting everything packed up and loading onto the cars. Every box is marked Company E 360th Infantry, A.E.F. (American Expeditionary Forces). Where do we go from here boys?

Entrained at 11 a.m. on the Santa Fe Railroad and going northeast through Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. At once the train stopped and orders were given to strip and take a shower under the spout of a railway water tank about ½ mile from the station. Stayed here for 30 minutes for about 800 men to a bath. This felt fine after a two and a half days ride on the train.

We are heading northeast till we reached Jersey City, New Jersey, where we detrained and waited about 2 hours for our boat to take us to Camp Mills on Long Island. Landed here on the Island and boarded the train again. A two-hour ride out to the camp and still had a 2 mile hike to the camp. Here we stayed in tents.

Rested all day from our long trip.... surely all tired out. Turned our cotton uniforms in and got the wool uniforms, 2 pairs of hob nail shoes and the steel helmet. Now I guess we are fully equipped to go across (the ocean) soon.

Out at 4:00 a.m. and hiked the 2 miles to the station where we laid about 2 hours on the pavement and waited for the train. Back to the boat which took us to Hoboken where we landed to take the ship for the trip across the ocean. Stayed in the docks for 2 days till we sailed off on the ship. Everything was crowded like sardines. Had to sleep in hammocks but this didn't suit me so I slept on deck...on the hard floor for a solid week every nite. Neither could we eat that English grub so bought myself apples and cakes for my meals at the canteen. Spent \$2.00 a day to buy my meals.

Went across in 7 days and landed in South Hampton, England. Were marched off the ship into the embarkation sheds where we laid on a plank floor all day till 5 p.m. Boarded a French transport and sailed across the English Channel at night. Here almost every soldier got seasick, owing to the roughness of the sea.... rocked the boat badly, landed at Havre, France at 7 a.m. Sick all night. Got our packs and hiked till 6 p.m. when we got our first meal for that day, and the first drink of water. Reached the rest camp about 5:30 p.m. Rested here for 4 days from our long trip and hiked back to Le Havre to take the train. Crowded in stock and freight cars like sardines.... rode for 3 days and hardly no place to sit or lay down. When we wanted to sleep had to lay half ways down on top of each other just like a bunch of hogs laying in a bunch on a cold day, but hogs generally got straw for a bed, we had the hard floor. Reached the Station of Latrecy at 1:00 a.m.

Detrained and laid on the platform till morning. Here is a real troop landing station...a platform one half mile long.

Marched about 1 mile up a side hill and put up our dog tents which we carry on our backs...each man carries $\frac{1}{2}$ tent so 2 men put up a tent and live together. Here 1000 tents go up in about 15 minutes. The first thing now...find some water to drink. Here we hiked over some steep hills down a valley where we found a spring. Gee, we were dry.... didn't have water for almost three days and had to carry all the water for the kitchen from here. Some job. Also, had to carry all our rations 2 miles from the nearest Supply Depot.... didn't have enough trucks to bring it out here. There we could see the cars go by all day and night long with troops and supplies to the Front.

Stayed here for 10 days and drilled hard every day. The captain always said," Boys, make it snappy we'll soon see the trenches".

Got up this morning at 4:00 and had breakfast. Tore down our tents and hiked with our heavy packs till 1 p.m. without anything to eat or drink...only rested 5 times during this time. We carried hard tack and corned beef in our packs and had 30 minutes for rest and dinner. Got up and hiked till 4 p.m. when we reached the town of Bay which was a distance of 25 kilometers. Here we lived in old houses and barns and hay lofts, but any kind of a place was good enough now as we were all hard boiled now. A lot of men fell out on this trip, but I managed to reach here and that's all too...gee and not a dry spot on us.

Today we had a rest and went down to the river and washed our clothes and had a bath, but gee, cold water.

Another rest day but had to do some policing up around the town.

Well, today we celebrated the 4th of July...had races of all kinds between Companies and platoons and the captain awarded prizes to the winners in Francs.

Our drill grounds are up a steep hill about a mile from here and we hike up there without a stop, come back for dinner and on back till supper time. Here we are getting close order drills and bayonet drill which takes the grease right out of us.

Got some poles about 2 miles out in the woods and put up a frame for dummies to practice bayonet training.

Was out on maneuver all day...hiked about 15 miles over hills, woods, brush, and swamps. Got back at 3 p.m. and had the first drink of water and chow.

Was on detail today.... go up a hill for 2 miles with a 2 wheeled cart and got wood for the kitchen. It took 5 men to push the cart up hill and 5 of us to hold it back going downhill.

Got our gas masks today...gee, some outfit to put over the head, some more to carry on our back. Had gas mask drill for 30 minutes. Almost kill a person to have them on but have to get used to them.

Bayonet drill, grenade throwing and close order drill.

Were out on maneuver again today, started out at 8 a.m. and got back at 4 p.m. Hiked about 12 miles with our packs, rifles, and gas mask.

No drill today.... had to police the whole town and cleaned up the rubbish to make the town sanitary as the French don't do much cleaning up. They all look like it too.

Out to drill again today.... had our gas mask on for 50 minutes to drill.



Had my first mail today. Gee...had 16 letters and everyone was glad to hear from home.

Our field kitchen arrived today. Some outfit...all steel and 2 teams of horses to haul it.

Started this a.m. at 7 o'clock and hiked till 3 p.m. with our field pack about 14 miles. Here we put up our dog tents to stay for a few days in a large stubble field on a side hill.

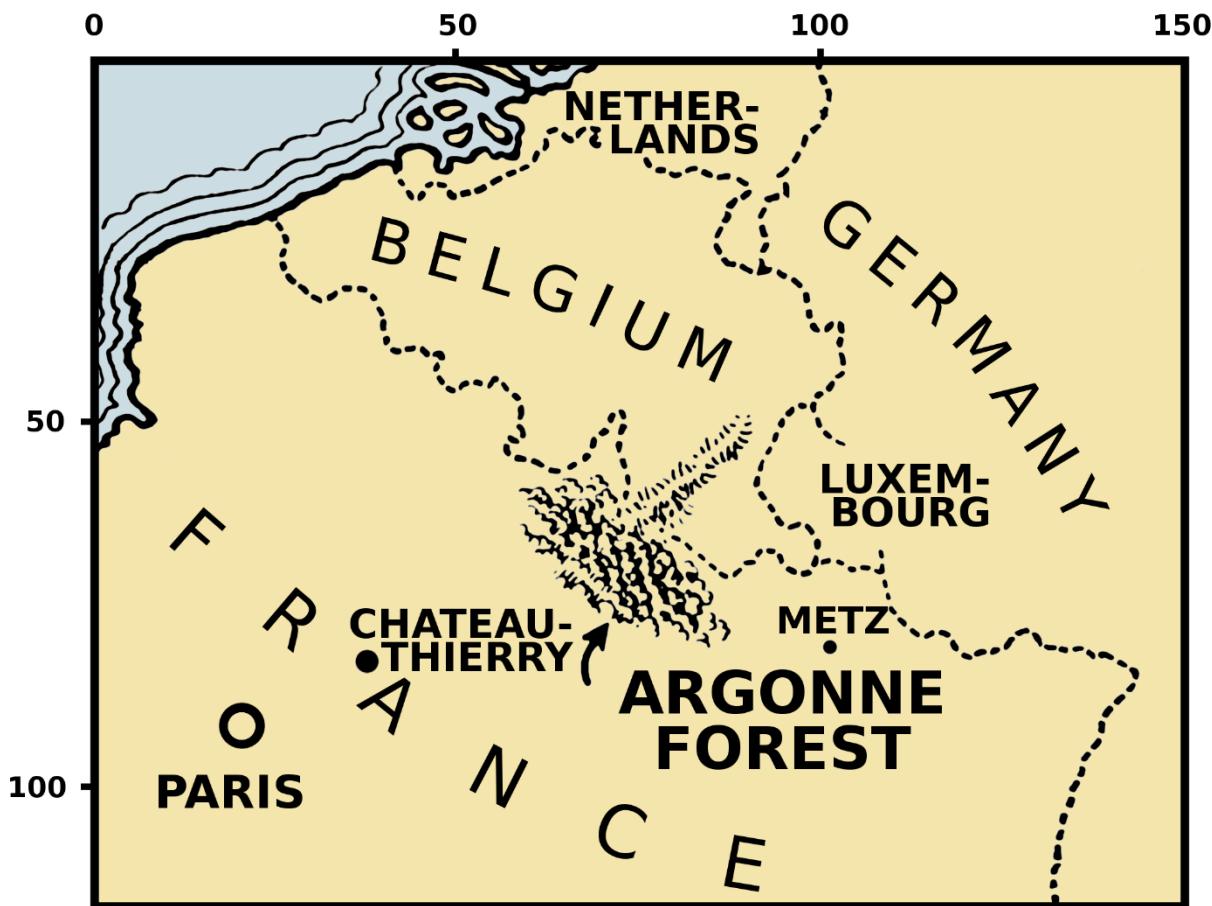
Today we were out on a maneuver from 8 a.m. till 2 p.m.

Were out again maneuvering again from 8 till 3...also had our field kitchen here and good chow.

Tore our tents down and rolled our packs and hiked back to our billets at Bay...got here at 3 p.m. Rested all day....no drill.

Everyone got to wash his clothes as we got orders to go to the front any minute now.

Today we got our reserved rations and checked up our clothing and turned in our barrack bags.



Got up at 1 a.m. and had breakfast and marched back to our loading station at Latrecy. Got here at noon and only rested 5 times on that hike. Here the 90th division met and loaded the cars to move to the front. Gee, some busy place...over 40,000 here besides all the wagons, trucks, guns, horses, mules, and all war materials. Loaded cars all afternoon and night till 7 a.m. the next morning.

When we got piled in our freight cars there was not even room to sit down. At Toul 3 p.m. From her we went about 5 miles to the unloading station and rested for 2 days. At 9 p.m. trucks came and moved us in the dark....no lights at all, got here at 2 a.m. in the woods. Here we had barracks to take another rest for a day. Had to rest during the day as nights we were always sneaking closer to the Front.



Started out at 8 p.m. and hiked till 1 a.m. when we reached the trenches and relieved the 78th. I had to stand guard at the battalion Headquarters dug outs. F Company is to our right and G and H to our left. Lieutenant Graham of F Company was killed, and two privates wounded.

Was on chow detail today. Our kitchen is in a town 1 mile from here in a large barn. E and F Company kitchens are in here.... carry out chow in three-gallon buckets to the lines. Only get 2 light meals a day. When we got back for supper, just as we were filling the bucket, Fritz sent over shells and landed right and left around us and everyone ran for the dug outs. Dropped 8 shells and the closest one hit right in front of the door.

Here we sleep in dug outs when off duty but d—n the cooties, they almost ran away from us.

Was on gas guard again all day and night—2 hours on 4 hours off. One of our men was killed last night...Lawrence Rayburn. Three of us are appointed permanent gas guards at the Battalion Headquarters dug outs. Fritz was shelling our kitchen again today but couldn't hit it. We see the shells explode from the side hill here. There is a quiet sector here at present.... just holding the lines but preparing for a big drive in about 2 weeks. The sky is full of planes and a lot of air raids all day till dark.

Fritz sent over gas shells last night, so had to wear our masks for about 15 minutes but didn't hit very close. G Company lost a lot of men from gas shells, but Fritz got about 15 back for everyone he sent over, but gee, those shells whiz thru the sky.... I felt like crawling in a rat hole sometimes.

Our artillery was active last night and this morning. Rains almost every day here on the lines.

There is a large graveyard here on the side hill where French and Germans were buried in 1914 in a battle at the beginning of the war.

Got relieved here last nite at 8 o'clock and hiked till 2 a.m. when we landed in the trenches again on top of a high hill in a heavy wood. Here we were in local support. Here is the place where they have the heavy artillery. Getting everything ready for the big drive.

Were relieved here at 8 p.m. and hiked till 3 a.m.... only 1 rest in the time. Here we live in barracks and sleep on a board mattress. Here we have rest till we get orders again to move up to the lines. We are in a heavy wood. Barracks and tents all over the woods. Some mud here almost shoe deep and genuine yellow clay here.

Raining just every day. Fritz is sending shells all around us here in the woods, even his planes come here and drop bombs and cut loose with their machine guns over us, but most of them never get back again. Some fun to watch the air raids...the whole sky is popping and buzzing.

I am on guard now but gee, some mud here to walk. My post on those roads is about 1/2 mile from the barracks and rain, rain, just pouring down and its hell to walk guard at night in these woods and mud and rain. Just pitch dark... couldn't see my hand in front of my face, and then occasionally Fritz would send over a gas shell and then I had to put the gas mask on too yet.

Got off guard this morning and rested all day.... also had a big bunch of letters from home.

Was down to the creek about a mile from here... downhill all the way. Took a bath to drown the cooties but they are hell. I am covered with bites all over. Tried to wash them out of my clothes, but when I laid my clothes out to dry, they started to run again. Couldn't drown the devils out at all. They nearly make me crazy to see them devils. Some of them are big enough to wear service strips.

Last night at about 12:30 a.m. someone hollered GAS, GAS and it took only 10 seconds time, and everyone had his mask on, too. The captain slept in the same barracks, and he found out it was a false alarm. Some feller dreamed he was on guard and got into a gas attack and he hollered GAS. Raining all day.... just poured down.

Went out to take a little exercise.... Squad right and left. Here 3 Bosch planes sneaked over us, but we turned our rifles right after them and chased them off. One of them didn't get back anymore.

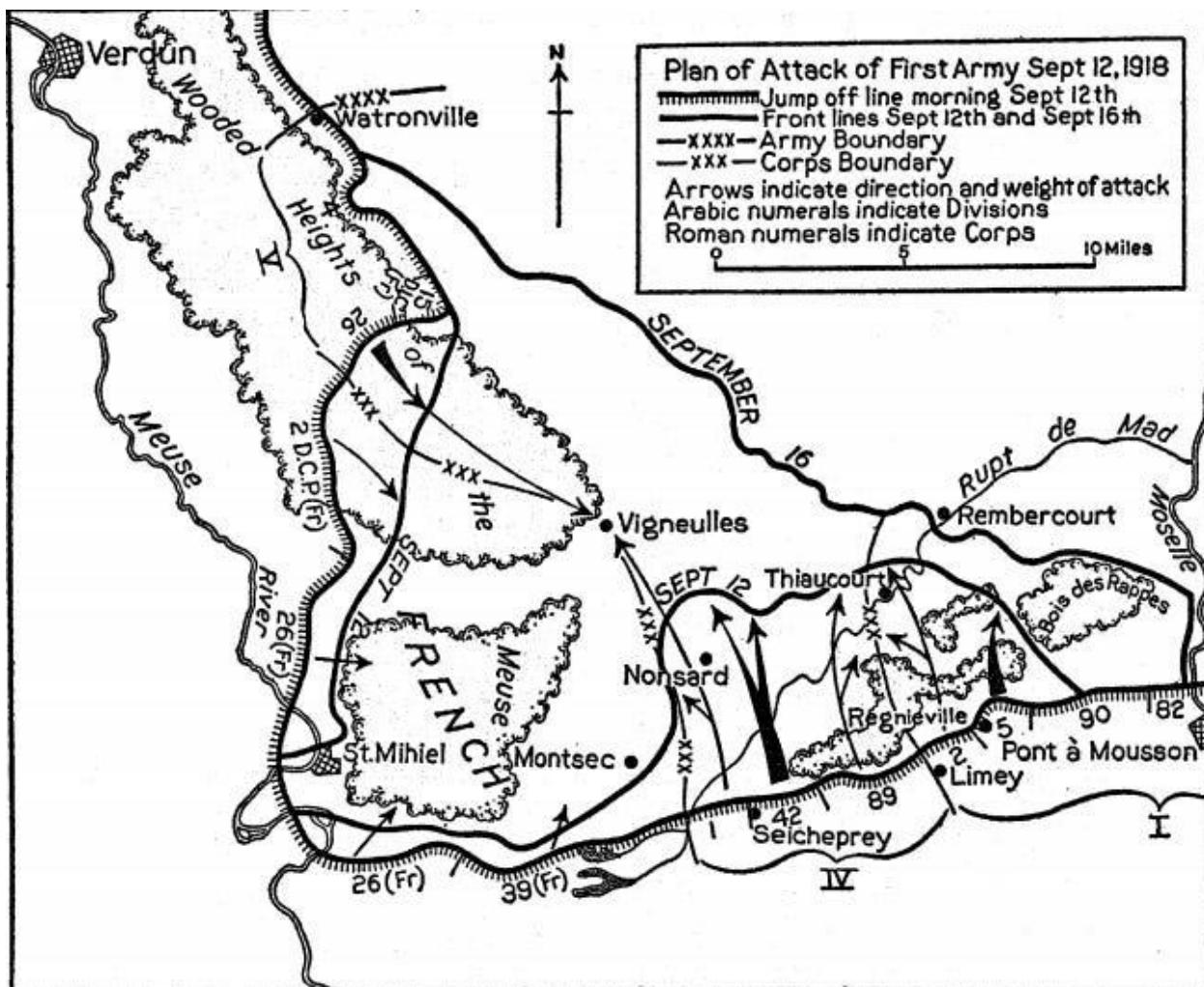
Well, I am on guard again for 24 hours.... 2 hours on and then 4 hours off again. It's raining again, too.

Resting all day till 7:00 p.m. Had to go to the ammunition dump about 3 miles from here and help load the ammunition train. Got back around 1:00 a.m.

Another rest day. At 7:00 p.m. Got orders to get ready to move to the front again. Got 220 rounds of ammunition and 2 grenades a piece. Also got reserve rations.

Started out at 8 o'clock. Pitch dark and raining...just pouring down. Hiked till 2 a.m.... steady go.... No rest. Over hills and brush and through wire entanglements and trenches till we landed on top of a steep hill in a heavy wood and stayed in the trenches. Mud and water knee deep. Still raining.... Not a dry stitch on us. At 3:00 a.m. our artillery started the barrage which lasted steady at full blast till 8 a.m. all along the front.

Today is September 12... the start of the St. Mihiel drive. We are here in local support. Going to the front line tonight. Just had our first bite and drink at 5 p.m. since last Nite. 150 German prisoners just went thru here, and we got them on the run now.... Seems they are getting it proper now. Down in the valley is the road leading to the front. Some traffic on this road. Here we can see our wounded and dead soldiers coming from the front in ambulances and trucks.



At 8:00 p.m. we started to sneak up to the front and relieved the 2nd Division. At 3:00 a.m. we rested and while Private Wilson was going to sit down on a stump his rifle discharged and shot his index finger off. The bullet whizzed right along my face into the air. Here we see what our artillery did.... Nothing but shell holes one along side by side. The Huns retreated leaving everything, only leaving machine gun emplacements here and there but we cleaned them out in a hurry. I was lace on man between E and F Company.

We kept advancing right along and all at once a machine gun started to fire at us but was put out of commission without losing a man. Fritz was sending over shells all day long. Our top Sergeant was hit by a shell and was blown to pieces. Captain Joslin was gassed badly. We are under shell fire all day and night. Had nothing to eat and drink for 24 hours.... Stayed in the trench overnight and Fritz sent shells all night and all exploded close by.

Twenty of us men were detailed to go and find the kitchen and bring some chow. Walked for about 2 and 1/2 miles before we located the kitchen and were under shell fire all the way up. We walked... 25 feet interval between each man on account of heavy shell fire and also Bosch planes over head shooting at us with their machine guns. Well, we found the kitchen in the brush and took our chow in large kettles back to the trenches. Some job to carry those heavy kettles over shell holes, trenches, and barbed wire entanglements... we landed okay with our chow without losing a man... got here at 10:30 o'clock.



Matt Perry Mess Kit.

Stayed here in the trenches all day. Fritz tried his best to shell us out all day and night and finally at 12:00 p.m. we started out to advance again. Advanced for about a mile and landed on a side hill and had to dig in here in a hurry. Today we are right on their heels, and I guess we will get it in the neck, too.

Landed in a German trench here at 7 a.m. under heavy shell fire all morning. Some shells burst ahead of the trench and some in the back of us. These trenches were dug down tin solid rock. At 11:00 orders came to advance and now over the top... men started to drop right away. One man ahead of me about 4 feet had his hand blown off by a shrapnel... but gee, here the shells whizzed around us right and left... we dropped about every step we made to dodge the shells and shrapnel. Got down in the valley... here we had to cross a canal, and this was all wired with barbed wire and entanglements and poultry netting. Kept advancing to the edge of the hill Dead and wounded laying all around. Came to the edge of the woods and had to rest for a while and still we were under heavy shell fire. Had to dig in.... got my bayonet out and started to dig, and here is where I got hit by shrapnel in my left arm. It threw me downhill about 15 feet and hit me unconscious for a few minutes. Got up at last and felt that my arm was shot to pieces and was covered in blood.

The first thing I did was look for a shell hole to crawl in. Here I found three more men wounded and so we bandaged each other up as good as we knew how. This happened about 1:00 p.m.. here we had to lay till 7:00 p.m. when the first aid men came and took us to the first aid station. While we were laying in that hole the Bosch airplanes came over and fired at us with their machine guns... the bullets piercing all around us in the ground but did not hit any of us.

The shells also came over and burst around us all afternoon and here we laid longing for water as we all had wound fever, but none to be had. The last water I had was 36 hours ago and the last bite. The stretcher bearers took the 3 wounded men and carried them out of the shell hole and put me on the stretcher, but my arm hurt too much laying down, so I got up again and managed to walk it with one man leading me but the arm and walked it all the way to the station which was about 3 and ½ miles. Quite a hard trip. Here everybody had to wait his turn to get in... was about 10:00 p.m.

Here I got my wound dressed and my arm put into a splint. My clothes were all cut off and I was placed into a suit of pajamas. Laid me on a stretcher outside along the road to wait for an ambulance to take us to the field hospital. Here we were not safe yet as the big shells were hitting all around us. I was tickled to get in the first ambulance to get away from here, but gee, the rough ride we had—the trucks cannot use any lights here at all and so we must drive by guess at night.

Got to the hospital at 1:00 a.m. Here I got on the operating table and took an x-ray of my arm and next got me under ether and started operating on my arm. Didn't wake up until 8:00 a.m., but I surely was tickled to see my arm lying in the splint, as I thought they might amputate the arm when they operated. Stayed here for 4 days and got transferred on the French Red Cross train to Base 54 at Nevers which was a 36-hour ride, laying on stretchers in the box cars.

Here is a bum place to stay.... Too many wounded men here... too many to take care of. Coming by the thousands every day. Many men dying from the FLU.

Eats are very slim here. Some days we do not even have coffee and if we do have coffee, it's black water... no sugar or milk in it. I am laying here in a tent with 2 inches in a tent with 2 inches of water in it... also have the FLU. A person must take care of himself here.... "No place like home", the men say.

I am always waiting for the day to be transferred from here.

Got to Base 8 at Sevigne... had a ride on an American Red Cross Train which was a 26-hour ride from Base 54. Here I have a nice place in a hospital,

Got a different splint on my arm today. Coming along fine. Stayed in this place for 3 days and now they put me in a barrack.... Some hell of a place here and hope to get out soon, too.

Got a full issue of clothes so hope to pull for the State soon.

Went to Brest on a U.S. Red Cross train and went out on a transport on the ocean where the large ocean liner AGAMEMNON, was waiting for us to take us to the GOOD OLD U.S.A.

HURRAH. HURRAH.

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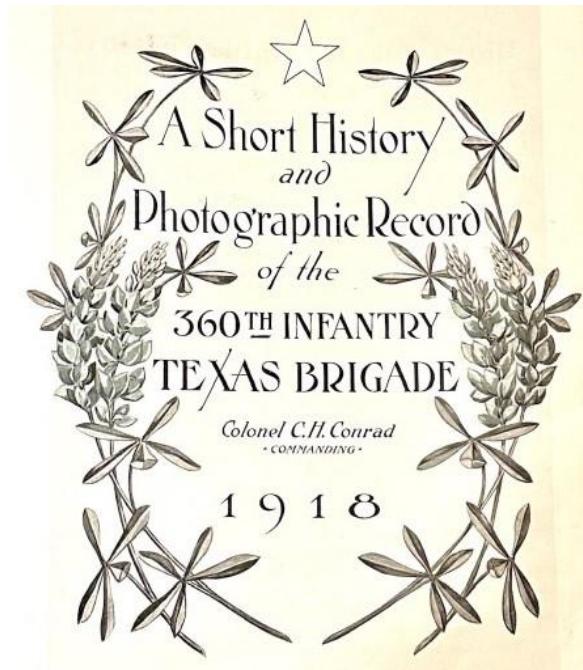
References:

Camp Dodge History. The Camp was named in honor of Major General Grenville M. Dodge U.S.V., who commanded Iowa volunteers during the Civil War. The Camp was established on June 18, 1917, to serve as training camp for the 88th Division which occupied the cantonment from August 1917 to July 1918. Construction started in June 1917 and continued through 1918.

Barnett, Victor F. A History of the Activities and Operations of the 360th United States Infantry Regiment in the World War, 1914-1918: Army of Occupation, American Expeditionary Forces. Zeltigen, Germany: 1919. 150 p. #603-360.1919. General history of unit.

Under the 360th Infantry Regiment, Company E casualties, this history report lists Private Math Perry as being gassed on September 15th, 1918. This gassing occurred during the St. Mihiel Offensive.

Hymans, H.I. A Short History and Photographic Record of the 360th Infantry, Texas Brigade. San Antonio, TX: San Antonio Printing, 1918. 104 p. #603-360.1918.



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**USS *Agamemnon*, 1917-1919.
Formerly S.S. *Kaiser Wilhelm II* (German Passenger Steamship, 1903)**

Kaiser Wilhelm II, a 19,361 gross ton passenger steamer built at Stettin, Germany, was completed in the spring of 1903. Designed for high-speed trans-Atlantic service, she won the Blue Ribband for the fastest crossing in 1906. In the years before the outbreak of World War I, she made regular trips between Germany and New York, carrying passengers both prestigious (in first class) and profitable (in the much more austere steerage). *Kaiser Wilhelm II* was west bound when the great conflict began on 3 August 1914 and, after evading patrolling British cruisers, arrived at New York three days later.

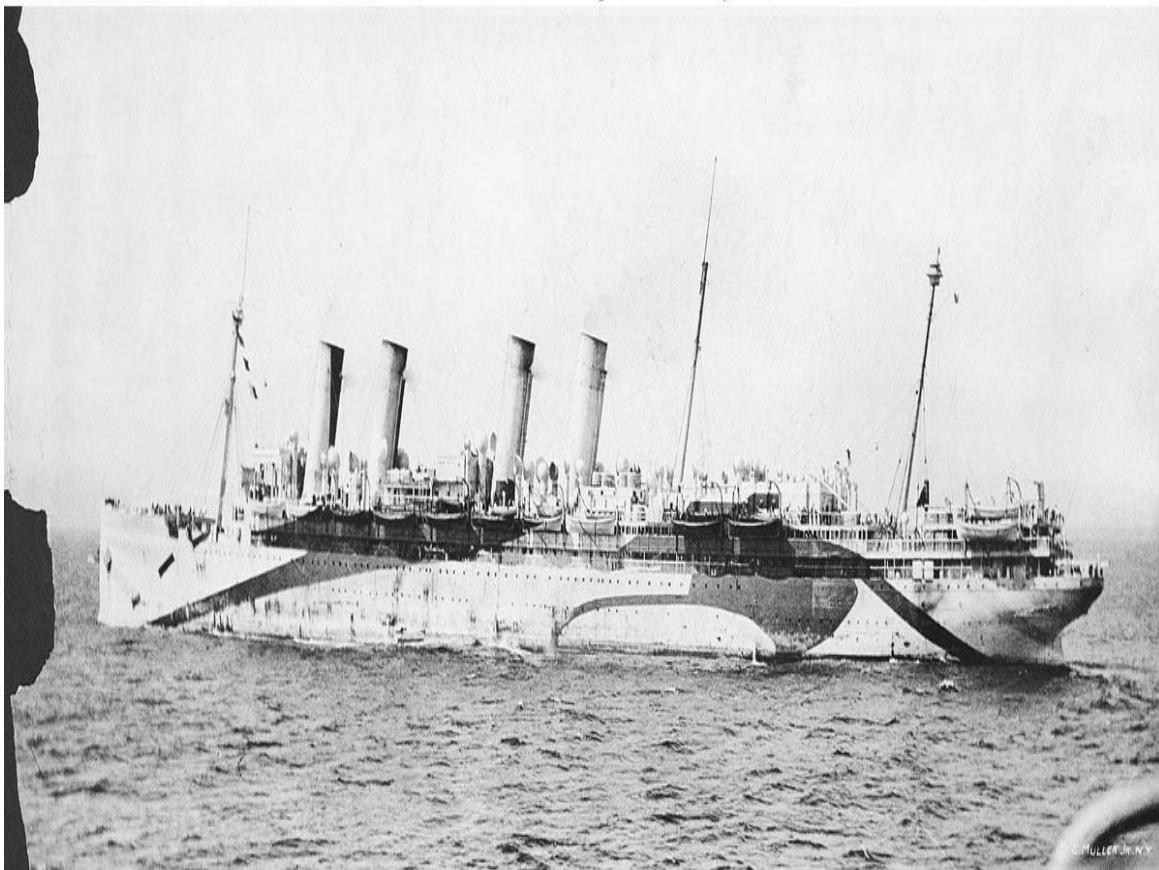
For more than two and a half years, as armies exhausted themselves in the European trenches, *Kaiser Wilhelm II* remained inactive. She was seized by the United States Government when it declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917, and work soon began to repair her machinery, sabotaged earlier by a German caretaker crew, and otherwise prepare the ship for use as a transport. As this work progressed, she was employed as a barracks ship at the New York Navy Yard.

The U.S. Navy placed the ship in commission as *USS Kaiser Wilhelm II* (ID # 3004) in late August 1917. Her name was changed to *Agamemnon* at the beginning of September and active war work commenced at the end of October, when she left for her first troopship voyage to France.

While at sea on 9 November 1917, she was damaged in a collision with another big ex-German transport, *USS Von Steuben*, but delivered her vital passengers to the war zone a few days later.

Following return to the United States in December and subsequent repair work, *Agamemnon* again steamed to France in mid-January 1918 and thereafter regularly crossed the Atlantic as part of the massive effort to establish a major American military presence on the Western Front. The routine was occasionally punctuated by encounters with real or suspected enemy submarines and, during the autumn of 1918, with outbreaks of influenza on board.

Photo # NH 105395 USS Agamemnon underway, 1918



USS Agamemnon in 1918 in Camouflage Paint Scheme, 1918.

General Pershing Letter to 90th Division Commander

“It gives me much pleasure to congratulate you, and through you the officers and men of your division on the splendid appearance that it made at its inspection and review on April 24 at Wengerohr. The smart appearance of personnel and the good condition in which I found the horse transportation and artillery are sure signs of the high morale that permeates all ranks. This is only what one could expect of a division which has such a fine fighting record.

“Arriving in France towards the end of June, 1918, it underwent, until the end of August, the usual course of training behind the line. It was then placed in the Villers-en-Hays sector and there took part in the St. Mihiel offensive, where it attacked the strong positions on the Hindenburg line immediately to the west of the Moselle River.

In these operations it was entirely successful, mopping up the Bois-des-Rappes, occupying the town of Vilcey-sur-Trey, the Bois-de-Pretre and the Foret-de-Venchers and advancing to a depth of 6½ kilometers. On the night of October 21, the division entered the Meuse-Argonne offensive, taking the town of Bantheville and the high ground north and northwest of that town.

In the tremendous attack of November 1, it continued its splendid record, piercing the Freya Stellung, crossing the Meuse and taking fourteen villages in its very rapid advance. The Carriere Farm, the Bois-de-Raux, Hill 243 (the capture of which was vital to the advance of the division on the left) and Hill 321 were the scenes of desperate fighting on the opening day of the attack.

On November 2, Villes-de Tailly, Bois-de-Mont, Bois-de-Sassey and the town of Montigny-devant-Sassey were taken, a very deep and rapid advance being made. On the 4th Halles was occupied. By November 10 the infantry had crossed the Meuse and the town of Mouzay was taken. The division was pressing the enemy hard at the time of the signing of the armistice.

“As part of the Third Army the division participated in the march into Germany and the subsequent occupation of enemy territory. I am pleased to mention the excellent conduct of the men under these difficult circumstances as well as for their services in battle. They are to the credit of the American people.

I wish to express to each man my own appreciation of the splendid work that has been done and the assurance of my continued interest in is welfare.

“Sincerely yours,
“JOHN J. PERSHING.”

(A letter to Major General Martin, commanding the 90th Division. April 26, 1919.)

Where did the Christmas Tree Originate? In Germany of Course!

By Karen Lodder

In modern times we see the Christmas Tree as an obvious symbol of the Christmas Season. Whether you decorate it with fabulous blown glass ornaments or hand-made ornaments that the kids made at school... there it is... a tree in your home. Maybe there are lights and tinsel, or maybe you like ribbons, but it's always decorated. Then on Christmas Eve... presents appear under it. It's as much a part of Christmas as Nativity plays and gift giving. But it wasn't always like that. So, where DID the Christmas Tree originate? The quick answer is Germany, but the longer answer is much more interesting.

Where did the Christmas Tree Originate?

Ever wonder how putting a decorated tree in the house came to be associated with Christmas? It looks like the actual Christmas tree is a mix of different traditions.... traditions blended, bits were added, previous reasons were forgotten or overwritten, and before you know it, Linus and the gang were singing.

More than 2000 years ago evergreen trees symbolized 'life' in the darkness of Winter. Romans celebrated the Solstice (December 21st) by decorating their homes and temples with evergreen boughs. The Vikings considered Evergreen trees to be a gift from Baldur the sun god, who would bring light and life back in the spring. Druids decorated their temples with evergreen boughs as a sign of everlasting life. Pagans brought evergreen branches into their homes to remind them of the springtime to come.

But how did that evolve into a Christmas Tree?

In Germany during the 12th Century, December 24th was considered the feast day for Adam and Eve. (The Eastern Catholic Churches venerated Adam and Eve as Saints... the western Catholic churches never went that far, BUT they did not oppose it, so it spread to Germany.) On the 24th, in front of the church, there would be a Paradise Play, with the story of Adam and Eve, and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Central to the stage props would be the Paradise Tree. Generally made from wood, but sometimes made from an evergreen tree... decorated with apples.

When the Protestant Revolution arrived, Paradise Plays went away. Although some Catholics did bring the Paradise Tree inside.

This is where Legend starts to get mixed up with History, and dates get fuzzy.

Martin Luther and the Christmas Tree

Many credit Martin Luther for bringing the Christmas Tree into German homes. According to the legend, he was walking one evening, trying to compose Sunday's Sermon. Seeing so many bright and shining stars through the branches in the forest gave him a sense of awe. He decided to try to recreate the magic feeling for his family. He brought a tree home and attached candles to the branches. (One story says that he added Advent Candles to the tree... but since the Advent

Wreath wasn't invented until the 19th Century... I think they were just ordinary candles). And there was the first Christmas Tree in the house.

But was he really the first? Or was he part of a growing trend?

Guilds had been setting up decorated Christmas Trees in their Halls for a while. There is a reference to one at the Freiburg Fraternity Baker's Apprentices of the German Alsace in 1419 (predating Luther). And an image of a decorated Christmas Tree being paraded with St Nicholas dates to 1521... a little early for Luther's invention.

By 1550, the Christmas Tree seems to have been a part of German Lutheran Tradition, since by then the first Tannenbaum songs were already being written! (Flashbacks to German School Christmas performances...) And by 1570, a guild hall in Bremen had a tree decorated with nuts, apples, and paper flowers. Then in 1605, we have the best description of all from Strasbourg, "At Christmas, they set up fir trees in the parlors of Strasbourg and hang them with roses cut out of many-colored paper, apples, wafers, gold foil, and sweets".

Still, in the early 18th century, Christmas trees were still much more common in the Northern Protestant areas of Germany... in the South, it was more common to find a Nativity in Catholic homes.

(As an aside...our house always had both. And because my parents couldn't hide the tree in our open floor plan California home, the tree went up a week before Christmas, and the Nativity went up on Christmas Eve... mom was raised Catholic, dad a Lutheran, so traditions mixed).

Christmas Tree Decorations

Nuts, apples, and paper ornaments were the first Christmas Tree decorations. And in very early days, Baby Jesus in his Cradle was placed at the top of the tree. Someone must have felt this was a bit wobbly and unsafe for the infant, so he was replaced with a star. And in some homes a Golden Angel ...the Christkindl?

In time, Glass Blowers began blowing ornaments in the shape of nuts and apples to hang on the tree. (They could SELL these and buy actual food for their own families).

The Christmas Tree Spreads Beyond the Borders of Germany

Naturally, when emigrants left Germany, they took the tradition of the Christmas Tree with them. But it wasn't always met with excitement and open arms. In 1621, William Bradford, the Puritan Governor of the Plymouth colony, wrote that he wanted to stamp out the "pagan mockery" that is the Christmas Tree, claiming that it promoted excess and had no scriptural basis. Puritans actually made celebrating Christmas ILLEGAL.

Time passed, more Germans arrived, and the Christmas tree became more common. (Some immigrants even brought special Feather Trees with them in their luggage!) The first went on public display in Pennsylvania in 1830, and by the 1890s, Christmas Ornaments from Germany were imported for sale.

In the late 19th century early 20th century in the US, feelings shifted the Christmas Tree from a "German Tradition" to a universal Christmas tradition. One reason was the push by communities to make the holiday a "family centered" event with gift giving instead of "wassailing" (drinking). Then Clement Clark Moore's poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" cemented the image for everyone of what Christmas should be (although, if you read the poem, no Tree is mentioned -->[A Visit from St Nicholas](#)).

Royals and Christmas Trees

Royal families had the habit of marrying other royal families throughout Europe, and they took traditions with them. Queen Victoria is credited with popularizing the Christmas tree because of an image shared by the Illustrated London News of the Queen, her German-born husband Prince Albert, and their children standing around a brightly lit Christmas tree. But Royals from Germany had been spreading the love of Christmas trees for years. In 1800, Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, wife of George III of England, gave a Christmas Party complete with a Christmas tree covered in lights and sweets.

Christmas Trees in Germany

Christmas Trees may have spread out from Germany, but not all the traditions surrounding the tree were adopted by Americans.

In Germany, the Christmas Tree was always set up on Christmas Eve ... usually by parents... in a closed-off room. The lit-up tree would be revealed on Christmas Eve after the Christkind had arrived.

Traditionally, Germans use a Fir tree (or Noble Fir) because the space between the branches leaves room for ornaments to properly hang. Also, German Christmas Trees tend to be smaller. Trees at home don't fill the room... they are often tabletop trees.

Edison and his string-light invention may be lighting trees in American homes, but in Germany, Candles are still used. (They aren't left lit all day and night like lights might be here... and they are always supervised).

December 26th, the 2nd Christmas holiday, is a day from Christbaumloben (Christmas Tree praising). You go to a friend's home and basically, praise the beauty of their Christmas Tree. Naturally, a good host or hostess will respond to the praise with a drink of something (maybe a Schnapps). And then you move on to the next home and praise that tree. Sounds like a nice way to spend the day.

Taking Down the Christmas Tree

In Germany, the Christmas Tree is generally left up until January 6th, the 12th day of Christmas or Epiphany. In some places they stay up until February 2nd! (Here in the US, I found them on the curb on the 26th.) But then, in Germany, the Christmas Holidays are more than Dec. 24 and 25.

When the tree is taken down on January 6th, children can "plunder" the tree. Basically, remove and eat all the edible treats... candies, nuts, and fruit... left on the tree. Some communities have bonfires to burn the trees. And then it's done.

One last Christmas Tree Legend

St Boniface and the Christmas Tree

St Boniface, an English missionary, was sent to Germany where he fought tirelessly to convert Pagans. He destroyed their temples and built churches to replace them. Eventually, he was promoted to Archbishop of Mainz and founded the diocese of Bavaria. (Interestingly, he's also the patron saint of Beer... so Bavaria was a good landing spot for him).

As the story goes... on the Solstice, he came upon a group of Pagans around an Oak Tree. Some say they were about to sacrifice a child that they had tied to the tree, others say they were just worshiping the tree. Boniface took an Ax and chopped the Oak Tree down. Immediately, a Fir Tree grew up in its place (although some stories say that Boniface planted it himself... things get murky after 1000 years). The evergreen Fir Tree was meant to symbolize God's eternal love.

A year later all of the pagans in the area had been converted to Christianity, so they hung decorations on the Fir Tree on Christmas... rather than celebrate the Solstice. My favorite part came when they added candles so Boniface could preach after dark.

Christmas Trees Today

Today Christmas trees are everywhere, in homes, churches, even in the corner of your local fast-food chain. It's like they were always there... always a part of the story. But it wasn't always so. We can thank Germany for bringing a tree covered in lights and magic into our lives.



A Christmas Memory

Carolyn Hauer Bina



I walk from the barn to the house after helping with evening chores. The night is hushed as nature takes a quiet rest. The farmland dreams its tranquil dreams. I see a great horned owl huddled on a high branch of the walnut tree. Crows are roosting in the grove of evergreens nearby. Ice enclosed, the

creek at the bottom of the hill is still. The stars above seem twice as bright, and the sky, doubly clear. A shooting star sails across the sky and suddenly disappears. The frozen snow sparkles and crunches under my feet. It is nourishing and protecting our fields and insulating the house and barn against the cruel sting of winter winds. The wind hurries over the hills and down the ravines and the leafless trees offer very little resistance. The branches of the walnut tree are backlit by an opalescent moon. As I observe all of this, I am thinking of the exciting night ahead, the school Christmas program at our church. It is 1947.

In the house, our Christmas tree is adorned with treasured old ornaments and tinsel. The fragrance of the tree fills the room. We eat a hurried supper and the four of us pack into our old 1938 Ford and head for church. As we drive through town, I see

the first outdoor decorated Christmas tree I have ever seen, and the memory of its beauty has stayed with me always.

The church basement is beautifully decorated with Christmas greenery brought in by a local farmer and arranged by the nuns. Strings of popcorn that the school children strung the week before are festooned over the greenery. A gold star, to portray the star of Bethlehem, hangs over the stage. We all huddle backstage until the program begins. After several weeks of rehearsals, the children are ready to perform. At 8 p.m., when the parents are all in their seats, the youngest children, girls dressed as angels in robes made of bed sheets, crowns on their heads, and wearing wings covered with glitter, and boys in white shirts and bowties, sing "Silent Night."

The next group sings all the verses of several Christmas carols and recites a poem. Next, the 8th grade children take part in the reenactment of the Christmas story. This ends in a finale when all the angels join them on stage and sing "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem." The most exciting part, a tradition that has been practiced for years, is still to come. Months before, parents paid for bags of treats for every child. Each bag contains an apple or an orange, peanuts in the shell, and a small amount of hard candy.

As we all wait with bated breath, a parishioner dressed as Santa Claus comes through the basement door. He and several men from the parish distribute the bags to all the children. What an exciting event this is for us. Candy, peanuts, and fruit is scarce in our lives at the time.

Wishes of Merry Christmas and Happy New Year soon echo through the church and we all head for home. My parents discuss who the man in the suit could have been, but in our hearts, we know that he really is Santa Claus. We arrive home, retreat to our cold upstairs bedrooms, crawl between the flannel sheets, and under the homemade woolen comforters. Despite us having very little at the time, we know we are rich with love.

Outside, the snowflakes are enormous, swirling in the dizzying eddies, and covering the spruce trees with thick coats of ermine. Soon the old farmhouse is wrapped in robes of silence.

A Local Tragedy! Patricide?

Mel Bodensteiner

History is the study of past events. It is the recalling and telling the story of events that happened in bygone time.

I grew up four miles southeast of St. Lucas on a farm which my wife Janet (Jirak) Bodensteiner and I now own. My dad, Irvin, and mother, Melita (Steinlage) Bodensteiner, bought this farm in 1945 from William and Jennie Strickland. The Strickland family had owned this farm since the 1860's.

When I was about ten years old my dad told me about an incident that happened before he was born. It took place not on our farm, but on the farm directly east of where I grew up. The date was March 18, 1908. At the time, Arlo and Mary Jane Whitbeck were farming this land east of our family farm. Arlo and Mary had come to this St. Lucas area from DuPage County, Illinois, around 1866, and had raised eight children.

By 1908 all the Whitbeck children had grown up and left home except Walter who farmed with his dad. The Whitbeck farm was sold in 1914 to my great grandparents, Henry and Helena (Kuennen) Bodensteiner, for my grandparents, Carl and Johanna (Rausch) Bodensteiner, a farm for them to raise their family. This farm, which had once been the Whitbeck farm subsequently, came to Uncle Leo and Arlene (Reicks) Bodensteiner, where their family grew up. Paul and Chris Bodensteiner currently own this farm.

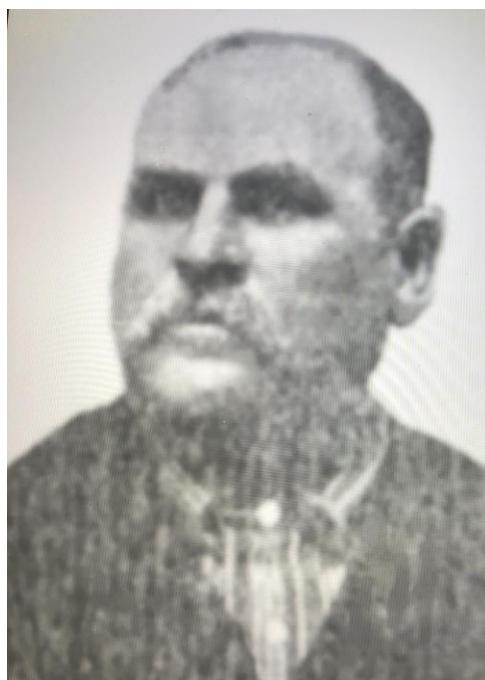


Whitbeck Hollow

So, to set the stage for the evening of March 18, 1908, there are the Strickland and Whitbeck farms next to each other, both located in Section 22, Auburn Township. According to my dad, on that evening a boy killed his father with an ironwood stake “from a wagon box” on the Whitbeck farm. I don’t remember if I even asked, “Why”? But the horrible event, someone killing his own father, has stuck in my mind, and recently sent me searching.

Here is the story as published two days later, in the March 20, 1908, Sumner Gazette:

“Arlo Whitbeck, a well to do farmer 62 years of age, living two miles northwest of Auburn, in Fayette County, was brutally murdered near his barn about 7:30 o’clock Wednesday night, March 18. His death was almost if not instantaneous as his skull was crushed by repeated blows from a heavy club. The crime was discovered by William Strickland, a neighbor living less than a quarter mile west, who came to the Whitbeck home to tell Mr. Whitbeck of the arrival of a wood saw and the opportunity to get some wood sawed. He was sent to the barn by Mrs. Whitbeck and on his second trip found the dead body of his neighbor. Returning to the house he and Mrs. Whitbeck gave the alarm over the phone and other neighbors were soon on hand.



Arlo Whitbeck

Arlo Whitbeck got up from the supper table about 7 or 7:30 to go to the barn to finish his chores...”

Just before getting to the barn, Arlo was attacked with six heavy blows to the head with a thick club, cracking and smashing his skull. He was killed instantly. One newspaper reported that the weapon was about the size of a baseball bat. Son, Walter, 32 years old, who worked with his father, quickly became the person of interest in the brutal murder. He’d left home Tuesday, the day before the tragedy, taking the train from Fort Atkinson to St. Paul and then on

to Duluth where he was arrested ten days later. Walter's mother, Jennie, claimed Walter had said on leaving Tuesday that he was going to be away for some time.

Witness testimony given at his trial, however, had him being seen on the Calmar train to Fort Atkinson on Wednesday and on the road home within 2 hours that same day before his father's murder. Walter's motive? His father didn't trust banks and was known to carry substantial sums of money in his pocketbook. Did Walter take Arlo's money? Was it revenge for bad treatment by his father? There were weak suggestions of hard motives at Walter's trial.

Whitbeck's sister, though, wondered why the sheriff had not arrested Strickland, the neighbor who had come to the Whitbeck farm looking for Arlo. She said that both as a child and as an adult she had on many occasions seen Strickland prowling around their property after dark. And Widow Whitbeck stated that when he knocked on her door on the night of her husband's murder, Strickland was pale and shaking.

Earlier in the week of the murder Bill Strickland had ridden on the wagon with Arlo Whitbeck when he, Arlo, had sold livestock in Fort Atkinson. He knew his neighbor had had a recent sizeable cash transaction and that he carried his money in his pocketbook. Arlo's pocketbook had been rifled and put back in his pocket at the time of the murder. Had Strickland been waiting for the right opportunity to do away with his more successful neighbor?

At any rate, Walter Whitbeck, following five months in jail and a trial by jury, was convicted of first-degree murder for killing his father on September 29, 1908, Correctionville, Iowa, (west of Sioux City). He was sentenced to life in prison. From its March onset, many Iowa newspapers including the Marble Rock Journal, the Sioux Valley News, The Greene Recorder, the Hermiston New Era, the Waterloo Courier, and the Des Moines Register covered the murder case and subsequent trial of Walter Whitbeck which began six months later.

You might guess that this local true crime story ends there. No! There's more!

In May 1913, yes, 1913, on a bridge near New Orleans, a letter was found in a bottle. Apparently, the note had been left by a man about to leap to his death. No one saw anyone jump, nor was a body recovered from the river. The note signed "Jesse Miller" claimed that he, Jesse Miller, had murdered "Fishbeck" or someone with a name like that somewhere in Iowa on March 16 or March 17, 1908. "I took what money he had left after I knocked him down," said the letter, "and I walked the whole night long. Another man came into the yard just after I struck the old man, and I suppose he is the suffering for the crime I committed".

It was generally supposed that the letter was planted by a prison buddy of Whitbeck to re-open the case. Newspapers that'd covered the case extensively from its onset hardly reported on this new finding two decades later.

But, nevertheless, in January 1931, Walter's life sentence was commuted to 60 years in prison, which made him apparently through the then-current law eligible for parole. He was paroled three months later. He served 22 years imprisoned in the penitentiary in Fort Madison.

Local lore had perhaps its own suspicions about the evildoer. I remember dad's brother, Uncle Ray, telling me that Bill Strickland always walked around looking over his shoulder in fear that Walter Whitbeck would take revenge. William Strickland had been the key trial witness, testifying that he had seen Walter Whitbeck exit the barn just before he, Strickland, discovered Arlo Whitbeck's body.

Strickland had not given this witness testimony before the trial. In his trial testimony, he said that he had not called out to Walter out of fear of him. As I said, locals, as the story was told and retold in the area, seem to have drawn their own conclusions.

The murdered man, George Whitbeck (1846-1908), is buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Auburn Township, Fayette County, Iowa, Grave Memorial ID 73739349.

Today, if one travels four miles southeast of St. Lucas, and turns off Nature Road east of the Bodensteiner Farm onto Oak Road and drives a quarter mile going over a small hollow, that hollow is still known as Whitbeck Hollow to many of the locals.



Arlo Whitbeck Tombstone, Oak Ridge Cemetery, Auburn, Iowa.

References:

Bill James. The Man from the Train Part IV. Online, August 20, 2012.

“The Tragedy in Auburn Township”. Sumner Gazette, Sumner, Iowa. April 2, 1908.

Society and Museum Happenings

Erfurt University Students Visit German Communities



**Erfurt University students visiting
Our Lady of Seven Dolores Cemetery,
Festina, Iowa. May 2023.**

The Erfurt University students visited several local historic sites: St. Luke Church and Cemetery, the Festina Church and Cemetery, and St. Anthony Chapel, the Smallest Church, located near the bank of the Turkey River, and NICC Dairy Center by Calmar, Iowa.

Luren Singing Society in St. Lucas



Luren Singers of Decorah in concert at St. Luke Church, May 2023.



Luren singing Society with Bon Voyage Cakes at German American Museum.



Cake for Luren Singing Society



Barbara Reicks, Marie Schneeberger, Janet Bodensteiner and Kathryn Kuennen. Back row: Dan Kuennen. German American Museum staff who hosted the Luren Singing Society Bon Voyage reception. May 2023.

Presentation on Dresden: A Royal Saxon Jewel

On Wednesday morning, June 21, Russell Baldner presented on “Dresden Germany: the Royal Saxon Jewel” at the German American Museum in St. Lucas, Iowa. This event is followed by a light lunch to enhance further discussion.

Russell states, “It is for very good reason that Dresden, Germany, has been called a “Cultural Center of World Renown” and, in recognition of its artistic and cultural wealth, “Florence [Italy] of the North.” For centuries, Dresden and the former Electorate and Kingdom of Saxony enjoyed a prominent and illustrious role in the history of Germany and Europe.”

Today, the rich heritage of Saxony and its traditional capital city continues intact, and is abundantly expressed in the splendid architecture, sumptuous treasure, and creative expression found in the historic Dresden Altstadt (Old City). Dresden suffered extensive devastation and an enormous toll on human life shortly before the end of World War II. Despite this destruction, Dresden arose from the rubble and ashes and was tastefully restored, its central and most glorious landmark, the Frauenkirche—the Church of Our Lady—representing indomitable faith and fortitude, human brotherhood, and reconciliation.

As Russell notes, “Dresden is a story both tragic and uplifting, poignant and hopeful.” This generously illustrated Dresden presentation provides historic context and features a broad selection of striking images, including those from far on high. Please join us as we visit the vibrant historic Altstadt and explore “Dresden, a Royal Saxon jewel.” “Dresden, Germany: A Royal Saxon Jewel” is one of several recent publications and illustrated lectures in German and ethnic German history by Russell Baldner.

As a youth, the presenter’s early affection for the German language and history led to B.A. and M.A. degrees in history and undergraduate and graduate study in German, a career in education, and a lifetime of research, publication, and public speaking in those and related fields, as well as repeated sojourns in ancestral Germany.



Frauenkirche Photo. Courtesy Dresden Tourist Office, 2023.

**Renowned Basket Weaver presented at the German American Museum
By Sue Kuennen.**

On Wednesday, July 12th, Susan Kuennen presented on her artist vision and life journey. Susan is well known for her striking baskets that incorporate natural elements such as animal antlers. Susan was the July speaker at the German American Museum's Monthly Speaker Series in St. Lucas, Iowa. Susan is the recipient of many artistic awards.

More recently, Susan has drawn to the art of Zen by utilizing stone and other natural objects into her basket weaving. Susan will share how she was drawn basket weaving and the basic elements of basket weaving. Susan loves to share examples of her work and what goes into their design and construction.

Susan Kuennen enjoys weaving baskets that are historically significant and have a utilitarian purpose or function. Susan appreciates the workmanship of baskets made by Winnebago, now Ho Chunk, Emma Big Bear and the willow work of German settlers in Northeast Iowa. Since the skills of basket weaving were rarely passed on, this art form is endangered. Susan is attempting to preserve as much information on the basket weavers of Northeast Iowa.

As Susan works in her garden, she ponders these questions: "What happened to all the baskets and basket weavers?" The native or indigenous people, the immigrants, the settlers, the pioneers, all cultures utilized many different baskets in their daily lives! Where are they today? I will explore this phenomenon in my presentation."

Susan grows several beds of cultured willows that allow her to enjoy and experiment with weaving as done by the pioneers and settlers in our region. Using a vast array of materials, Sue's favorite is willow. Sue says "If given the opportunity -- hold, feel and smell the willow basket. Nothing can compare to its natural beauty." Repairing baskets is a challenge Susan enjoys, as well as weaving baskets incorporating or embellishing something of importance--deer antlers, vines, parts of a tree, beads, pinecones, shell, feathers, buttons, or vacation memories.



Sue Kuennen Massman. July 12, 2023.



Closeup of Sue Kuennen's Award Winning Baskets.

Presentation on My Father's Wartime Experiences

Dr. Herbert H. J. Riedel, the president of the Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) since July 2022, presented on his father, Heinz Riedel's, personal experiences as a draftee in the German Army in World War II, on Wednesday, September 13th, from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM at the German American Museum and Library in St. Lucas.

Heinz Riedel married after the war and emigrated to Canada in 1956, where his two sons were born, and later to the United States. He became a U.S. citizen later in his life and was very proud of his American citizenship.

The presentation by Dr. Riedel includes unpublished photos from Heinz's travels, personal encounters and impressions in Germany, Poland, Russia, Belgium, France, Italy, and Libya. Heinz was born in Berlin in October 1920, drafted into the German Army at age 19, and served as a mechanic. "Reviewing these personal materials in no way condones the behavior of the German Army during those wartime years", states Dr. Riedel.

Dr. Riedel has previously worked at large research universities, a four-year liberal arts military college, and technical, and community colleges, in Alabama, Florida, South Carolina, and Texas. His efforts at NICC have resulted in an expanded athletics program, reversing a 7-year decline in enrollment, and achieving back-to-back record revenues in workforce training during his first two years at the College.

Dr. Riedel earned master's and doctorate degrees in the field of Pure Mathematics from the University of Waterloo, Canada. Dr. Riedel is fluent in German and conversational in Spanish. The son of German immigrants, he is a native Canadian and naturalized US citizen. The speaking event at the German American Museum was followed by informal discussion, refreshments, and cookies. Seventy-five people attended the event.



Dr. Herbert Riedel



Clair Blong, Herbert Riedel and Carl Most at the reception.

Reicks family Connects with Cousins from Germany



Harry and Barbara Reicks gave their cousins the Ameling family from Gailingen, Germany, and their college friends from Oberboihingen, Germany, and Vysoka Pri Morave, Slovakia, a tour of the Museum. Photo of August 10, 2023.

German American Museum Receives 20th Anniversary Award from Iowa Museum Association



Clair Blong, of the German American Museum, receives the IMA Award from Patricia LaBounty, the Curator of the Union Pacific Railroad Museum. The IMA annual meeting took place in Davenport, Iowa. October 3, 2023.

Sister Cities: Eisenach, Germany and Waverly, Iowa, visit German American Museum. October 2023.



Society members hosted the Eisenach, Germany, and Waverly, Iowa, Sister Cities participants for a tour the German American Museum and lite refreshments and desserts in mid-October. They were very pleased to visit a museum in Iowa that focuses on preserving and celebrating cultural heritage. Eisenach person playing the Lorraine Kuennen piano in the Dining Room.



From Bessarabia (now Moldova) to Eldorado, Iowa: A Harrowing Family Journey

"We were very pleased Lili Gross of Eldorado spoke about her family's journey to America and her life experiences at the German American Museum in St. Lucas on Wednesday evening, August 16th, from 6:30 to 8:00 PM," says Clair Blong, president of the St. Lucas Historical Society. Lili's presentation was followed by informal conversation, refreshments, and cookies. Over one hundred people attended this presentation.

Lili Gross shared the engrossing story of the Rauter family's forced relocation from Moldova, their harrowing journey across Romania, then crossing Hungary, Austria, Germany and eastward into Poland during World War II, only to fall into the abyss of Soviet occupied eastern Germany when the war ended. The Rauter's escaped to Western Germany during the late 1940s and then to the heartland of America in 1952 where the family grew and prospered in the following decades.

Lili Gross's family endured excruciating Soviet removal policies, harsh wartime conditions, and starvation in the early cold war period. Then Lili and the Rauter family were able to enjoy the happiness of raising a family and seeing her children prosper in peaceful Northeast Iowa. At 89 years young, Lili's endurance, self-reliance, and most importantly, her zest for life defines her today.



Rauter family in Gronau, Germany in 1951.

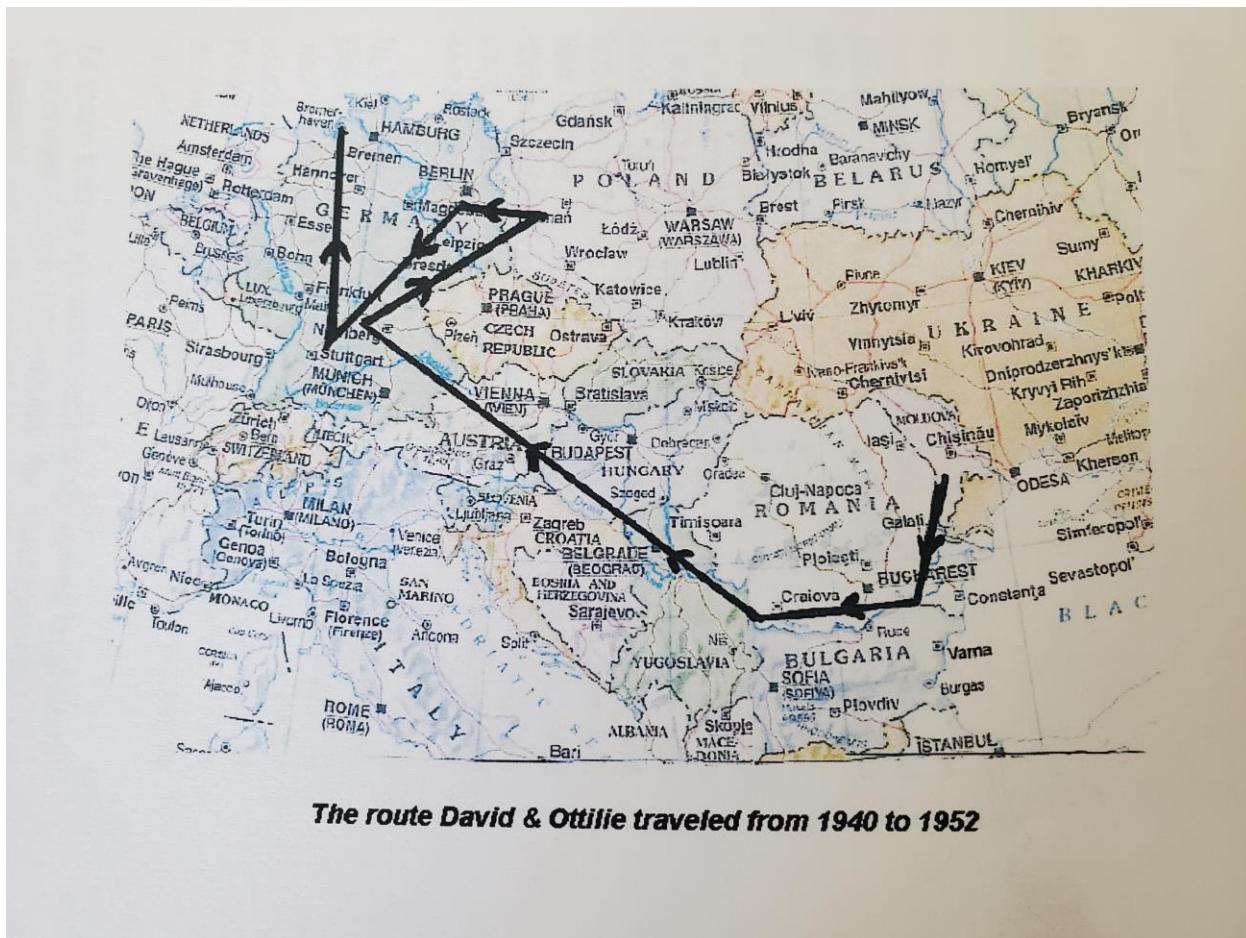
In early June Lily attended the Luren Singing Society concert at St. Luke Church in St. Lucas and toured the German American Museum. When asked "Who drove you here?", Lily replied, " I drove myself."

Lili is a passionate gardener and baker. Lili sold baked bread, pies and fresh vegetables at the Decorah Farmers Market for twenty years. Lili's breaks into a big smile and her eyes sparkle when she recalls baking for her family and the farmers market. She loves to make specialties like colonial bread, ground cherry and gooseberry pies.



Lili Gross. July 24, 2023.

"When I interviewed Lilli on July 24th, she had just finished baking delicious hamburger buns and colonial bread to feed over 100 persons at a forthcoming family reunion," says Clair Blong. To find out what goes into colonial bread you needed to come to her presentation.



Lili Gross in her flower garden, Eldorado, Iowa, July 24, 2023.

References:

Otillie Henke Rauter. Our Life and Struggles: The Life Story of David and Ottillie Henke Rauter, 2002. Written by Lydia Ruter Clements.

Cedar Valley Retired Teachers Tour Museum



The Cedar Valley Retired Teachers Association toured the Museum on September 27, 2023.

Annual Oktoberfest Dinner at German American Museum

On Saturday, September 30th, from 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM, the St. Lucia Court 233 of 1891 Financial Life sponsored an Oktoberfest meal at the German American Museum in St. Lucas.

The drive by meal includes: the famous Polasek's German style brats, buns, sauerkraut, potato salad, baked beans, and scotcheroos. The meals were available for curbside pickup at the German American Museum at 212 East Main Street, St. Lucas. Suggested donation was \$12.00 per meal.

Janet Bodensteiner, Kathryn Kuennen and Helen Pinter are the core team preparing this traditional Oktoberfest event. Janet said, "We are very excited to bring you a very tasty, wholesome traditional style meal for the Oktoberfest." Kathy adds "We are making the deserts ourselves. We think you will really like the scotcheroos." Enjoy a Saturday evening with a prepared meal.

1891 Financial Life matching funds are helping with the museum roof replacement. 1891 Financial Life was formerly the National Catholic Society of Foresters (NCSF). The St. Lucas Historical Society members that operate the German American Museum, Library and Family History Center, greatly appreciate the support of 1891 financial Life and the many persons who dropped by for the meals.



**Iowa State Representative Mike Bergan, Mel Dietzenbach
and Mayor Nic Busta of St. Lucas, enjoying Oktoberfest. September 30, 2023.**



Virginia Manderfield, Ava Hansen, Rosemary Most, Lydia Fankhauser, Mel Bodensteiner, Kathryn Kuennen, Diane McCarty, Jeanette Dietzenbach, Annette Kuennen, Marilyn Kuennen and Jodi Steinlage, preparing the Oktoberfest carryout meals. September 30, 2023.



**Ralph Steinlage and Janet Bodensteiner
Preparing the Bratwurst.**



Oktoberfest Arrangement at the Museum, September 2023.

Donation of Native American Beaded Bag

On October 12, 2023, the Museum received a handmade beaded bag. The item has been researched to determine its origins and date of creation. The Ho Chunk Nation Museum Curator in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, identifies it as an Ojibway Nation artifact. It is a magnificent addition to our Native American theme area in the Museum.



Ojibway Nation Traditional Beaded Bag. October 2023.

Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area Staff Visit Museum

On October 17, 2023, the Director and senior staffer visited the Museum to evaluate its potential as an emerging member of the Heritage Area.

With staff training in museum operations and enhanced signage in our displays such as agricultural theme areas, the museum has begun the process of affiliation with the Heritage Area.



Candice Welch-Streed, Director of Partnerships, and Laura Elfers, Educational Engagement Director, of Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area at German American Museum. October 17, 2023.

Presentation on Germans Settlers in Texas

On Wednesday evening, October 18th, from 6:30 to 8:00 PM, Barbara Ortwein, a well-known author from Germany, spoke on how our German ancestors emigrated to the USA. This special event took place at the German American Museum in St. Lucas.

Barbara's Ortwein's book presentation includes music and an exhibition. Barbara will be our special guest for this evening. She is going to present us with a book talk from her first historical novel about the emigration of the Germans to Texas in the 1840's and 1850's as well as to other places in the USA.

In Between Worlds: Never to Return, Barbara describes the difficult journey of Karl Engelbach and his son Johann through a heavily divided Germany from Hesse to Bremen. In Bremerhaven they can board a sailing ship to the States. But it takes a long time and several more ships to finally arrive in Texas.

Barbara Ortwein combines the reading and explanation from her book with songs of the German emigrants and Texan songs. Furthermore, Barbara presented an exhibition about Germany in the 1840's till 1890's, about the emigration process in Germany at that time, about the German harbors Bremerhaven and Hamburg during the time of the sailing vessels and the steamboats, about their passengers and about the reasons why people in Germany left their homes for a promise of a better life.

This presentation was an exciting evening exploring early German migrant history. Barbara's presentation was followed by informal discussion, refreshments, and cookies.

Since Barbara Ortwein has retired from teaching, she has relocated from Winterberg to the Czech capital of Prague. Here she became inspired by the work and life of the Bohemian composer Antonin Dvořák and especially by his journey and stay in America in 1893.

Following the traces of the composer in Prague, New York and Iowa led her to the writing of her book in German Der Sommer 1893 in Spillville which had been translated shortly thereafter by Pamela Phillips into A Summer in Spillville in 1893. She is now beginning to research for a possible historical novel about Josef Spillman, the founder of Spillville.



Barbara Ortwein, distinguished author of historic novels.

Melita Steinlage Bodensteiner, Founding Member, Celebrates 100 birthday.



Melita Bodensteiner, with her sons, Melvin, and Gary Bodensteiner, at her 100-birthday party in West Union, Iowa, on October 29th. All are active supporters of the German American Museum.

German American Museum Team Appreciation Dinner



The Museum staff team gathered at the Riverside Bar on November 1st, Wednesday evening, for an excellent fried chicken dinner with potatoes and green and beans and an excellent dessert. Attending were L to R: Dean and Marie Schneeberger, Mel and Jeanette Dietzenbach, Dan Smith, Cathy and Ken Ehler, Virginia Manderfield, Glenn Blong, Clair Blong, Ralph and Cathy Steinlage, Kathryn Kuennen, Janet and Mel Bodensteiner and Dan Kuennen. November 1, 2023.

Richard Orthaus, Founding Member, Passes Along in late October.

Dick Orthaus, of New Hampton, was a Founding Member of the Society. Dick passed away on October 27, 2023. Dick was a strong supporter the German American Museum, Library and Family History Center in St. Lucas since its inception in 2003.

Back in 2004 Dick took great pride in finding, restoring, and donating the large and handsome Mennonite harvest table to the Museum for our society meetings and many staff huddles. This table is of the finest quality and so very durable. Reports have it that one member was sawing boards on the table years back. It is the centerpiece of many informal gatherings and discussions.

This table donation was a turning point in helping folks see practical ways of supporting the new museum. Dick was always lending a hand at Oktoberfest and Christmas Refection's. Dick was a regular financial supporter of the publication of our Journal called Historical Perspectives.



Richard Orthaus. July 20, 2023.

Halloween at the Museum

On Sunday evening, October 29, 2023, from 3:30 to 6:30 PM the Society hosted Halloween movies and candy treats for young and old from the community. The event was held in the ground level Chapel/Auditorium room of the Museum. Over 75 children and parents attended the event and thoroughly enjoyed the atmosphere of the scary movies, ghoulish skeletons, and spooky spider webs, and of course they delighted in choosing their favorite candy treats.



Nic and Heidi Busta and family at Halloween movies and party.

October 29, 2023.

Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area: Annual Training Session for Heritage Sites and Emerging Members

This training session helps our staff develop interpretive writing techniques, how to work with social media influencers, and provide input on the German American Museum for the next SSNHA visitor Guide. We were also updated on new legislation and rules of the use of the National Park logo.



**Participants were Clair Blong, Kathryn Kuennen,
Janet Bodensteiner, and Mel Bodensteiner.**

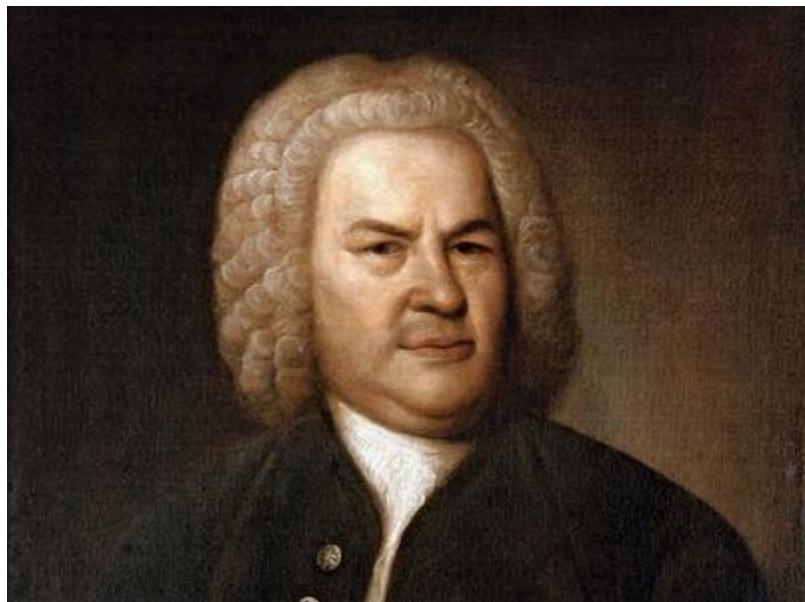
Presentation on Bach as the Great German Music Synthesizer

James Griesheimer, Professor Emeritus, from Luther College presented “Bach as the Great German Music Synthesizer” on Wednesday evening, November 15th at 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm at the German American Museum in St. Lucas. Jim has a lifelong passion for Bach’s stellar contributions to the world of classical music.

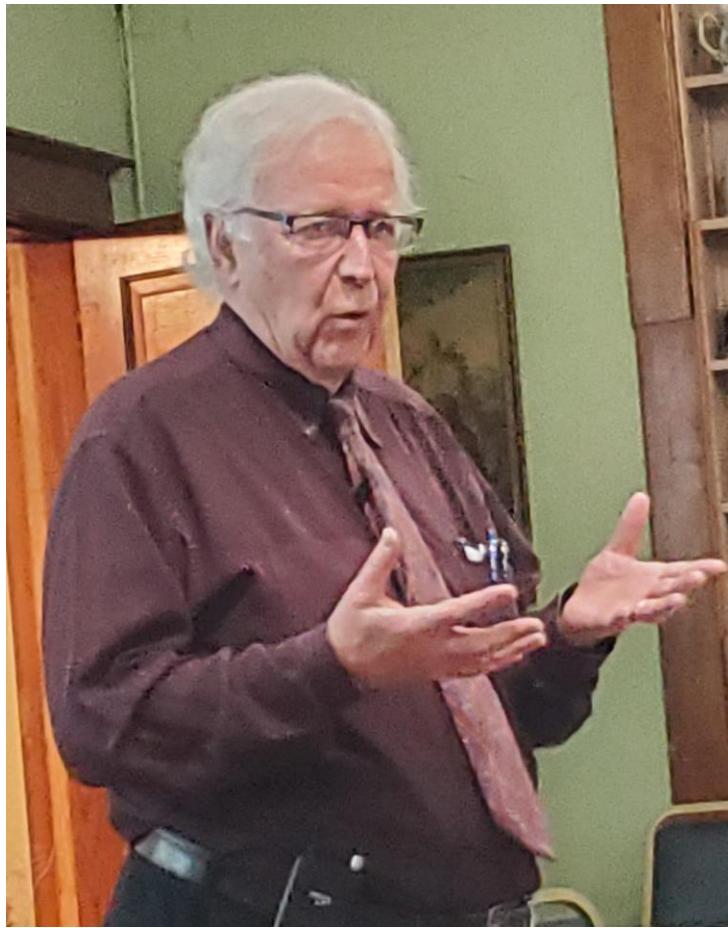
Professor Griesheimer studied music at Ohio State, Arizona State and Indiana University. He was a principal oboist and played in symphony orchestras in Chicago, Phoenix, El Paso, Pittsburgh, Dubuque, and Rochester. He taught music at New Mexico State University, Middlebury College and most recently at Luther College. He received a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Germany from 1973 to 1975.

Griesheimer is a much beloved Professor of Luther College. He is known for his brilliant mind and for his absolute passion for music and music history as noted by Jeanette Dietzenbach, Historical Society member, who was privileged to take some of his classes. Jim is highly regarded by his students for his amazing grasp of all the classical composers and his analysis of classical music.

In addition to his music career, he was a champion speaker in Ohio in his early life. In 2010, he was ordained as an Episcopal priest and currently serves congregations in Decorah and Charles City.



Johan Sebastian Bach, 1685 to 1750. Britannica Image.



James Griesheimer at German American Museum.

November 15, 2023.

During his presentation Professor Griesheimer highlighted the various influences on Bach music: the allemande (Germany), the courante, sarabande (Spain), optional, gigue (England), the minuet, origins (Italy), the gavotte, bourree (France), loure, passepied, the polonaise, and the hornpipe. Dr. Griesheimer stressed that the aria juxtaposes glitter and glamor of this world against the fleeting quality of human life and fragility of earthy treasures.

Clair Blong, president of the St. Lucas Historical Society, noted that this was the final lecture for this season. The Society initiated a series of monthly lectures this year and they have proved to be very successful. Refreshments and desserts were served after the event.

Letter from German Visitor to the Museum Gregor Kania's letter in German

Deutschland, 14. 10. 23

Liebe Rosie, lieber Carl,
Leider ist unser Urlaub wieder vorbei, von dem wir gestern wohlbehalten zurückgekehrt sind und viele gute Erinnerungen haben werden.

Die übriggebliebenen Dollars habe ich diesem Brief beigeführt und sollen als Spende Eure hervorragenden Arbeiten für das deutsch-amerikanische Museum in St. Lucas unterstützen.

Gregor

Translation into English:

Dear Rosie, dear Carl,
Our vacation [in Maine] has now ended, from which we returned safe and sound and of which we will have many great memories.

The dollars which we have left from our trip I have sent as a donation for maintenance for you most excellent German American Museum in St. Lucas.

Gregor

Note: The letters ä ö ü are written in English form as: ae oe ue



**Clair Blong, Gregor Kania,
Rosemary Kuennen Most, and Carl Most
October 2023**

Christmas Reflections Weekend at the German American Museum

The traditional Christmas Reflections Open House will be held on Saturday, December 9th and Sunday, December 10th, from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM at the German American Museum, Library and Family History Center in St. Lucas. The Christmas Reflections meal will be served both days in the attractive and expansive Museum dining room decorated for the Christmas holiday season.

This year the abundant meal consists of three all-time favorites: chicken dumpling (spätzle) soup, harvest squash with sausage and rice, and hearty chili soup. The meal is topped off with delicious Black Forest ham sandwiches. The meal includes a wide variety of desserts: traditional Christmas cookies with hot apple cider, bottled water, coffee, and Californian Glug wine. Suggested meal donation is \$15.00.

This Christmas Reflections event is partially supported by the Reicks View Farms and the Melissa Lea Reicks Foundation of Lawler, Iowa, and by 1891 Financial Life, formerly the National Catholic Society of Foresters, St. Lucia Court # 233, St. Lucas, Iowa. This Christmas Reflections event is to help raise funds for the rehabilitation of the museum roof and the upgrading of its electrical system.

See what's new at the German American Museum. Check out the extensive Hummel artifact collection, the 1860s German antique baby grand piano, the stunning 100-year-old beaded Ojibway Nation handbag, the Christmas displays in the attic, and the new display cases populated with family exhibits, Czech and Native American artifacts.



Susan Franzen, Kathryn Kuennen, Janet Bodensteiner, Virginia Manderfield and Rosemary Most, December 9, 2023.

A traditional St. Nicholas will be greeting the children in the chapel auditorium. St. Nicholas wants to share a holiday goodies gift bag with each child who ventures in the auditorium to watch classic Christmas movies.

According to the St. Nicholas Center Website: “The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara in Asia Minor. At the time the area was Greek and is now on the southern coast of Turkey.

St. Nic's wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to “sell what you own and give the money to the poor,” Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships.” Hence, the good Saint Nic.

Treat yourselves, your children and grandchildren to an enjoyable time exploring the four levels of the Museum and discovering the magic and spirit of Christmas.



Janet Bodensteiner, Ellany Bodensteiner, Annika Bodensteiner and Bella Stika. December 10, 2023.

German American Museum to Benefit from IMA Training Program

Cynthia Sweet, the Executive Director of the Iowa Museum Association (IMA), has announced that Janet Bodensteiner and Kathryn Kuennen of the German American Museum, Library and Family History Center in St. Lucas, have been chosen to be part of the 24-month learning group utilizing a national level museum staff training program.

As the leading authority on the museum industry in Iowa, for almost fifty years, the Iowa Museum Association (IMA) has offered a range of programs to support museums in building their organizational capacity.

One such program is STEPS-IMA, a learning cohort utilizing the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) STEPS curriculum that supports museums in meeting national museum standards. The purpose of STEPS-IMA is to provide content, training, mentoring, and peer support to enable Iowa museums to work toward basic, good, or better standards as defined in a national curriculum, and thus better serve their communities as stewards, educational partners, and community anchor organizations.

The STEPS-IMA provides professional development for staff and volunteer leaders who grow in capacity to serve their organization, grow their network of colleagues and form attachments with dedicated mentors. Each participating Museum grows in six identified areas of learning, develops basic museum policies or documents based on organizational needs.

Their training will help the German American Museum grow its capacity to demonstrate good stewardship to donors; improve capacity to demonstrate good governance to community and potential funders; increase the museum's ability to fulfill partnership or project requirements; and improve the museum's sustainability with a solid foundation of core documents and policies. This learning program is sponsored by Humanities Iowa.

Cynthia Sweet states, "We're all going to be working through this together. We're all learning and we're all going to help each other. This is an exceptional opportunity to do this organizational training that is fully funded by an Iowa grant. I'm looking forward to working with you (the German American Museum and other museums)".

