

Historical Perspectives

**A Journal of the
German American Museum,
Library and Family History Center**



**Albert (Bullet) Bulgren, 1934
Baseball Player Extraordinaire**

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German American Museum Building

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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

Spring 2024

Dear friends of the Museum:

The Spring and Summer months are quite exciting times with the annual Maifest event at Pivo Brewery, visiting families, cultural groups, and the popular Monthly Speaker Series.

The speaker series begins in June with Cecelia Rokusek, CEO of the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library. This event is co-sponsored by the German American Museum and the Czech Heritage Partnership. The public interest and great attendance at these speaking events are very impressive and heartwarming.

The Museum roof rehabilitation project will begin shortly and transform the appearance of the building. Lifetime Construction of St. Lucas is the contactor.

This Spring/Summer journal issue contains articles: on Hersey Bulgren: Strike Out King; for the Love of Bread and Barches—the very German-Jewish Challah Knife; St. John Paul II on Warfare and Warfighters; the History of Ossian: Past and Present; and an update on Museum activities. Special thanks to the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, and the University of Heidelberg, Center for Jewish Studies for permission to share Wasserfuhr's article. We hope you find these stories interesting and enjoyable. Let us know of possible historic topics for future issues.

Happy Springtime and a delightful Summer ahead.

Sincerely,

Clair Blong

President

212 East Main Street, P.O. Box 195, St. Lucas, Iowa 52166

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Hershey Bulgren: Baseball's Strikeout King

By Maria Schwamman Charbonneaux

Written in December 2006, Updated in June 2024

I wrote this research paper for an undergraduate history class about rural America with Professor Pamela Riney-Kehrberg at Iowa State University in fall 2006. When I was in college, I often visited my grandparents, Darlene and Clarence "Slim" Schwamman, in St. Lucas on the weekends. They were closer to Ames than my hometown of Wichita, Kansas, so St. Lucas became a home away from home during those years. While visiting, I was fortunate to hear stories about their childhoods in northeastern Iowa while being treated to what seemed like an endless supply of Grandma's molasses cookies. Honestly, I wish I had written down more of those stories, as Grandpa died in 2016 and my grandmother now lives in Faith Lutheran Home in Osage, Iowa.

Growing up, I often heard tidbits from family members about how my grandmother's dad — my great-grandfather — Albert "Hershey" Bulgren, was an exceptional baseball player; and my grandma even had a scrapbook of old newspaper clippings from his baseball years. Grandpa Hershey died a few months before I was born, but the family folklore sparked my interest in this topic. Grandma Darlene, who was always very interested in the town's history, was eager to help me learn more about her dad's baseball days. She was instrumental in helping with the project by lining up interviews with Kenneth Kuennen and Jene Smith and reading drafts of the paper. I assume she shared the final paper with the St. Lucas Historical Society at some point in the years after, and I'm honored now to have these stories about my great-grandfather and other who played baseball in northeastern Iowa published in this journal.

As he dug his cleat into the soft dirt of the pitcher's mound at the Western League Ball Park in Des Moines, Iowa, Albert "Hershey" Bulgren couldn't believe he was getting paid to have fun. It was July 31, 1933, and his Readlyn team was up 19 to 1 at the top of the ninth.¹ Readlyn had heavily recruited him to pitch for the team at the state tournament after seeing and hearing about dozens of batters in the Turkey Valley League falling to his fastball.² Albert — known to his friends and family as "Hershey" and to the batters who faced him as "Bullet" — had been hesitant at first to play with Readlyn when the team manager, Erich Poock approached him earlier that summer. He had a girlfriend, Clara Hauer, back home in St. Lucas whom he planned to marry in January, and he wasn't sure how he would make a living during the week when he wasn't playing ball. But the money that playing with the team would earn him and a job in Readlyn driving a gas truck during the week proved to be enough financial incentive to convince him. He was confident Clara would understand. After all, he met her while playing ball in St. Lucas. She made it to his games when she wasn't looking after her younger siblings, and she faithfully cut out and saved the newspaper articles that mentioned his name every week.³

However, his father had been a different story. Hershey still bitterly remembered the day the scout visited his home back when he was a minor, and his father cut the meeting short saying Hershey was too young to go to the big city.⁴ But at age 23, Hershey was now old enough to

¹ "Readlyn Rips Osceola in Final Game 19-3." *The Des Moines Register*, August 1, 1933.

² "Baseball Memories from New Hampton, Iowa." Personal memoir, July 3, 2003.

³ Interview with Darlene Schwamman, October 1, 2006.

⁴ Ibid.

make his own decisions, and it was now or never. He knew 1933 had been his best season of baseball yet, but he hadn't realized how great it was until the Indianola first-round win on Thursday. Local scouts had been watching the game, and the Des Moines Demons offered him to sign a contract to play in the Western League next year.⁵ Things were looking good for Hershey even though Iowa was in the middle of the Depression. And in just three more outs, his team would prove successful too when it would defeat the Osceola Indians to become the 1933 semiprofessional state baseball champions.

Albert "Hershey" Bulgren (1910-1985) was just one of thousands of men in Iowa who played on a town or semiprofessional baseball team during the summers in the first half of the 20th century. A few of these men went on to play professionally, but most continued to play and umpire for their town teams until age forced them to hang up their cleats and make way for younger players. The Turkey Valley League, including teams from St. Lucas, Fort Atkinson, Decorah, and Lawler, and the Little Eight League, including teams from Hawkeye, Elgin, West Union, Oelwein, Lamont, Volga City, Wadena, Arlington, Fayette, and Waucoma, were just two examples of leagues established around the state.⁶ These games were entertainment for both the players and the townspeople who would flock to the ball fields on Sunday afternoons or during tournament times at county fairs or town celebrations.⁷ Baseball's popularity in Iowa during the first part of the 20th century is evidenced by the lives of the players who played, the structure of the games and the leagues, and the rivalries that ensued, until its decline in the 1960s with the advent of other forms of entertainment and softball.

Hershey Bulgren's story suggests several points about small-town Iowa baseball. A Fort Atkinson native, Bulgren played many games for teams originating from nearby towns, which implies the loose loyalties players had for their hometown teams. Teams would recruit players to improve their chances of winning and put on a good show for onlookers. Players often cast aside their allegiance to hometown teams when they wanted to play in more games and possibly earn money. Although he started playing in high school and began playing semipro ball in 1927, Bulgren was acclaimed by local papers for his performance for many teams during the 1933 season, which was no doubt his most successful.⁸ He had been one of four players recruited by Readlyn to help them win the state semipro tournament, and he was named the MVP of the tournament.⁹ Besides Readlyn, other teams in northeast Iowa, including St. Lucas, Waucoma, Alta Vista, and Protivin, recognized Bulgren's talents and recruited him to play. Earlier in the summer, William H. Summers of Fort Atkinson wrote a letter to Sec Taylor, sports editor and columnist at *The Des Moines Register*, that was featured in his "Sittin' In with the Athletes" column. In the letter, Summers wrote, "Dear Sir: Mr. Ripley of 'Believe it or Not' fame would be hard pushed to beat this one. Albert (Bullet) Bulgren of Fort Atkinson, during the eight consecutive days July 2 to July 9, inclusive, pitched four baseball games. In the first game, July 2, pitching for Waucoma, he defeated St. Lucas 2 to 0, striking out 19 men. In the second game, July 4, he defeated West Union, 3 to 1, striking out 20 men, while pitching for St. Lucas. In the third game, July 6, pitching for Lawler, he lost to Waverly, 2 to 1 striking out 21 men, and getting

⁵ "Readlyn Follows Lead of Neighbor Dunkerton." *The Des Moines Register*, August 2, 1933.

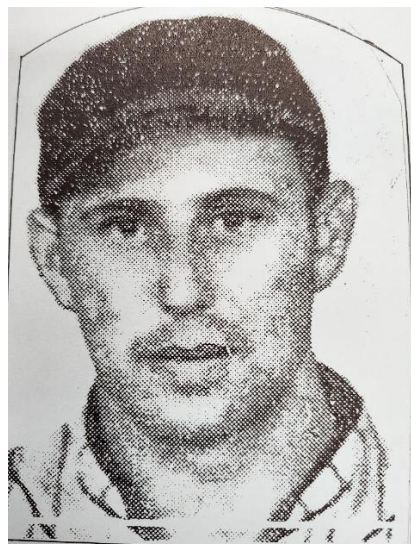
⁶ "The Little Eight Meeting." *The Fayette County Union*, May 10, 1934.

⁷ Interview with Kenneth "Kenny" Kuennen, October 1, 2006.

⁸ Schwamman.

⁹ "Readlyn Rips Osceola in Final Game 19-3."

two of the four hits that Lawler made. In the fourth game, July 9, pitching for Waucoma, he defeated Lawler, 4 to 3, in 12 innings, striking out 28 men and driving in the winning run for Waucoma. In the four games, Bulgren had struck out 88 men, which is a record that I do not believe has ever been equaled in baseball history.”¹⁰ Although 88 strikeouts in four games seems questionable, Summer’s letter shows the variety of teams for which Bulgren pitched. In the four games he played in those eight days, he pitched for three different teams, all within 15 miles of his home. Kenneth “Kenny” Kuennen (1928-2018) was a batboy during Bulgren’s baseball days and a player for St. Lucas in the 1940s through 1960s. He said teams commonly would “beef up” at tournament time, and pitchers were the most recruited — and paid.¹¹ Bulgren had a hard fastball, a sharp curve ball, and a penchant for strikeouts, which made him a competitive hurler and crowd pleaser. Since he loved the game so much, it was not hard for a team to persuade him to pitch for them at any given time, especially if they had a little cash to offer a good pitcher.¹²



Hersey Bulgren

Small-town baseball was important in the lives of the players, but it also was a primary form of summer entertainment for these small towns. After the state semipro win in Des Moines, Bulgren and his teammates were given a hero’s welcome in Readlyn. *The Waterloo Courier* reported, “this small but enthusiastic baseball community” gathered on Monday evening for “a big feed, speech making, band music, and then a dance.” The women prepared a chicken dinner and were shocked to learn that the “cook decided to enjoy the trip and watch the games instead of preparing dinners”¹³ for the players, who had camped near the baseball park in Des Moines during the tournament. “A large ‘welcome’ sign stretched across the street let everyone know that Readlyn was doing its best to honor those who had brought the town a big measure of state recognition in the short space of four days.”¹⁴ The mayor, August Meyerhoff, presented the team

¹⁰ “Sittin’ in With the Athletes by Sec Taylor: Strikeout King.” *The Des Moines Register*, August 1933.

¹¹ Kuennen.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Readlyn Honors Its Ball Team with Big Feed.” *The Waterloo Courier*, August 2, 1933.

¹⁴ Ibid.

with a key to the city, and “old-timers recalled that Readlyn has won three pennants in the 12 years that it has been represented in semipro leagues.”¹⁵ When Bulgren returned to his hometown area to pitch for the Waucoma Braves in a game versus the St. Lucas Pirates on Sunday, August 22, he was welcomed back with a similar celebration. The day was dubbed “Bulgren Day” in honor of his performance for Readlyn at the state tournament, and his last game in the area, since he would likely be playing for the Des Moines Demons in the spring.¹⁶

These two celebrations, although held for a special reason, were indicative of how much baseball became an important form of entertainment for the people in rural communities during the summers at the peak of baseball’s popularity. In the small town of St. Lucas — where the ball diamond was next to the church — the institution of baseball was tied closely with the institution of the Catholic Church. Jene Smith (1934-2013), a player from Fort Atkinson, remembered when he was offered \$25 by the St. Lucas team to pitch a game in the ’50s. When one player complained, he said the priest intervened and would not allow the team to offer Smith money if the other players weren’t paid as well.¹⁷ Diamonds charged a small admission to pay for equipment and the umpires’ salaries. Without a movie theater or other forms of nearby entertainment in some northeast Iowa towns to attract people’s spending money, they were willing to pay the admission price. In the 1940s, Kuennen remembered that admission was a quarter even though the government rationed tires and gasoline during World War II and the teams played fewer games. The price later went up to 50 cents in the ’50s and \$1 in the ’60s. Kuennen remembered crowds of 200 to 300 people, especially when teams with big rivalries, such as neighboring towns St. Lucas and Festina, played.¹⁸ These rivalry games attracted people from both towns, but also those from the surrounding area, but the numbers are still impressive when one considers that the population of the 1933 state champion Readlyn was 375 during this time¹⁹ and the population of St. Lucas was 168, according to the 1930 census.

Rivalries existed between smaller neighboring towns, but there was a little tension when a bigger town, such as New Hampton, played one of the smaller towns. “Bigger towns always thought they could beat the pants off of smaller towns,” Kuennen said.²⁰ On the state level, when Readlyn won the tournament, *The Des Moines Register*, in a follow-up article, was still reeling that a town of 375 had toppled the “big shot” teams of Indianola, Guttenberg, and Charles City, in the same way that Readlyn’s neighbor Dunkerton, had won the high school boys’ state basketball tournament earlier that year. However, it was not completely clear whether the Register was more miffed by the fact that a small-town team won the tournament or that only about 50 Readlyn fans showed up because of a funeral in Readlyn that same day. In his sports column that week, Sec Taylor admonished teams from the larger towns for thinking that they were invulnerable because “the small-town teams, if they play the game properly, can prevail.”²¹ In the Dunkerton article, the Osceola team manager Ulysses Cowan, acknowledged Readlyn’s

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Waucoma Will Honor Bulgren on Sunday.” *The Waterloo Courier*, August 19, 1933.

¹⁷ Interview with Jene Smith, November 11, 2006.

¹⁸ Kuennen.

¹⁹ “Readlyn Follows Lead of Neighbor Dunkerton.”

²⁰ Kuennen.

²¹ “Sittin’ In With the Athletes: The State Meet.” *The Des Moines Register*, August 1933.

worthiness as an opponent when he said, “It’s a great ball team. They’re a bunch of boys who really like to play ball — and know how.”²²

Because New Hampton was a bigger community, Kuennen recalled the town put up lights at the ball diamond in the 1950s. Lights allowed the team to play in two leagues, and thus play more games because they could have double headers on the weekends or even play on weeknights. Players of the smaller town teams, such as St. Lucas, found it more difficult and a little intimidating to play under the lights because they were not used to them, Kuennen said. The New Hampton team was also notorious for “beefing up” with college boys who played ball at school and returned home during the summers, Kuennen recalled.²³ Teams had their own rivalries, but sometimes conflicts ensued between individual players. Smith remembered an incident when one player accidentally stepped on his teammate’s foot as he rounded the bases, so when the injured player had his turn at bat and got to base, he kicked the player with his metal cleat and cut him.²⁴

While larger towns generally always had enough players to field a team, smaller towns often had trouble maintaining a group of nine. Kuennen said St. Lucas was luckier than most because it generally had always been a good team and players for other towns sometimes chose to play for them rather than their hometown. “As good as the teams were, they always had a little trouble getting players,” Kuennen said.²⁵ High school players were often recruited during the summer when they had a break from their high school games, but they didn’t boost numbers much because they ended up replacing older players who wanted to retire. Sometimes teams had to adjust their lineup because of the weaknesses of their older players.

Kenny Kuennen remembers one year when he was assigned to play centerfield between his relatives Conrad Kuennen and Leo Kuennen, two players well into their 30s who played left and right field, respectively. Because Kenny was only in high school at the time, he had to field all the balls that were hit into the outfield. The older Kuennens may not have been as fast, but “we had to have them in the lineup because them boys could hit,” Kenny Kuennen said.²⁶ When one considers the age range of these teams, it seems plausible that a good pitcher like Bulgren — at his prime — could get as many as 15 to 20 strikeouts a game when he was up against batters who were still practically boys or as much as 15 years older.

While most players played strictly for their town teams until age forced them to retire, a few players in the northeastern Iowa area moved on to bigger and better things. One example is Smith, a left-handed pitcher from Fort Atkinson who signed a professional baseball contract with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1953, a year after he graduated from high school. He was recruited while playing the “Southern Minnie League” of Minnesota. Smith’s parents were opposed to him signing with a scout, but he was able to convince his mother to sign for him. However, when his father died from cancer a year later right before he advanced from “A” ball to “AA,” Smith

²² “Readlyn Follows Lead of Neighbor Dunkerton.”

²³ Kuennen.

²⁴ Smith.

²⁵ Kuennen.

²⁶ Ibid.

decided to give up baseball and come home and take over the family farming operation.²⁷ In the 1950s, Smith said the contracts players signed last for life (until a later change abolished that rule). Therefore, when Smith returned to Iowa and wanted to make some extra cash on the weekends by pitching for the town teams, he had to play under an assumed name in case there were scouts around.²⁸

Duane “Josie” Josephson (1942-1997), a catcher from New Hampton, had better luck in the majors. He began playing Little League baseball in fifth grade in New Hampton and continued with the New Hampton high school team. Josephson was recruited after the misfortune of his teammate, Vern Kuennen, who was heavily pursued by scouts from Cincinnati and Chicago. In his 2003 memoir, Denis Kuennen (1936-2017), a former player, recalled what happened. “Unfortunately, Vern came down with rheumatoid arthritis. He became so weak that he had to quit baseball and missed a year of college. He was never able to throw so hard again, and the scouts lost interest. But they didn’t forget Josie, and the White Sox signed him after college graduation,” wrote Denis Kuennen in his 2003 baseball memoir.²⁹ Josephson played for the White Sox and the Red Sox from 1965 to 1972 after playing college ball at the University of Northern Iowa.³⁰

Kenny Kuennen is a more typical example of a player who kept his town team going but did not move on to the next level. He continued to play for St. Lucas until the age of 34 in the early 1960s. By this time, baseball had experienced a decline in northeastern Iowa. Kuennen says he quit playing, not because he wanted to, but because of the strain of age. As the popularity of the sport declined, so too did the number of players the team could field. Eventually, Kuennen said he also grew tired of trying to round up a team to play.³¹

Some players were able to continue their involvement with the sport even after they were too old to play. Conrad Kuennen, the older slugger whom Kenny Kuennen had to cover for in the outfield, was largely responsible for baseball’s popularity in northeast Iowa. Conrad’s nephew, Denis Kuennen, recalled that Conrad had started the St. Lucas Pirates in 1927 with his brothers. “By 1928, Conrad was telephoning nearby towns in order to schedule Sunday afternoon games. He was only 14 years old, but he was the main organizer, groundskeeper, and to be one of the best players for the St. Lucas Pirates,” he wrote.³² Conrad retired in 1949, but he continued to umpire well into the 1950s and ’60s. “He had the old-fashioned habit of going to the managers before the game. He would ask the names of the pitchers and catchers who were starting the game. Then he would make notes on the shiny white game ball and walk to the crowd in the grandstand,” Denis Kuennen wrote.³³ Conrad was known for announcing the pitchers and catchers of each game while reading the notes off the ball.

²⁷ The City of Fort Atkinson, *History of Fort Atkinson, Iowa* (Decorah: IA: The Anundsen Publishing Company, 1995), 276.

²⁸ Smith.

²⁹ “Baseball Memories from New Hampton, Iowa.”

³⁰ Jerry E. Clark, *From Anson to Zuber: Iowa Boys in the Major Leagues* (Omaha, NE: Making History, 1992), 141-142.

³¹ Kuennen.

³² “Baseball Memories from New Hampton, Iowa.”

³³ *Ibid.*

The small-town Iowa town teams' decline in the 1960s marked not only a downshift in popularity of the sport at that level but also the end of one sense of community in many of these towns. During this time, cars became more reliable, making some forms of entertainment — such as the movie theater in Decorah — easier to reach for people traveling from towns 20 or more miles away, such as St. Lucas. Cars themselves also became a form of entertainment as young people “cruised the loop” on the prowl for something to do. The growing popularity of television might have also had an effect. Waterloo was granted a television station in 1954 and as sports events began to appear on television, many people were able to get their baseball fixes without ever leaving the comforts of their living rooms. Baseball fans in northeastern Iowa had something to cheer for with the advent of a new professional team, the Minnesota Twins, appearing on radio and television in 1961. Finally, northern Iowa fans had a team with a homebase close to home, and they were entertained by broadcasters Ray Scott and Herb Carneal who began every broadcast of the game with “The Win! Twins! Fight Song.”³⁴

Kenny Kuennen also attributed the wane in popularity of baseball in small towns to the advent of fast-pitched softball, which he thought was more approachable for older people or those who might not have considered themselves baseball team material but wanted to play recreational sports. A new field was built south of St. Lucas specifically for softball in the early 1950s with lights to allow for night games. “It was something new,” Kuennen said, noting the games were less formal and a bit more recreational.³⁵

In larger towns, such as New Hampton, Little League flourished as former town team players preferred to cheer on and coach their children rather than play themselves. High school sports retained their popularity, but high school students had other things to do during the summer months, so drumming up enough town team players became difficult in small communities, such as St. Lucas and Fort Atkinson. Schools in this area began to consolidate during the time period, as well. With bigger schools, other sports were possible, such as football, which competed for prospective players' time. Kenny noted people began to identify more with their school district as they cheered their kids on in school athletics rather than with their individual towns. Darlene Schwamman, the eldest daughter of Hershey Bulgren who was born in 1935, also noticed the shift. “Sports became more of a big-school thing than a small-town thing,” she said.³⁶

The small towns in northeast Iowa followed the rural trend of decline in the 1960s as farming became less profitable and people began to trade in small-town life for opportunities in urban areas. The decline of town team baseball made this change seem more evident as towns became quiet on Sunday afternoon instead of bustling with activity as crowds gathered to catch the game. After the 1960s, players and fans were only left with their memories of local town team baseball. As Denis Kuennen wrote, “Many young people should be grateful to the community for providing decades of healthy activity. We didn't worry then about being overweight or being couch potatoes. Baseball gave many of us a sense of belonging, a sense of importance, and a feeling of self-respect. Thousands of youths are better off today because they had the opportunity to play baseball in northeast Iowa.”³⁷

³⁴ Stew Thornley, *Baseball in Minnesota*, (St. Paul, MN: The Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006), 174.

³⁵ Kuennen.

³⁶ Schwamman.

³⁷ “Baseball Memories from New Hampton, Iowa.”

It was all over. After several years of keeping up a strenuous game schedule and last year's whirlwind season with Readlyn, "Bullet" Bulgren had come face to face with the problems that rigorous play had caused for his pitching arm. He shook his head as he read the *Register* article that explained the outcome of his tryout with the Des Moines Demons in the spring of 1934. According to the article, he simply "was handicapped by a sore arm and was unable to show what he could do."³⁸ What the article didn't explain was the end of a possible career. His arm was not sore but rather thrown out. Bulgren remembered his brother Russell's prediction from five years before when their father wouldn't let him sign with the scout as a minor. "If Hershey keeps playing around here, he'll throw his arm out."³⁹ Bulgren could still hear the angry thud of Russell slamming his fist into the dining table. After the 1933 season — his best ever — this prediction proved true.⁴⁰



**First Row: Joe Schwickerath, Bob Sommers, Albert Bulgren, Herman Kuennen.
Second Row: Herbert Kuennen, Billy Balk, Kenny Reisner, Nick Croatt,
Connie Kuennen, Leo Kuennen, Duane Reisner.**

³⁸ "Bullet Bulgren in Meet Again." *The Des Moines Register*. July 1934.

³⁹ Schwamman.

⁴⁰ After the unsuccessful tryout, Hershey Bulgren was picked up by the St. Lucas Pirates to play in the state semiprofessional baseball tournament that year, but the team lost to a Des Moines team early in the tournament. Hershey had married in January 1934, and he and his wife, Clara, would have their first daughter, Darlene Bulgren Schwamman, in August 1935. He and Clara went on to have three other children: Janice Bulgren Dodge Anderson, Roger Bulgren, and Lois Bulgren Dietzenbach. Hershey continued to play ball, but closer to home in St. Lucas where his family resided. When he retired from playing, he continued with his involvement with the baseball town teams as an umpire in the late 1940s and 1950s.

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**Back Row: Conrad Hauer, Theodore and Agnes Klemmer and Agnes Meyer.
Front Row: Albert Bulgren and Clara Hauer, Married January 9, 1934,
in St. Luke Church, St. Lucas, Iowa.**

**For the Love of Bread and Barches—The Very
German-Jewish Challah Knife
by Hannah-Lea Wasserfuhr**



That Germans love bread seems to be one stereotype that is largely accurate. Given Germany's rich baking culture, it is perhaps not surprising that it also has a long tradition of producing challot, braided loaves eaten during Shabbat. There were many expressions for challah, including *Datscher*, *Challe*, and *Striezel*.¹ The most common terms, *Barches* and *Berches*, are derived from the word *brachah*, i.e., blessing. Additionally, *Barches* in some regions contained potato flour in place of eggs, which were used only for *Jontefberches* – challot for religious holidays.² As potatoes are very common in German cuisine, this made *Barches* even more German.³

This blog entry is not about bread, though. Rather, it is about a special tool for cutting challot, the challah knife. Its existence is by no means self-explanatory, not least because it is not necessary. After all, challot can easily be torn by hand, and rabbinical discussions suggest that one need not cut them. Yet, since I came across a variety of these knives, I wish to explore why such a – prima facie superfluous and sometimes prohibited – item has been produced and sold. This brings us back to Germans' love of bread: challot come almost exclusively from areas that are or used to be parts of Austria or Germany. So, perhaps, this Germanic tendency found its way into Jewish ritual objects. It appears that challah knives emerged when Jewish history in Germany was intertwined with local knowledge and trade traditions, shifting social hierarchies,

and cultural inclinations. I will recount this story based on the mass-produced (not custom) knives I encountered in my research. At least in Germany and German-speaking regions, manufacturers clearly perceived a need for them.

Historical Challah Knives: Varieties and Commonalities

The knives I found come from various companies, including some of the most well-known German cutlery producers. Most have a visible mark from the blade manufacturer, very often Zwilling or other specialized companies from Solingen, Germany's "city of blades." Yet, as the handle producer usually purchased the blades from these companies, the name on the blades is not conclusive. Rather, the hallmarks on the handle lead us to the names of the cutlery manufacturers, among them Koch & Bergfeld of Bremen, Wilhelm Binder of Schwäbisch Gmünd, and Franz Bahner of Düsseldorf. Most challah knives are bread knives that have been "elevated" to Jewish ritual items through the addition of a blessing. Some have an engraving that might have been added later, but others were obviously made as challah knives: They bear embossed Hebrew letters or have exquisite designs referring to the Shabbat dinner or the challot themselves.



Fig. 1a: Challah knife by Koch & Bergfeld, Bremen, Appel Auction, author photo.



**Figure 1b. Detail of challah knife by Koch & Bergfeld,
Bremen, Appel Auction, photo by the author.**

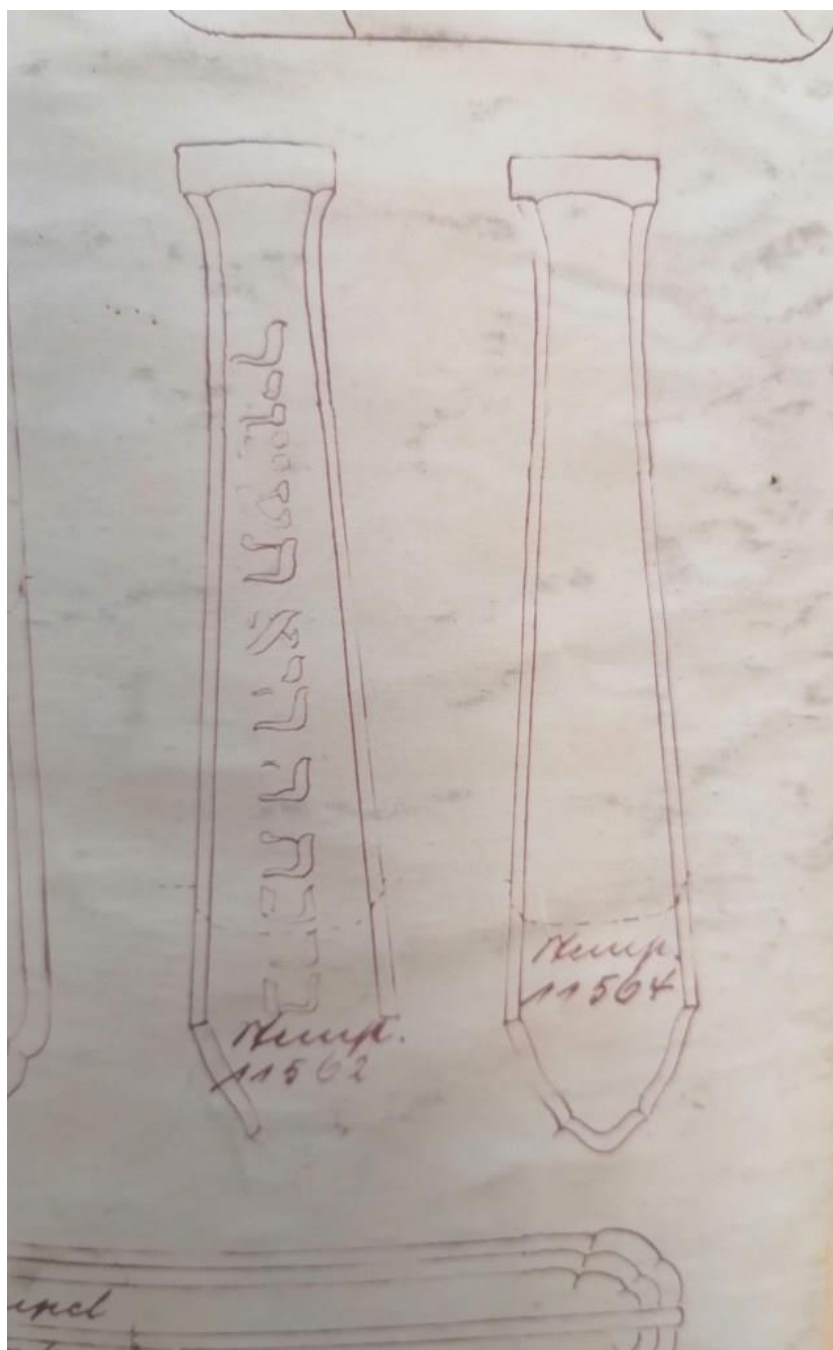


Figure 2: Detail from a book of forging dies from the company Wilhelm Binder, Schwäbisch Gmünd, ca. 1920, Museum im Prediger, Schwäbisch Gmünd, photo by the author.

One challah knife produced by Koch & Bergfeld, an important silver manufacturer in Germany even today, provides a good example of an engraved knife handle (Fig. 1a, 1b). Although its design is quite simple and the blessings, “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy” (Kohelet 9:7) and “It is the blessing of the Lord that enriches” (Proverbs 10:22), are only engraved, these were likely done in the factory. The decorative engravings and the Hebrew letters seem to come from the same hand and match the knife’s design perfectly. Whereas the handle’s form belongs to the Spaten pattern, the first cutlery design from the early years of Koch & Bergfeld’s existence around 1830, the piece itself bears hallmarks used between 1875 to 1932.

Nevertheless, most challah knives were clearly produced as such, as Figure 2 makes clear: This drawing from the book of forging dies by the company Wilhelm Binder (ca. 1920) shows that the company created a special die for challah knife handles. The Viennese company Jarosinski & Vaugoin created similar pieces after 1922 that bear two popular quotations: “It is the blessing of the Lord that enriches” (Proverbs 10:22) on one side, and “Go thy way; eat thy bread with joy” (Kohelet 9:7) on the other. A challah knife currently on display in the Frankfurt Jewish Museum has identical quotations and a similar handle design. It lies in a box of the jeweler and silver manufacturer Lazarus Posen Wwe of Frankfurt am Main.⁴

While the Lazarus Posen Wwe company is still known for its production (or at least trading) of Judaica, the company H. Meyen has largely been forgotten. This company was run by the Schlesinger brothers, who were related to Gershom Sholem. Although they were very well known in their day and supplied the Royal Prussian court, knowledge about their production – especially their Jewish ritual items – has mostly been lost. Nevertheless, they produced an extensive range of Jewish ritual objects, including one challah knife I came across with an extraordinary engraving in Hebrew, “Remember the Shabbat day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8), with niqqudot (vowels). This rare addition suggests that the buyer was not expected to know Hebrew well.



Fig. 3a: Challah knife by Franz Bahner, Düsseldorf, Appel Auction, photo by the author.

The cutlery company Franz Bahner of Düsseldorf (Fig. 3a) offered a more elaborate design. It bears the usual inscription, “It is the blessing of the Lord that enriches” (Proverbs 10:22) and adds wheat stalks on one side and two challot, a kiddush cup, and a menorah, on the other. The company changed its hallmarks in 1918 when its name changed to Mansfeld & Bahner.⁵ Accordingly, we can identify its challah knives from both before and after 1918.⁶ The later hallmark also has the additional inscription “ges. gesch.” (*gesetzlich geschützt*: patented) incorporated into the forging die (Fig. 3b).



Fig. 3b: Detail of challah knife with the patent marking on the handle by Franz Bahner, Düsseldorf, Appel Auction, photo by the author.

Figure 4 presents a similar knife. Designed by Leo Horovitz and produced by his brother's company Felix Horovitz, it also depicts two challot and a kiddush cup on one side together with the Bible verse Proverbs 10:22. The backside depicts wheat stalks appropriately accompanied by the phrase "who bringest forth bread from the earth" (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 35a). As this is the last part of the HaMotzi blessing for challah bread, it functions like a cheat sheet.



Fig. 4: Challah knife by Felix Horovitz, Frankfurt, Appel Auction, photo by the author.



Fig. 4b: Detail of challah knife by Felix Horovitz showing wheat stalks and the Hebrew phrase “who bringest forth bread from the earth” (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 35a).

Handles with different shapes further elaborate challah knife designs. A knife from Austria (from after 1922 according to the hallmarks) has a handle adapted to the form of a challah (Fig. 5a). One side depicts a full Shabbat dinner table with a kiddush cup and two challot framed by two columns and a Moorish arch with a Shabbat lamp hanging from it and surrounded by stars (Fig. 5b).. The dedication “Remember the Shabbat day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8) appears between the lamp and the table, and a quotation from the Amidah prayer, “A day of rest and sanctity you have given to your people” (Siddur Ashkenaz, Amidah, Sanctity of the Day), appears underneath the table. The company Wilhelm Geist & Sohn from Hanau in Hesse used a

similar design but retained the common handle form (Fig.6). A third quotation reads “on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread” (Exodus 16:22).



Fig. 5: Challah knife by unknown Austrian company depicting challah, Appel Auction, photo by the author.



Fig. 5b: Reverse side of the same knife depicting a full Shabbat dinner table with a kiddush cup and two challot.

All these examples show that the Jewish community in German-speaking regions generated a demand for challah knives. The engraving on some knives seemed to have been added later, attesting that simple breadknives were “elevated” to help satisfy this demand. Likewise,

examples clearly produced in the factory as challah knives show that silver manufacturers perceived and then catered specifically to this demand. Since most of the knives I found share the blessings and bible quotations with very little variation, it is apparent that the companies copied one another.



Fig. 6a: Challah knife by Wilhelm Geist & Sohn, Hanau, Appel Auction, photo by the author.



Fig. 6b: Reverse side of the same knife, showing the common handle form.

Dating the Emergence of the Challah Knife

Something else all these examples have in common is that none of them dates to before 1900. Many come from the 1910s or 1920s. This aligns well with other sources. Books and paintings from before 1900 do not reference the challah knife. Rebekka Wolf in her *Kochbuch für Israelitische Frauen* from 1865, for example, does not mention a special challah knife in her advice for setting a Shabbat table.⁷ The paintings and prints of Moritz Daniel Oppenheimer, likewise, have no such knife. While his paintings *Schabbat Nachmittag* (1860/66), *Freitag Abend* (1867),⁸ and *Die Heimkehr des Freiwilligen* (1867–69) all portray a Shabbat table setting with challot, none of them depicts a distinctive knife for cutting them.

Advertisements further confirm the post-1900 emergence of the challah knife and even help us to date it more precisely. In 1904, a Solingen knife manufacturer and Jewish family business, Joseph Feist/Omega-Werke, advertised its breadknives without reference to challot in *Israelitisches Familienblatt*.⁹ A 1911 advertisement by the publisher Jakob B. Brandeis, Breslau and Prague was the earliest reference to a *Barches* knife I could find.¹⁰ At the time, Breslau and Prague still belonged to the German(-speaking) world. Another early example of a *Berchesmesser*, together with a *Berchesplatte* – a serving plate for challot – was reportedly shown in an exhibition of Jewish ritual objects by the company Felix Horovitz under the artisanal direction of Leo Horovitz in June 1914.¹¹

Dating the emergence of the challah knife to after 1900 is also consistent with the general history of the production of breadknives and cutlery innovations. Despite their ritualistic function, challah knives are only breadknives with special dedications. Ordinary breadknives themselves only emerged in the middle to second half of the nineteenth century. Initially, breadknives had a sawtooth or a plain blade with a rounded tip before the serrated knife became common. Three companies claimed to have invented the breadknife: Güde in Solingen, Hack in Steyr (produced a serrated knife around 1930), and Dick in Esslingen (produced a breadknife around 1900). Thus, challah knives necessarily emerged after breadknives in general, around the first decade of the twentieth century.

The Challah Knife and the Halacha

Why did challah knives not exist before 1900? Likely due to religious traditions and Halacha laws. In the Sephardic tradition, one breaks the bread rather than slicing it, even today, so no knife is needed. The Mishne Torah (Brakhot 7:4) and Schulchan Aruch, Or Chaim (Siman 274) expressly state that one should break the bread. While many Sephardim tear their challot, slicing it is a more recent Ashkenazi tradition. Indeed, the Halacha provides sound arguments against using such a knife. First, the challah should be treated differently than usual bread, which would, however, leave some room for a special knife that is overall also parve (neither touched by meat, milk, or other derivatives). Second, and more importantly, the Shabbat table is thought to represent the showbread table in the temple. Accordingly, using a sharp, weapon-like knife for challot would desecrate the temple. Thus, within Halacha law, using a challah knife is at least questionable.

Explaining the Emergence of the Challah Knife

The challah knife's rise is rooted in sociocultural developments in early twentieth-century Jewish-German history. During this time, consumerism took flight, and the bourgeois emphasis on etiquette and table manners peaked. Several famous cooking, housekeeping, and etiquette books refer to these habits (those by Henriette Davidis, Louise Holle, Lina Morgenstern; and for the German-Jewish cuisine those by Rebekka Wolf, Marie Elsasser, Henny van Cleef, and Marie Kauders). In this context, rudely tearing off a piece of bread among company may have been unthinkable. Additionally, the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 may have spurred this development. In the Covid pandemic, Jewish communities began slicing challot for hygienic reasons, so it seems plausible that the practice spread in 1918 for similar reasons. After the Spanish flu, during the 1920s and 1930s, the number of advertisements for these implements rapidly increased. That the challah knife quickly became an established part of Jewish rites is evident in a 1931 [raffle of *Israelitisches Familienblatt*](#), the prize for which included challah knives.¹²

The challah knife's emergence also coincided with the rise of technical gadgets in turn-of-the-century Germany, where local tradesmen proudly linked their knowledge with engineering

advances. A tool just for cutting one sort of bread sounds like something pleasing to this German mindset. Remember that the (serrated) breadknife was, itself, innovative. Moreover, other new gadgets also appeared in German cutlery, such as the small fork with one wider spike for cutting pieces off a slice of cake.

So, it seems that it was more than just Germans' love of bread that brought the challah knife into being – it also involved bourgeois table culture, the rise of consumerism, hygienic concerns, and possibly German technical ingenuity. Yet, the German love of bread helps us to understand why this item developed where it did. Thus, the challah knife is a very German Judaica that found its place within the Ashkenazi tradition. Today, the knife is taken for granted, but reconstructing its emergence opens a window onto a specific constellation of Jewish history in early twentieth-century Germany. An interplay of craft traditions, trade interests, and broader socioeconomic developments paved the way for its creation. If you happen to have inherited a simple breadknife from your German-Jewish (grand-) parents, I hope you now see that it harbors a greater story than you may have anticipated.

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1. Max Grünwald, “Aus dem Jüdischen Kochbuch,” *Menorah* 6, no. 9 (1928): 519; and Jüdischer Frauenbund, “Die jüdischen Gerichte, ihre Entstehung und Symbolik,” *Kochbuch für die jüdische Küche* (Düsseldorf: Israelitischer Frauenverein, 1926), 267. ↩

2. Marie Elsasser, *Ausführliches Kochbuch für die einfache und feine jüdische Küche, unter Berücksichtigung aller rituellen Vorschriften in 3759 Rezepten* (Frankfurt a. M.: J. Kauffmann, 1901), 479 and 480. ↩
3. *Barches* come in different varieties. There are *Wasser-*, and *Butterbarches* – the former a typical challah and the latter a “milky” one. Some bakeries in the German countryside still sell *Barches* on Fridays, even though there is no longer a Jewish community. In some cases, as in the southern village of Heinsheim, the recipe was handed down from when the bakery produced the *Barches* for the Jewish community, having received the recipe from that community (Heinsheim Kulturweg). ↩
4. Georg Heuberger, ed., *Pracht der Gebote: Die Judaica Sammlung des Jüdischen Museums Frankfurt am Main* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag), 487, nos. 167 and 168. In the only surviving catalogue of this company, held today in the Israel Museum, one can spot two challah knives with forged letters. One of them has the form of Koch and Bergfeld’s Spaten design. While I have not found an example of this item so far, it was probably produced by Koch & Bergfeld for Lazarus Posen Wwe as Koch & Bergfeld provided items for the Posen company; Bernhard Heitmann, *Handwerk und Maschinenkraft: Die Silbermanufaktur Koch & Bergfeld in Bremen* (Hamburg: Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, 1999), 14; and State Archives of Bremen, 7,2141 Koch & Bergfeld 191. ↩
5. Falk Möller, *Silberwaren-Fabrik Franz Bahner 1895–1962: “Echt silberne Bestecke nach künstlerischen Entwürfen”* (Books on Demand, 2021), 12. ↩
6. In the Frankfurt Jewish Museum’s collection, one knife has a hallmark predating the rebranding of 1918; Heuberger, *Pracht der Gebote*, 487, no. 166 (formerly not attributed). ↩
7. Rebekka Wolf, *Kochbuch für israelitische Frauen enthaltend die verschiedensten Koch- und Backarten mit einer vollständigen Speisekarte und einer Hausapotheke sowie einer genauen Anweisung zur Einrichtung und Führung einer religiös-jüdischen Haushaltung* (Berlin: W. Adolf & Comp., 1865), 1. ↩
8. This painting merely depicts a regular place setting of a knife and fork with no additional challah knife. ↩
9. *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, Vol. 7 (1904), October 20, 1904 (no. 42), 15. ↩

10. *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, Vol. 13 (1911), March 23, 1911 (no. 12), 8. ↩
11. Neue jüdische Presse, *Frankfurter Israelitisches Familienblatt*, Vol. 12 (1914), June 5, 1914 (no. 22), 3. While we do not have pictures of the objects, it might well be the abovementioned knife. Other items are described as having a décor of grapes, which is probably like the objects held today in the collection of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt; Heuberger, *Pracht der Gebote*, 152, 444. ↩
12. If you were puzzled by the rebus, see the solution [here](#). ↩

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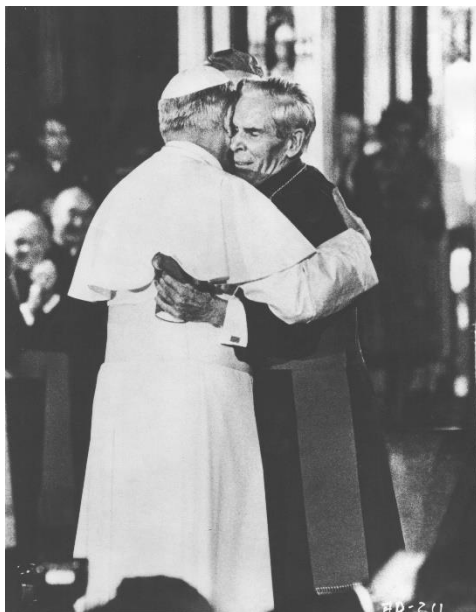
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Preface: At the beginning of March, the parishioners of Christ Our Hope Cluster heard a homily pertaining to the Catholic teaching of Just War. With so many conflicts throughout the world today, I was asked to expand upon the topic for the latest journal. As I mentioned months ago, entire courses can be taught on this topic alone. I needed to boil it down and being as this is a historical journal, I felt the need to paint the teaching in a historical lens. April 27th marked the ten-year anniversary of St. John Paul II's canonization. The following is a look back on the teaching of the saintly pontiff and how his work explains the Catholic stance on the legitimate, moral use of force.

St. John Paul II on Warfare and Warfighters

Rev. Nicholas Radloff

The Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen once wrote, “Unless souls are saved, nothing is saved; there can be no world peace unless there is soul peace. World wars are only projections of the conflicts waged inside the souls of modern men and women, for nothing happens in the external world that has not first happened within a soul.”⁴¹ Upon meeting Archbishop Sheen



Sheen

months prior to his death in 1979, Pope John Paul II declared him a “loyal son of the Church.” When one examines the work of John Paul II, one could argue that Archbishop Sheen was also loyal to the teachings and beliefs of John Paul II as well. Throughout his life, the Holy Father wrote on warfare and how Catholics must approach it. The writings and speeches of St. John Paul II taught that Catholicism has a strong aversion to warfare but also showed a great concern for the spiritual welfare of those who were engaged in military service.

⁴¹ Fulton J. Sheen, *Peace of Soul* (New York: Image Books, 1954), 1.

St. John Paul II's stance on warfare was rooted in the worth of the human person. In his eleventh encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, he outlined not only the Church's commitment to ending abortion and euthanasia, but also the responsibility of us as Christians to avoid war and preserve life. At the same time, he spoke of the need to defend life which implies that in justified cases, war may be necessary to stop the destruction of human life. In this address to the faithful, he writes,

“...Every person sincerely open to the truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree.”⁴²

He goes on to say, “In a special way, believers in Christ must defend and promote this right.”⁴³ This means of course, one needs to defend the rights of the unborn and the infirm, but one can also infer that in cases where innocent life is at stake, John Paul II calls on those with legitimate authority to wage just war to protect that life.

The Saintly Pontiff takes special care to note that war itself is not always justified. In fact, in many cases it produces evil that is not only destructive to human life but also disregards the worth of the human person

entirely. In regard to the dangers to life, he writes that some threats “are the result of situations of violence, hatred, and conflicting interests, which lead people to attack others through murder, war, slaughter, and genocide.”⁴⁴ In this statement, he asserts that where war is not undertaken to

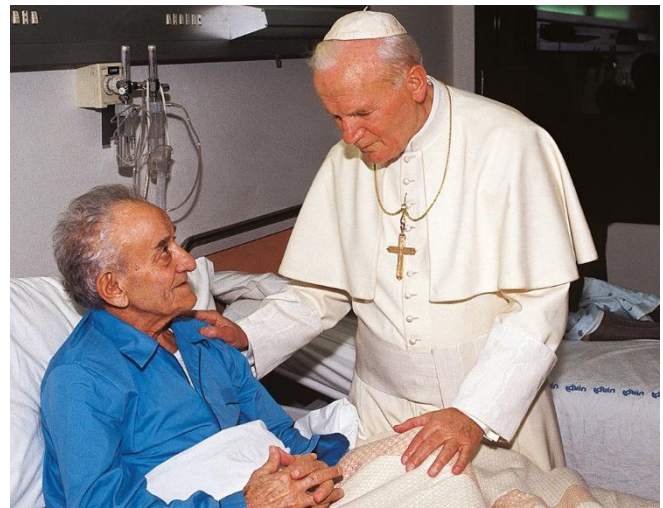


Figure 2: John Paul II caring for the infirm

⁴² John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae*,” The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html (accessed 30 May 2014), 2.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 10.

protect life, it can, in fact, be a threat to life and embody the very evil that just wars seek to eliminate. Later, in his discussion of the Fifth Commandment, the Holy Father states that the Christian understanding of this commandment did not reach maturity until the Sermon on the Mount. We learn, “With Jesus, these positive requirements [regarding the inviolability of life] assume new force and urgency, and are revealed in all their breadth and depth: they range from caring for the life of one’s brother...to showing concern for the stranger, even to the point of loving one’s enemy.”⁴⁵ With this in mind, it becomes harder for warfare to be justified as we are obliged to love our enemy. Only when our enemy is a greater threat to innocent life, according to John Paul, may warfare be allowed.

When, then, is warfare allowed? To answer this question, Pope John Paul II quotes from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. “Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm.”⁴⁶ Immediately, one could have difficulty with this stance as it would require the taking of the aggressor’s life which also has sacred value. “In this case,” the Holy Father states, “The fatal outcome is attributable to the aggressor whose action brought it about, even though he may not be morally responsible because of a lack of the use of reason.”⁴⁷

Even with warfare allowed in such manner, John Paul II cautioned strongly against it and advocated for other means of resolving conflict. He took hope in the “new sensitivity ever more opposed to war as an instrument for the resolution of conflicts between peoples, and increasingly oriented to finding effective but ‘non-violent’ means to counter the armed aggressor.”⁴⁸ One non-violent means of countering such a foe was described by John Paul II as “development.” In a world where so many international conflicts result from economic differences, universal development of economies and cultures can help to avoid conflict and violent action. Not only is it a suggestion, but a responsibility. He wrote in 1991,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church, trans. United States Catholic Conference (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 2265.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae,” 55.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 27.

“...Another name for peace is *development*. Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development. Just as within individual societies it is possible and right to organize a solid economy which will direct the functioning of the market to the common good, so too there is a similar need for adequate interventions on the international level.”⁴⁹

It could be argued that this belief is a direct result of his experience with Communism and its oppressive nature he witnessed upon the people of Poland. It is of note that the above statement was not without temporal significance. The document in which it is found, *Centesimus Annus*, was published on the Memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker in 1991. Those familiar with that day may know that it was established by Pius XII to be on May 1st, a day which communist nations celebrate the worker and their socio-political system. In giving the speech that day, he emphasized the Church’s opposition to communism and communism’s disregard for the value inherited in the human person.

The Second World War could easily be considered a legitimate war in the in the Just War Tradition. John Paul II stated that the war, “which should have re-established freedom and restored the right of nations, ended without having attained these goals.”⁵⁰ Instead, what resulted was a good portion of Europe, included the Holy Father’s homeland of Poland, under the thumb of Communism. The vast ideological differences between Western powers and the USSR resulted in the Cold War placing the world under the constant threat of nuclear war. It is of note that the use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent, and deterrent only, has not always been condemned by Church leaders. In fact, the original draft of *Gaudium et Spes* at the Second Vatican Council contained a condemnation of nuclear weapons. The language even condemned the mere possession of the bombs for use as a deterrent. The final draft does not contain such a condemnation due to the urging of Archbishop Philip Hannan. In his autobiography, he states

⁴⁹ John Paul II, “Centesimus Annus,” The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html (accessed 22 June 2014), 52.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 19.

that he, “together with approximately four hundred fifty-one votes for [his] position”⁵¹ removed the condemnation by arguing that nuclear weapons for the sake of deterrence was not immoral but safeguarded the lives of millions.

While the voting of the Holy Father as the then-Archbishop of Krakow at the Council is not known, his writings later in life made his stance on nuclear weapons clear. Almost thirty years after the Council he wrote, “...The whole world was oppressed by the threat of an atomic war capable of leading to the extinction of humanity. Science used for military purposes had



Figure 3: Archbishop Hannon and John Paul II

placed this decisive instrument at the disposal of hatred, strengthened by ideology. But if war can end without winners or losers in a suicide of humanity, then we must repudiate the logic which leads to it: the idea that the effort to destroy the enemy, confrontation and war itself are factors of progress and historical advancement.”⁵² In this, it was not only the weaponry itself that was immoral, but the very thought process

which led to its development and use. The technology served to oppress life, not protect it as warfare is intended.

The fall of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War did not lesson Pope John Paul II’s resolve to turn humanity away from war. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in the early 1990s caused uproar in the international community. The intervention by the American government could be argued to be consistent with the Just War Tradition. Nevertheless, Pope John Paul II advocated against the use of force. He spoke out against the war and reiterated his stance in *Centesimus Annus* and wrote,

⁵¹ Philip Hannan with Nancy Collins and Peter Finney, *The Archbishop Wore Combat Boots: From Combat, to Camelot, to Katrina*, Kindle Edition (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2010), loc 8357.

⁵² John Paul II, “*Centesimus Annus*,” 18.

“I myself, on the occasion of the recent tragic war in the Persian Gulf, repeated the cry: ‘Never again war!’ No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution to the very problems which provoked war.”⁵³

The Holy Father’s stance mirrors that of the Church. War is a last resort. It is only to be used when all other avenues have been exhausted. Since his opposition to a possibly justified war was so strong, it should come as no surprise that his opposition to wars of less justifiable nature was equally as fervent. In 2003, the United States made the case for an invasion of Iraq to eliminate the threat of weapons of mass destruction that it believed were present in Iraq and under the control of Saddam Hussein. Despite the Holy Father’s condemnation of such weapons, he publicly condemned the use of military force to eliminate the threat. The New York Times categorized his statement against the war as his “strongest opposition yet.”⁵⁴ On numerous occasions, he spoke out against the war which has the distinction of being the first war in history to be protested on a global scale before it even began. In his stance against the use of force, he reminded the world that “War is not always inevitable,” and “It is always a defeat for humanity.”⁵⁵ Perhaps his most profound words to the international community were regarding how that defeated humanity is to approach war. In his address to the Vatican Diplomatic Corps, he told the representatives of world governments, “...[I]t is vital to note that the independence of States can no longer be understood apart from the concept of interdependence. All States are interconnected both for better and for worse. For this reason, and rightly so, we must be able to distinguish good from evil and call them by their proper names.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁴ Frank Bruni, “Pope Voices Opposition, His Strongest, to Iraq War,” The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/14/international/europe/14POPE.html> (accessed 30 May 2014).

⁵⁵ John Paul II, “Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Diplomatic Corps,” The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20030113_diplomatic-corps_en.html (accessed 30 May 2014).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

It's important to note that despite the Holy Father's (and the Church's) aversion to war, there were times in his pontificate where he did identify the evil of which he spoke and chose not to condemn the use of martial force. The most notable of these events is the military action in the country of Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil on September 11th, 2001.

When American military forces began operations to bring justice to those who perpetrated the



Figure 4: September 11, 2001, attack

attacks and their harborers, the Holy Father spoke of the moral and legal right of a nation to defend itself. This was not a *carte blanche* ability to wage total war, however. The pontiff took care to note that this right is only morally executed when focused on those responsible for the attacks.⁵⁷

The moral and legal right of a nation to defend itself requires a country to have a military ready to employ lethal force. Despite the Church's predisposition against war, it's interesting to note that the oldest standing army on the planet is the Swiss Guard of the Vatican. The men of that military force were not, however, the only ones for which John Paul II had a special concern. The employment of lethal force is a heavy burden for any individual to bear. As a result, the Holy Father took care to safeguard the spiritual wellbeing of those engaged in combat in the defense of their nation. In 1985, he established the Archdiocese of the Military Services of the United States. Prior to that year, the Catholics of the U.S. Armed Forces fell under the care of the Archdiocese of New York. John Paul II saw the need for a separate diocese to care for the men and women engaged in military service due to the unique spiritual circumstances to which they are subjected.

In an address to the attendees of the Jubilee of the Armed Forces and Police held in Rome in 2000, the Holy Father acknowledged these unique circumstances. He said, "Who better than you, dear soldiers...can testify to the violence and to the disruptive forces of evil present in the

⁵⁷ Bruni

world? You fight against them every day.”⁵⁸ In this confrontation with evil, the Holy Father reminded those who serve that there is hoped to be found in Christ. He went on, “The Gospel comforts us, presenting the victorious figure of Christ, the Judge of History. With His presence, He brightens the darkness and even man’s despair, and offers those who trust in Him the comforting certainty of His constant assistance.”⁵⁹

In the same way as civilians, members of the military encounter Christ through the Sacraments provided in this case by military chaplains. John Paul II took special care to ensure that the chaplains charged with the spiritual care of those serving in a military capacity understood the magnitude of their charge. At the Third International and Interdenominational Conference of Chief Military Chaplains of Europe and North America, he emphasized that the chaplains not only provide sacramental care but are responsible for forming the person of the military member as well. He said, “As chaplains, you are aware of the role of the word of God in forming people’s consciences and



Figure 5: St. Lucas native Chaplain Aloysius Schmitt

hearts, and in leading them to thoughts of peace and the correct use of freedom.”⁶⁰ In that way, the chaplains are not only charged with the care of the soul, but also the care of the international community. He implied that their work forming the individual should lead to the promotion of

⁵⁸ John Paul II, “Jubilee of the Armed Forces and Police: Homily 19 November 2000,” Mission Capodanno, <http://www.missioncapodanno.org/jubilee-of-the-armed-forces-and-police-homily-19-november-2000/> (accessed 19 June 2014).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ John Paul II, “Address to the Third International and Interdenominational Conference of Chief Military Chaplains of Europe and North America, 6 February 1992,” Mission Capodanno, <http://www.missioncapodanno.org/address-of-the-holy-father-john-paul-ii-to-the-third-international-and-interdenominational-conference-of-chief-military-chaplains-of-europe-and-north-america-6-february-1992/> (accessed 30 May 2014).

peace by the members of the military in all of their works. He continued, “In the fertile soil of freedom of conscience you must sow abundantly, so that also in the military sphere individuals will act in a way which reflects deep reverence for God and, consequently, unfailing respect for the dignity and rights of other persons.”⁶¹

In an echo of his warning against technology driving immorality in warfare regarding nuclear weapons, the Holy Father cautioned the chaplains about technology in our current age. Just as in the Cold War, technology of the current age can allow for ethical dilemmas for one engaged in combat. One calls to mind the use of drone warfare and collateral damage. In reference to this topic, the Pontiff said to the assembled chaplains, “Before you lie the task of educating others in human and spiritual values, and of helping them to place ethics above technology, moderation above passion, a sense of justice and brotherhood above hatred and oppression.”⁶²

Above all, he directed that goal of every chaplain, and military member for that matter, is peace. Every act should be oriented toward it and designed to obtain it. This is not only done in the actions taken in the formation of individuals to avoid war, but also the actions taken during war to promote the most rapid restoration of peace. In 2003, he wrote, “Military chaplains, inspired by Christ’s love, are called by their special vocation to witness that even in the midst of the harshest combats, it is always possible, and only right, to respect the dignity of the military adversary, the dignity of the civilian victims, the indelible dignity of every human being involved in armed conflict. In this way, moreover, the reconciliation is fostered that will be necessary for re-establishing peace when the war is over.”⁶³ In this statement we see the Holy Father’s teaching come full circle. With *Evangelium Vitae*, he began with the dignity of the human person. His teachings always were painted in this light. Even his direction to military chaplains uses that dignity as the bedrock principle for their conduct, and in turn, the conduct of those for which they are responsible for forming.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ John Paul II. “Message to the Military Chaplains, 24 March 2003.” Mission Capodanno. <http://www.missioncapodanno.org/message-of-john-paul-ii-to-the-military-chaplains-24-march-2003/> (accessed 30 May 2014).

Saint John Paul II's writings concerning warfare and those who engage in it are of immeasurable value to those who work for peace in the world. Members of the military and the civilians who guide them must always be mindful that the Church teaches that peace is the ultimate goal. War should exist only for the manifestation of peace, and the dignity of the human person is paramount in the employment of force. That dignity extends not only to those who are protected, but also to the protectors. His actions and writings as Pope emphasized and showed his dedication to the spiritual welfare of the warfighter. Long after his passing, there is much we can all heed and learn.

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THE HISTORY OF OSSIAN, IOWA – PAST AND PRESENT

A Case Study of Small-Town, Rural America

By Clyde Cremer
Edited by Kellie Cremer

“History is the best introduction, not only to know how we arrived at our current predicament but how we can imagine all possible futures.” -Anonymous

Reminiscences

In years long since gone by, my family would spend many memorable days visiting our close relatives outside of Ossian. The Lichtenberg’s operated a family farm of 160 acres as did so many farm families in the area. They raised a mix of crops and farm animals ranging from dairy cows, hogs, and chickens to corn, oats, and hay. The town of Ossian was less than two miles away from the farm and they depended on the village for groceries, dry goods, fuel, repairs, and livestock supplements, to name a few. The school and church were also located in the town and became an important part of their lives.

My cousin and I would spend many wonderful times enjoying a Saturday night with friends in Ossian (with around 800 people at that point), as well as indulging in ice cream or “pop.” My brother, cousins, and I would go to the Saturday afternoon matinee to watch cowboy movies. There were also carnivals that visited the town, occasional parades celebrating events such as its centennial, Independence Day, Memorial Day, and Christmas.

A wedding and later a dance in the evening were times when the community and the rural residents would come together to renew friendships and make new friends. A grandstand was located at the end of main street, ready for an impromptu serenade. Saturday night was a time for shopping and meeting with neighbors to catch up on happenings around the county. Ossian was not only a commercial center but also an important hub for social life. These are my boyhood memories of Ossian and my affinity for it today.



Bustling Iowa town in the 1950s.

The Early Years

They say that every person has a story and that is also true about every city, town, or village, whether large or small. Residents who have lived in a certain domicile for decades know little about its founding, early residents, or how it even got its name.

The land that was to become Ossian and Winneshiek County was inhabited by indigenous Otoe people who for eons shared land with the Omaha and Ponca. The tribal presence changed over time due to tribal warfare, U.S. Government incursions, and land being sold to settlers who wanted to farm. In 1846, Fort Atkinson was built to protect the Winnebago Indians from the depredations of neighboring tribes, such as the Dakota Sioux and the Sac and Fox. The ancient inhabitants of the land were driven from their tribal lands and many farmers took possession of the land as their own for \$1.25 per acre. This is how my great-grandfather (William Cremer) started his farm near Festina. The new farms on the fertile lands of Iowa led to the eventual establishment of towns and villages.

Ossian is in Military Township, named after Military Ridge, located between Ossian and Calmar. The army road that ran between Fort Crawford, Wisconsin, and Fort Atkinson, Iowa, cast a long shadow even after its abandonment by the military prior to the Civil War. This military road became an important byway between some of the early towns in Military Township.

When the first white settlers came to the area the land was covered with tall prairie grasses and a proliferation of native flowers. These plants had an elaborate root

system that could survive the periodic droughts and fires that plagued the prairie. Along the water courses, one could find various species of riparian vegetation including oak, wild plum, and cottonwood. These could be used for fuel and shelter and many early dwellings were located nearby for this reason. In addition, there was potable water to use before deep water wells could be constructed.



Ossian playing his harp.
François Pascal Simon Gérard. 1801.

As with all towns and cities, the first step is driving a stake into the ground at the chosen site. This was completed by John Ossian Porter, in the late 1840s or 1850s. The location consisted of three blocks of 14 lots. These lots were located on the edge of the old military trail. Porter was born in New York, then traveled to Pennsylvania before coming to Winneshiek County. His family's first home was a log cabin 18' x 20' in size and served as an early stage stop and lodging for the weary traveler, with hard liquor being served as needed. A log cabin in the early days sold for \$50 to \$70. When the Porters had a son in 1855, he was named Ossian and so the town was born. In

1876, when records for Ossian were first kept, it had a population of 476 people. In 2020, it had 802 people. There are two other U.S. towns with the name Ossian: one in Indiana and one in New York. Ossian (Gaelic **Oisín and pronounced oh-SHEEN**) was a legendary poet, known as the greatest Irish warrior-poet of the Fenian cycle of hero tales. Along with St. Patrick, he is also the main character in William Butler Yeats's epic poem, *The Wanderings of Oisín*.

The McGregor & Western railroad came to Ossian in 1865 and breathed new life into the town at the expense of Frankville. Prior to the railroad coming into the area the agricultural goods had to be hauled by horse or ox-drawn wagon to Lansing or Marquette to reach a barge or steamboat for shipment. With the railroad reaching Ossian, the population greatly increased, as did the number of businesses. After 21 years, the first church was established; a Catholic Church erected in 1869. Two years later, a Methodist church was built and in the following decades a few others followed such as the Universalist Church and the Stavanger Lutheran Church.

In time, two banks were established as well as a newspaper, the *Ossian Bee*. The town was becoming an oasis for the inhabitants and the surrounding farms. Goods could be shipped in by the railroad and farm products shipped out. In 1856, the wheat harvest

was 19,344 bushels, 14,340 bushels of corn, 6,262 bushels of oats, 148 hogs, and 160 cattle. With this symbiosis between the railroad and the farmers/merchants, the community would grow and prosper. The *Northern Iowa Times* of McGregor published a story about Ossian in 1867: “Last year, 28 new buildings were constructed; town lots are in strong demand. The prospects are excellent for business this fall. This is the point where Decorah receives most of her goods and ships much of her produce. The freight charges at this station were over \$200,000 the past year.”



Early photo of Lydia Street in Ossian, looking north.

Downtown Ossian in the 1930s.





Small log cabin built by Norwegian settlers in Ossian.



Lorraine Kingry on the Stangeland family's Farmall tractor outside of Ossian in 1952.

*© Kim Davis and Mike Stangeland
kimandmikeontheroad.com*



Norwegian Lutheran Church in Ossian.



Nordness Railroad Depot.



De Sales School

The early years in the town and surrounding area were challenging, with hardship being the key word in the farmer's daily existence. Drought, flooding, cold winters, deep snow, insects, crop failures, and brutal physical labor were too often the norm. In 1875, the town rallied to assist Kossuth County residents, who were ravaged by an invasion of grasshoppers.

Nineteen years before that, in 1856, a prairie fire rolled across the township from south to north devouring everything in its path. This natural disaster was followed by the winter of 1856-1857, when a blizzard hit a widespread area leaving a four-foot deposit of snow which was followed by rain which created an impenetrable crust to humans and animals of every type.

Elk and deer became easy prey at this time and the settlers took advantage of their plight. In 1873, a snowdrift 1,000 feet long and six feet deep blocked the railroad tracks near Ossian. Death stalked the land with disease and accidents. The newspapers told of men freezing to death when caught in a blizzard, killed by a runaway team of horses, a child killed by an exploding kerosene lamp, clothes catching fire near a stove, and all the other myriad injuries associated with work during the pre-antibiotic era. A cholera and diphtheria epidemic almost wiped out a Norwegian settlement north of Ossian at Washington Prairie. The possibility of a raid by tribes of American Indians was also a disquieting factor throughout the early frontier days.

With a hard life being the norm, many of the farmers and workers needed to "let off steam." This excess energy was usually dissipated with an infusion of alcohol. Ossian had numerous taverns that served as watering holes in the evening and late into the night. Heavy drinking usually ended in a brawl that would expel any hostilities harbored by the combatants with the resulting destruction of some of the furnishings within the establishment. The next morning the perpetrators would return to the scene of the mischief and pay the proprietor for the damages. In his book on Winneshiek County, Alexander wrote: "Almost from its inception...from the time that the proprietor kept his jug well filled, down to the present (1882), Ossian has been celebrated for its traffic in intoxicating liquor and street brawls were not infrequent occurrences in its history."

Even Iowa prohibition laws couldn't hinder the residents of the county. One man, in a Letter to the Editor in the *Ossian Bee*, stated: "After all that has been done in this county for the suppression of the illegal traffic [of whiskey], it still holds its hydra-head above it all and defies law, injunctions and all restraint whatever. In less than ten days, two debauches of the lowest order have occurred in as many places, to say nothing of the drunkenness that is seen every day on our streets." A story in the *Ossian Bee's* centennial issue reported: "The Ossian pioneers were rugged chaps, hard drinkers, hard fighters, and hard gamblers." In one episode that signifies this hard life and bad behavior, a young man came into town riding a mule. Another man came out of the

tavern and shot the animal dead. He then gave the man \$10.00 and said, "Get yourself a good horse!"

Ossian and the Civil War

The shadow of the Civil War came to Ossian in 1861 but was short lived. The *Decorah Republican's* issue on June 13, 1861, publishes a story of an insurrectionist raising the secessionist flag on his property. A band of 150 concerned Unionists from Moneek and Castalia confronted the man who said that it was his right. After a bit of streetside debate, he lowered the flag and raised Old Glory. The crowd dispersed, feeling that the matter was over. However, the next day, one of the Union men, Mr. White, was badly beaten by two of the secessionists and his barn and stable were burned. The story has several murky sides to it, but in the final analysis Ossian remained 100% for the Union. In 1862, a military quota of 48 was ordered and 31 men volunteered. By the end of the year, the quota for the township increased to 73. Thus ended the great insurrection of 1862.

The Great Railroad War: June 1884

The morning on this early June day was broken by bells ringing from the schoolhouse, signifying an important event was unfolding. Shouts rang out that a force of 1,000 men were tearing up the Chicago, Decorah & Minnesota railroad (C. D. & M) tracks outside of town. The actual number was more like 400, but the damage and errant behavior was real. The investigation found that men from the Milwaukee railroad had decided to lay their tracks where the C. D. & M tracks were located. The Milwaukee company claimed to own fifty feet from the center of the track and that they were at work on their own grounds.

The Mayor of Ossian ordered the crew to stop their supposed depredations but to no avail. The foreman of the Milwaukee crew was arrested but was released without bond when he said that he was new and did not know of the significance of the work being undertaken. To cool the passions on both sides, all eight saloons were closed until further notice and the restaurants did not serve the interlopers any food. Foreman Collins went into a local hotel demanding food for the crew, but as the argument increased in intensity, the foreman was felled by a blow from the proprietor. End of demand.

According to IowaGenWeb: Friday afternoon, "the town council met and passed an ordinance giving the C. D. & M. company right-of-way over the disputed territory... Notice was served on Saturday that an injunction would be sought from Judge Hatch, restraining the Milwaukee company from occupying the ground." Through the decision of the courts, "the controversy ended with the Milwaukee Road leasing usage of their

right of way for trackage in this location.” Later, the town granted right of way to the C. D. & M with the adoption of ordinances 33 and 34, solidifying the railroad's right to lay tracks in Ossian. Per the *Decorah Republican*, C. D. & M wanted to name the depot between Decorah and Ossian “Cartersville,” after the attorney who litigated the compromise, but he objected.

The Reverend Johnson of Springfield Township was then chosen to name the depot and he selected the name Nordness, after the nearby town of Nordness, Iowa. After the compromise, it was not over until the drinking of liquor began and all hell broke loose in the finest Ossian fashion. Attorney Carter recalled: “There was a hot time in the old town that night as dozens of fights broke out when hungry, thirsty section hands were refused service.” Finally, the railroad war ended and was relegated to a snippet in history.

The First World War and Ossian

The European War eventually involved the United States in the conflict as President Woodrow Wilson searched for a *casus belli* (Latin for “cause for war”), so that he could come to the aid of the struggling allies. This call to arms in April 1917 became a classic case of military unpreparedness with the mostly drafted army being the victims. Poorly armed and poorly trained, they faced the German Army with its ability to wage war with modern weapons and its Prussian instinct to engage a foe in modern warfare. Winston Churchill said that “No one knows war until they have fought the Germans!”

Without getting bogged down in the many facets of this war, it will suffice to say that two men from Ossian died during it: Sergeant Theodore Brockman was first listed as having died by a sniper’s bullet. Later this was changed to death by an exploding bag of grenades two days before the end of hostilities. So much for forensic science in World War I! The other man killed in action was Solomon Elias Johan Hammersland, who was slain in Épié, France, at age 29.

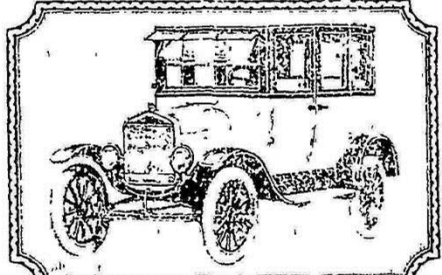
Several other men from Ossian died of natural causes while serving during the war. The Influenza pandemic contributed largely to many deaths in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) as well as on the home front. The flu became a big day for the snake oil salesmen and the *Ossian Bee* ran many advertisements on bogus potions. The local theatre helped fan the flames of patriotism with a 1918 movie entitled *The Beast of Berlin*, which featured an unflattering portrait of German Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Interesting Dates in Ossian’s History

- 1896: Gilbert G. Oyloé lays the first cement sidewalk in front of his photo gallery.

- 1893: The railroads report that 404 Ossian residents took advantage of the “excursion rates” to attend the World's Fair in Chicago.
- 1901: The Nordness Telephone Company extends its line to Ossian. F. W. Dessel and M. J. Carter were the first Ossian residents to put in phones. By the end of that year, it had 91 subscribers.
- 1913: On April 17, The Majestic Theatre opens with silent motion pictures accompanied by a Decker Brothers piano. The grand reopening of The Majestic (turned Princess Theatre) occurs on September 29, 1917, with new Power's Cameragraph Projectors. L.E. Palmer closes the Princess Theatre permanently in 1929, citing competition just about ten miles away where the Postville Theatre had “talkies.”
- 1919: An oil well is drilled near Ossian. It was considered a “dry hole” after reaching a depth of 3,037 feet and was abandoned. In 1926, a large charge of dynamite is detonated in the hole but still no oil. Was this Ossian’s answer to fracking?
- 1921: The first airplane lands near Ossian.
- 1922: First radio comes to Figge Garage.
- Early 1920s: Henry Dessel opens a Ford auto dealership. In the early 1960s, a Model B Ford is sold off the floor of the dealership as a curio and the business closes.
- Mid-1920s: Ben Bear, a Decorah clothing merchant, installs equipment for radio station KDCA. His first program featured fiddle player Happy Knight, an entertainer of questionable musical ability - unless you talked to his mother!
- 1929: A major fall in stock prices in the United States leads to The Great Depression. “The Hard Times,” as my father called this period, descends upon the nation, the world, and Ossian. To promote shopping in town and to help keep local businesses afloat, tickets are issued for each dollar

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*Advertisement in the Ossian Bee,
published on Thursday, 11/08/1923.*

spent in town. These are placed in a barrel for a periodic drawing. Herman Funke is the first beneficiary and drives home a new car. Some 8,00 people flooded the streets of Ossian for the event.

World War II

This was a cataclysm that rocked the town as well as the world. As a prelude to the total mobilization of the country, 179 men from Ossian signed up for the draft. During the war, a total of 223 men served, seven dying in service to their nation and one passing from his wounds in 1947. I remember a wooden façade on main street in the early 1950s listing the names of all who served during the war.

Korean Conflict

On June 25, 1950, the Korean conflict embroiled America in another fight as the North Koreans stormed across the 38th parallel to subjugate the free nation of South Korea. President Truman called up the U.S. troops to defend South Korea and an undeclared war began. My recollections of the conflict were observing a restaurant in Ossian turning the chairs in reverse to form a makeshift pew and praying the Rosary for peace. There were also stories circulating of “draft evaders” having their mailboxes painted red. During the conflict, 74 men served from Ossian. Two died during service from non-combat related causes.

The Metamorphosis of Small Town, Rural America

The following discussion does not in any way disparage Ossian or any of the towns that I refer to. It is merely a reflection of what life once was like in small towns in America and what now eclipses this once bucolic scene.

A few years ago, I drove through Ossian. It was quiet except for one bustling convenience store. A lonely cat observes me from the maw of an alley, curious as I go down the quiet main street. I turn around and drive back through town, thinking about how the “Big Box Stores” have replaced the locally owned businesses that once thrived. Huge numbers of people now sit in the comfort of their homes and order a wide range of products online. When the doorbell rings, it could mean that the steaks have arrived from Omaha, or a Christmas present shipped from a computer-controlled warehouse in Georgia. It could even mean that a refrigerated truck is in the driveway selling high quality meat and seafood.



Part of downtown Ossian today.

In the book, *Reflections of a Golden Era: Ossian, Iowa*, published by the Ossian Historical Society, it lists 74 businesses that once served the area during the Golden Era. One of the businesses that has survived is Becker Hardware, which started in 1885! Today, the face-to-face purchasing of items from local stores has been replaced by the computer chip. What a sad feeling to see this transition in marketing. Farming has also evolved from the idyllic family farm to large farms (many run by large, out-of-state corporations) with expensive equipment and vast

amounts of agrochemicals. The farms of today are primarily involved in corn for ethanol and feed grains for the factory farms which raise thousands of hogs, cattle, poultry, and dairy cattle. It is not only the merchants that are left out of this matrix, but the population has decreased across rural America as well. Allamakee County, to the north, had 23 towns in the late 1890s but has dwindled to 12.

I have seen a town in Kansas where a half dozen homes are steadily going back to nature to become habitat for small mammals and bird life. A concrete block silo in western Kansas has gone to seed, so to speak, and a tree has grown up through its center. It presents its canopy to the sun from the now-roofless structure, a testament to a small dairy farm gone extinct. I saw a Victorian mansion in a small midwestern town that now sits as a shadow to its former glory; the laughter that resonated from its rooms in an earlier era have been replaced by the creaking of its walls in a winter storm. The town has followed this desolate home into one of empty stores and businesses. Windows have been replaced by plywood.

Let us go back to my opening paragraphs of this treatise. It speaks of a town that was bonded by a spirit of God, country, and friendship. This has now been replaced by a life of modern living where the residents don't know their neighbors or community members as they once did. Mass communication, mass entertainment, and ever-changing technological marketing have relegated the old ways of community spirit and friendship to people living more solitary existences. I visited a friend in small town Nebraska some years ago. Even though his family lived just outside of the town for generations and a town 10 miles away is named after his great-grandfather, no one knew him. It took five stops asking directions before I tracked him down a few miles outside of town. People are detached from the community as a whole and this has led to more self-imposed isolation. For many years, I have made it a point to talk to people in stores, in barber shops, during walks, and with the homebound elderly. Strangers

have even thanked me for having extended conversations with them. How miserable is that!

Across America, a feeling of hollowness and despondency has been recorded at unacceptable levels. Current U.S. Surgeon General. **Dr. Vivek H. Murthy** recently reported that about half of U.S. adults say they have experienced loneliness. He also reported that loneliness is more deadly than smoking: “There’s really no substitute for in-person interaction. As we shifted to using technology more and more for our communication, we lost out on a lot of that in-person interaction. How do we design technology that strengthens our relationships as opposed to weaken them?”

Prince Charles (now King Charles III) has noticed this trend in England and has partnered with a well-known architect to design and construct a modern, small town that is self-sufficient and sustainable. Named Poundbury (poundbury.co.uk) and located in the county of Dorset in England, it has a population of only 5,000 residents. No big box stores, no reliance on fast-paced technology, just the baker, the butcher, the candlestick maker! The residents of this community know their neighbors. On any given day, they can traverse the parks and sidewalks and connect with one another. King Charles has essentially replicated the bygone era of small-town America. I will leave further analysis to sociologists.

As I depart Ossian, I travel past the Greg Lechtenberg home, perched above the county road that takes one to Festina. The house sits lonely and deserted and I can’t help but think of the wonderful times that were had in another time long since relegated to one’s memory. The barn and the various farm buildings are moldering in disuse.

I leave the treasured memories of this farm, of my boyhood visits, and journey to Festina to find a quiet scene devoid of the businesses of the early years. My maternal grandparents’ home has been demolished and replaced by a large, verdant lawn. The lives of many generations that were born, lived, and died here have been erased. I remember all the photos of special events taken on the front lawn in years gone by. During the good ol’ days in Festina, if you needed hardware supplies, you went to Etteldorf’s, if you wanted to play cards or drink beer you went to Schneberger’s, and if you needed groceries, you went to Schupanitz’s. Active back then, the Schupanitz store has now all but deteriorated. Not already having enough angst in my heart, I travel to the Cremer family farm that was settled in the early 1850s. That, too, is erased from the face of the earth, first by a violent multi-vortex tornado in April 2017, then by the new owners who razed some of the damaged buildings, feeling that reconstruction could be a financial black hole. All the memories of the Cremer family for some 150 years gobbled up by one ferocious meteorological event.



Left: Cremer family farm in Festina, prior to the tornado of 2017. Right: The farm in 2022.



Festina in its early years.



St. Anthony of Padua Chapel aka "The Smallest Church in the World." Outside of Festina.

I move on through other parts of northeast Iowa and see the changing face of the previous Norman Rockwell America. Numerous small towns fade in my rearview mirror as I see them bereft of basic venues such as grocery stores, dry goods stores, repair shops, and hardware stores. Two miles south of New Albin, under Black Hawk's Bluff, I stop at the former homesite where my family lived for four years. The house and farm building were demolished decades ago by wrecking crews and aided by a bulldozer. The State of Iowa purchased a large tract of land for a public hunting area and consequently the farm buildings that had fallen into disrepair were removed permanently.

The only vestiges of my home are the artesian well and a large lilac bush which used to waft its intoxicating scent through my bedroom window. Yes, this is the same bush on which a Whip-poor-will used to sing its haunting song on an idyllic summer evening. For this young boy, life was simple...and life was good. A thousand memories ricochet through my mind in a bewildering kaleidoscope of a past that once was.

On a Saturday evening, I finally arrived in my hometown of New Albin. It is dark except for the lights shining through the front window of the two remaining taverns. It is quiet; no hustle and bustle on the streets as during my adolescent years in the 1950s and 1960s. The current residents are curled up in the family cocoon streaming a movie or texting on a smartphone. Most of the stores that once served the area are now gone, the town's business sector only a shadow of its former glory.

All my recollections of a friendly oasis in farm country are now encapsulated in dark, silent streets. So many friends and acquaintances from my formative years are gone; some forever. As I finish my sentimental visit, I am filled with melancholy and nostalgia from the transformations I have witnessed in these rural areas since my youth.

In my final analysis, I must agree with John Steinbeck who stated in his novel, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, you reach a point in your life when "You can't go home again because home has ceased to exist except in the mothballs of memory."



“Main Street” by Norman Rockwell

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Museum Activities

German American Museum to Benefit from Iowa Museum Association Training Program

In December 2023, 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.

L to R: Kathryn Kuennen, Hannah Justin Frederick, and Janet Bodensteiner participating in training class. Ms. Frederick is the director of the Montauk Mansion Museum in Clermont, Iowa. Hannah is mentoring Janet and Kathryn in this IMA museum staff training course.



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 key areas of learning, develops basic museum policies or documents based on organizational needs. These critical learning areas include mission statement, collections policy, code of ethics, emergency preparedness and response plan, strategic plan, interpretation plan, and exhibit standards.

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)".

German Maifest Returns to Pivo Brewery in Calmar

The St. Lucas Historical Society sponsored the 2nd annual German Maifest at the Pivo Brewery on Saturday, May 4th, from 12:00 to 4:00 PM to raise funds for the operation of the German American Museum, Library and Family History Center and for improvements to its electrical system.

Maifest (in German) is the traditional German celebration of the arrival of Spring. Maifest is still celebrated throughout Germany with the maypole (maibaum) decorated to show off the history and crafts of the local village or town. Mayfest, like Oktoberfest, has now become a popular fest throughout many American cities and towns celebrating elements of their German cultural heritage.

To celebrate German cultural heritage, The Guttenberg German Band will provide musical entertainment for the afternoon. The Guttenberg German Band (photo below from their website) was established in September 1988, initiated by Father Paul Peters of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Guttenberg, who invited local church members to create a band for the yearly fall polka Mass. Thus, the Guttenberg German Band was born.

Sister Jean Evelyn Menster BVM was a founding member of this band who played the accordion. She died in a car accident in 2004. Her favorite song was "Edelweiss" from the Sound of Music. The Guttenberg German Band specializes in playing authentic German music including marches, polkas, and waltzes, with a few specialty numbers.



The St. Lucas Historical Society served a tasty German style dinner starting at noon. To rouse your appetite, Janet Bodensteiner, event organizer, says the meal includes delicious roasted pork loin, turkey casserole, homemade German potato salad, salad, and trimmings. "Our 2024 German/Bavarian style Maifest dinner, the traditional music of the Guttenberg German Band, and Pivo's amazing German beers are a great way to invigorate yourself and celebrate springtime," says Kathryn Kuennen.

"In addition, we offered over 75 amazing baskets of new and antique items at our silent auction this year. At Maifest 2023 we raised funds from the silent auction for the rehabilitation of the German American Museum roof. That roof restoration project is now underway with Lifetime Construction," states Kathryn.

"Your participation in this family friendly afternoon with traditional musical entertainment is very much appreciated," states Clair Blong with the German American Museum, "The Guttenberg German Band is a traditional and growing German/Bavarian village band with members from Guttenberg, Iowa, and surrounding towns." We are friends who practice together for the love of German music. Our members come from all walks of life." states the band's website. The band played from 1:00 to 4:00 PM at Pivo Brewery.

Craig Neuzil of Pivo Brewery says Pivo's hospitality team will be serving Pivo's many styles of beer, including the popular St. Lucas Honey Weiss Bier. There is no admission charge to this family friendly event. Craig also notes that PIVO Brewery will keep the Maifest party going into the evening with 13 different German style beers on tap and free live music by the Bruce Bearinger Band from 6:00 to 9:00 PM. Gruess Gott, Guten Tag, Servus!!



Rosemary and Carl Most dancing at Maifest 2024.



Helen Pinter, Virginia Manderfield and Sheila Oswalt

Museum Roof Rehabilitation Project

The rehabilitation of the German American Museum roof systems is beginning in June. The contractor could not do this extensive roof work in the cold weather in winter months.

A formal contract was signed on February 2, 2024, with Lifetime Construction to do this roof rehabilitation project when warm weather arrives. The contractor expects to complete the roof project in the summer months.



Front Row: Virginia Manderfield, Jordan Jirak, Clair Bong. Back Row: Dan Kuennen, Mel Bodensteiner, Ralph Steinlage, Kathryn Kuennen and Jeanette Dietzenbach.

We are restoring this roof system in full compliance with the Department of Interior, National Park Service guidelines for historic preservation for structures on the National Register of Historic Sites. We will be removing all three layers on the current roof materials and replacing it with the original roofing material, red cedar shingles.

The contractor has already ordered the # 1 red cedar shingles for the sloped roof systems. These shingles are on site. The two flat roofs will be replaced with new rubber



membrane systems and new gutters installed as well. This work will likely be completed in the coming summer months.

Many private donors have been very generous in helping us raise the necessary funds for this project. We are excited that we can finally move forward with this important roof rehabilitation project.

Czech Heritage Partnership Team Making Sauerkraut



Michael Klemish and Bernie Pecinovsky stomping the cabbage while Kay Pecinovsky oversees the process.

On Saturday, March 16, 2024, an enthusiastic group of friends gathered at the home of Ken and Lois Zajicek in Ossian to prepare sauerkraut and enjoy the camaraderie of their friendship and cultural heritage. The process of sauerkraut making has a long history in German and Czech communities but in recent decades we have witnessed its decline as families enjoy the convenience of just purchasing it at the grocery store.

In the old-world history of Czech and German families in Iowa it was a vital food source during the long cold winter months. And today we know of its many health benefits for our bodies. The

actual process of sauerkraut making came from China after Marco Polo adventures there. Every family can recall some aspects of the preparation process, usually the hard labor of cutting and shredding the cabbage heads, the sometimes-bleeding fingers, but few of us practice it these days.



Front row L-R: Kay Pecinovsky, Eileen Tlusty, Patty Zajicek, Lois Zajicek, Cecilia Rokusek.

Back row L-R: Russell Lensing, Gordy Pecinovsky, Michael Klimesh, Clair Blong, Bernie Pecinovsky, Michael Pecinovsky, Ken Zajicek.

So, the Czech Heritage Partnership, with the encouragement of the Cecelia Rokusek, the CEO of the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library (NCSML), a Smithsonian Institution Affiliate Museum, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has supported the preservation and revival of traditional old country family heritages like hog butchering and sauerkraut making.

Keeping family food traditions alive is the name of the game in historic preservation. Kolaches is another great example of food heritage that has a wide and growing popular following these days.

During the time of COVID, the CHP members butchered a hog at the Zajicek farmstead near Protivin, Iowa. This traditional hog butchering event was led by Ken Zajicek and Bernie Pecinovsky. They explained the different steps of the process in their native Czech language. The event was filmed by the NCSML professional staff for later showing on Iowa Public Television and of course, in the Czech Republic.

This cold winter day event was followed by a wonderful traditional Czech dinner with various spirits to enhance the lively conversation about families performing hog butchering on their farms in Iowa and South Dakota in decades gone by.

For Kraut Fest 2024, Ken took the lead in procuring 80 large cabbages for the kraut making morning. After cutting the heads in half and removing the hearts, the cabbage was ready for the cutting board. This cutting process and the stomping of the slaw in old Red Wing crocks sapped the energy of several of us. The stomping of the slaw removes the excess water and prepares the slaw for the fermentation process that follows for a couple of weeks. The jarring of the slaw is the final step in preparing the kraut.



Sauerkraut ready for storage.

As Lois Zajicek explains: “After packing the jars with the sauerkraut, you get canning lids to tighten the jars. Then place the jars in the canner. When it comes to a boil - simmer for about 25 minutes. Then I remove the jars from the canner and place them on the counter overnight, and pray they are all sealed. You can hear the "pop" when the jars start cooling down and they seal! Ready for the shelf!!!”

After preparing the kraut for fermentation Ken and Lois invited everyone to gather for a delicious Czech meal and beers and recounted their family tales of kraut making and other traditional food preparation activities. Ken has offered to provide a demonstration of sauerkraut making at our annual Oktoberfest event.



Kraut Making Goes Better with a Beer

Modeling Lansing's Old Black Hawk Bridge



Jordan Jirak, Melvin Bodensteiner and Ralph Steinlage studying Ralph's model of the Blackhawk Bridge in Lansing, Iowa.

Ralph Steinlage, an active modeler with the St. Lucas Historical Society, has created a thirteen-foot-long model of the Black Hawk Bridge in Lansing, Iowa. In recent months Ralph became very interested in the States of Iowa and Wisconsin construction project to replace this historic bridge. His nephew, Nic Humpal, is one of the construction managers on the project.

Ralph says he spent over 75 hours in the past month creating the model in his craft shop in his hometown, Lawler, Iowa. Many problems were encountered in modeling such a large structure. Ralph says he enjoys those challenges: researching the structure blueprints, scaling the model, selecting the appropriate materials, and then combining these materials into a viable model.

Ralph especially likes to share his models with the local communities. Twelve of his historic building models are displayed in the German American Museum in St. Lucas. Starting in March Ralph's Black Hawk Bridge model has been displayed in the Lansing Public Library. Weekly meetings of the bridge contractors, State officials, and Lansing citizens are held in the library to survey the progress on the new bridge construction. Now they have the model to admire.

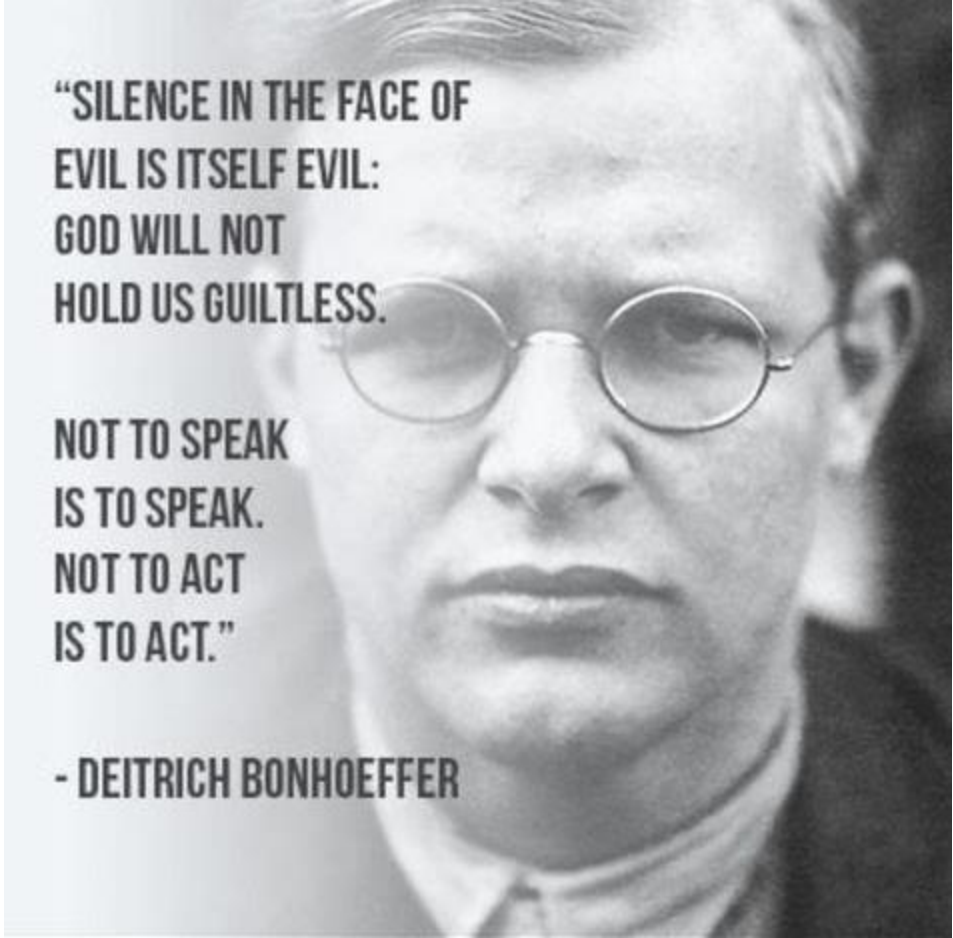
The Black Hawk Bridge will be torn down once the new bridge is completed in 2026. The Black Hawk Bridge spans the Mississippi River. It connects the town of Lansing in Allamakee County, Iowa, to Crawford County, Wisconsin. It is the northernmost Mississippi River bridge in Iowa.

According to Wikipedia, this riveted cantilever through truss bridge was constructed between 1929 and 1931. The designer and chief engineer was Melvin B. Stone. The McClintic-Marshall Company of Chicago erected the trusses. The steel came from the Inland Steel Company.

Originally a privately built and operated bridge owned by the Iowa-Wisconsin Bridge Company, it was closed between 1945 and 1957 due to damage from ice damming. Due to lack of funds to repair the bridge, the company went out of business. The States of Iowa and Wisconsin then acquired the bridge and repaired it.



Blackhawk Bridge viewed from Mount Hosmer, Lansing, Iowa.

A black and white portrait of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a man with short hair and round glasses, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt and a dark tie.

**"SILENCE IN THE FACE OF
EVIL IS ITSELF EVIL:
GOD WILL NOT
HOLD US GUILTLESS.**

**NOT TO SPEAK
IS TO SPEAK.
NOT TO ACT
IS TO ACT."**

- DEITRICH BONHOEFFER

