

Bringing Light to the Milwaukee German Theater

Calla Buttke



Calla Buttke and Cora Lee Kluge with Calla's poster display in the Capitol Rotunda, Madison, Wisconsin

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German-language theater in Milwaukee has a long and distinguished history that has now largely been forgotten. It began with amateur productions as early as 1850, just two years after Wisconsin entered the Union as the 30th state, and ended with the dissolution of the German Theater stock company in 1935. The high point—the “golden years”—came roughly in the 1890s, following the organization of the group as a stock company, the engagement of Ferdinand Welb, Julius Richard, and Leon Wachsner as directors (in 1884), and the group’s

move to the “Neues Stadt Theater,” which Frederick Pabst purchased to be its new home (in 1890).

In Cora Lee Kluge’s course entitled “The German Immigration Experience,” which I took as a freshman, I learned about Milwaukee’s German and German-American culture. I was particularly interested in (1) the theater and its fame throughout the world; (2) the large and essentially unexamined Trostel Collection of German Theater Scripts; and (3) other materials that are available to

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Workshop on Deciphering Old German Script

Saturday, 1 October 2016, 9:00am–3:30pm
Union South, University of Wisconsin–Madison
1308 W Dayton Street, Madison
Presenter: Mark L. Louden



Are you a historian trying to decipher old German handwritten documents? A genealogist researching your German-speaking ancestors? In this workshop, Mark Louden will introduce participants to the basics of reading German handwritten materials, with a special focus on those from the 19th century. The workshop combines presentations with practical exercises. Participants are welcome to bring copies of particular documents they are interested in working on. Though a reading knowledge of German is helpful, it is not required. **Lunch included!** (Details at mkifriends.org)

Mark Louden is the Director of the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies and a Professor in the German Department at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED!

mkifriends.org

Space is limited. Register early!

Workshop Fee (includes lunch)

Regular: \$34

Member of the Friends of MKI: \$29

Member of the Wisconsin Historical Society: \$29

UW student: \$19

Contact: Antje Petty, apetty@wisc.edu, 608-262-7546

Co-sponsored by the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Greetings, Friends and Readers!

As we come to the end of another academic year, we look back on busy, even exhilarating months. We have reported about many of our activities in the last few *Newsletters*, and the recent highlight, the Annual Meeting of the Friends in Racine just last month, is described elsewhere in this issue. Therefore, we would like at this point merely to express our gratitude once again to all our Friends for their constant support, especially to those who have helped organize the events that were held during the past year. At the same time, we congratulate those who were elected in May to a second term on the Friends Board of Directors, and also give a warm welcome to the Board's new officers.

The MKI maintains a visible presence both nationally and internationally. In April, Cora Lee attended the annual symposium of the Society for German-American Studies in San Antonio and gave a presentation on the attitudes of German Americans in the World War I era. While there, she visited the Texas Hill Country, a region settled in the 1840s by German immigrants, which became a focal point during the Civil War. She admired the well-known *Treue der Union* (Loyalty to the Union) monument in Comfort, Texas, which honors the memory of 68 men from the area—mostly Germans—who were massacred by Confederate forces as they tried to escape to Mexico to join the Union Army. And she enjoyed

discovering traces of the original Texas Germans there.

Meanwhile, Mark is currently a DAAD Guest Professor at the University of Freiburg, teaching summer semester courses on German-American linguistics. While in Europe, he is networking with colleagues in Germany and in Switzerland to expand the scope of the Pennsylvania Dutch Documentation Project. A few weeks ago he visited the Emmental, a valley near Berne, the area to which most Amish trace their ancestry; and he promises to write an article about his experiences there for the fall *Newsletter*—with pictures!

It is always wonderful to greet visitors in our beautiful quarters on Library Mall, who come to investigate our exhibitions, use the MKI Library and Archives, talk with the staff, or simply stop by to see what we are all about. In addition, we are delighted to welcome so many of you to our events, including lectures, work-

shops, conferences, and festivals, which take place both in Madison and elsewhere. And we are grateful to the Friends for helping to make these activities possible.

We also thank the Friends for their significant financial contributions to the MKI Library Project. However, we would like to point out that our campaign to establish an endowment for the MKI Librarian position is still ongoing. We are now reaching the next-to-last deadline to receive matching funds from our National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant. Please help us reach this year's goal of \$50,000 by June 30 by making a tax-deductible donation to the Max Kade Institute Library Support Fund at the UW Foundation. You can donate directly online at <http://mki.wisc.edu/giving/donate>

We wish for you good summer days—do stay in touch!

—Cora Lee and Mark

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Spoken German in South Africa—A Lecture by Peter Wagener

Antje Petty

If you travel in the Midlands region of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and approach a stranger for directions, you might get the following response:

Greytown? Joo, denn fährt du dree Kilos goodut bis an den ersten Robot, door drehst du rechts ein, denn komms du an die witte Fens lank, denn wieder een Robot, du drehs links ein un komms dörch Neu-Hannover un denn noch fief Kilos, denn komms du nach Greytown.

On April 19, the Madison community was treated to a special presentation entitled “Of German Neighborhoods and Low German Villages: Spoken German in South Africa” by Peter Wagener, Director Emeritus of the Leibniz Institute of German Language in Mannheim, Germany. The lecture was based on recording sessions in February/March 2012, which were conducted on behalf of the Leibniz Institute in order to survey systematically the South African varieties of spoken German. Within this broader picture, Wagener focused on one particular “Sprachinsel,” or language island, in the Midlands of KwaZulu-Natal, a linguistic enclave where fully functional Low German is still spoken today by hundreds of speakers, over 160 years after the initial migration occurred.

It is more widely known that German immigrants settled in



Peter Wagener in South Africa

Namibia, the former German colony in South-West Africa. In this region, their descendants continue to have an economic and cultural influence today, despite the fact that they number only about 20,000 individuals, or less than one percent of the total population.

Wagener pointed out that the history of European settlement in South Africa is different. Among the very first Europeans that followed Dutch colonialists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were people from Northern Germany, but most of these earlier settlers put down roots with the Dutch and quickly assimilated into Dutch culture. On the other hand, German immigrants who arrived in the second half of the nineteenth century settled in clusters, establishing themselves in more isolated places. They included missionaries from the “Lüneburger

Heide,” the heath region between Hamburg and Hannover, who settled in Zululand, as well as weavers from the Osnabrück region, who founded Philippi, a village in Western Cape.

In 1853, a group of missionaries was sent to South Africa by the “Evangelisch-lutherische Missionsgesellschaft” in Hermannsburg, then part of the Kingdom of Hanover. They founded the small settlement of Hermannsburg in KwaZulu-Natal, which over time expanded into six villages and spurred additional German settlements in Transvaal and Krondaal. It was in the KwaZulu-Natal villages that Low German was retained from the beginning as an everyday language. Over time, Standard High German, introduced mainly in church services, was adopted by many families as their primary language of communication.

However, among several thousand primary German speakers today, about one hundred families still use Low German in their everyday life. Many of them belong to older generations, but even today—especially on remote sugar farms—children are brought up with Low German as their first language.

While the documentation of written languages has a long tradition, especially among missionaries, the documentation of the spoken word is a much more recent endeavor, mostly undertaken by linguists. For over 60 years, the leading research institution and depository of recordings of spoken varieties of German has been the German Language Archive at the Institute of German Language in Mannheim. When Peter Wagener set out in 2012 to audio-record German speakers in KwaZulu-Natal, his goal was to collect language data in different settings, on different topics, and in different layers of speech, as well as to gather information about the sociolinguistic environment and metadata about the speakers. In all, he interviewed 112 people, 46 of whom spoke more than one language. This included one farmer who spoke Low German, High German, and Zulu on his farm, and English with his wife. He also had learned Afrikaans in school, but did not consider himself a fluent speaker. 12 interviews were conducted entirely in Low German and 31 in a Northern-German colloquial language often heavily colored with Low-German influences.

Wagener's presentation was followed by a lively Q&A session. We learned that many German-speaking

South Africans find that the Low German dialect better expresses their feelings, calling it the “language of their heart,” while they prefer to converse in Standard German with members of the larger community. Unlike in the United States, dialect speaking is not socially stigmatized. There are no German-language newspapers in the region, but there is a popular German radio program that broadcasts twice a week. The local German schools, such as the “Deutsche Schule Hermannsburg,” form an important cornerstone of a German identity. Here, in grades 1 through 12, the language of instruction is English. All students also study German, no matter what their ethnic family background, which leads to the internationally recognized diploma “Deutsches Sprachdiplom II” and is part of their high school degree. Zulu and Afrikaans are offered as additional languages. 🇩🇪



The Deutsche Schule Kroondal, established in 1892, is evidence of South Africa's enduring German heritage.

Undergraduate Academic Excellence: An Interview with Calla Buttke

Cora Lee Kluge

Calla Buttke's lead article in this Newsletter describes her work on the Milwaukee German-language theater.

Cora Lee: The MKI—and I, personally—have been delighted to work with you and proud of all your accomplishments and honors. Just to mention a few: Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, the German National Honor Society, and the Leadership Certificate. Are there more?

Calla: There are quite a few, but I felt especially honored by the invitation to participate at Posters in the Rotunda on April 13, 2016, as only six UW–Madison students were included. The University Bookstore Academic Excellence Award was also an important recognition, as I was awarded that on the basis of an excerpt from my Senior Thesis, as well as an abstract of the Thesis project. Being one of UW–Madison's three nominees for the district Rhodes Scholarship competition was also a huge honor. I feel grateful for the many distinctions that have come my way.

Cora Lee: You very early became interested in German-American studies. Is this because of your own family background?

Calla: I've been interested in German-American studies since I was very young, and that does have a lot to do with my family background. All of my ancestors immigrated to America in the 1800s from German-

speaking lands, and my family still keeps a number of German traditions alive, including eating the delicious German potato salad that my grandma makes, finding the pickle in the Christmas tree during the holidays, and enjoying the Plattdüütsch toast that my grandpa sings whenever there is a group gathering. My maternal grandparents were also founding members of the Central Wisconsin Pommerscher Verein, or Pomeranian Club. As most of our forefathers were originally from Pomerania, my grandparents were eager to preserve this aspect of our family's heritage, including the language and culture, and thus a passion for studying German America was instilled in me. Unfortunately, it is an important part of American history that is often skimmed over in history classes. I thoroughly enjoyed working on this project because it is "so close to home" for me—I can just imagine my German ancestors encountering language misunderstandings similar to those in the play *Greenhorns in Amerika* or getting their news from America's German-language newspapers. I hope that information about the Milwaukee German Theater (MGT) can reach a wide audience, perhaps in part through my Senior Thesis, and allow others to learn about German-American culture.

Cora Lee: Why is the story of Milwaukee's German-language theater something worth exploring?

Calla: Milwaukee's German-language

theater is part of the history of Milwaukee, and studying it provides insights into America's ethnic German communities, as well as America itself. Through it we learn about the history of our country and its culture from a different and relatively unknown angle—it is a "hidden story" that we are bringing to the stage. We learn about the tastes, interests, and traditions in entertainment of Milwaukee's German Americans and about the celebrities of the theater: the "Big Three" directors, Julius Richard, Ferdinand Welb, and Leon Wachsner, and the long-forgotten yet formerly beloved members of the MGT. The theater was the site of major Germany-to-America cultural transfer, serving as a bridge between the German-American and Anglo-American communities in Milwaukee. It also played a key part in putting Milwaukee on the map as the "German Athens," because in its heyday, people around the nation as well as in Europe knew about the MGT and held it in high esteem. German-American culture was thriving in Milwaukee, and the German-language theater was at the heart of it. This theater was truly the pride of a great Midwestern city, and it contributed to German-American culture as a whole.

Cora Lee: You have made a huge contribution to the Milwaukee German Theater project, and now that you are graduating and leaving Madison, your presence at the MKI will be missed. But perhaps you could de-

scribe for us what you see as the next tasks that should be done to move the work forward.

Calla: While my Thesis is doing its part to preserve the history of the MGT as well as disseminate knowledge about it, there is still much that must be done—and without delay—, especially because source materials are disappearing rapidly. A more expansive study of the MGT performers should be undertaken, and some of the German-American plays in the Trostel Collection should be translated. Digitizing source materials, such as German-language newspaper articles concerning the theater, would be extremely useful as well. I would urge that efforts be made to use technology to promote and spread the word about this amazing piece of German-American culture. Although I just graduated and am currently finishing my Senior Thesis, I would like to make an attractive website this summer about my Senior Thesis, as

information is more accessible to the general public when it is online. In the next few years it would be great to see even more information about the MGT online in our technology-driven world.

Cora Lee: Tell us about your future plans! Where will you be and what will you be doing in the next year? And what are your long-range goals?

Calla: In the next academic year, I will pursue an MA in East Asian Studies at Stanford University, with the support of a full-tuition fellowship plus a generous stipend. In addition to German, I also majored in Chinese and East Asian Studies, and pursued certificates in Medieval Studies and Leadership, so this merely takes me into another of my areas of interest. Nevertheless, all of the skills and experiences that I gained through writing a Senior Thesis under Cora Lee's guidance, as well as working with other staff members at the Max Kade Institute, will help

with my graduate school work—I am so grateful for everyone's help and support.

Working on this project was the most academically rewarding thing that I did during my time at UW–Madison. It has inspired me to pursue a career in academia, for I've realized that I love doing research—I want to be a lifelong learner. Upon completion of the MA in East Asian Studies, I would like to work in China for a year or two to gain experience and then pursue a PhD in Chinese Studies or a related field. My career goal is to become a professor or work for a think tank or business. Although I will be doing research related to China, I will be a lifelong member of the Max Kade Institute, as well as a supporter of German-American studies.

Cora Lee: Thank you very much, Calla! We wish you all the best! 🎉



Left to right: Kay Gruling and Tim Buttke (Calla's parents), Bob Gruling (her grandfather), Cora Lee, Calla, and Eppie Gruling (her grandmother)

Friends 2016 Annual Meeting in Racine, Wisconsin

Antje Petty



Jeff Hill of Racine's Deutscher Männer Verein with Greg Smith in the Klinkert Roadhouse

On a beautiful Saturday, May 7, the Friends of the Max Kade Institute held their annual meeting in Racine, Wisconsin. The day started with tours of two unique historic buildings in the Racine area: the Klinkert Roadhouse in Sturtevant and the Klinkert Horse Barn in Mount Pleasant, both named after the person who built and first owned them: Ernst Klinkert. We learned all about Ernst Klinkert (or Ernest, as he was widely known in America) in a presentation by local architectural historian Pippin Mitchell, which rounded out our day at the Reefpoint Brewhouse in Racine.

Ernst C. Klinkert was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1844 and came to this country in 1862. After living in St. Louis for six years, he moved to Milwaukee and was hired by the Valentine Blatz Brewery. In the early 1870s he started working for the Frederick Heck brewing company

in Racine and in 1878 entered into a partnership with Phillip E. Schelling to operate Racine's City Brewery. Only a year later, Klinkert bought out Schelling and became the sole owner of the business. Subsequently, Klinkert Brewery on 800 Washington

Avenue became the largest brewery in the city's history—until 1920, when prohibition caused its collapse.

In the meantime, though, to meet the competition of the larger Milwaukee breweries, Klinkert purchased a number of tavern buildings in Racine. He then leased the taverns to proprietors who agreed to sell his brews exclusively. In 1908 he expanded this concept by building a fancy brick structure at the Sturtevant train station on the site of the original station hotel that had burned down a year earlier. Klinkert's new Roadhouse welcomed train passengers with fifteen guestrooms, a barbershop, a restaurant, and a bar. However, the Roadhouse changed hands quickly, and during prohibition, the hotel business could not make up for the lost

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The Klinkert Barn



Todd Michalek enjoying the bar at the Roadhouse



Ed Langer and Sabine Schwark outside the Klinkert Roadhouse



MKI Friends and guests listening to the presentation at the Klinkert Barn

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beer revenue. By the late twentieth century the building was largely abandoned and deteriorating—until the Borzynski family purchased it and started to restore it to its historic beauty. Original woodwork, tin ceilings, art glass windows, and craft-tile flooring have emerged from layers of paint and grime, and the original bar is stocked again. We are very grateful to Nancy Borzynski for hosting our group and giving us a personal tour of this magnificent structure!

Our next stop was the Klinkert Barn in nearby Mount Pleasant, built in 1889 for Ernst Klinkert's prized sulky racing horses. It is believed to be the only barn in the upper Midwest designed in the Kentucky bluegrass style. Owners Jan and Linda Roland have done a marvelous job of restoring the barn as well as the adjacent historic farmhouse, which once was the caretaker's residence. They have also collected many fascinating period artifacts. As



During Jan and Linda Roland's presentation at the Klinkert Barn

an additional treat, local collector James Mercier brought an assortment of original Klinkert beer bottles and crates. The Friends greatly enjoyed hearing stories about the barn and its history from Jan and Linda. A big "thank you" to both of them for welcoming our group so generously and making our day such a special event.

The Friends then gathered for the annual meeting at the Reefpoint Brewhouse, where they elected three members to the Board of Directors:

Karen Fowdy, Steven Geiger, and Pamela Tesch. All of them will be serving second three-year terms. The Board elected the following officers for the year 2016–2017: John Pustejovsky, President; Hans Bernet, Vice President; Luanne von Schneidemesser, Treasurer; Pamela Tesch, Secretary; and Edward Langer, Executive Committee member at large.

Pippin Michelli's after-dinner speech revealed many details of Klinkert's life and the many buildings he built or owned in Racine, as gleaned from her ongoing research through newspapers, maps, and city documents.

After a long and exciting day, we all agreed that we had experienced a side of Wisconsin that most of us had not seen before. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to Greg Smith, a longtime Friend, former Board member, and a high school German teacher in Racine, who planned and organized the day, introduced us to Racine's German history, and opened so many doors for us. Thank you, Greg! 🍷



Nancy Borzynski discussing renovation of the Klinkert Roadhouse

The Meyers of Milwaukee

Cora Lee Kluge

Patricia Tesch's intriguing article in the winter 2015–2016 issue of the *Friends Newsletter*, which showcases Yearbooks of the National German-American Teachers' Seminary from the First World War era, led me to check further into the identity of their original owner, a woman named Frieda Meyer Voigt, whose daughter Helga Voigt Epstein presented them to the MKI many years ago.

Frieda (1899–1973) was the daughter of Georg (George) Meyer (1856–1940) and his wife Anna (1864?–1932), who were born in Bremervörde and Saarbrücken, respectively. The couple came to the United States late in 1886, several years after their marriage, and essentially as refugees: as a recruit Georg had gotten into difficulty with the military over a trivial matter and fled to America via France, in order to save his life.¹ Their first home was in Milwaukee, but they moved on, and Georg worked for German-language newspapers in Lincoln, Winona, Chicago, Denver, Dubuque, and Appleton before settling permanently in Milwaukee, where he held a position for many years as editor of the *Milwaukee Herald*. He was one of the German Socialist immigrants of the late nineteenth century, and visitors in his home included many well-known figures such as the anarchist Emma Goldman and the celebrated German-American poet Martin Dre-scher. The Meyers' children went to performances at the Pabst Theater,

were members of gymnastics classes under Papa Brosius, and took lessons in the art school run by Milwaukee's panorama painter Friedrich Wilhelm Heine. When the *Milwaukee Herald* ceased daily publication in 1932, the same year his wife Anna died, Georg moved to Madison, where he spent the rest of his life in the home of his daughter Else.

Frieda had an older sister and an older brother. Her sister Else (1888–1964) was married to Hans Heine, the son of the painter; and after they divorced, she moved to Madison and in 1930 took a position as librarian at the *Capital Times*, organizing what is referred to in her lengthy *Capital Times* obituary as “a haphazard filing system of news clippings, pictures, zinc plates, and envelopes.”² Stricken with multiple sclerosis, she retired in 1948 and took up residence in the Dane County Home in Verona, where she “tirelessly and vigorously” used her connections to build a Home library, served as a liaison between the County Home and institutions in Madison, and also became an American Red Cross Gray Lady. She was respected and fondly remembered by those with whom she worked: William T. Ewjue, editor and publisher of the *Capital Times*, spoke at her memorial service, which was held in the First Unitarian Church in Madison on 21 January 1964.

Frieda's brother, Ernest L. Meyer (1892–1952), who was known as “Ernie,” was a senior at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and editor of

FORMER GERMAN EDITOR, GEORGE MEYER, IS DEAD

Madison —(AP)— George Meyer, 84, former editor of The Milwaukee Herald, German language newspaper, died in a Madison hospital today. He was the father of Ernest L. Meyer, columnist for The New York Post and The Madison Capital Times.

Mr. Meyer retired in 1932 when The Milwaukee Herald ceased publication. He had worked on German newspapers at Lincoln, Neb., Winona, Minn., Chicago, Denver, Colo., Dubuque, Ia., and Appleton.

Among the survivors are two daughters, Mrs. Else D. Heine, of Madison, and Mrs. Freida Voight, of Milwaukee.

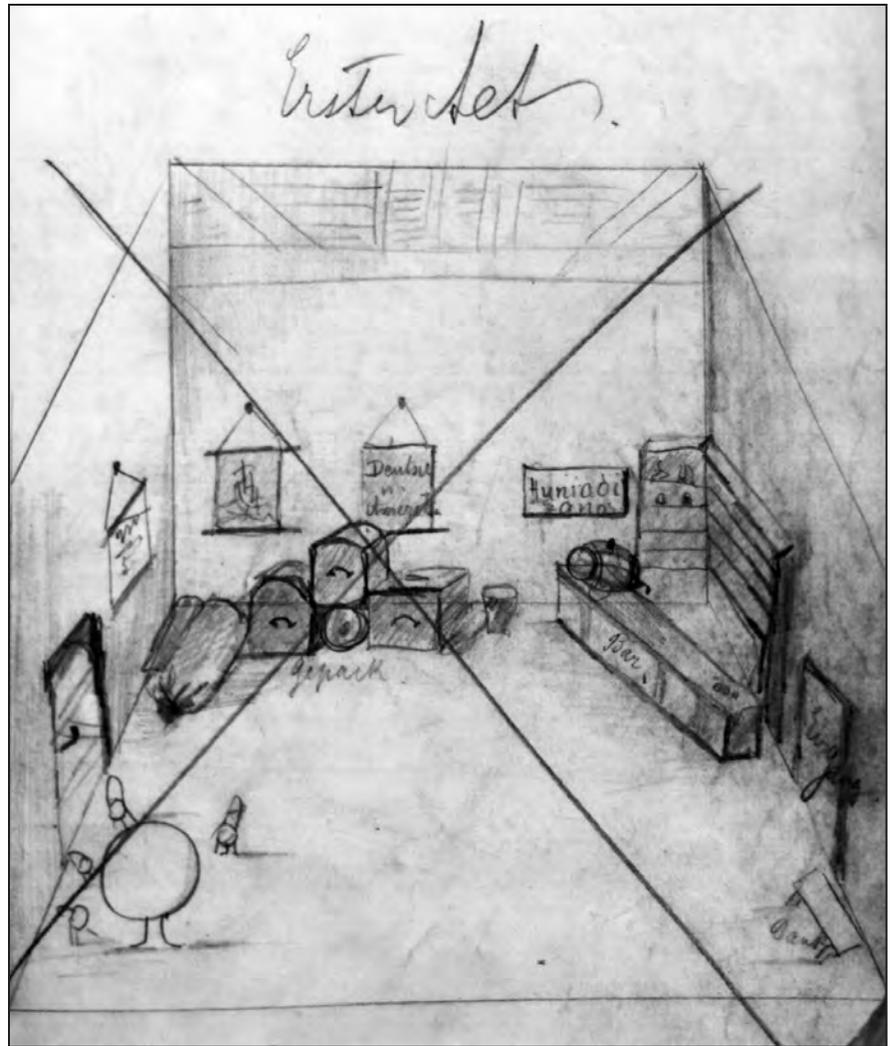
the *Wisconsin Literary Magazine*, when he was expelled and subsequently imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas for refusing military service as a conscientious objector—a political, not religious, conscientious objector, as he emphasized. After the war, he told this story in *Hey! Yellowbacks*.³ Like his father and his older sister, Ernie went into the newspaper business, working as a managing editor and columnist first for the *Capital Times* and then, beginning in 1934, as a columnist for the *New York Post* and later as an assistant telegraph editor for the *New York Daily News*.⁴ He wrote delightful memories of late-nineteenth-century German-American Milwaukee, including a series of seven articles entitled “Milwaukee Nights—1910” that appeared in the *Capital Times*

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help us learn details concerning what was performed, by whom, etc. These materials have proven to be invaluable resources for my senior honors thesis project.

In the summer after my sophomore year, I participated in the Welton Summer Sophomore Honors Apprenticeship, serving as a research assistant to Cora Lee. During this time, I perused the newspaper archives at the Wisconsin State Historical Society, looking for any and all information regarding German-language theater in Milwaukee. At first, the task was a daunting one—the sheer number of Milwaukee newspaper volumes archived at the Historical Society is considerable. Moreover, the newspapers are on microfilm—meaning not digitized—which meant that I had to go through each newspaper page by page in order to find information (instead of simply searching keywords). Although it was a time-consuming process, I quickly learned which newspapers, both German-language and English-language ones, had the most reliable information concerning Milwaukee's German-language theater, and became acquainted with the newspaper layouts so that I could be more efficient. By the end of the summer, I had found and documented over 1,600 news articles, announcements, reviews, and advertisements. I compiled lists of what was performed when and also collected articles about the theater's directors and performers. For the 1893–1894 season, I created what I believe to be a complete list of performances, based on the information in the ar-



Set sketch for the first act of Wilhelm Müller's play *Im gelobten Land Amerika* (Trostel Collection)

ticles and advertisements. We have labeled the 1890s the “golden era” of the German-language theater in Milwaukee, because of the quantity and quality of information we found in the newspapers of that decade. These 1,600 articles about the theater complement the Trostel Collection, as we now have accompanying news items for many of the Trostel Collection plays.

This academic year I added to the existing scholarship concerning Milwaukee's German-language theater

by writing a Senior Honors Thesis entitled “Taking Center Stage: Bringing Light to the Golden Era of the Milwaukee German Theater.” The aim of my Thesis is to describe and assess this important but overlooked aspect of German-American culture as a piece of American history. I provide information about the German-language theater in Milwaukee and its playhouses, as well as the lives of both the directors and also select prominent actors and actresses. My work also analyzes two German-



Wilhelm Müller (1845–1931)

American plays that are mentioned in secondary literature but whose texts have not been available. We were able to locate these plays in the Trostel Collection and “bring them to light” by transcribing them, translating some key parts, and discussing themes and linguistic aspects. The two plays we selected are *Im gelobten Land Amerika* (In the promised land America), a piece written by Wilhelm Müller in 1882, which highlights the German immigrant experience, the corrupting powers of wealth, and workers’ rights, and *Greenhorns in Amerika*, a modernized version of an earlier play entitled *Grünhörner* (Greenhorns), both written by Hans Kissling and thematizing topics of immigration, the longing for one’s “home,” language barriers, and love, among others. We now know that *Im gelobten Land Amerika* was performed in Milwaukee at the Pabst Theater on March 21, 1897, and *Grünhörner*, the original version of

Greenhorns in Amerika, was performed in the Neues Stadt Theater on December 16, 1894, and January 1, 1895. Unfortunately we have yet to find the original version of *Grünhörner* or any news articles containing information about when *Greenhorns in Amerika* was performed in Milwaukee. However, because this version of the play was found in the Trostel Collection, we have reason to believe that it was also put on stage in Milwaukee at some point.

Both of these plays end on an optimistic note regarding the immigrants’ new lives in America, and they include themes and topics that demonstrate what was important to German-American immigrants and what interested Milwaukee’s German-speaking audiences. Moreover, both of the plays incorporate interesting mixtures of German, German dialects, and English in the language of the characters, thus providing us with a sample of how German immigrants spoke.

These German-American plays are an integral part of the study of German-American culture, for they provide a window into various aspects of the lives of German immigrants. Moreover, the newspaper articles and reviews concerning them further allow us to obtain more knowledge about German Americans and German-American Milwaukee, as they tell us how the plays were received (which was exceedingly well, by the way).

Overall, giving scholarly attention to Milwaukee’s German-language theater is important because it tells part of the *unknown* or *hidden* story of immigrant Milwaukee. Because of the decline in the number of Ger-

man speakers, the fact that fewer members of the later generations spoke German, and the anti-German sentiments of the World War I era, among other reasons, the study of the German-language theater in the mecca of German-American culture in the United States has long been neglected.

I am pleased to have contributed to this important research project, which will bring light to a significant part of the story of Milwaukee’s German-American community and also America’s cultural history. 🇺🇸



Hans Kissling, who wrote *Greenhorns in Amerika* and also played a leading role in its performances (newspaper clipping in the Trostel Collection)

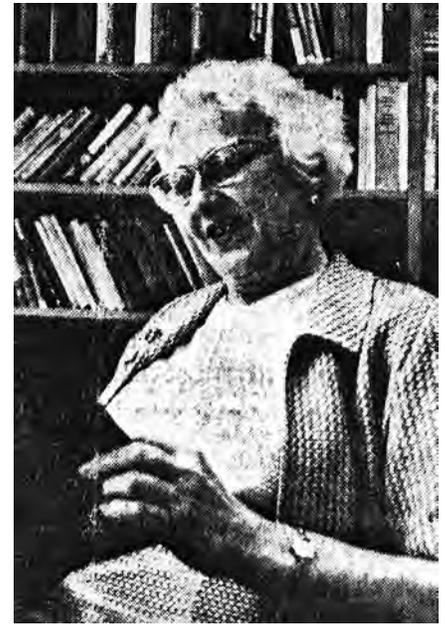
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(17 November to 10 December 1931) and *Bucket Boy: A Milwaukee Legend* (1947),⁵ both well worth reading. He is also known for his daily *Capital Times* human interest commentaries that ran under the heading “Making Light of the Times,” some of which have been collected in book form under that title.⁶ His younger sister later hinted that he lost touch with the German language, stating that she never knew him to read a German book; and at times he used “Louis” as his middle name instead of “Ludwig.” He had an excellent ear, however, for the difficulties German immigrants had with the English language, teasing his mother’s attempt to use the telephone—“Obberator, pleece giff me Lingoln, vun, vun, vun, acht, jott! [...] tree straight vuns, den a acht und den a jott!”—or her frustration when shopping for a *Besen* (broom) with which she could sweep—and being brought a *basin*.⁷ His hilarious stories about Dolfie Doellinger, the *Herold’s* police reporter, who lived in the same house as the Meyers and regularly shot mice in the upstairs hallway with his pistol, and who kept a record of the birthdays of all the city officials, so that he could visit them and drink to their health, constitute for me a sheer proof of the fact that the German Americans were not lacking in humor.⁸

Unlike her sister and brother, Frieda had always wanted to be a teacher. To prepare herself for her career, she spent five years at the National German-American Teachers’ Seminary (NTS) in Milwaukee, 1913 to 1918, enrolling in a three-year

preparatory course, the equivalent of the customary four-year high school course, plus two “normal” classes, i.e., pedagogical or teacher-training years. She was a member of the very last class of the NTS, which graduated in June of 1918, as the institution did not survive the anti-German sentiment of the World War I era. If one checks the internet or looks in library catalogs for information concerning this school, one finds relatively little except for her own article entitled “The National Teachers’ Seminary, A Unique Experience in Teacher Training,” which appeared in the *Modern Language Journal* in 1964.⁹

After finishing her work at the NTS, Frieda completed her B.A. degree at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and was doing graduate work at the University of Nebraska when she became interested in the work of a German poet named Rudolf Voigt (1899–1956), who lived in New Jersey. She wrote to him, and the two began a correspondence that resulted in their engagement—by mail; and in 1925 she turned down a fellowship at Bryn Mawr to marry. She and her husband moved to Milwaukee, where they taught German for many years at the “old extension division” (now the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee). Frieda finally completed her M.A. degree at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, in 1937, and when she retired in 1967, she held the position of associate professor of German at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, having taught there for 42 years. She was at that point the only woman in the German Department, the only person over the age of 40, and the only one without



Frieda Meyer Voigt, 1967

a Ph.D., as she herself confessed. “I realized I was an anachronism in my own time, and it was time to get out,” she mused, continuing “The world is truly for the young.”¹⁰ In 1971, she moved permanently to San Rafael, California, where her daughter lived, and did volunteer teaching at the San Rafael High School; she died in 1973.¹¹

It is obvious how much richer the inquiry into the life of a person becomes when one takes into consideration that person’s broader environment: his or her family, community, and times. In this case, our investigation also provides a broader context for the experiences of German Americans in Milwaukee through a number of decades. This information and these connections were not difficult to put together, as all the information is readily available in library holdings, newspaper archives, and published and unpublished documents; and modern internet tools have made

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the records easily accessible. We are struck by how the circumstances that affected the Meyers' lives are the same ones we have heard about so often: troubles in Europe that led to the emigration of liberals; longtime wanderings in America to find a position; the rise and fall of the German-language press; the First World War and its impact on German Americans of all ages; language difficulties; career choices; educational issues; positions for women; and more. But the stories we have told remain too often nothing better than historical abstractions and statistical analyses. Here we find them tied to individual members of a particular family, through whose names and faces and dates our understanding of the tapestry of American life becomes more personal and more meaningful. 🌿

NOTES

¹ Ernest Ludwig Meyer, *Bucket Boy*, 2nd printing (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1992) 33f.

² Else Heine's obituary was published in the *Capital Times*, 20 January 1964, pp. 1, 4.

³ First published in New York by the John Day Co., 1930; republished in New York by J. S. Ozer, 1972.

⁴ Ernie Meyer's son Karl E. Meyer (1937–) is also a noted journalist, who has served as a contributor, columnist, and editor of well-known publications including *The Saturday Review* and *The New York Times*. He and his wife Sharen Blair Brysac are the authors of *The China Collectors: America's Century-Long*

Hunt for Asian Art Treasures (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).

⁵ Originally published in New York by Hastings House, 1947.

⁶ Published by the *Capital Times* in Madison, 1928.

⁷ *Bucket Boy* (1992) 96, 103.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 143ff., 48ff.

⁹ Vol. 48.6, pp. 361–363.

¹⁰ *The Milwaukee Journal* (22 May 1967). From an article about her published at the time of her retirement.

¹¹ Her obituary was published in the *Daily Independent Journal* of San Rafael, California, on 7 September 1973.

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