

11874



TO: First Annual Dinner/Presentation:  
Taylor County Historical Society

FROM: Robert "Bob" P. Rusch

DATE: October 21, 2006

RE: Push and Pulls: German Migration to Taylor County, Wisconsin

## I. INTRODUCTION.

I am a Germanophile – a lover of things German. In 1884, Herrmann Emanuel Rusch, an immigrant from West Prussia, got off the boat in Baltimore. In 1885, Wilhelm Gebauer, an immigrant from Silesia, debarked from his steamship after sailing from Antwerp. Today, their grandson stands before you to attempt to tell their stories and the stories of other Germans who settled in Taylor County.

## II. WHO IS A GERMAN?

There was no Germany until 1871. In that year the German Empire was created and the Prussian King, Wilhelm I, was declared the Emperor of Germany. Until 1871 central Europe was a collection of German kingdoms, dukedoms, free cities and lesser political entities.

In 2006 there are three countries in Europe that have German as an official language; Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Actually, Switzerland has four official languages. Approximately 78% of the Swiss are of German ancestry.

But millions of Germans lived in Europe outside of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. These are the so-called ethnic Germans. Examples are the Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia, the Siebenbergen colony in Romania or the Volga Germans of Russia. Large numbers of Germans lived scattered throughout central and eastern Europe.

In this talk I will use the term German to describe anyone that used German as their mother tongue – die Mutter Sprache.

## III. THE PUSH FACTORS.

The period of German migration to Taylor County was between the creation of Taylor County in 1875 and the commencement of WWI in 1914. Why would Germans want to forsake their European homes? The answer to that question is to identify the factors pushing Germans to migrate:

A. Desire for land. Many German farmers did not own the land they tilled. Many had no prospect of owning land. Even where a German may own real estate, the



11874A

parcels were small. In the case of August Gebauer, his farm field was 300 feet wide and 1.8 miles long.

B. Desire for better living conditions. Germany was a rapidly industrializing country. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century was the era of the sweatshops and despicable conditions for many industrial workers. Even in rural areas, living conditions were frequently bad.

C. Political repression. Germany and Austria-Hungary were monarchies. The Hapsburgs ruled in Austria and the Hohenzollerns in Germany. Both regimes were conservative and insensitive to need for change. In 1848 reformers mounted protests throughout central Europe seeking political change. The protests were rejected and many protest leaders jailed. Still others fled to America. One of the most colorful groups was the so-called Latin farmers of Watertown, Wisconsin. These were German intelligentsia who came to America and could find no work in their chosen professions. They took farms in Dodge County, Wisconsin. Each night they would meet at Otto's Inn in Watertown to argue politics, philosophy, religion, etc. But they conversed in Latin.



Wilhelm Gebauer

D. Wars and militarization. If you were a young man in central Europe, chances were excellent that you would be forced to spend a long period of time in the army. Wars and the threats of wars were commonplace. Leaving was the equivalent of draft dodging.

E. Overpopulation. Many areas of Germany speaking Europe experienced a soaring population. This – coupled with the shortage of land – created a class of people that saw no prospect for improved conditions. Large farm families produced sons that had no prospect of having a farm of their own.



F. Religious freedom. The Reformation – and its aftermath – had deeply divided the Germans. The terrible and savage 30 years war left central Europe in ruins. The peace treaty, the treaty of Westphalia, provided that the political head of each German state got to choose the religion of his subjects! The German and Austrian governments were involved in religious life to an extent which we Americans would consider unthinkable. Taxes were, and to this day are, collected for the express purpose of supporting churches. In 1817 the Prussian king decided that the Reformed and Lutheran churches should be merged. He ordered and created the church of the union. Thousands of conservative Lutherans fled Pomerania and moved to Wisconsin as a result.

#### IV. THE PULL FACTORS.

A number of conditions made Taylor County a highly attractive place for Germans to settle.

A. Wisconsin Central lands. The Wisconsin Central Railroad – later Soo Line – was constructed here in 1873-74. It was a land grant railroad. Congress gave to the railroad every other section of land as an inducement and reward to the railroad for building. These lands were for approximately 18 miles on either side of the track. The attached map shows the location of these lands in Taylor County.

The railroad moved rapidly to sell these lands and to have them populated. The Wisconsin Central built and maintained the immigrant house (das Immigranten Haus) in Medford. It stood two blocks north of Highway 64 on the east side of Main Street. The immigrant house provided free, temporary lodging for prospective settlers.

The railroad also actively promoted settlement. It founded stations approximately 7 miles apart with the hope that each station would become a flourishing village. This led to the creation of Stetsonville, Medford, Whittlesey, Chelsea and Westboro.

B. The Homestead Law. In 1863 Congress created the Homestead Act. It provided for the gift of 160 acres of public land to any settler who would build a cabin and live on the land for at least five years.

C. The lumber and tanbark industries. Taylor County was covered with a magnificent virgin forest. It provided the raw material for the explosive growth in lumbering and the collection of tanbark – for the use of tanneries located in Medford, Westboro, Perkinstown and Rib Lake. These industries, in turn, needed workers. This presented a win-win solution for settlers who could work in camp during the winter, but operate their farms during the summer. After forests were logged, mill owners were eager to sell the denuded lands.

D. Wisconsin state recruitment efforts. The State of Wisconsin conducted its own immigrant offices. These offices existed both at the major ports of entry, such as New York,



11874 c

and in Europe. German language publicity was printed actively soliciting German immigrants.

E. Private recruitment efforts. A number of private individuals or private groups operated soliciting immigrants.

1. Joseph Brucker. Medford's most colorful and charismatic figure was Joseph Brucker. Brucker, with his partner, Karl Ludloff, moved to Medford and built the imposing brick structure that still stands on the northeast corner of Division and Main Street in Medford. He was a AAA personality. A gifted speaker, his father described him as "the silver tongued pinery boy". He published a German language newspaper, Der Ansiedler "The Settler". He distributed the Ansiedler both in German speaking parts of America and to Europe. He was active in the selling of the Wisconsin Central Railroad lands. He was highly successful.

Brucker was also the founder and publisher of Medford's long-time German language newspaper, Der Waldbote. The Waldbote was so popular that even non-Germans, for example, Dr. Nystrom, advertised in it. It had a peak circulation of 2,000. The paper was sold in 1919 to The Star News.

Arthur J. Latton wrote the following in "Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Early Taylor County":

"...Brucker and Ludloff started a real estate business here [Medford]. A German monthly newspaper, called the Ansiedler, was printed in Milwaukee, and sent to Europe in large numbers for the purpose of starting a stream of emigrants coming to this county, and it did. Joseph Brucker was a strong minded, energetic, somewhat visionary man, whose mind was seemingly crammed full of all sorts of plans and schemes, many of which worked to the advantage of Brucker, and, to be fair, we must say to the advantage, more or less, of the new growing community, but not always to the advantage of those who, because of his wonderful ability to talk and make a prospect believe that black was really white, put their good money into some of his visionary schemes. But, never-the-less, it did help to settle, and advertise Taylor County."

2. Herman and Walter Koehler were Medford based land speculators active in soliciting German settlers.

3. The Evangelical Lutheran Land Company actively solicited German Lutheran settlers, especially for Lincoln County real estate.

4. Roman Catholic recruitments efforts. In 2003 my friends, Mr. & Mrs. Randy Budjimlija of Rib Lake found a fragment of a German language newspaper in the



11874 D

walls of their Rib Lake home. It is Der Wahrheits Freund "The Friend of Truth". It was a newspaper published in Cincinnati with close ties to the Roman Catholic Church there. I have attached the article within the paper describing the efforts to found a Roman Catholic Church in Taylor County and to populate the area with German Catholic settlers. See attachment. The English translation was made by Hildegard and Loretta Kuse. I believe these efforts resulted in the founding of Saint Ann's Church in the Township of Greenwood.



F. The magnetic effect, "Landsmann". Germans have a strong affinity for their own. Once you establish a small colony, others are naturally attracted to that colony. That was certainly the case in respect to Germans in Medford and in Taylor County. As the German settlers arrived, they brought with them their desire for culture, good times and Gemuetlichkeit. Medford had a Turnverein or Turner's hall. This is an organization promoting health/gymnastics and German culture. Medford also had a Krieger Verein. This was a veteran's society for soldiers of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. As late as 1990, faint lettering on a wall of a brick building on the main street of Marshfield advertised that it was the headquarters for German war veterans: "das Hauptquartier der Deutschen Soldaten".

Medford also had an active German singing society and in 1906 hosted the state's Saengerfest. Special trains brought hundreds of German singers to Medford. As late as 1970, Medford was the site of the GUG, or Germania Unterstuetzung Gesellschaft. This was literally the German support society.

In addition to Der Ansiedler and Der Waldbote, other German language papers flourished. For example, the Marshfield Demokrat advertised itself as the Deutsches Organ for Mittel Wisconsin. Even the Rib Lake Herald ran articles in German. At times, Medford also had the German language Deutsche Zeitung and Reform newspaper.



11874E

The German Lutheran (Immanuel) and Catholic (Holy Rosary) churches were strong bastions of German awareness. Each had thriving parochial schools in which German was the language of instruction. Whittlesey's Catholic church was Mutter der immerwährende Hilfe Kirche (Our Lady of Perpetual Help).

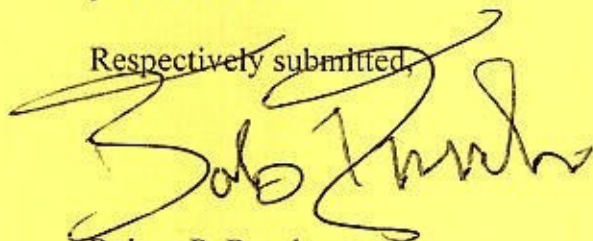
But the premier Medford place for Germans to meet and socialize was Germania Hall. This was a large, two-story wooden structure located on Second Street where the telephone company stands today. It featured plays, socials and political events. Everything was "auf Deutsch". Whittlesey's social center was a building next to its train depot, "das Eulenhause" "The Owl's House".

Permit me to add one personal comment on the role of Lutheran churches in maintaining German identity. In 1968 I graduated from Concordia Senior College at Fort Wayne, Indiana. The college was a Missouri Synod Lutheran facility. President Neep was handing out diplomas. He had announced an unbroken stream of good German names when he exclaimed "Sullivan, how did you get in here?"

#### V. SUMMARY.

The massive German migration into Taylor County was the result of a happy marriage of facts. At the same time powerful factors forced many Germans to look for a new home outside of Europe, other factors made Taylor County a readily available, attractive place to settle.

Respectively submitted,



Robert P. Rusch

RPR/cs



Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Weekly* used this illustration in the late 19th century. It shows a crowded boatload of immigrants passing the Statue of Liberty on their way into the harbor of New York. (*Germans to America: 300 Years of Immigration 1683 to 1983*, ed. Moltmann)

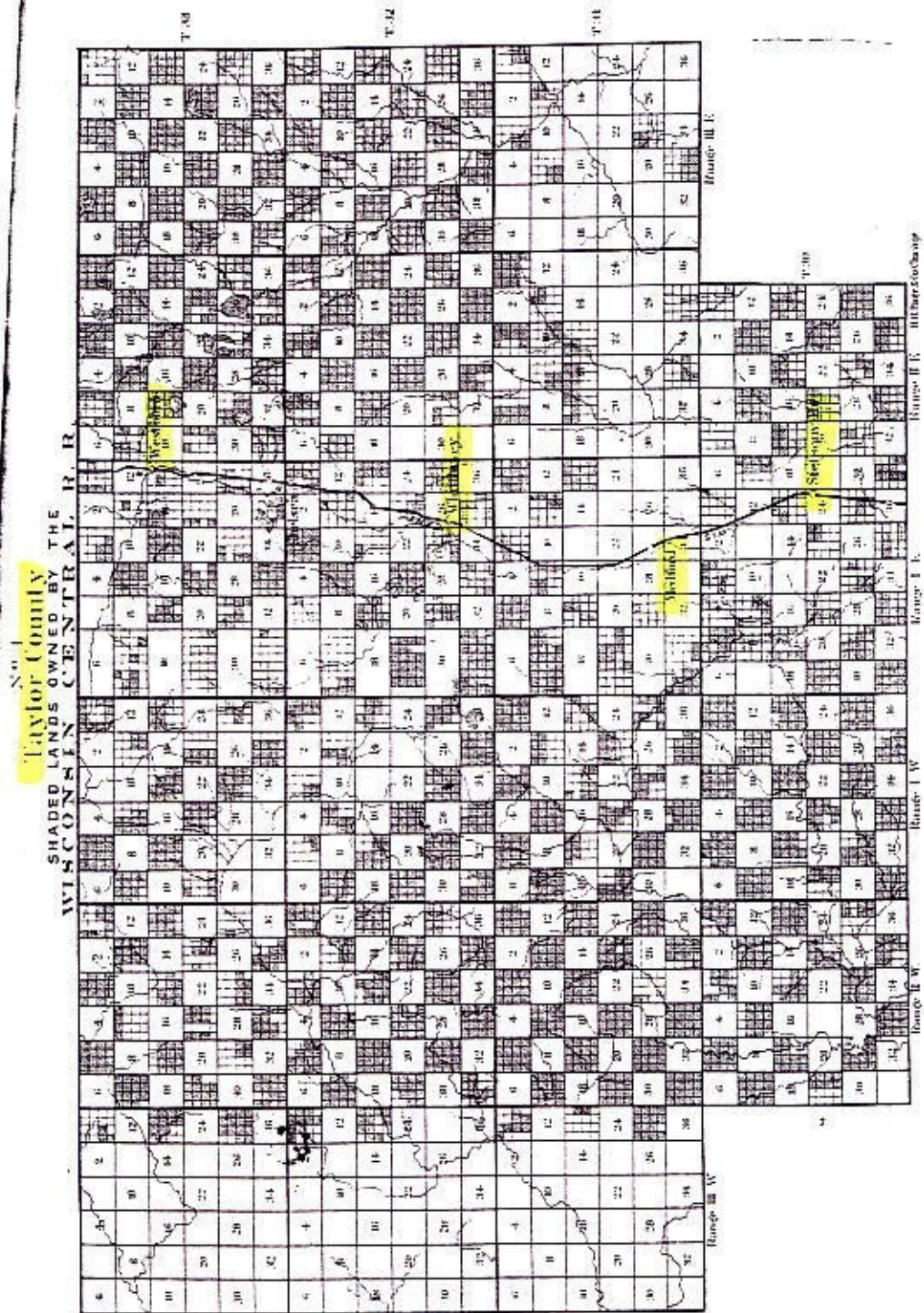


11874 F

o., Wis., May 7, 1890.

you herewith a truth-  
 orchester, as far as I  
 and products raised.  
 found here and there  
 d on the 25th of May,  
 beans, peas, potatoes  
 n that line. My po-  
 to Mr. Schwartz, of  
 s I planted, I cannot  
 f them to a neighbor  
 m thirteen bushels.  
 ls in return. Last  
 nd, from five to six  
 men in Dorchester  
 er saw. All garden  
 re. A man bought  
 x bushels from it.  
 rop of 45 bushels,  
 els of rye, and had  
 ve sown 12 bushels  
 of spring wheat,  
 ple seeds, and the  
 There are also  
 market here from  
 that any of the  
 helped to dig a  
 lo to supply four  
 h, but all have a  
 110 cords of four  
 land and sold to

ood on low lands  
 chiefly through  
 railroad it is all  
 Sheboygan, Mil-  
 owed rye on the  
 days of Febru-  
 Barley thrives



SOURCE: WISCONSIN CENTRAL RAILROAD LANDS, M.P., M.D. [MILW, 1881]



11874 ←

(This was typed from a paper that Robert Rush wanted us to translate. It was transcribed from old German to contemporary characters first so that it could be translated more easily)

Der Wahrheits Freund, Benzinger Brothers, 143 Main Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
29 October 1884

Deutsche Kathol. Niederlassung  
St. Kilian,  
In Taylor County, Staat Wisconsin.

Durch die starke Einwanderung deutscher Katholiken hat sich in Ober-Wisconsin schon längst das Bedürfnis geltend gemacht, eine geschlossene Ansiedlung ausschließlich für deutsche Katholiken zu gründen.

Durch das Entgegenkommen der Leiter der Wisconsin Centralbahn wurde eine ausgedehnte Fläche guten und fruchtbaren Waldlandes für genannten Zweck reservirt. Es ist dies ein noch wenig besiedeltes, schönes Stück Land; das sich durch Laubwald und zahlreiche sehr schöne Landseen auszeichnet. Die Lage ist östlich von der Bahnstation und dem Orte Westboro in Taylor Co.

Die in diesem Gebiete liegenden Bahnländereien werden an Ansiedler katholischer Religion zu \$5 für den amerikanischen Acker, bei 1/4 oder 1/5 Anzahlung verkauft: der Restbetrag des Kaufschillings ist abzutragen mit 7 Prozent Zinsen in 5 Jahresraten.

An Nebenverdienst bei hohem Lohn, Absatz der Feldfrüchte u. f. w. ist überreiche Gelegenheit, so daß – es auch Unbemittelten leicht möglich ist, sich zur Unabhängigkeit, zu Besitz und im Laufe der Jahre sogar zum Wohlstand empor zu schwingen.

Die geistliche Leitung hat der Unterzeichnete übernommen und die mit der Niederlassung verbundenen geschäftlichen Abmachungen werden von der Brucker Ludloff Co. in Medford besorgt.

Es liegt in der Natur der Sache, daß nur Katholiken in dieser Niederlassung erwünscht sind, und solche, die gesonnen sind, sich dort ein Heim zu gründen, sollten sich mit dem Unterzeichneten in geeigneter Verbindung setzen, um dessen Zustimmung einzuholen,  
(Here below too much of the article was torn and missing to make translation possible)

\_\_\_\_\_ Niederlassungslustigen \_\_\_\_\_ assung in die \_\_\_\_\_ wird vor-  
\_\_\_\_\_ derlas=—e ist, \_\_\_\_\_

.....  
Medford, Taylor Co., Wisc., 23 Okt. Hochw. Herr Jos. Wilh. Ritz, Pfarrer der kath. Gemeinde in Medford, hat soeben einen Assistenten in Rev. Jgn. Harrier erhalten, welcher die schweren Arbeiten in den 15 Filialen mit ihm theilen wird. Pfarrer Ritz gedenkt in den Filialen wenigstens 3 bis 4 Schulen diesen Winter zu eröffnen, die bisher gänzlich mangeln, obwohl sie sehr noth thaten. Die hier im Bau begriffene neue kath. Kirche ist bereits unter Dach und wird vorläufig diesen Winter am Bau nicht weiter gearbeitet, aber im kommenden Frühjahr

FATHER JOSEF WILHELM RITZ

RECEIVED

SEP 23 2005

RUSCH & RUSCH  
LAW OFFICE, S C



11874 +

wird sie sicher fertig gestellt werden. Sämtliche bis jetzt geleistete Arbeit refp.  
Material ist von den Kirchenmitgliedern durch \_\_\_  
(Several lines of print seem to be missing here.)

\_dem Gottesacker wird gehalten von hochw. F Kess

ing von der St. AntoniusKirche. -- Am Montag morgen ist das Seelenamt um 8  
Uhr und am Nachmittag um 3 Uhr Bruderschafts=andacht zum Troste der  
Armen Seelen. -- Die Beiträge der Mitglieder, sowie auch die Namen folcher, die  
sich diesem höchst verdienstvollen Vereine anschließen wollen, werden vor und  
nach der Prozession im St. Laurentius Schul=hause  
entgegengenommen werden.

## TRANSLATION

German Catholic Settlement  
St. Killian  
In Taylor County, State Wisconsin

Because of the heavy immigration of German Catholics to upper  
Wisconsin, it has long been apparent that there is a need for an exclusive  
settlement solely for German Catholics to be established.

Through the cooperation of the leaders of the Wisconsin Central Railroad  
an excellent area of good and productive forest land has been reserved for this  
purpose. This is still a sparsely settled lovely piece of land with deciduous  
forests and many beautiful lakes. The location is east of the depot and the  
community of Westboro in Taylor County.

In this region the railroad lands are available to settlers of the Catholic  
religion for \$5 for an American acre and are sold for 1/4 or 1/5 down payment:  
the rest of the purchase price to be repaid with 7 % interest in five years. With  
supplementary income with high wages, finding a ready market for farm  
produce etc., there is abundant opportunity--it is readily possible to become  
independent, to have land ownership, and over the years to become prosperous.

The spiritual leadership has been undertaken by the undersigned. The business  
arrangements related to settlement are looked after by the Brucker Ludloff Co. in  
Medford.

It is in the nature of the situation that only Catholics are welcomed to the  
settlement, and those who are so minded as to establish a home in this location  
should get in contact with the undersigned.

( Here follows a torn section of the newspaper which is not readable.)

.....  
Medford, Taylor Co. Wisc. 20 Oct.

Honorable Mr. Jos. Wilh. Ritz, the pastor of the Catholic Church in Medford has  
recently obtained an assistant in Rev. Jgn Harrier who will share the difficult



11874 I

work in the 15 affiliates with him. Father Ritz plans to open 3 or 4 schools this winter in the affiliates, which up to now were not available though sorely, needed.

The here under construction new Catholic Church is now roofed and enclosed and probably will not be worked on during the winter but will certainly be completed in the spring. The church members have up to this point furnished labor and materials.

(Several lines of print seem to be missing here)

....at the cemetery will be held by the honorable F. Kessing of the St. Antonius Church.

On Monday morning mass will be celebrated at 8 o'clock and in the afternoon at 3 o'clock a fellowship-devotion for the comfort of the poor souls. The contributions of members as well as the names of those who wish to join this worthy organization will be taken before and after the procession in St. Laurentius schoolhouse.

*Sorry this took a while - we spent the better part  
of two evenings & a morning on it.  
Very interesting!  
Hildegard & Leetha*