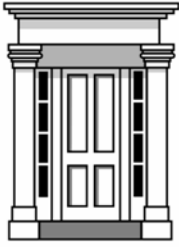


SHEBOYGAN COUNTY



HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
CENTER

The Researcher

The Newsletter of the Sheboygan County
Historical Research Center

Volume XXIV Number 6 August 2014

Symbolism and Beauty in Cemeteries



People who bury their dead say as much about themselves as the ones who have died. Gravestones are excellent sources of dates, birthplaces, maiden names, spouses' names and parents' names. And they are beautiful works of art.

Other than a few records and documents and, perhaps, some family jewelry or heirlooms, your ancestor's tombstone is the only physical evidence of the life they lived. There is nothing in your genealogical research that will connect you to your ancestor more than to stand in the one place on earth which contains their mortal remains and to see important pieces of their life carved into stone. It is an amazing, awe-inspiring experience.

Above is a rare altar-style grave stone at Our Lady of Angels Cemetery in the town of Osceola. It is a solid, rectangular, raised tomb or grave marker resembling ceremonial altars of classical antiquity and Judeo-Christian ritual. At left are two elaborate stones found in Calvary Cemetery in Sheboygan.

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The Sheboygan County Historical Research Center is located at 518 Water Street in Sheboygan Falls.

Open Tuesday through Friday, 9:00am – 4:00pm and Saturdays from 8:30am to 12:00 noon.

Closed Saturday, August 30, 2014 for Labor Day.

Phone: 920-467-4667

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The Researcher is the official newsletter of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin.

It is published six times per year in August, October, December, February, April and June.

The Research Center is the local history archive for Sheboygan County and areas surrounding the county. It is a repository for paper records of all kinds.

The Research Center is a sister organization to the Sheboygan County Historical Society and Museum which collects the artifacts of the county.

If you file it, it comes to the Research Center. If you dust it, it goes to the museum.

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SCHRC NEWS

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Catch us on Facebook— Updates weekly.

Wish List - Toilet paper, Lysol wipes, unscented hand soap, paper towels.

SCHRC Closure - The Research Center will be closed Friday, October 24 and Saturday, October 25, 2014 for the Wisconsin Historical Society's Annual Meeting which will be held at the Osthoff in Elkhart Lake. Staff members will be presenting and attending this great local history event right in our backyard.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

All programs take place at The Plymouth Art Center, 520 East Mill Street, Plymouth.
9:30am to 11:30am

SECOND SATURDAYS

September 13, 2014 - **Pabst Mansion and Frederick Layton and The Great 19th Century Art Patron of Milwaukee** with John Eastberg

When Captain Frederick Pabst, Milwaukee's famed beer baron, began construction of a new mansion for his family in 1890, he could not have anticipated that it would survive and thrive into the twenty-first century as a testament to America's Gilded Age. Designed by George Bowman Ferry and Alfred Charles Clas, construction at 2000 Grand Avenue lasted two years and was completed in July of 1892 at a cost of just over \$254,000 -- including the house, furnishings and artwork. John is the Pabst Mansion historian and a fantastic presenter.

Frederick Layton - A wealthy businessman, Frederick Layton can be regarded as Wisconsin's earliest and most influential art patron. In 1887, he established the Layton Art Gallery, initially built to house his collection of fine painting and sculpture. This also housed the eponymous School of Art whose legacy is seen today in the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. The Layton Art Gallery also acted as the catalyst for the eventual creation of the Milwaukee Art Center and later the Milwaukee Art Museum.

October 11, 2014 - **Immigration Today and Yesterday** with Michael Jacobs
It might be said that the United States was built by immigrants, people who left their homelands looking to build a better life. This presentation by Mike Jacobs will deal with immigration and how we got here? It will deal with all the problems of the immigrants and the issues the established residents had/have with new residents. It should be a very interesting morning.

November 8, 2014 - **Barns of Wisconsin** with Jerry Apps
Jerry Apps, award-winning author, shares a unique perspective on the great barns of rural Wisconsin. Digging deep as both an enthusiast and a farmer, Apps reaps a story of change: from the earliest pioneer structures to the low steel buildings of modern dairy farms, barns have adapted to meet the needs of each generation. They've housed wheat, tobacco, potatoes, and dairy cows, and they display the optimism, ingenuity, hard work, and practicality of the people who tend land and livestock.

Continued on page 3

December 13, 2014 - **Life, Death and Archaeology at Fort Blue Mounds** with Bob Birmingham

Life, Death, and Archaeology at Fort Blue Mounds is an archaeological detective story illuminating the lives of white settlers in the lead-mining region during the tragic events of the historically important conflict known as the Black Hawk War. Focusing on the strategically located Fort Blue Mounds in southwestern Wisconsin, Robert A. Birmingham summarizes the 1832 conflict and details the history of the fort, which played a major role not only in US military and militia operations but also in the lives of the white settlers who sought refuge there. Birmingham then transports us to the site decades later, when he and fellow Wisconsin Historical Society archaeologists and dedicated volunteers began their search for the fort. The artifacts they unearthed provide fascinating - and sometimes surprising - insights into the life, material culture, and even the food of the frontier.

January 10, 2015 - **The Life of Increase Lapham, Wisconsin's First Science Superstar** with Martha Bergland and Paul Hayes. The Life of Increase Lapham, early chronicler of plants, rocks, rivers, mounds and all things Wisconsin.

In this long overdue tribute to Wisconsin's first scientist, authors Martha Bergland and Paul G. Hayes explore the remarkable life and achievements of Increase Lapham (1811-1875). Lapham's ability to observe, understand, and meticulously catalog the natural world marked all of his work, from his days as a teenage surveyor on the Erie Canal to his last great contribution as state geologist. Self-taught, Lapham mastered botany, geology, archaeology, limnology, mineralogy, engineering, meteorology, and cartography. A prolific writer, his 1844 guide to the territory was the first book published in Wisconsin. Asked late in life which field of science was his specialty, he replied simply, "I am studying Wisconsin." Lapham identified and preserved thousands of botanical specimens. He surveyed and mapped Wisconsin's effigy mounds. He was a force behind the creation of the National Weather Service, lobbying for a storm warning system to protect Great Lakes sailors. Told in compelling detail through Lapham's letters, journals, books, and articles, Studying Wisconsin chronicles the life and times of Wisconsin's pioneer citizen-scientist.

February 14, 2015 - **Amish in Wisconsin** with Mark Loudon

Wearing plain clothing and traveling with horse and buggy, the Amish stand out in the rural landscape, yet their neighbors often know little about them. Local and national media outlets tend to mention them only when something dramatic has happened, such as a traffic accident, or they portray them in sensationalizing programs such as "Amish Mafia." As it turns out, among the states of our nation, Wisconsin has the fourth largest Amish population. In some areas, the Amish and their close spiritual cousins, the Old Order Mennonites, make up a sizable percentage of the population and have a significant impact on the local economy and the communities around them.

Their language stands out, too: in addition to English, Amish and Old Order Mennonites speak Pennsylvania Dutch, America's oldest thriving heritage language. Over 300,000 people are speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch in the United States and Canada, a number that is doubling every twenty years because of the group's high birth rate.

March 14, 2015 - **H.H. Bennett Photographic Studio, Wisconsin Dells** with Alan Hanson

Everyone knows the images of the German Shepherd jumping the gap at Stand Rock in Wisconsin Dells. Well, historic site coordinator Alan Hanson will bring H.H. Bennett and his photography to SS this March. Henry Hamilton Bennett opened his first studio in 1865. It has the distinction of being the oldest operating business in Wisconsin Dells. In 1875 he moved into the current studio he designed on Broadway. It has been in continuous operation ever since and is believed to be the oldest operating photography studio in the United States. Bennett's family ran the business until 1998 when they donated the property to the Wisconsin Historical Society. Photography historians consider Bennett one of the best landscape photographers of the 19th century, considered the "Golden Age of Landscape Photography." Today the studio continues to house many of Bennett's original photographs, glass plate negatives, photography inventions, cameras and equipment.

April 11, 2015 - **This Superior Place: Stories of Bayfield and the Apostle Islands** with Dennis McCann

Picturesque little Bayfield on Lake Superior is Wisconsin's smallest city by population but one of its most popular visitor destinations. Author and columnist, Dennis McCann, will capture those unique qualities that keep tourists coming back year after year. He will offer a historically reliable look at the community as it is today and how it came to be. His new book, of the same title, is abundantly illustrated with both historical and contemporary images. This Superior Place showcases a community where the past was layered with good times and down times, where natural beauty was the one resource that could not be exhausted by the hand of man, and where history is ever present.

May 9, 2015 - **Where the Hammock Hangs** with Rochelle Pennington

Rochelle Pennington returns to Second Saturdays to tell us about her newest book, Where the Hammock Hangs. This book will deal with the concept of Up North. Just what does Up North mean? If you're from Wisconsin, the UP of Michigan or Minnesota, we all know what it means. Rochelle will tell stories of the Pennington's beloved cottage in the Porcupine Mountains in Upper Michigan. She'll deal with mysteries from lighthouses and shipwrecks and tell stories about hunting, fishing and camping. We're sure to have a great morning and a trip Up North with Rochelle.

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COLD CASE FILE REVISITED: THE MURDER OF 1851

BY SCOTT NOEGEL

In a previous edition of the SCHRC Researcher (October 24/1 2013), I opened a very “cold” case file from Centerville, which I entitled: “The Murder of 1851.” The grizzly event involved the vicious slaying of Wilhelm Gerken, at the hands of two men, Gustav Eichhoff and George Egloff, in a jealous rage over Wilhelm’s wife Catharina. After escaping jail, the two men were never caught. I concluded the piece by pondering: “It is unknown what happened to Wilhelm’s young wife, Catharina. Probably she was encouraged to remarry and start again.”

Since the article sparked some attention from SCHRC members, I thought it might interest readers to know that after it appeared, a SCHRC member came forward to identify himself as a descendent of Wilhelm and Catharina Gerken. He informed the SCHRC that, at the time of Wilhelm’s murder, the young couple had another child, a six-month old daughter also named Sophia (b. February 22, 1851).¹ After the SCHRC shared the lead with me, I was able to learn a bit more about Catharina Gerken and her life before after the tragedy. The research also put me in touch with other descendants who have provided me with stories about the case as passed on to them through their families. From these new insights have emerged even more questions, and a tale that is more intriguing and darker than I had expected.

As it turns out, Maria Catharina Gerkin (nee: Westerfeld, b. May 22, 1823) and Wilhelm Gerken (b. May 17, 1821) both emigrated from Bad Westernkotten, Soest, Germany. I do not know when Catharina came to America, but Wilhelm arrived on May 22, 1848. He and Catharina married two weeks later, on June 5, 1848 in St. Louis, Missouri. At the time, Catharina was five month’s pregnant.²

These facts pose a rather looming problem for the case as described in the court documents, newspapers, and in Louis Falge’s History of Manitowoc County. These sources characterized the murder as a crime of passion by would-be suitors who had unsuccessfully sought Catharina’s hand in marriage. However, since the couple had been married a little over three years by the time of Wilhelm’s murder, this is temporally impossible; unless the would-be suitors knew Catharina before leaving Germany. Here is where the story gets interesting: neither Gustav Eichhoff nor George Egloff could have known them. Egloff was from France and Eichhoff was from Halver, Germany.³

All of this might appear rather pedantic were it not for a very different understanding of the event passed down through descendants of Sophia Gerken. As someone who has written my own family history, I am quite familiar with family lore founded on the complete absence of reality or inherited jealousies. On the other hand, I have found that many oral histories have a basis in fact, and that we do well to assess their validity by triangulating the various accounts. Thus, the more one hears the same story from different and more disparate descendant family lines, as I have in this case, the greater likelihood the story holds a kernel of truth.⁴ Moreover, I cannot help but lend the alternative claims some credence, because they were passed down within the family, precisely where one would not expect to find them.

With this in mind, I was surprised to learn of an alternative version of the story that goes briefly as follows: Catharina’s lover murdered Wilhelm, he/they framed the two young men, and then married a few weeks later.⁵ I realize that such a story could test the sensitivity and historical memories of living descendants, so I shall entertain it here solely as a thought experiment, looking at the evidence anew from this perspective. I shall do so while keeping in mind that one must establish means, motive, and opportunity, which at such a late date, is probably impossible.

Nevertheless, the alternative narrative does shed light on a number of puzzling aspects of the case. I already noted that the widely reported motive for murder was impossible given that neither of the accused could have known Catharina before she married. In addition, the arrest warrant issued against the accused posited that they assaulted him with “certain axes which they then and there in both their hands had and held.”⁶ Since it is unlikely that both men took turns striking Wilhelm (the murder weapon was apparently Wilhelm’s own ax!),⁷ the warrant was composed to cast equal guilt on both parties, so that in the event that one proved innocent, the other still could be tried. This suggests that the testimony was too weak to specify the guilty party.

The manner in which the court case was conducted also appears to cast some doubt on the guilt of the two young men, not only because Egloff and Eichhoff were understood to be only recent acquaintances of Wilhelm, but because the judge kept delaying the trial. The judge summoned no less than thirty-one people to give testimony, most of them neighbors of Wilhelm Gerken, but none of them provided a statement proving their guilt. In fact, immediately after Wilhelm’s body was found, it took many days to issue a warrant for their arrest, because the authorities could not find sufficient evidence. Indeed, the two young men also had entered pleas of not guilty. When the judge failed to put the accused up for

trial after several months, newspapers began sympathizing with them. The *Manitowoc County Herald*, December 4, 1851, reported: "The fact of them having made use of premeditated means to effect their liberty would seem almost convincing proof of their guilt, and yet, under the circumstances, such a judgment appears more severe than is warrantable. When it is remembered that they waited patiently for months, in view of their anticipated trial, and that they made every preparation for their securing the attendance of eminent counsel and important witnesses, and that they waited until it was certain no special term would be held and without the intervention of extraordinary means, a long and dreary winter's confinement was before them--when all these things are taken into account, considerate persons will be more disposed to suspend a hasty and severe judgment, and entertain the hope, at least, that they may be guiltless. Their escape will be justly looked upon as a reproach to the county, because, if the jail was insecure--as was evidently the case--a

sufficient guard should have been prevailed to insure their safe custody."



Theodor and Catharina Schulte, ca. 1860, and 1893⁸

Such reports make one wonder whether there could have been other sympathizers that abetted their escape. Curiously, the authorities had no problem locating and retrieving the accused men several weeks after the warrant was made, one of them as far away as Milwaukee. Yet, they could not track the accused the very morning after their escape.

It also is an odd fact that the court files refer to Catharina as Mrs. Gerken, because she already had remarried by the time of her summons. She had married (Caspar) Theodor Schulte on October 25, 1851, a little more than a month after Wilhelm's murder.

1. ...	
2. Theodor Schulte	25
3. William Gerken	27
4. William Goeke	25
5. Caspian Westerfeldt	25

Theodor (b. February 20, 1823) had come from Eikeloh, Germany, a village less than three miles east of Wilhelm and Catharina's hometown. As the passenger list for the barque Olof Wyk reveals, Theodor and Wilhelm arrived together at the Port of New Orleans. In the roster clipping at left, not only are they listed side by side, but a Caspian Westerfeld appears with them,

possibly as an assumed name for Catharina.⁹

A letter written by Theodor Schulte to his mother on July 25, 1848, mentions Gerken by name and records his observations as he and Gerken traveled from New Orleans to St. Louis to Centerville.¹⁰ Aside from its inherent historical interest, the letter reveals that Theodor left Germany in haste, apparently without informing his mother. It also suggests that he left under some suspicion. As he admits: "Yes, I know well that everyone has suspected that I got away to America."¹¹ He then states that if had he stayed in Germany, he would be "sitting in the Luxembourg fortress and have no freedom."¹² Oddly, Theodor also refers to Gerken by his last name (i.e., "der Gerken"), but when speaking of friends and relatives with whom he met in St. Louis, he uses their first names. He also refers to the marriage of a cousin that took place before he reached St. Louis, but he makes no reference to Wilhelm and Catharina's marriage, which took place while they were there.

Since Wilhelm, Catharina, and Theodor knew each other before emigrating, it perhaps should not surprise us that, when they reached Centerville, Theodor and Wilhelm purchased adjacent lands. What perhaps is surprising is that, unlike all of Wilhelm's other neighbors, Theodor's name appears nowhere among the witness, court, or other testimonial documents created in preparation for the trial. He apparently was never questioned or summoned. In 1850, Theodor apparently had gone to St. Louis, while retaining his property in Centerville.¹³ But when exactly did he return? He was clearly in Centerville when the trial was being prepared. According to one family account, Catharina had written to Theodor in St. Louis asking him to assume responsibility for her property, as she intended to return to Germany, but instead, she and Theodor married.¹⁴ According to another, the invitation and possibly his absence were simply part of a cover up.¹⁵

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Sheboygan County Reacts to Halley's Comet



Edmond Halley

In the spring of 1910 the Dalai Lama fled Tibet to escape the Chinese, President Taft began the tradition of throwing out the first ball on baseball's opening day, King Edward VII of Great Britain died and Montana's Glacier National Park was formed. In May of 1910 the citizens of Sheboygan County also braced themselves for a close encounter with Halley's Comet.

Halley's Comet is a periodic comet last seen here in 1986 and expected to return in 2061. Named after Edmond Halley, an Oxford mathematician who observed that it came every seventy-six years on the anniversary of significant world events, it was especially significant to Christians who believed it to be the Star of Bethlehem that guided the Wise Men.

The comet is visible for slightly less than three months each occurrence. The earliest known written record of the comet is by the Chinese in 240 BC.

Mark Twain, author and humorist, born in 1835 as the comet approached, said in 1910, "I came in with Halley's Comet... It is coming again ... and I expect to go out with it... The Almighty has said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together.'" Sure enough, he died on April 21, 1910, the first day the comet was visible.

Celestial phenomena have triggered apocalyptic hysteria many times throughout history. The comet of 79 A.D. was blamed for the eruption of Vesuvius that led to the destruction of the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Its appearance in 1665 was said to have caused the Black Plague that killed tens of thousands in London. In 1835 it was blamed for several things, including the fall of the Alamo and a fire in New York City that raged for nearly a week.

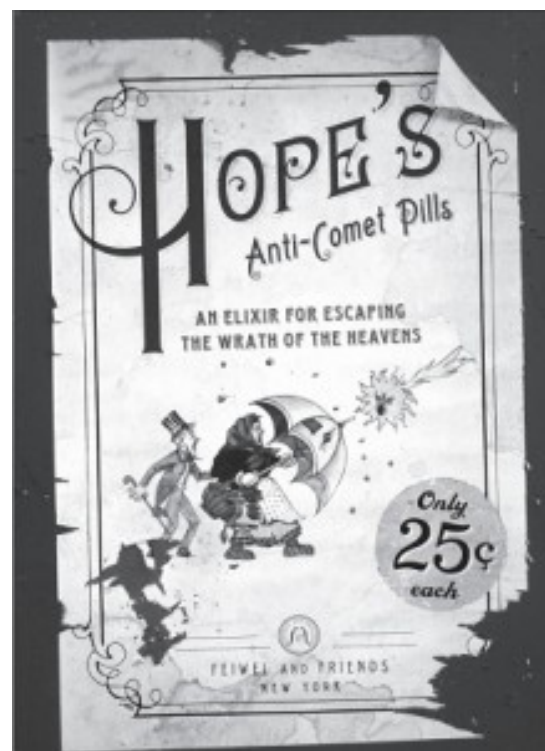
In 1910, when astronomers from Wisconsin's very own Yerkes Observatory announced that the planet would pass through the tail of Halley's Comet in May of that year alarmists and tabloids spread the erroneous rumor that poisonous gas within the comet would spell doom for the world's population. They warned Cyanogen gas in the comet's tail would "snuff out" all life. Shysters capitalized on the resulting fear, selling "comet pills" and "anti-comet umbrellas" that would counteract any lethal effects.

During the night of May 18, 1910, when the Earth passed through the tail of Halley's, some people took precautions by sealing the chimneys, windows, and doors of their houses. Others confessed to crimes they had committed because they did not expect to survive the night, and a few panic-stricken people actually committed suicide. Church services were held for overflow crowds, and people in the countryside took to their storm shelters.

But, by 1910 people were also divided in their thinking. Along with the fearful, there were skeptics who turned the event into festivity. A strangely frivolous mood in cities caused thousands of people to gather in restaurants, coffee houses, parks, and on the rooftops of apartment buildings to await their imaginary doom in the company of friends.

The Sheboygan Historical Review of July 1910 reported, "Late in the afternoon of May 18, 1910 the earth was scheduled to enter the tail of Halley's Comet. If the wanderer came in contact with the earth or the atmosphere there was nothing unusual to indicate it."

It seems the residents of Sheboygan County were sufficiently educated and streetwise to avoid falling for the purveyors of snake oil found everywhere at the time. By the end of the summer of 1910 news coverage of the event disappeared. The world went on and so did the Comet; there were more important events to report. Looking back it seems slightly reminiscent of Y2K doesn't it?



History on the Move

Cedar Grove Public Library, 131 Van Alton Avenue, Cedar Grove, WI

6:00pm to 7:30pm

September 9, 2014 - Native American History of Sheboygan County - Native American history in Sheboygan County is an elusive thing. It spans hundreds of years and ranges from the mounds of the Woodland Indians to the departure of Old Solomon, the last of the local Native residents to leave the area.

October 14, 2014 - Postcards - Deltiology, the official name for postcard collecting, is thought to be one of the three largest collectable hobbies in the world, along with coin and stamp collecting. Postcards are popular because of the wide range of subjects, with just about every subject imaginable being at some time, portrayed on a postcard. History itself can be tracked on postcards, be it historical buildings, famous people, art, holidays, streets, etc. The idea for the postal card originated in Germany in 1865. It was the Austrian government, however, that on October 1, 1869, issued the first postal card. We'll take a trip through history with post cards (not just Sheboygan County).

November 11, 2014 - On The Home Front - On the Home Front is a chronology of civilian life in Sheboygan County during the war years of 1941-1945 documenting the many ways ordinary local citizens helped the war effort. We'll talk about scrap drives, saving fat, collecting milkweed fluff and so much more

December 9, 2014 - Pioneers of Commerce - Sheboygan County's iron-fisted work ethic began with its earliest residents. From the jackknife trading posts and mill wrights of the early 1800s to the spas and "Great Wall of China" of Kohler Company, the importance of commerce to Sheboygan County is evident. This wonderful pictorial history of the small family-owned businesses of Sheboygan County begins in the 1870s and ends with a great shot of a 1950s American Classic—McDonald's Golden Arches. It provides an intimate look at tin shops and cheese factories, butchers and blacksmiths, movie theaters and much more. Sheboygan County: Pioneers of Commerce presents a cross section of American life as the country grew from a rural entity to a business giant.

History on the Move

Oostburg Public Library, 213 North 8th Street, Oostburg, WI

1:00pm to 2:30pm

September 23, 2014 - Oostburg, Wisconsin - We'll take a photographic trip through the historic village of Oostburg in this presentation. Come equipped with your stories as we learn about the village's history.

October 28, 2014 - Remembering One-Room Schools - From 1791, when the first school was established in what is now Wisconsin, to the 1960s, when consolidation was finally complete, the one-room school's history has been one of growth and change. They served as cornerstones of rural America's educational system and local communities for more than a century. Share the bygone days of the 3Rs as we explore the history of Sheboygan County's schools.

November 25, 2014 - Garton Toy Company - The Garton Toy Company was founded in Sheboygan, Wisconsin by Eusebius Bassingdale Garton in 1879. For 94 years the company manufactured coaster wagons, sleds, tricycles, pedal cars, scooters and other toys for children. At one time the company was the largest wheel goods toy factory in the world, exporting its toys to many foreign countries. We'll learn about the company that produced the toys we all dreamed of having.

Genealogy Classes

SCHRC, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, WI

Time: 1:00pm to 3:00pm at

September 15, 2014 - Cemeteries, Graveyards and Burial Grounds – Stories They Hold and How to Interpret Them

October 13, 2014 - Military Records, How to Access Them, What to Do With Them

November 10, 2014 - Organizing My Research: I have all this stuff, now what do I do with it?

December 8, 2014 - Photos, What We Can Learn From Them and How We Identify Them

July 28, 1934 - Two killed, 40 hurt in Kohler riot; National Guard occupies town

On this day, the "model industrial village" of Kohler became an armed camp of National Guard cavalrymen after deadly strike-related rioting. The July 27th violence, which killed two Sheboygan men and injured 40 others, prompted the summoning of 250 Guardsmen to join the 200 special deputy village marshals already present. After striking workers became agitated and began to destroy company property, deputies turned to tear gas, rifles, and shotguns to quell the stone-throwing crowd, resulting in the deaths and injuries. Owner Walter Kohler blamed Communists and outside agitators for the violence, while union leaders blamed Kohler exclusively. Workers at the Kohler plant were demanding better hours, higher wages, and recognition of the American Federation of Labor as their collective bargaining agent. Not settled until 1941, the strike marked the beginning of what was to become a prolonged struggle between the Kohler Company and organized labor in Wisconsin; a second Kohler strike lasted from 1954 to 1965. [Source: Capital Times 7/28/1934, p.1]

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Above left: Iron grave markers and decorations were popular during the Victorian era, often being produced by specialist foundries or the local blacksmith (Kohler and Vollrath made them.) Cast iron headstones have lasted for generations while wrought ironwork often only survives in a rusted or eroded state.

Above right: This miniature cherub or angel signifies the death of an infant and the sorrow that lingers.

Don't miss SCHRC's class on cemeteries. The county has some great ones, but we'll also take a look at some prominent worldwide burial grounds.

The old section of Wildwood Cemetery in Sheboygan has some outstanding stone imagery, as does Calvary, St. Michael's Cemetery in town of Mitchell and the Brick Church Cemetery in Glenbeulah. Great for a summer walk!

While the reports in no way prove the guilt of Catharina and/or her second husband, they do suggest an opportunity, and perhaps even a motive. Indeed, if we still are to maintain that the motive was one of a jilted suitor, then there are no other candidates.¹⁶ At the very least, the facts validate the descendants' claims that Catharina remarried soon after his death. I leave it to the reader to consider whether seven and a half weeks allowed enough time for her to overcome her husband's brutal murder before remarrying or whether she did so because she had few to no economic options with an infant in tow.

Yet, life went on. Catharina and Theodor continued to live and farm in Centerville, just south of where Wilhelm was found, and they had six children of their own: Mary (b. March 21, 1853, d. June 22, 1932), Theresa (b. March 6, 1855, d. October 24, 1947), Frank (b. May 23, 1857, d. May 21, 1875), Joseph Peter (b. April 8, 1860, d. May 3, 1940), Anton (b. May 10, 1863, d. October 12, 1933), and Helena Lena (b. June 18, 1865, d. June 1, 1958). Theodor and Catharina amassed a good deal of property too. After combining their lands, they purchased an additional 160 adjoining acres. By 1870, their property totaled 320 acres and it was valued at \$12,000.¹⁷

Theodor died only a year after the census on July 26, 1871, at the age of forty-eight.¹⁸ Catharina outlived him by nearly twenty-three years and passed on April 17, 1894. They both were buried at St. George's Catholic Cemetery in Centerville.

Life went on also for Sophia Gerken, Catharina's child with Wilhelm. She lived with her mother and step-father, appearing as Sophia Gerken in the various censuses, until June 5, 1873, when she married John Wilhelm Knauf (b. June 24, 1844, d. June 13, 1893). Like Sophia, John had lost a parent at a young age.¹⁹ Knauf was a Civil War Veteran, self-made man, and an important player in the politics and economy of Stevens Point and later Tomahawk.²⁰ Sophia and John had eight children of their own, though two of them would sadly die young.

Life went on for the two accused men as well, though perhaps for a time under different names and in more distant locales.²² If they indeed were framed for the crime, then we must view their escape as good fortune or perhaps the result of a helping hand. According to Louis Falge's History of Manitowoc County, one of the accused returned to Centerville around 1880, but no one pursued him, because, as he put it, "grass having grown over the affair." I now wonder whether his use of the word "affair" was meant as a *double entendre*, a clue to the reader. In 1880, Catharina was still alive, though both her husbands were beneath "the grass," as it were.

If history imparts lessons, then I believe we might learn a few things from this thought experiment. First, it demonstrates that there are many sides to history, not all of which are contained in plat maps, census reports, and other documents. The oral histories of our own families are equally important resources, even if they are sometimes darker than we would like them to be. Second, the social dynamics among the early settlers was as filled with the stuff of soap operas as any small community today. We tend to think of the past as a golden age, but the past has its equal share of tarnish. The alternative history also reminds us that the age-old adage, "don't always believe what you hear and read," is a point well taken. Old stories can tell the absolute truth, be utter fictions, or represent a muddling of the two informed by generations of "telephone."²³ Newspapers of the day too, as often today, thrived on sensation and simply parroted what came to them from other papers. Yet, since the accused never went to trial, the sad truth is that we will never know who killed young Wilhelm Gerken. While the murder certainly was a crime of passion, we cannot truly know whose passion it was.

¹ Their first daughter, also named Sophia, had died on October 23, 1850. Sadly, she died in a fire while her parents were working in the fields.

² This is revealed by the birth date of their first child, Sophia (b. October 22, 1848). Despite claims to the contrary, such predicaments occurred quite frequently in this early period of immigration. However, the circumstance also lends this particular story additional intrigue.

³ The former appears in the early censuses. It could have been used for the region of Alsace-Lorraine, since it was part of France. Still, this is too far away. The latter town is roughly seventy miles from Wilhelm and Catharina's hometown.

⁴ Only one of the descendants with whom I have been in contact was unaware of the alternative story, because, as was related to me, no one in the family ever talked about it.

⁵ Of course, one cannot rule out a third scenario in which Catharina committed the murder and framed the two men without her second husband's knowledge.

⁶ The record is housed in the Cofrin Library, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, #CF1-X98.

⁷ Reported by C. Joseph Nuesse, "An Immigrant's Progress: From Westphalia to Wisconsin," *Voyageur Magazine* 5/1 (1988), p. 11.

⁸ Photographs found in Nuesse, "An Immigrant's Progress," pp. 7, 10.

⁹ Nuesse, "An Immigrant's Progress," p. 13, n. 14, notes that family resources consistently had Catharina traveling with Gerken and Schulte. He suggests that Caspian might have been an assumed name. He adds that according to notes kept by Catharina's youngest daughter, Catharina had a brother names Caspar Antona Johannes (b. June 13, 1817), but that he



John and Sophia Knauf²¹

died in infancy. Nevertheless, German records show that Catharina had another brother by the same name, who was born on March 14, 1820. Yet, he would have been twenty-eight, and not twenty-five, as shown on the shipping log. On the other hand, Catharine was exactly twenty-five.

¹⁰ The letter states that he and Gerken became sick after three days aboard ship, but that they both viewed the experience as a healthy purgative. It also reveals that they left St. Louis via steamboat on June 9th and stayed in Milwaukee for eight more days before heading north. The letter is housed in the Cofrin Library, #SC 85. It was subsequently translated and published, along with historical background, by Nuesse, "An Immigrant's Progress," pp. 7-13, 31-33.

¹¹ "Ja, ich weiss gewiss, das ich binn nach Amerika gemacht."

¹² "Sonst täte ich jetzt Wohl in der Festung Luxemburg sitzen, und hätte keine Freiheit." Nuesse, "An Immigrant's Progress," p. 9, wonders if this possibly refers to time spent serving in the Prussian garrison.

¹³ This according to a descendant of Theodor and Catharina Schulte. Indeed, Theodor's name does not appear in the 1850 census for Centerville.

¹⁴ Reported in Nuesse, "An Immigrant's Progress," p. 12.

¹⁵ The claim that Catharina wrote to Theodor in St. Louis does suggest the possibility of a previous trail of correspondence. If Theodor had intended to stay in St. Louis, then one also wonders why he retained his holdings in Centerville.

¹⁶ Nuesse, "An Immigrant's Progress," p. 13, n. 21, discounts the claim of suitor jealousy by saying "the account does not seem reliable." However, Nuesse's only informant appears to have been Theodor and Catharina Schulte's youngest daughter, Helena. No descendants of Wilhelm were consulted. Moreover, Nuesse was born in Sevastopol, Wisconsin, just twenty-five miles north of Algoma, where Helena lived. Since Nuesse cites correspondence from her dated May 22, 1948 (p. 13, n. 18), they knew each other at least forty years before he published his article. Thus, he clearly relied on only one side of the story.

¹⁷ Interestingly, on May 11, 1855, Theodor purchased some of the land (S14 of E1/2 W 1/2 NW 1/4) from Edward Eickhoff (i.e., the brother of one of the accused men).

¹⁸ He died intestate (cause unknown), and because all of his children were minors, Catharina had to petition the probate court to appoint a male guardian. Dominikus Schneider (b. August 4, 1823, d. November 15, 1903), who was a neighbor and witness to their wedding, served in this capacity until 1884, when the youngest child turned nineteen.

¹⁹ He had come to America at the age of three from Trier, Germany, and he had lost his mother when he was ten.

²⁰ A brief sketch about John Knauf appears in *Commemorative Biographical Record of the Upper Wisconsin Counties of Waupaca, Portage, Wood, Marathon, Lincoln, Oneida, Vilas, Langlade and Shawano* (J. H. Beers & Co., Chicago, 1895), pp. 582-583.

²¹ I thank Lisa Knauf for the photograph.

²² Gustave Eichhoff does not appear in the censuses until 1870, when he was living in Dent, San Joaquin, California, with his family. In 1863, he had married and started a family of six children, but in 1876, he committed his wife to an insane asylum. He had his marriage annulled and he later remarried. He died on February 23, 1893. I have not located George Egloff anywhere in the records.

²³ For example, according to one descendant, Wilhelm was killed with a shotgun, though the court files make it clear that the weapon was an ax.

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