

# infoblatt

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*The mission of the German American Heritage  
Center is to preserve and enrich for present and  
future generations knowledge of the German  
immigrant experience and its impact on the  
American culture.*

## OUR PRESIDENT WRITES

### Dear members,

*Greetings GAHC Members!*

It was great to see the turnout at our annual 'Best of the Wurst' festival and our Fall Frolic. I would like to send a huge thank you to our donors, volunteers, vendors, and participants for supporting both of these events. I would encourage anyone who has not yet been to either event to give them a try next year.

I am excited as we enter into the upcoming holiday season. The GAHC staff has been working hard to come up with quality programming and preparing the gift shop. They have come up with many ways of making our programs, exhibits, and even the gift shop available to those who are comfortable for in-person participation and those who wish to participate virtually.

Take time during this holiday season to enjoy time with family and friends, but most importantly stay safe.

*Mit freundlichen Grüßen!*

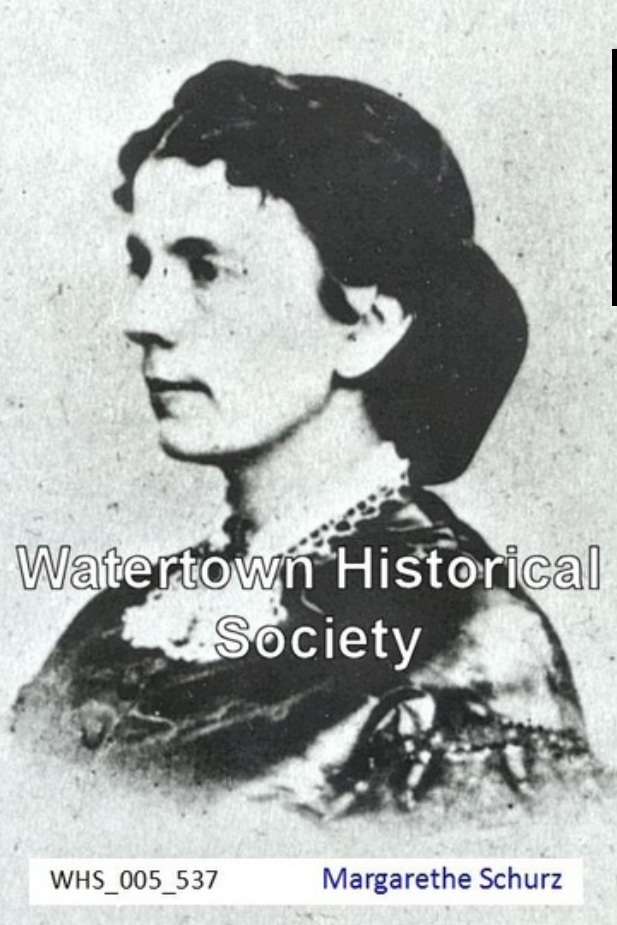
*Daniel Cabage*



*The cover image this quarter is of a donated image and certificate to our collection. The men in this image are part of a club in Germany circa the late 1800s. Courtesy of the German American Heritage Center & Museum archive.*

# dank der deutsche

## THANK A GERMAN!



WHS\_005\_537

Margarethe Schurz



America's First Kindergarten

### Margarethe Meyer Schurz

*Founder of the First Kindergarten in America*

In late August or early September this year, millions of young Americans began their career in public education by attending their first day of kindergarten. These children, and perhaps the majority of their parents, might be unaware that both the name of this important school year and its learning concepts were brought to the United States by the German immigrant Margarethe Meyer Schurz. The contribution is so significant that the name itself has been maintained in its German language form since 1854.

Margarethe Meyer was born the youngest of three daughters on August 27, 1833 in Hamburg. Her mother died a few hours after her birth; her father raised the girls in an atmosphere of culture and the arts. They attended lectures by child advocate Friedrich Froebel who created the "Kindergarten" concept. He encouraged the social education of young children learning together in small groups, focusing on games, songs, physical movement, and group activities. This was the basis for more formal education in primary school. At the time, schooling for all ages in Germany and America was largely based on memorization and progress was an individual achievement. Discipline was strict and students who did not excel in this environment were destined for short experiences in school settings. Kindergarten was designed to make a successful transition from the home environment to school, one that focused on the joy of learning and tapped the natural energy of young children.

Margarethe moved to London in 1851 to join her sister Berthe. She taught at the England Infant Garden founded by her sister and brother-in-law. She met her husband Carl Schurz in London where he had fled following the failed 1848 revolutions in Germany. They soon immigrated to the United States; settling first in New York and then in Watertown, Wisconsin, where they started a small farm.

Margarethe founded the first kindergarten in America in 1851 while caring for her daughter Agathe and four cousins who lived nearby. Other parents were impressed with the children's activities and asked Margarethe to teach their children as well. She moved the kindergarten from her living room to a downtown location in Watertown, where she operated it from 1854 to 1856. Classes were conducted in German. The Schurz family moved to Missouri and the school closed, but it was later incorporated into the public school system and operated until World War I, when sentiment against the German language led to its demise.

Margarethe was a faithful advocate for the Kindergarten philosophy, as well as a supportive political wife for her husband Carl. He became a strong defender of the Union cause, a friend to Abraham Lincoln, and a United States senator. She was the mother of four children, but died at age 43 in 1876, only three days after her son Herbert was born. The original kindergarten building in Watertown was restored in 1957 and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

# willkommen jessica!

Hi, my name is Jessica Gordon and I am the new Education and DEAI Coordinator here at the German American Heritage Center! I'm excited to be here, and even more so to get in touch with some of my German roots- hat tip to the Schaabs, the Hofmeisters and the Rupps.

I come to this position with a background in community organizing, specifically helping to make change for people with disabilities and kids of color. Most recently I spent some time working for political candidates and organizations doing a variety of work. My favorite job was helping

parents advocate for their kids with ADHD, Dyslexia and other issues.

I was raised in Walcott, then graduated from Davenport West High, then received a degree from the University of Northern Iowa. I'm married to Mark, who plays the drums and works at John Deere, and am the mom to three children, Aspen, Astrid and Anjuli. I used to spend a lot of time doing improv comedy, but the pandemic hit, so now I read a lot. A few of my most recent favorites are Salt to the Sea, The Murmur of Bees, The Yellow Bird Sings and The House in the Cerulean Sea.



*Jessica is helping the GAHC become more Diverse, Equitable, Accessible, and Inclusive as an institution.*

*Do you have an idea on how we can accomplish one of these goals? Please share it with us by emailing [jessica@gahc.org](mailto:jessica@gahc.org)!*

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# auf wiedersehen erika!



We are so sorry to say goodbye to our Assistant Director and Curator Erika Holshoe as she continues on her career path at the John Brown House Museum in her native Providence, Rhode Island. She will serve as director of the institution, a part of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

In her time at the GAHC, Erika brought in new and innovative speakers that represent a variety of perspectives and subject matter as well as created two beautiful exhibitions, which are still on display! She shared her love of German culture and history with our members through social media, including the popular "Pop Kultur Mondays." We are sad to lose her talent and creativity, but we know she will go on to achieve great things.

If you are in her neck of the woods, be sure to stop in for a "hallo!"

*Erika carefully places vases on loan from the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in the exhibition *Jugend: Art for All*. The exhibit is open now through February of 2022.*

# intern corner

## LYNN COLLARDIN REFLECTS ON HER VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP AT THE CENTER

Social media has become a staple of our lives, especially after the pandemic and virtual life. Before my internship at the GAHC, I scarcely thought of social media as a place to share knowledge and bond a community of people with similar interests. Through my posts, I learned how to bridge the gap between the visual and the written, creating a cohesive post that shared a fascinating new word or cultural fact. I've also found value in reflecting on how social media is social in the sense that we relate to our audience. How can everyone find some form of connection to each post? I hoped the quizzes and stories that accompanied my posts were a way to reach more people, representing a variety of social media presences. I am honored to be a part of this wonderful GAHC community, and I am forever grateful for the support I received!



*Lynn Collardin is a junior at Hunter College High School in New York City. Her interest in German culture and language was sparked by her own German heritage- her father is from Germany! Her love of all things German inspired her to create a blog dedicated to exploring German culture and history. Lynn has been interning with the German American Heritage Center this summer and her project has focused on our German Lesson of the Week and Deutscher Donnerstag social media campaigns, which teach our greater community about German language and culture.*

# legacy of leadership 2021

## JERRY & JULI NIEMAN RECEIVE TOP HONOR AT FALL FROLIC GALA

The German American Heritage Center & Museum is honored to name Jerry and Juli Nieman as the 2021 Legacy of Leadership award recipients. Jerry served as Board President from 2015-2020, helping the Center grow to experience some of our most successful years, celebrate our 25th anniversary in 2019, and survive the year 2020.

Jerry started on the board of directors in 2007. He has helped the Center with many building and grounds projects as well as rolled up his sleeves and worked on many projects himself! Jerry built storage shelves for the archives, created exhibit text stands for our *Who? What? Wear?* exhibit, and tore off the old carpet from the gallery walls on the first floor, allowing us to create an enhanced exhibition experience for visitors. When flood

waters lapped at the steps of the museum, Jerry was there filling sandbags to protect our investment, decades worth of work, and physical representation of our heritage. These are just a few examples among many. His work can be seen inside the Center in exhibits, inside the walls of the museum, and in the fact that our structure is standing tall at the foot of the Centennial Bridge still today. Jerry worked hard to make sure the GAHC was doing its best as a steward of our historic 1871 building. And we know Juli was there to help with the many hours it takes when helping a non-profit for over 15 years!

Jerry and Juli Nieman are members we have counted on for many years, and we are grateful for their leadership in leaving a legacy for future generations.

# cyndi's genealogy corner



This is part 10.5 of a recurring series in our Infoblatt. Part 10 can be found in the Summer 2021 issue. These letters were written by immigrants in America and mailed to the local newspapers in Probstei, printed in the Preetzer Zeitung and the Preetzer Wochenblatt from 1835-1852. Translated by Clara Mortiboy, Nick Pitz, and Scharlott Goettsch Blevins.

Printed in "Preetzer Wochenblatt", issue Nr. 12 Sunday 20 March 1847

Letter of the Holsteiner from North America  
Moline, on 1 Jan, 1847. *continued*

Now I want to describe for you farming by American farmers. First, when they have bought the land, the land is somewhat broken and then seed corn is planted in rows like potatoes. Afterwards this is cultivated like potatoes, and then when it has been plowed for the last time, then another seed is sown which one calls alfalfa. These plants keep the land pure when they are used properly. They grow so big that they weigh 20 pounds and are used to feed the cattle which they gladly eat. The Welch corn grows 10 to 12 feet and benefits the farmer greatly. If the Welch corn becomes ripe, it is cut down and bundled together. Then the wheat is sown on top of it without having the land plowed, only gone over a little bit with a disc and then it grows. They even sow a seed on a plot of land 7 times, and it always grows well as I have heard. Also in the fall no land is cleared of stubble but rather it's no sooner plowed under then it is sown. The crops are Welch corn, wheat, barley, oats, buckwheat, peas, beans. Rye is only seldom eaten because here it's always wheat bread.

The raising of cattle is done the most; everything that one has in terms of foals, calves and lambs, they remain alive (not slaughtered). Pigs are raised to a great extent, and I have not met anyone who didn't have 20, 30, 50, or even 100 pigs. The cattle costs little to feed here, that all happens on the open prairie as well as the pigs and the horses and the cows, oxen and sheep. The steer is somewhat stronger than yours, the oxen are as large as a horse. The horses are of English descent, handsome and slimly built. The price for the horses varies just like at home. It can climb anywhere from \$25 to \$60. The cows cost \$10 to \$12. The calf however, which is born in that year

belongs to the cow. A pig before it is fat, about 150lbs, one can buy here for \$1. The cattle here are not expensive. The steer doesn't come into the stall for the entire winter. It always has to run around and is fed at the house. Pigs kind of run around on the roads; horses come for a little time in the stall but not all of them.

The winter here is as strong as your winter; we already have had two months of frost. So strong that in the mornings the windows were frosted over, most of the time there is snow with the frost. The climate is similar to yours. This summer it has been pretty hot, which has not been the case for a long time; therefore, we often had fevers here which were very common but not serious. We all had the fever, not one of us escaped; it was however easy to get rid of, in 8 to 14 days we were all healthy again.

Now something about the farmers and the necessary inventories. Above all here is what the farmers must have: first eighty acres of land which cost \$100, a house which costs almost as much as the land, but it can however be built for less. A house here can be easily built; for \$100 one has a relatively good house and that is possible because the wood here is very cheap. So it is entirely made of wood as well as the roof and the walls; the roof consists of shingles just as you would find on your church. The foundation: first floor boards and every two feet along the floorboards is a stud; outside narrow boards are nailed on to the studs which are one inch thick and about 5 to 6 inches wide. In between rough stones are walled in and then covered over with plaster. The floor is made out of boards and also from clay; that is approximately how it is constructed. They do not need a barn and stalls; the grain is either transported on the land where it has grown or put into piles by

the house, just like the hay. That grows here so much that not even one 1/1,000 is used; this same grain is burned in the winter when it is dry so that in the spring new growth can come again.

Two horses, two to three cows, one sow in order to raise the pigs, that is the livestock that is first needed. Many have oxen instead of horses because the oxen are cheaper than the horses, and their means do not stretch as far that they can afford horses. It is also easy to work with oxen but much slower than with horses. A wagon costs about \$50 to \$60, a plow and a disc cost about \$8 to \$9, and the harness for two horses costs also \$8 to \$9. The seed here is very different according to the price and how much one wants to use.

It is also not easy to determine the amount of groceries in a household, it depends on the price of groceries and how big a family is. If one were to travel to St. Louis or Chicago to buy a horse harness and wagon he can save himself something because here in these two cities it is cheaper to buy it. It consists in the fact that both of these cities are in the older states and that much more is in these older states than in our new state (Iowa). In these two cities one can buy a pair of horses, wagon and harness for \$100 and travel well with it. Who therefore has \$400 to \$500 when he arrives here, he can without any worry live on his own farm. Expenses are quite small, \$1 to \$2 and two days each year for hired workers. That is all that a farmer needs to pay for. The roads are fairly good, wagons don't sink into them easily. They have a width of 70 feet and go in a straight direction. Also the trains are operating which are supposed to go through our state. Then trade will be better which is already pretty good even though our cities are small. Many farmers themselves travel with their products on steamships down to St. Louis to the large world market in order to sell them there for more money. This year is a good year for new arrivals because the groceries are very cheap. I have already mentioned what flour, bacon and beef costs; butter costs 12 ½ cents, cheese 7 and 8 cents, wool 20 cents, coffee and sugar 10 cents – prices per pound. This is the price for things that I know.

Therefore a tradesman who has any means for the trip could do no better than to come here because

here the advancement for a tradesman is ten times easier here than it is in Germany. For him who has so much money when he comes here, he does not have to first earn here and has a big advantage over the others who first must earn money here. Each person must work for himself because keeping a servant or a day laborer costs too much. The farmer has nothing to do over the winter other than to supply firewood for himself and during the rest of the time he travels with his wife on visits to the neighbors. And so he passes all the day like this; he leads a free and satisfied life. If one comes into an American's home, he is quite friendly and polite, and quite welcoming; right away one goes with him to the table and will be given the best service. As rough and uneducated as the American is thought of there, he is just as friendly and humble.

Therefore, I say to you, you dear Laböers, if it should be the case that some of you would have a desire to come over here, you would have nothing to fear here in this country. The sea sickness is also not dangerous. We didn't have the slightest fear on the trip. I'm not writing this letter in order to entice you here to sugar coat things, but rather this must be each person's free choice. And those whose free choice it is to come here will also see easily when they are here a short time that they have not made a mistake. So I now close with you, you dear Laböers with my letter this time and wish you once more God's blessings.

*Der hat auch das verfloss'nt Jahr  
Mich väterlich geleitet,  
Und als mein Herz voll Sorge war  
Mir Hulf und Trost bereitet.  
Von ganzer Seele preis' ich Dich,  
Auf's Neue Gott ergeb' ich mich  
Ganz Deiner weisen Führung.*

(poem translated as follows:

He has also led me like a Father the past year  
And when my heart was full of worry,  
His help and trust prepared me.  
With my whole soul I worship you.  
God, you have given me something new  
entirely due to your wise guidance.)

Written on New Year's Day.  
A Vieths.

# potosi, wisconsin bus trip

TRAVEL WITH GAHC AND SCHPS ON OCTOBER 12!

Visit the National Brewing Museum. Enjoy a delicious meal and taste the brewery's finest as we tour the museum and collection!



**Limited space available in this special day excursion! Call the GAHC to reserve your spot today!**

\$55 Members and \$60 Non-members  
Advance payment and registration required!  
9:00am departure from GAHC  
5:00pm arrival back at GAHC

## **POTOSI IS BEER'S HOMETOWN!**

Join the German American Heritage Center and Museum and the Scott County Historic Preservation Society on this exciting trip up north.

We will meet at the GAHC and take a chartered bus to Potosi. Members and friends will enjoy camaraderie and a delicious meal complete with samples of beer and root beer! We will be treated to a special tour of the extensive collection of the museum.

The National Brewing Museum is a joint venture between the Potosi Foundation and the American Breweriana Association. These two organizations have teamed up to create a world class national brewery museum showcasing a collection of beer bottles and cans, glasses, trays, coasters, advertising materials and other items relating to breweriana collectibles.

The town of Potosi was selected over cities such as Milwaukee and St. Louis because of the community's passion for beer, brewery history and beer-making culture!

Founded in 1852 by Gabriel Hail and John Albrecht, the Potosi Brewery had humble roots, quenching the thirsts of area farmers, fishermen and miners. It was much like hundreds of others across the state that had a low profile before the invention of refrigeration.

In 1886, Adam Schumaker bought the building and by 1906, he and his brothers ran the Potosi Brewing Company. They survived Prohibition and became the fifth-largest brewery in the state. The brewery was the main employer in this part of the state for more than a century, but was shuttered in 1972.

The buildings were put on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, but sat empty until 1995, when local artist and woodworker Gary David and his cousin Denis David bought them.

Following a \$7.5 million restoration, the Potosi Brewery Foundation reopened the brewery in 2008.



### *A Special Treat!*

Joining us on this trip are Davenport's own Merle Vastine, a Davenport Beer and Brewing aficionado as well as board member at the National Brewing Museum, SCHPS President Judy Belfer, and GAHC's own director Kelly Lao. These three will delight in sharing their favorite parts of the museum's history and collection



# the great chicago fire of 1871

## HOW DID GERMAN IMMIGRANTS FARE?

This fall will mark the 150th anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire. Flames first burst out in a shed owned by Patrick and Catherine O'Leary around 9:00 p.m. on October 8, 1871. A lead article in the Chicago Evening Journal the next day blamed Mrs. O'Leary for the disaster, asserting she had carelessly knocked over a lantern while milking her cow. The reporter later conceded he had fabricated the origin story, but the location was confirmed. The fire raged to the evening of October 9. The intensity of the destruction in a world famous city captured headlines around the globe, and millions followed the fire story and its aftermath for weeks.

A total of 120 bodies were removed from the ruins, the death toll was likely 300 fatalities as many were never found. A swath of blackened ruins ran four miles long and one mile wide, resulting in 17,500 buildings lost, 73 miles of street destroyed, 2,000 lamp posts gone and an estimated \$222 million in property damage. One out of three Chicago residents - nearly 100,000 people - were left homeless and often destitute. Many victims were immigrants and from the working class. At the time German immigrants comprised 20% of the city's population, Irish immigrants were 13%.



Great Chicago Fire, 1871,  
Image courtesy of WTTW Chicago

Did you know? The Great Chicago Fire was not the largest fire in American history. On the very same day in 1871, the small town of Peshtigo, Wisconsin went up in flames, killing up to 2,500 people and torching 1.5 million acres. It was published in the press, but because the telegraph wires to Green Bay were burned, the disaster's scope took longer to report and the drama of the Chicago fire completely captured and held national and international attention.



Chicago German Church 1871,  
image courtesy of the Getty



Remains of a German Church 1871,  
image courtesy of the Getty

Several factors caused the fire to become a conflagration. There had been only one inch of rain since July 1 of that year. Two-thirds of buildings in the city, both commercial and residential, were made of wood and had highly flammable tar roofs or tar shingles. Nearly all the sidewalks and many of the streets were made of wood planks. Winds picked up to 30 miles an hour, the cool air off Lake Michigan combined with high spikes of hot flame vapor to create "fire whirls," which shot streams of spark and flame for far distances. One burning timber burst through the roof of the city's waterworks, rendering it useless. Along the lake shore, many industrial or factory sites had large piles of flammable waste which

continued from page 9

city officials had indifferently tolerated for decades.

As if those factors weren't enough, the fire outposts sent a crew to the wrong address at first, and when they finally arrived at the correct street, the fire was already out of control. The firefighters were volunteers with inadequate equipment for such a big city. The city had only 17 pumper trucks. *What could go wrong, did go wrong, and in the worst way.*

The fire crossed the river twice, sending tens of thousands streaming over bridges to escape the flames. A major portion of the downtown civic and retail core was totally destroyed, and much of the Near North Side along the lakefront also burned to the ground. Some victims spent the night in Lincoln Park, which was formerly a cemetery. The city had begun to remove graves to a new site beyond city limits, and some panicked victims jumped into the vacated plots for protection. In the end, the fire burned itself out in this less populated area and rain began to fall on the evening of October 9, putting a steamy, smoky end to the destruction.

The fire was the first catastrophic event to be reported internationally by telegraph. Telegraph lines had largely connected America, and the first European wires were finished in 1866. In a matter of hours, donations of all kinds began to pour into the city. Financial help was sent from all across the United States. The German cities of Berlin, Frankfurt and Basel in Switzerland sent funds. The King of Prussia pledged monetary support.

But the city had to hurry to help the homeless, for winter was coming. Reports of looting and lawlessness caused a two-week period of martial law supervised by Civil War hero Phillip Sheridan and US troops. The Chicago Relief and Aid Society was distributing bread and meat to tens of thousands within a week of the fire. The agency developed a formula for a week's rations for a family of two adults and three children:

- 3 lbs. pork, at 5½ cents
- 6 lbs. preserved beef, at 5 cents
- 14 lbs. flour, at 3 cents
- 1¼ peck potatoes, at 20 cents
- ¼ lb. tea, at 80 cents
- 1½ lbs. sugar, at 11 cents
- 1¼ lbs. rice, at 8 cents OR 3½ lbs. beans, at 3¾ cents
- 1¼ lbs. soap, at 7 cents
- 1½ lbs. dried apples, at 8 cents
- 3 lbs. fresh beef, at 5 cents

Total: \$1.98

Complaints from victims were frequent and sharp. The aid workers often based their help on suspicion of need, and they lacked any translators for non-English speakers. "There will be no wishy-washy sentiment and rascals will have no mercy shown them." Applicants had to fill out lengthy forms detailing their situation and losses, and provide references from pastors or otherwise reliable sources. Finally, they had to pass a personal inspection by an aid worker. For many immigrants, these were impossible barriers. If one member of a household still had work, that was deemed sufficient to keep the entire family going, regardless of size or circumstances. Hundreds if not thousands of the homeless were fed and housed by family members and friends. Countless charities tried to help with food, clothing, shelter, and jobs.

A total of four clusters of wooden barracks were erected for the homeless for about 1,000 families. Residents were allocated two rooms furnished with a stove, utensils, chairs, a table, crockery, beds and bedding. Some barracks were soundly made, others were made with poor materials and had flooring with such wide cracks that the winter's cold crept upon the residents. In time the Relief Shelter Committee provided plans and materials for skilled workers to rebuild their own houses, using plans for houses no larger than 16 x 20 feet. Among the unfortunate victims were those who had purchased fire insurance but lost all proof of same in the fire.

Rebuilding the city moved surprisingly fast. Most of the railroad was intact and the city was still served by boat traffic from the Great Lakes, so supplies were plentiful. The city adopted a new and stricter fire code and limited the use of wood in new buildings. A professional firefighter system was established with better equipment and warning systems. By 1893 the city welcomed over 27,300,000 visitors to the World's Columbian Exposition, built at Jackson Park, itself a dumping ground for tons of burnt ruins from the fire.

And Mrs. O'Leary? She denied any fault at the investigation of the fire in 1872, but the legend and lore persisted. In 1997 the City of Chicago formally exonerated her from any blame. The site of the O'Leary's shed became the city's firefighting training facility and academy in 1961, and the floor has a marker on the exact spot where the Great Chicago Fire began in 1871.

# highlights from the collection

A RICH AND DEEP HISTORY FROM THIS SEWING CHEST



Images of the desk in our collection.

One of our archivist Gloria Fiedler's favorite pieces in the collection here at the GAHC is this sewing chest that was donated by Tom and Nancy Johnson after his mother Katherine passed away.

The family held this sewing chest in their possession as it was Katherine's great-grandfather who was the cabinet maker who designed and constructed the beautiful piece.

In 1859, Carl Gustav Frisk was born in Sweden. He was the son of a bookkeeper and when he turned 18, he was conscripted for service in the military. Since Carl was a pacifist, he refused. He changed his last name to Lundeen and moved to Berlin, Germany.

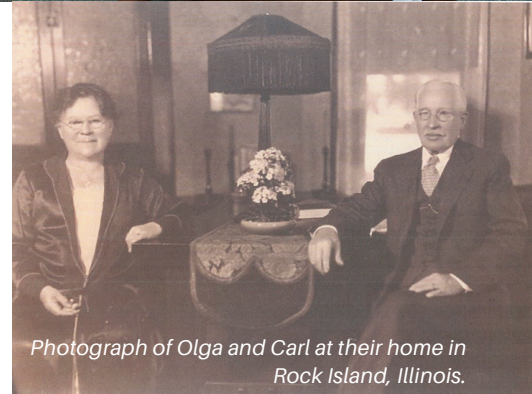
It was here that he learned the cabinet-making trade. For his final project in his course, he made a sewing cabinet that was purchased by Kaiser Wilhelm for his "betrothed" Augusta Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein!

Carl graduated from the school in 1885 and soon married Olga Hengstbach, a governess in Berlin. For Carl's betrothal gift, he made Olga a slightly smaller version of the same sewing chest that Kaiser Wilhelm had purchased. Carl presented Olga the chest and they were married in 1890.

The couple had a child in Berlin before immigrating to the US in 1893. Eventually Carl and Olga settled in Rock Island, Illinois where they raised their son Curt.

The chest appears to be sitting atop a small table, but it is one piece. It is made of several types of wood with small inlay surrounding the interior mirror. Many compartments house the sewing implements. A pincushion can be hidden from sight if desired.

The chest top is labeled *Andenken* which can be translated as "souvenir," "memory," "keepsake," or "remembrance."



Photograph of Olga and Carl at their home in Rock Island, Illinois.



Photograph of Olga and Carl and granddaughter Mary in Rock Island.

# memorial

## DON OCKELMANN IS REMEMBERED BY THE DAVENPORT ZITHER ENSEMBLE

With deep sorrow I share with the Heritage Center members word that Donald Ockelmann, original director of the Davenport Zither Ensemble (DZE) at the German American Heritage Center, passed away on 1 September 2021. From 2002 until just before GAHC closed down because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Don was certainly one of the most frequent "visitors" to the Center as he met with the zither ensemble almost every Saturday morning from 10:00 to noon for close to eighteen years.

In some ways, Don was our own Harold Hill, the Music Man, but the reformed Hill of later in the story rather than the flim-flam Hill who came to town hoping to get rich selling fraudulent musical instruments. Our music man had fallen in love with the sound of the zither - the Alpine piano - while visiting Vienna early in his music career. He so loved the sound and had such desire to recreate the music on his return to the United States that he commissioned the creation of a zither by the world famous Meisl zither family. Back in Davenport, Don would drive down to Blue Grass, Iowa on Saturday nights and sit in at Carl Schurr's tavern, listening to Carl play his zither for himself and his customers. Don learned the basics in Blue Grass but did not have much opportunity to move beyond that in our area.

Then came the German American Heritage Center's program committee which in April, 2002, invited Janet and Lou Stessl of the Chicago Zither Club to perform at the Center back when everything we did was on the first floor (exhibits, shop, programs, meetings). After the standing-room-only audience listened to a mesmerizing performance, the question was put to them, "Would anyone be interested in forming a zither group at the German American Heritage Center?" Don Ockelmann, Katherine Bodenbender, Bonnie Walling, and I responded in the affirmative, and together with Harvey Prinz on hackbrett (hammered dulcimer), the Davenport Zither Ensemble was born. The Stessls returned several times to help us get started, but it quickly became apparent that in Don Ockelmann, we had the skilled practitioner and driving force we would need to learn the instrument and begin creating music similar to that created by the original Davenport Zither Club from well over 100 years before.

For those of us who played in the Ensemble, Don Ockelmann represented the best of music direction. His years as a professional music educator (44 years in schools near and far) prepared him to nurture zither players - from rank beginners, like Susan Harnung and me, to more

accomplished players, like Katherine Bodenbender - and bring their collective skills together to create beautiful if not always perfect zither music.

Over the years, Don welcomed new members totaling twenty-one individuals working with zithers and an additional twelve or more on hackbrett, guitar, double-bass, psaltry, autoharp and voice - all instruments that added dimension to the sound of zithers. At its peak in the early 2010s, the DZE was the largest active zither ensemble in the United States. Quite an accomplishment for a "retired" music teacher from Davenport.

Don selected and arranged music that would fit the playing ability of the musicians as well as provide a pleasant listening experience for those who attended the twice-yearly concerts by the DZE at the Center or other local venues. Regardless of the complexity of the music, Don wanted the players to have fun and the audience to enjoy Hausmusik...music that might be shared by friends gathering in a pleasant room with an open hearth and a glass of his or her preferred beverage at hand. The beauty of Don's direction for the members of the Ensemble was his humane yet steady pressure for the group to perform ever more challenging pieces without feeling defeated by the complexity of fingering or phrasing.

*continues on page 13*

continued from page 12

Don also realized that adding other musical voices would enhance our ensemble so that over the years, the DZE performed with the world-class harmonica playing of Richard Krueger, the sounds of harp strings with James Van Speybroeck, and beautiful vocalization from Nancy Burgess singing in duet with our own Anne Prinz. For many Christmases, the DZE was joined by bell choirs from a variety of local churches. We all shared in the Hausmusik. The focus was never on Don or on Don's zither group but always on the music and joy it brought to both the players and those who enjoyed the concerts.

Thanks to the tech savvy of Harvey Prinz and later his daughter Anne (zitherist & vocalist), many of the performances by the DZE were recorded and burned to CD. Don's son Kurt recorded video of several concerts, selections of which can

be viewed on YouTube. These recordings are testament to the lasting impact Don Ockelmann had on the local music scene and the revival of zither music in the Quad Cities.

Four years ago, Don decided that he could no longer carry the burden of direction for the group, yet he wished to continue to play his zither and add to the collective sound of the DZE. Alice Spencer ably stepped forward to direct the ensemble and was the first to say that she continued to depend on ideas, suggestions, and direction from Don. Over the years the DZE has lost members to death and relocation. The DZE stopped practicing altogether when COVID-19 closed the Center for months. The remaining members have sadly agreed to disband, due to health issues and the loss of Don.

A bright spot for zither in the U.S. is

the relocation of Anne Prinz to the St. Louis area for a career move but which also allows her to continue to nurture the young but growing Schwarzer Zither Ensemble of Washington, Missouri. The group was formed in part because of efforts by Richard Krueger, Anne Prinz, and Alice Spencer several years ago. Without Don Ockelmann, there would probably have been no DZE. Without the DZE, Anne Prinz and Alice Spencer would probably not have taken up the zither. Without Anne Prinz, it is hard to say if Washington, Missouri would be hosting its own thriving zither ensemble.

This is part of the legacy of the GAHC's own Music Man.

Thank you, Don.

*Contributed by Michael Hustedde*

# davenport zither ensemble

UNDER DIRECTION OF DON OCKELMANN - HARFENZITHER

Marilyn Arvidson - Konzertzither  
Jerry Arvidson - Konzertzither  
Schar Blevins - Konzertzither  
Katherine Bodenbender - Luftresonanz Zither  
Jacqueline Franklin - Konzertzither  
Bess Frerichs - Zither  
Brian Greene - Konzertzither  
Susan Harnung - Luftresonanz Zither  
Esther Hicks - Konzertzither  
Ron Hillis - Zither, Guitar, Mandolin  
Michael Hustedde - Harfenzither  
Richard Krueger - Konzertzither & Harmonica  
Anne L. Prinz - Harfen & Alt Zither & Vocalist  
Cheryl Schroeder - Konzertzither  
Krissie Shiroma - Konzertzither  
Jennifer Smith - Konzertzither & Bass  
Alice Spencer - Harfen & Quint Zither  
Debra Story - Harfenzither

Hal Story - Harfenzither  
Bonnie Walling - Luftresonanz Zither  
Barbara Weber - Luftresonanz Zither

## *Other Instrumentalists*

Lucas Berns - Double Bass  
Nancy Burgess - Vocalist  
Phyllis Dobbins - Autoharp  
Linda Dowd - Guitar  
Danielle Harris - Bass  
Larry R. Johnston - Psaltry  
Mary McAndrew - Bass & Autoharp  
Harvey Prinz - Hackbrett/Hammered Dulcimer  
Lyle Stratton - Guitar  
Anita Sundin - Autoharp  
Matt Trimble - Double Bass  
James Van Speybroeck - Harp

# memberships & memorials

JULY 1-SEPTEMBER 21

## WILLKOMMEN AN BORD

Curry, Russell	Coralville, IA
Klemme, Donetta	Eldridge, IA
Koski, Ann L	Rock Island, IL
Mahoney, Molly A	Bettendorf, IA
Ohley, George	Davenport, IA

## MEMORIALS

### WAYNE HOLST

Reeg, Stan & Betty

### DONALD OCKELMANN

Brown-Lowe, Janet and Jerry Lowe  
Dunsworth, Ira and Dolly

## o tannenbaum!



There is little doubt that the German speaking lands of Europe were the first to adapt fir or pine trees in their Christmas celebrations. In 1521 the small town of Schlettstadt near Strasbourg, now in France, is credited with the first municipal trees. The town fathers paid a two shilling fee to the city forester for the right to cut trees for their celebration. By the 1700s German settlers brought the custom of decorated trees to America, but most were still sponsored by clubs, societies, and taverns. In 1747 German settlers in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania constructed wooden pyramids festooned with "greenwood, and decorated with candles, apples and pretty verses." Hessian soldiers displayed decorated trees during the Revolutionary War, and soldiers at Fort Dearborn had jolly trees in their barracks in 1804.

The custom of putting up a tree inside homes spread slowly throughout the 19th century, gaining popularity wherever

German immigrants predominated. Still, this was a matter of preference. Some Americans viewed Christmas trees as undignified or sacrilegious. The city of Williamsburg, Virginia decorated a tree in 1842 which inspired many in the region. By 1851 the first retail lot to sell trees started in New York City. President Pierce (1853-1857) was the first to put up a Christmas tree in the White House. Not all presidents who followed kept the custom; it was generally done when presidents had young children. By the late 1800s a lighted tree in the White House became a standard fixture.

And yet... Theodore Roosevelt, who had six children in the White House, did not always have a Christmas tree. There is no clear historical record to offer an explanation. Some speculate that the conservation-minded Roosevelt objected to cutting down trees for such a temporary and frivolous purpose. Others point to the busy and boisterous

atmosphere of six children and numerous pets, plus the pressure of seeing to other decorations was reason enough for the Roosevelts to forego a tree. They did hang stockings every year and in 1903 young Quentin Roosevelt crafted a tree with help from the groundskeeper. He revealed it to his parents and siblings on Christmas to everyone's delight.

The German origins of the Christmas tree have only been strengthened over the years by the famous "O Tannenbaum" carol which also came from Germany. The song was composed by Ernst Anschütz in Leipzig in 1824. Its original lyrics were based on a 15th century love poem about a faithless maiden. In contrast, the fir tree is a symbol of faith and constancy, always green, always true. None of the song verses in German make a specific reference to Christmas, but in time the music and the tree have become inseparable, whether sung in German or in English.

# kalender of events

10

oct.

## SAT 2ND. OKTOBERFEST QC

1-10pm. Admission Free 1-5pm-  
after 5pm \$10 in Advance, \$15 at  
door. 12 & under free. Vintage  
football at 1, music from 5-10 at the  
Hauberg Estate, Rock Island.  
Tickets at eventbrite.com

## SUN 3RD. RADICAL WARRIOR:

August Willich's Journey from  
German Revolutionary to Union  
General. **2-3pm In-person book  
signing with David T. Dixon.** Free  
with Admission

## TUES 12TH. BUS TRIP: POTOSI BREWERY & NATIONAL

**BREWING MUSEUM** Potosi, Wi.  
9am depart from GAHC, 5pm  
return. \$55 members, \$60 non-  
members. Meal at the brewery and  
special tour of the museum.  
Preregistration required.

## SUN 24TH. I AM BAPTIZED: Martin Luther & Birthplace Eisleben. **2pm Virtual lecture with Russell**

**Baldner.** Free members, \$5 non-  
members. Register at  
eventbrite.com

### ONLY IN OCTOBER!

#### HAUNTED WALKING TOURS.

Guided Spooky walk through  
historic downtown! \$10 per  
person. Dates, times, &  
registration on Eventbrite!

11

nov.

## SUN 7TH. THE CONSERVATION

**OF PAINTINGS:** Historical and  
Technical Discoveries. **2pm Virtual  
lecture with Barry Bauman.** \$5  
Partnership with the Figge Museum  
Register at figgeartmuseum.org

**FRI 12TH. KINOGARTEN: M. FRITZ  
LANG 1931.** 8pm or sundown. Free  
outdoor film screening at Rozz Tox.

## SUN 14TH. SOLVING THE

**CRANACH MYSTERY** Surrounding  
the Portraits of Martin Luther and  
Katharina von Bora. **2pm Virtual  
lecture with Barry Bauman.** \$5  
Partnership with Figge Museum  
Register at figgeartmuseum.org

## WED 17TH. A CONVERSATION WITH RUSSELL CURRY

(reschedule) **2pm Virtual interview  
session with Russell Curry,** of  
Curious Music. Free for Members, \$5  
Non-member. Register at  
eventbrite.com

## FRI 19TH. AN INTERNATIONAL TOUR OF ART NOUVEAU

(rescheduled) **2pm Virtual lecture  
with Dr. Terri Switzer.** Free for  
Members, \$5 Non-member.  
Register at eventbrite.com

## SAT 20TH. GAHC BOOK CLUB

10:30am. Visit [gahc.org/gahc-book-  
discussion](http://gahc.org/gahc-book-discussion) for the full calendar!

12

dec.

## 3RD/4TH/5TH.

**CHRISTKINDLMARKT QUAD  
CITIES.** Many vendors, live music  
and food at the Freight House  
Farmers Market. More at  
[christkindlmarktquadcities.com](http://christkindlmarktquadcities.com)

## 3RD. KINOGARTEN: ER IST

**WIEDER DA.** DAVID WNENDT  
2015. 8pm or sundown. Free  
outdoor film screening at Rozz Tox.

## SAT 11TH. WEIHNACHTS

**KAFFEE UND KUCHEN** at  
Schützenpark 2:00-4:00 A new  
tradition begins this year! Live  
Zither music, sing-a-long of  
traditional German songs,  
homemade cakes, cookies, and  
more. Inside the newly-renovated  
Jens Lorenzen Pavilion with warm  
wooden stove.  
Zither performance by Anne Prinz  
and Karen Hinnah, members of the  
Schwarzer Zither Ensemble.  
Donations accepted. For more info:  
[Schuetzenpark@yahoo.com](mailto:Schuetzenpark@yahoo.com)

### SHOP OUR GIFT SHOP!

**POP UP VENDORS** throughout  
the holiday season in the GAHC  
gift shop! Watch our emails and  
social media to find out about  
our Featured Pop Up Vendors  
from our usually held  
Christkindlmarkt Craft Fair!



On this special day where we pause and remember the immigrant ancestors that came before us and paved a brighter future for their kin, despite the hardships and struggles of their times, we ask you to consider a financial investment in the Center that shares their stories in our community, region, country, and abroad.

The German American Heritage Center & Museum is dedicated to preserving and enriching for present and future generations knowledge of the German immigrant experience and its impact on American Culture.

Just like our ancestors, recent and past, we have faced our share of hard times and good. Help the Center build on the momentum we have created in the community with an end of year gift. Members of the Center will receive a request in the mail and through email. If you would like to remember a relative or ancestor with your gift, designate your message in our German American Stories collection attached to this letter and it will be shared with our friends on social media during German Heritage Month!

Thank you for your memories and bringing these stories to our future friends and family.