

PERSPEKTIVEN

PERSPEKTIVEN Volume 1, No. 4

Fall 2002

Friedrich Martin von Bodenstedt, a German poet and travel writer who visited Wisconsin in 1880, held that German-speaking immigrants lost the "poetry of life" because work came first. Generations of the family of John Michael Kohler, a German-speaking immigrant who began the world-wide Kohler Company in 1873, advanced the idea that "labor without art is brutality." Their stories:

John Michael Kohler's Legacy a Labor of Art

"The Americans do not merely work, they overwork themselves even when they are already deep in wealth, and the most thereby lose the enjoyment of life." - Friedrich Bodenstedt

German Poet's Writing Deflates Nickname of "German Athens" for the City of Milwaukee

By Friedrich Bodenstedt

That this nice city carries the nickname "German Athens" naturally does not lack giving occasion to make other comments - "intra muros et extra." I myself in the principal paper of the Germans, the "Herold", repeated ongoing debates which are found, whether and how the city is justified to produce such a name. We may also make our commentary over Isar-Athens, Elbe-Athens and Spree-Athens, although these cities for the history of art are more significant than all the American cities taken together.

The emigrant is not drawn to America to study art, but in order, through hard work, to achieve a secure, if also a modest estate. But the educated among them soon perceive deeply enough that fleeing the poverty and hypocrisy of the Old World, also many nice and lively things must be left, which cannot be replaced in the great prosperity of the New World, where the long work days

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The adaptation was simple, but the idea was genius. In 1883, John Michael Kohler took an item produced in his Sheboygan foundry, heated it to 1700 degrees and sprinkled it with enamel powder. Placing a picture of the finished product in the center of his one page catalog he called it "a horse trough/hog scalding...when furnished with four legs will serve as a bathtub."

According to the Kohler legend, he sold that item for one cow and 14 chickens. Kohler was in the plumbing business.

Over the years, his original immigrant workforce - many German speaking - and subsequent family generations came up with ideas, craftsmanship, technology, and expansions that lead to more gracious living and an incalculable contribution to the world of art.



J. M Kohler and bathtub

John Michael Kohler was born November 3, 1844, in Schnepfau, a province of the Tirol in Austria. His birthplace is also described as an Alpine home in the

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Goethe House of Wisconsin is a non-profit German-American cultural institute serving Wisconsin since 1958. Our mission is to serve as a statewide resource for information about the past and present culture of all German-speaking people - especially those in the Federal Republic of Germany. Goethe House of Wisconsin invites the financial support of individuals, companies and organizations who share our mission and recognize the value of this important cultural exchange. Goethe House of Wisconsin is a not-for-profit (501) (c) (3) organization. Donations are tax deductible as the law allows.

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From the President

With this fourth edition of PERSPEKTIVEN, it is my pleasure to announce that Helga Nikolic has joined our productive and creative staff responsible for PERSPEKTIVEN. Helga, in addition to having devoted many years teaching Deutsch at Wauwatosa West High School, also has had a successful hand in several other non-profit publications.

In this issue we venture into the controversial with an article challenging whether Milwaukee actually was ever worthy of the appellation "German Athens of America."

We also include a most interesting account of the Kohler families' generous contribution to the rich fabric of German culture in Wisconsin.

We also inaugurate a series on the oldest, still existing vereines, starting with a salute to the Madison Mannerchor, which is celebrating its 150th year of wonderful vocal entertainment.

Hut Weg!

ALLES GUTE,

ALLES GOETHE

Ted E. Wedemeyer Jr.

The Goethe House of Wisconsin
Annual Meeting and Dinner
will be held

Thursday evening, December 5th
at the Bavarian Wursthau.
Please mark your calendar.

Teaching Youngsters German is Learning Experience for Adults

**By Katharina Hren
Executive Director**

This summer has been rife with opportunities to work with children and youth. As always, such work has invigorated and rejuvenated our mission as we learn from these young people. We held four Kinder Kamps - at Prairie Hill Waldorf School, Carroll College, Milwaukee German Immersion School, and Milwaukee Kickers - serving almost 75 children and working with six energetic and creative teachers. Thanks to the Milwaukee German Immersion School Foundation (MGIS), the MGIS PTA, and the Bradley Foundation we were able to offer \$1,500 in scholarships.



Students teach at German Fest

This year at German Fest the Goethe House sponsored the computer contest alongside Frau Sabine Beirold and her Rufus King High School students. The students lent their expertise and helpfulness to the many visitors who flocked to our tent to test their wits with trivia quizzes and call forth their knowledge of the

German language with various language tests. Rufus King loaned lap-top computers for the event.

"Kinder Deutsch" to begin

This summer brings us to an exciting autumnal slate of events! Our adult classes resume during the week of September 16th. Our Spielgruppe has grown into "Kinder Deutsch" and will meet every Saturday at Goethe House beginning September 21st. We will begin with verse and song, followed by some physical movement and games, and then a 45 minute lesson. The session will conclude with a half hour consisting of a small snack, a video, and a bit of play time, during which the adults will have an opportunity to socialize in German. Every two weeks we will have an experienced teacher lead the session; the alternating weeks will be comprised of seasonal and holiday activities, as well as reviews of what we have learned. One parent or grandparent must attend with the child(ren), so as to learn with and from the young people. German natives are encouraged to join us, for many of the current parents are also natives. We strive for a German immersion atmosphere, but the parents do not need to have a prior knowledge of German. Kinder Deutsch will cost \$90 for the school year. Parents of Kinder Kamp attendees are invited to visit one session for free! Call me personally with questions about this very special prospect!

Off to Germany

Our intermediate and advanced German teacher, Sabine Connerton, is planning a language class that will culminate in a trip to Germany! The class will learn language content which will then be put to relevant and active use in Germany with the guidance of the teacher. Watch for dates and prices to be announced sometime this fall!

Viele Gruesse

Vielen Dank

We extend a thank you to Regis Marketing Group Inc. for its contributions to Goethe House of Wisconsin.

John Michael Kohler's Legacy a Labor of Art

[Kohler, From Page 1]

Bregenzerwald near Lake Constance in Western Austria. His father, also named John Michael, was a dairy farmer and cheese maker, and his mother was Maria Anna Moosbrugger from the village of Schoppernau where her family had operated an inn since the 1600s.

Could that have been an omen?

John Michael Kohler ultimately settled in Wisconsin, a prime dairy state in which cheese was essential as breathing, and his heirs now operate the foremost inn in the Midwest, The American Club and Resort in Kohler.

John Michael Kohler was 10 years old when he emigrated from Austria to the United States in 1854 with his father, his stepmother and two brothers and two

owned a machine shop and foundry. Kohler went to work for Vollrath in 1872.

A year later, the Kohler Co. was founded. Starting with the name Kohler & Silberzahn, with John Michael joined by partner Charles Silberzahn, they bought the Vollrath business for \$5,000. In 1878, Kohler and Silberzahn terminated their partnership, and the company became Kohler, Hayssen and Stehn Manufacturing Company. Silberzahn had sold his interest to Herman Hayssen and John H. Stein.

Walter and Herbert Kohler Born

Meantime, Walter Kohler had been born in 1875 to John Michael and Lillie, who died in 1883. John Michael married Wilhemina Vollrath, Lillie's sister, in 1887, and John Michael's and Wilhemina's



Dedication of The American Club

Kohler, Wisconsin June 23, 1918

sisters, spending 53 days on the Atlantic crossing from LeHavre, France, to New York.

After a brief stop in Galesburg, Illinois, the family settled on their 160-acre farm north of downtown St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1862, reaching the age of 18, Kohler moved to Chicago, working as a salesman and attending Dyhrenfurth College.

At one point, he sold furniture for a Chicago manufacturer, a job that took him to Sheboygan.

Kohler moved to Sheboygan

In 1871, Kohler moved to Sheboygan, marrying Lillie Vollrath that July. The Vollraths were also German-speaking immigrants from the Rhineland, and her father

only child, Herbert, was born in 1889. These two half brothers, born in the 19th century, and their namesake sons would have crucial roles in Kohler Co.'s worldwide role into the 21st century.

By 1900, John Michael Kohler and his partners had settled their company operations in the village of Riverside, five miles west of Sheboygan and later to become the village of Kohler. In November of that year, John Michael Kohler died.

During his lifetime, John Michael had made significant contributions to Sheboygan. He was a county supervisor, city council member, member of the

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John Michael Kohler's Legacy a Labor of Art

[Kohler, from Page 4]

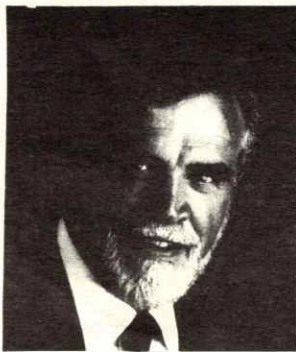
city's Library Association, mayor, part owner of Turner Hall and owner of the Sheboygan Opera House, a theater "superior to anything ever before seen in this city."

In 1901, fire seriously damaged the Kohler factory and later that year the company was reorganized as J. M. Kohler Sons Co. In 1902, the company was back in operation with a new foundry.

Walter Kohler Sr. was president of Kohler Co. from 1905 to 1941, and during that period was a one-term governor of Wisconsin from 1929-1931. He continued the tone of coupling labor and art, according to Herbert Kohler Jr., current head of the company.

"...labor without art is brutality"

Back in the early teens of the 20th century, the company adopted a saying by John Ruskin, "Life without labor is guilt, labor without art is brutality," Herbert Jr. commented.



Herbert V. Kohler Jr.
Chairman, CEO and President
Kohler Co.

"If you think about those words it means that literally everything you do must be artful," he said. "This belief propelled the company into becoming a leader in plumbing product design. A suite of its products were placed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1929."

Another belief adopted by Walter Sr. was that "a worker deserves not only wages but roses as well." That inspired him to complete his father's idea to make Riverside a place where workers could live in comfort in their own homes. "So the village of Kohler was born and became one of the first planned communities in the United States, and the only one of that vintage that survives to this day," Herbert Kohler Jr. said.

The American Club built

Pursuing the notion of a worker deserving not only wages, but roses as well, Walter Kohler Sr. built The

American Club, a temporary dormitory for immigrant workers from Europe who had no other place to live, Herbert Kohler Jr. said. Lessons were taught in the English language and American citizenship. The club has since become the only Five Diamond resort hotel in the Midwest and the centerpiece of the Kohler hospitality group.

Then in the 1960s, the home of John Michael Kohler in Sheboygan was established as an arts center and underwent two \$20 million expansions.

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center has become renowned throughout the art world for two major initiatives, according to Herbert Kohler Jr.

"One is to discover, research, restore and collect the work of self-taught artists," he said. "The other was to develop, in conjunction with the company, an arts in industry program whereby artists from around the world working in ceramics, iron and brass would come to the company, do their work on the factory floor using unfamiliar processes but common materials."

That program is continuing with dozens of artists making a wild array of sculptural and surface modified pieces, and has inspired the company into developing a broad array of color and glazes along with its own series of more commercial product called Artists Edition.

"...and it all stemmed from the simple generational idea that labor without art is brutality," Herbert Kohler Jr. concluded.



The Bregenzerwald crest

Michael Krenn of the Kohler Co. and Steven M. Markiewicz of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center graciously contributed the material for this article. Any errors of commission or omission are ours - The editors

Goethe Tribute Sparkles in Distinctive Arts Center Washroom

Even the public washrooms are works of art at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. Each of the six washrooms was created by an outstanding American artist in the Arts Center's renowned Arts/Industry program.

Begun in 1974 as a means of supporting artists, Arts/Industry gives artist the opportunity to create whole new bodies of sculpture and other works of art using the facilities, technologies, and materials of nearby plumbing ware manufacturer, Kohler Co. Up to 22 artists from around the world spend two to six months each year in residence in the company's pottery, iron and brass foundry and/or enamel shop creating works they could not undertake in their own studies.

Through the years, several artists have created major public commissions for sites across the United States, from federal and state office buildings to parks and mass transit stations. The six washrooms were the first commissions undertaken for the Arts Center itself. The commissions were funded through the Campaign for a New Arts Center for a New Century to which more than 2,800 contributors gave \$20.5 million. The washrooms are indicative of the Arts Center's efforts to make the arts an integral part of adults' and children's lives through nationally acclaimed visual and performing arts programming.

The main entrance men's washrooms - titled *"The Social History of Architecture"* - was done by Matt Nolen, a New York artist, who came to the Arts/Industry program for the first time to create his commission. Nolen's work includes a tribute Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who lends his name to the joint Germany-United States venture known as Goethe House of Wisconsin and other Goethe Houses. Among Goethe's studies were art, architecture, philosophy, philosophy and languages, making him an ideal representative for the Goethe Houses, which serve as cultural outposts for Germany around the world.

Formally trained as an architect, Nolen has depicted *"The Social History of Architecture"* from ancient Egypt to the present. GOETHE is inscribed above the door of the washroom, which has tiles and fixtures wittily portraying the ruler or visionary of each period.

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center is known nationally for the breath and fascination of its ever-changing, ever-new exhibitions, performances, and other programming. Its washrooms are equally amazing and, like old friends, they are always there for visitors.



**Tribute to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
in the main entrance men's washroom
at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center**

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 608 New York Avenue, Sheboygan, is open to the public free of charge every day of the week.

**Regular gallery and retail shop hours are:
Mondays, Wednesday and Friday 10 a.m. to**

5 p.m.

Tuesdays and Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Saturdays and Sundays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

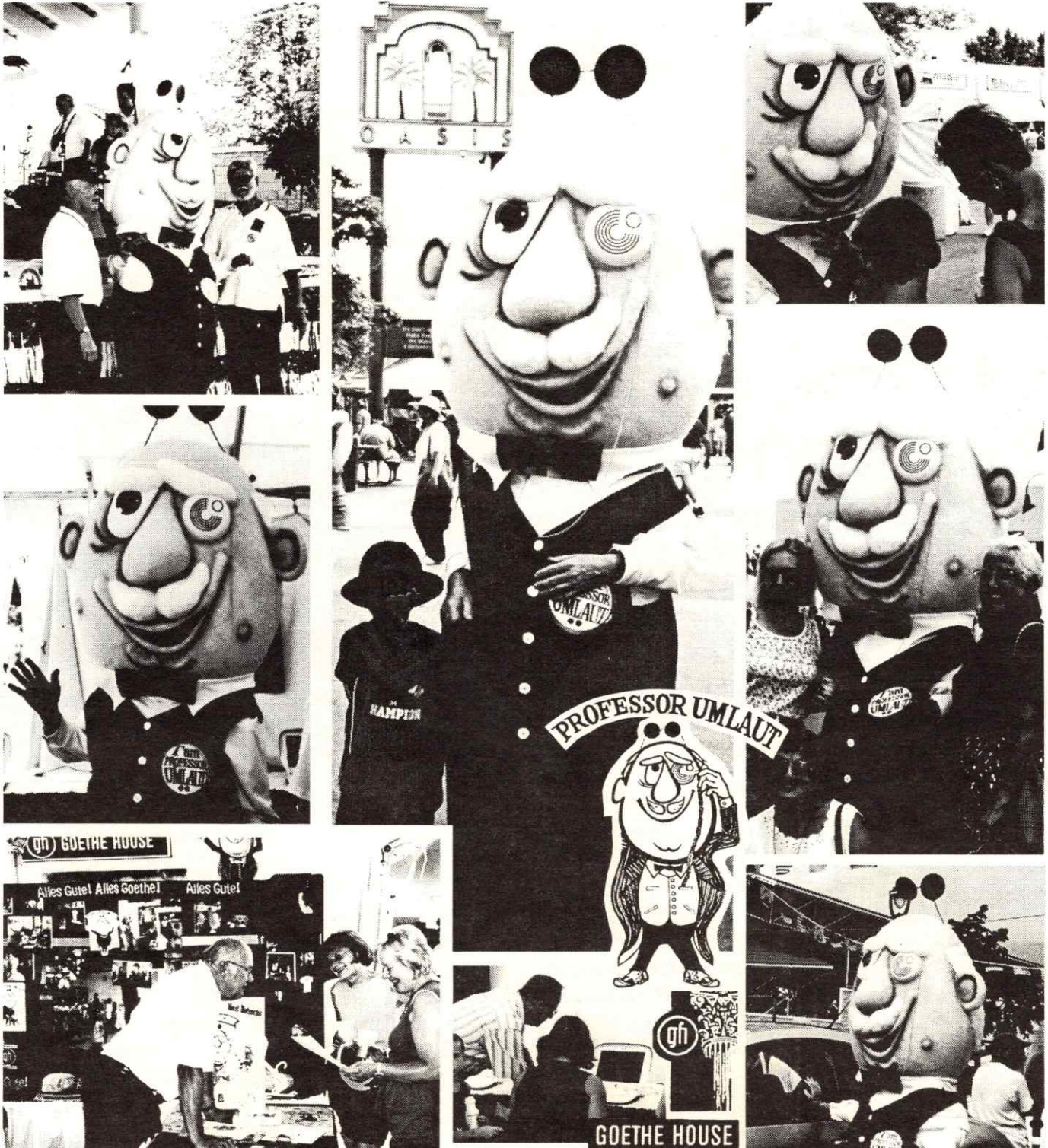
The Carriage House Cafe, which has both indoor and outdoor dining, is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. seven days a week, and until 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursdays as well as on evenings of performances.

The Arts Center's free admission and programming are made possible by 170 corporate and foundation contributors and 1,500 families as well as by several federal, regional and state granting agencies.

Goethe House of Wisconsin at German Fest 2002

Goethe House of Wisconsin's presence at German Fest was more than obvious. Professor Umlaut made his first official appearance in the Saturday parade at the Henry W. Maier Festival Grounds. On both Saturday and Sunday he made every effort to bring good cheer. He was well received by the crowds.

Also at German Fest, a most successful computer language testing program was conducted in which "Ich kenne mich gut aus" buttons were given to all of the participants.



The Madison Maennerchor extends an invitation to attend its Gala 150th Anniversary Concert on September 21, 2002, at the Marriott-Madison West in Middleton, Wisconsin. The concert starts at 7:30 p.m. and will feature the music of the Madison Maennerchor as well as the combined voices of 16 other German choirs from Wisconsin and Illinois. The massed chorus at the end of the concert will have more than 350 singers. Following the concert, there will be entertainment by Johnny Hoffmann und seine Herzbuben. Ticket prices are \$10 per person. If you are interested in tickets, please send a check made out to the Madison Maennerchor to Tim Hughes, 5714 Forsythia Place, Madison, WI 53705.

The Madison Maennerchor Celebrates 150th Anniversary With Gala Concert



Members of the Madison Maennerchor

In February 1852, 12 German immigrants founded the Madison Maennerchor in Madison, Wisconsin. They gave their first concert in February 1853 in the Baptist Church and the fine caliber of these singers and musicians soon attracted to the group not only those of German origin but other nationalities as well. The chorus grew and other choirs came into being in Wisconsin.

A memorable event in the history of the Madison Maennerchor took place on October 11, 1887 when President and Mrs. Grover Cleveland visited Madison. The President was the guest of Col. and Mrs. Vilas in their beautiful mansion on the shore of Lake Mendota. In the evening the Madison Maennerchor paid tribute to the President and First Lady with a Moonlight Serenade.

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The Madison Maennerchor Celebrates 150th Anniversary With Gala Concert

[Maennerchor, from Page 8]

In 1902, the Madison Maennerchor celebrated its Golden Jubilee with a Gala Concert in the Fuller Opera House (the present site of Madison's Parkway Theater), followed by a banquet at the Turner Hall.

The steady, progressive growth of the Madison Maennerchor was diminished by World War I when its ranks were depleted by the younger members going into military service. While rehearsals and concerts were continued, the former enthusiasm was lacking. Full gaiety was not reached again until the choir's 75th Anniversary and Jubilee Concert was held on April 21, 1927, in the auditorium of the Masonic Temple under the director of Dr. Sigfried Prager.

In 1936, the state of Wisconsin celebrated its Centennial Anniversary in which the Maennerchor took a prominent part by leading the German section in the International Cavalcade.

On November 15, 1940, a disastrous fire destroyed the Turner Hall, which was the home of the Madison Maennerchor, and claimed all of its treasured possessions. They included a Steinway Grand Piano, which had been donated by Mrs. Fred Rentschler in memory of her husband, a former member. The choir's entire musical library, which had been collected during the span of 90 years, all flags and banners and Saengerfest trophies, records and photographs were gone.

However, numerous friends came to the assistance of the choir and provided music and other donations so that rehearsals could go on until the members adjusted to the loss. In October 1941, the New Turner Hall was completed and dedicated. The Maennerchor participated in the celebration and occupied a large room in the new hall designed for singers.

In 1952, the Madison Maennerchor celebrated its 100th anniversary. A concert was held March 8th at the old Central High School auditorium. Other groups participating in the concert were the Madison Civic Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, the Mozart Club, the New Glarus Maennerchor and the Grieg Male Chorus. The Madison Maennerchor also was host for the 55th Wisconsin Saengerfest in July of 1952, and received the "Zelter Plakette" from the German singing federation for its longevity.



The Madison Maennerchor took a concert tour of Germany in 1984, combining with singers from the Maennerchor of Denver, Colorado, performing seven concerts in 14 days.

Ron Rockow has been director of the Madison Maennerchor since 1989.

The Madison Maennerchor of today consists of 42 singers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The Madison Maennerchor is an active member in the Wisconsin Saengerbezirk and takes part in its two annual events, the Kommers and the Saengerbezirk. In addition, the choir gives two formal concerts each year, sings at the Madison Civic Center International Festival and sings for any other community groups throughout the year.

The Madison Maennerchor still adheres to the standards and customs established 150 years ago. They include:

- Perpetuating its beloved German Lieder and holding two annual public concerts for Madison area residents.
- Each June, making a pilgrimage to Madison area cemeteries to pay homage to departed members.
- Closely adhering to the policy of non-sectarian, non-political principles, and loyal allegiance to the United States of America.

Writer-Poet Deflates Milwaukee's Nickname of "German Athens"

[Athens, From Page 1]

"If Milwaukee is being named 'German Athens', so is it therewith no comparison directed, but only a suggestion of an ideal goal. Athens also lets itself a comparison to no other city and least with an American one. The blooming of Hellenistic culture was not at the same time of the blooming of people's welfare and the genius of its eternal works was produced at the cost of depressed masses.

"The work which the free Americans honor was valued by the free Athenian as a shame."

- Friedrich Bodenstedt

follow each other like poplar trees with the open roads, so thick, so fragrant-less and shadow-less in black conformity, and who will blame the estranged immigrant if he at last reaches his goal, breathless and weary, needing first rest and strengthening, before his thought again opens for other material satisfactions, before the longing after lost and forgotten poetry of life rules him!

The "holy dollar" as king

How many lost this poetry completely in the arduous immigration where it is of so little use? It tumbles from its throne and the "holy dollar" sets there as king which was gained with skilled kind of work so tiresome. And so it happens to so many poetry-less people, for whom the artist blooms in vain, for not only the art of poetry, but the work of musicians, the sculptors and of the painters will be associated with poetry and so be valued.

Who does not understand how to set the sound of music into the language of the people, to him one does not speak in the speech of poetry. For him the music is only noise.

Only paint and stone

Who in the marble forms of the sculpting art does not read the history of human life, who does not feel living in himself the spring charm of the painted landscape or the full secret of the air of a moonlit night by the view of the scene, for him are the creations of the greatest artists only paint and stone.

Observations of this type, through which a slight homesickness trembled, one heard and or read more often from old immigrants and exactly from those who

contributed the most that sense for what they missed in their new homeland.

If Milwaukee is being named "German Athens", so is it therewith no comparison directed, but only a suggestion of an ideal goal. Athens also lets itself a comparison to no other city and least with an American one. The blooming of Hellenistic culture was not at the same time of the blooming of people's welfare and the genius of its eternal works was produced at the cost of depressed masses.

The work which the free Americans honor was valued by the free Athenian as a shame. The Americans do not merely work; they overwork themselves even when they are already deep in wealth, and the most thereby lose the enjoyment of life. This is somewhat less the case by those immigrant Germans which it has already brought to a prosperity and in the least, so are as my experience reaches, by those residents of Milwaukee, where, as already noted, the German element is preponderant, and on that account its peculiarly is more valid than in other cities.

I have found other families who belong to the old grand nobility in the homeland and were sufficient rich in order to be able to live up to their class, but left it and drew around themselves a depressed lower social relationship to breath free air in the New World.

Friedrich Martin von Bodenstedt, a poet and travel writer from Peine, Germany, visited American cities in 1880 and published his impressions in the book "Vom Atlantisch zum Stillen Ozean" - "From the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean." The book was published in 1882 by the firm, Brockhaus, and now is in the library of the Milwaukee Turners. He wrote about pleasant visits he made to Milwaukee - "I came back several times again and learned to know the nice city in winter and summer garb and the subsequent impressions served only to establish the first impression and to increase it so that the friendly relations hold to this day." Bodenstedt, however, deflated Milwaukee as a "German Athens," an image of which Milwaukee people of German extraction were proud. The above passage is from the Milwaukee chapter in the book. -

Frank P. Zeidler

Goethe House of Wisconsin - Wir Danken

We would like to thank our friends who have generously supported us.

Ein herzliches Dankeschön
Ted E. Wedemeyer Jr.

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German Ancestry Still is First Choice in the 2000 Census for U.S., Wisconsin

When people were asked to declare their ancestry or ethnic origin on the 2000 United States census form, German was first among the top 16 ancestry groups just as it was in the 1990 census.

One significant difference, however, was that fewer people listed German ancestry in the latest count. A variety of reasons have been offered for the falloff.

The 2000 census counted a population of 273,643,274. Among them 46.5 million claimed German ancestry, a percentage of 15.2. The 1990 population was 248,709,873 with a German ancestry total of 58 million, a percentage of 23.

In Wisconsin, the percentage of people with German ancestry in the 2000 census was 42.7. For the Milwaukee metropolitan area the number was 37.6.

[As an aside, Irish had been the No. 2 ancestry declaration for the nation in 1990, but was relegated to fourth place in 2000 behind Hispanic or Latino and African-American.]

Kevin Deardorff, a statistics chief with the U.S. Census Bureau, listed reasons for fewer people claiming their European roots. The primary one is the country's expanding diversity, particularly with Asian and Latin American immigrants. A second is that as new generations continue to come along, their connections to ancestral homes decreases. Third, the choice of "American" as an ancestry has increased rapidly. People born and raised in the United States don't have as strong a tie with a particular country as previous generations may have had.

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