

Lest We Forget.

The Bachhuber family came to Wisconsin during the early South German immigration to America, 1846 being the year of their entry. The first and second generations, European born, have long since passed away. The third generation, American born, knows but little of the trials and struggles of these true pioneers, while to succeeding generations they are but names from the dim past. It is the purpose of the following lines to aid in preserving the memory of our heroic forebears, their courage, their fortitude, their industry, their vision.

Martin Bachhuber decided to turn his back on his native Bavaria and to emigrate to America. This was in 1846, when he was thirty-six years of age. He turned his assets into cash, and with his family, took passage in a sailship, and left his fatherland forever. He hoped to found a new home in a new country. He was the only one of that family to emigrate to faraway America at that early date.

Martin Bachhuber was born at the village of Deglkofen, near Regensburg (Ratisbon) in Upper Franconia (Oberfranken), Bavaria. We know but little of his family, practically nothing of his parents. He had several brothers, with whom he corresponded for over a decade, and their replies to his letters are still preserved in the family. The familiar given names prevail. There are letters from Alois and Franz, and in one there is reference to a son of Franz, Johann. It would appear that all of them were farmers, and Martin himself is described in his passport as a Kleingütler, owner of a small farm. It seems that, as yet, there were neither factories nor railroads, for there is no reference in any of the letters to labor, other than farm labor, not to means of travel, other than the stage coach. We also know that Martin Bachhuber was skilled in veterinary surgery and medicine, and many of the letters are addressed to him as Tierarzt. Also, on the farm in Town Leroy where the Max Bachhuber family lived from 1880-1889, there were various instruments used in that work, which had belonged to him. He must have been quite versatile for in later years he also became a brewer.

It would be interesting to know just why he forsook the land of his fathers to seek a faraway wilderness home. One can easily deduce some of the reasons, for the letters referred to before constantly speak of the "life of a slave" they were leading in the homeland, and of the high taxes and "other charges constantly creeping on". In one letter military service is mentioned. A matter referred to again and again is the high price of wheat, rye and potatoes and the exceedingly poor harvests of that period, there having been a succession of crop failures.

It is not easy for us today to picture to ourselves the difficulty of emigrating to a faraway country in 1846. Travel was slow and tiresome. These letters required two months to reach their destination. As yet there were no steamers to ply the ocean as a few decades later. Travelers had to take passage in sailships. Also, they were bound for a country where language and customs were strange. The earlier immigrants did not know even the most important details about the new country.

They had no idea of the distance from New York to Milwaukee. They only knew they would be free from the tyrannical restrictions of the homeland. When they arrived in the promised land, newcomers, unless highly skilled in some line, found that there was no work for them, and they were forced to settle on land in the backwoods, to hew out a home for themselves there. This always meant a period of years during which they eked out only a miserable existence.

Apparently, the brothers were eager to follow Martin to America, but they were gripped by the fear that they might become "beggars in a strange land" and they never developed the requisite courage to take the final step and emigrate. In fact, as times improved in the homeland, the letters gradually ceased and ties were slowly broken. The American born generation did not know and soon lost interest in their European relatives.

Martin Bachhuber married Theres Dirmaier. In the marriage contract we read that he possessed property to the value of 720 florins (Gulden) and that his wife contributed 300 florins in cash and an outfit worth 50 florins as her dowry.

To them were born five children: Max, John, Barbara, Emmeran, and Eligius, the last dying at the age of six. Of these Max, the oldest, was sent to the Klosterschule (Monastery School) at Regensburg, where he studies Latin and mathematics. Family traditions says that his tuition was paid by the maid and menservants of the neighboring estate and that it was planned he should become a priest. His studies were, however, soon broken off when the family went to the new world. He was then 13 years old.

The family came directly to Milwaukee, then a little town of 3500, where they arrived probably in August, as their passport was vised in Havre on June 9, 1846, and it is probable also that they sailed from that port. Here they stayed only a short time, as grandfather bought and settled on a forty acre tract near St. Lawrence in Town Addison, now Washington County. They always referred to Town Addison as Town Eleven. Here they erected a log cabin, one room with a loft. Clearing the land of its huge oaks and maples was backbreaking work, for the only implements they had were the ax, the grubhoe, and the saw. Explosives were unknown, or too high priced for their meager purses. Due to this and to the lateness of the season, they made little headway that year and the following winter was one of near starvation. Family tradition says that the only food they had for months was turnips and venison.

An incident about the food problem is of interest. Their food supply had entirely dwindled away when grandfather managed to get a bag of wheat. But the mill was 35 miles away at Milwaukee, and the only way of getting it there was to carry it on his back. This trip required several days. In the meantime the children complained bitterly of hunger. Relief was near, however, for Max saw a deer. He rushed into the house to ask mother permission to use the rifle. She consented only because she had also become weak from hunger. Thirteen year old Max, accompanied by twelve year old John loaded the clumsy rifle and went in search of the deer. They found it in a dense swamp. A well-aimed shot brought it down and John, with his penny knife (kreuzerbugger) rushed in and slashed its throat. Mother was called to help drag it in. That night there was food in the house, the fat portions their meat, the lean their bread. Want makes men early of little boys.

Hardships of another nature, too were theirs. There was no medical help available. They had to depend on themselves. It is reported by the grandson (Mr. Klink, many years superintendent of the Dodge County farms) of another early settler of the community that grandfather set the fractured hip of their neighbor who had been struck by a falling tree, and secured a perfect union.

This farm was no place for a man of grandfather's nature and two years later saw him return to Milwaukee. Here he began to practice veterinary surgery, while his sons engaged in carrying newcomers to their destinations in various parts of southeastern Wisconsin. Presently fortune began to smile upon them a bit, and they could afford a few of the comforts of life.

In their long trips the brothers frequently came to Town Leroy, Dodge County, where a group of Bavarian families had settled as early as 1844. Here they found old friends and heard their familiar dialect, and here Max settled on his marriage in 1856. A few years later (1861) the remainder of the family settled in Mayville, five miles away, five miles away, where grandfather passed away in 1870 and grandmother in 1871.

In the course of time father grew to man's estate. Long before this he had done a man's work. His father thought it was time he established a home for himself and advised his son to find a helpmate. The story of his courtship was told me by my mother. It is a romantic story, romantic because so unusual. Said grandfather to his son:

"Max, I think it is time for you to marry".

"Do you know anyone?"

"No."

"No one at all?"

"Well, there is the cousin of the Wuerzinger's".

"Have you spoken to her?"

"No."

"Well, you better go over and see her".

Accordingly, he "spruced up" and went. She opened the door for him. He stammered and hesitated.

"Real", he said, "if you will take me, I'll marry you".

"Yes, I'll take you".

And so, the courtship, while exceedingly brief, was thoroughly successful. On Feb. 8, 1856 they were married in St. Joseph's Church in Milwaukee. They immediately moved to Leroy.

Theresa Engel was born near Landau on Isar, Lower Bavaria (Niederbayern) on March 30, 1835. She was the second child. Her father, Georg Engel, owned a Kleingut here. Hard work and small remuneration was their lot. As the members of the family grew up they assisted with the farmwork and also worked for neighbors. Presently mother went to work in a household in Landau. Here the hours were long and the work onerous, while the wages were a mere pittance. "This drove me to America", mother told me one time, but I suspect that the spirit of adventure also was a very important motive as she had planned for only a short stay.

Theres Engel, at the age of nineteen, crossed the sea in company of an older lady friend, who came here to visit relatives. She sailed from Bremen on the sailship Suwa, and spent forty four days on the ocean. She entered the promised land in New York. She at once bought a ticket for Buffalo, but was surprised to find as were so many others in the same situation, when she came to Albany, that the remainder of the trip was to be on the Erie Canal.

This part of the trip was very tedious, so she left the barge at Utica. But she was bound for Milwaukee, so she did not stay here long, and continued by rail to Buffalo. Here she took passage in a steamer and stopped off for a while at what was then called Manitowoc Rapids, from where she finished her journey by stage coach. In Milwaukee she spent some time in domestic service, but soon arranged for a permanent stay in her own home as told before.

On their arrival in Leroy, the young couple took possession of their new log house, erected by father the year before. Already a considerable number of settlers had preceded them, and this village had been a post office under the name of Farmersville since 1848, Mr. Lamberson and Mr. Gill having been early postmasters. Soon father became postmaster. In addition to the post office he also carried on a general store and tavern, and the little hall above became the recreation center for the community, as he arranged dances, puppet shows, and other entertainments. This also became a favorite place for wedding parties.

Other industries soon sprang up. A blacksmith shop was operated by Mr. Katzendobler, and a wagon shop by Karl Gruber. Later the blacksmith, Karl Wagner, also located here. On a neighboring tract Uncle Lawrence Weix, who had married father's sister, was already engaged in making a farm. A tailor also came to the community, Ferdinand Gregor, known as Schneiderfertl, and two shoemakers, Anton Haertle and Sebastian Weinberger, located nearby. The creek just west of Farmersville was dammed in various places and furnished power for several sawmills. I heard the names Blanchard, Holdridge, Wanninger and Uncle Lawrence Weix in this connection. The old up-and-down saws must have been awkward implements for sawing the heavy oak and maple logs, but the many board fences and sawed posts of the neighborhood attest to the industry of the owners. In addition to the occupations mentioned, father also acquired some land, and added farming and feed grinding as further occupations.

In the course of time a large family was born: Andrew 1856; Crescentia 1858; Mary 1860; Emeran, 1862; Max 1864; Kate 1866; John 1868; Alois (Louis) 1870; Albert 1872; Emily 1874; Alphons 1877; and Hugo (C.H.) 1879. Of these all grew to maturity except Emmeran, who died in early childhood, and Emily who was killed by a crazed cow, also early in childhood.

Father was always active politically. He was town clerk and justice of the peace for many years, and he also served in the state legislature as assemblyman a number of terms 1860, 1864, 1875.

In 1856 Town Leroy was still decidedly primitive. The forest was broken only infrequently by little clearings where settlers had obtained a foothold. For this reason it was referred to by people of nearby Mayville as "der Busch", the forest. Indians were still numerous especially along Horican Marsh, then Lake, and they made frequent trips past our place as they were on their way to Theresa, where Solomon Juneau, the agent, had in the meantime settled. Often, too, they came to our place to beg, and their shadow would flit across the window where mother sat sewing by candle light. French charcoal burners were also located here, and many a farm is still covered with bits of charcoal to remind us of their activity.

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In the meantime the Fond du Lac, Amboy, and Peoria RR had been built from Iron Ridge to Fond du Lac, but it passed two miles east of Farmersville, and a station was located a mile north of that point. This soon led to the dropping of the post office at Farmersville (1882). A new one was established at Knowles, the station, and with this most of the business also went to the new place, as well as to Mayville, as roads improved. Mother with her big family did not stay long in the old place, but promptly traded it for another farm adjacent to the one they had owned since 1872. The spring of 1880 saw the fatherless family migrate to a new home on the farm, half a mile away.

However, farming as mother had to carry it on, was uphill work. As the family grew up one after another left the maternal home, thus making mother carry on with hired men and little boys, and so, realizing that this was not a desirable undertaking for her; she sold out, 1889, and moved once more, this time to Mayville, to retire from active life. But mother really never retired; she remained active to the end of her life.

As the Max Bachhauber family had achieved some degree of well-being, mother prevailed upon her family to follow her to the new world. They did as father's family had done before them, sold out and in 1857, all excepting Joseph, set out on the long trail to the new world. In addition to mother, Theresa, there were five other children: Crescentia, Mary, Joseph, George and Magdalen. Grandfather George Engel was destined never to see the new home, for he died of cholera on ship-board a few days out of port, and he was buried at sea. The remainder of the family with the exception noted, came directly to Milwaukee. Crescentia and Mary soon were married, while Magdalen went to Minnesota with a family by whom she had been employed; where she was also married. George and Joseph, the latter coming after he had finished his apprenticeship, stayed with the folks at Leroy until they established homes of their own, while grandmother stayed with the family until her death in 1868. All of them have long since gone to the Great Beyond.

Civil War days laid a heavy hand on the family. When the draft came father and Uncle Lawrence Weix were assigned to the colors. The draft was not selective then as in the World War, and the men were torn from their helpless families. Father was not so situated that he could go, for his brother John had just died; so he availed himself of the privilege of furnishing a substitute and Uncle Joseph Engel went in his place. For this service father assigned to Uncle Joe a house and several acres of land. Uncle George volunteered at the age of 19 and joined the 26. Regiment of Wisconsin Volunteers which became a part of the Iron Brigade under Gen. Edward S. Bragg. He served throughout Sherman's campaign through the heart of the Confederacy.

During those days these Bavarian immigrants suffered severely as all prices, especially of cotton goods, soared tremendously. So intensely felt was this that they sowed flax, and spun and wove it into cloth, the weaving having been done by one of the neighbors, who had brought his weaving or rather loom with him. Pieces of this linen are still in possession of the family and are highly cherished. How hard their lot was may be seen from the fact that hardly one able bodied man was left in the entire community.

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Added to these hardships came another just after the war in the shape of terrible epidemic of small pox. Suffering was widespread, and death took its toll from almost every family. Vaccination, as they practiced it, was crude in form and was usually done by a member of the family who took vaccine from the scab of one who had just been vaccinated. I remember many who had been horribly disfigured during this epidemic.

The family prospered and achieved some degree of success and prominence. Many are intellectually inclined and have studied for the various professions, notably, medicine and teaching, while one has pronounced his vows and is a member of the Society of Jesus.

These Bavarian immigrants of Leroy were all Catholics and they promptly made provision for divine worship. At first missionaries, Fr. Rehl being mentioned in this connection, meagerly supplied their needs. At an early date, some time in the late forties, the Stern family who came in 1847 (the first Bavarian settler was Johann Ernst, called Ernst'n Hans), donated a piece of land on which they erected a modest log church. Another and larger building soon took its place. In 1869 a then pretentious brick building was erected, but this soon also proved inadequate, and a fine modern church was built in the late nineties.

To this church all the Bachhuber's of Leroy belonged, and here all the children of Max and Theresa Bachhuber were baptized, and here likewise are buried the maternal grandmother, as well as Uncle John Bachhuber. Father was also buried here, but his remains were removed to the Catholic Cemetery at Mayville, following mother's death, April 24, 1917, and here mother and father are resting side by side, as once, in the early pioneer days of Leroy, they had worked side by side in wrestling with the problem of creating home for themselves and their children.

May eternal peace be theirs!

Charles
Hugo
BACHHUBER