Notable Germans In Early Rochester

By William Wykoff

Rochester lay on the western frontier of America. After the Revolutionary War and the 1779 conquest of the Iroquois in New York State, vast lands were purchased and opened for settlement. The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 made New York the Empire State. Tradesmen and businessmen were often headed for Cincinnati, St. Louis, Chicago, and Milwaukee. Rochester was a destination and a gateway to the West for both American and European settlers, and some even came with savings and the intent to buy farmland.

Not all Germans who came to Rochester were uneducated laborers and farmers from Pommern and Mecklenburg. Some of the earliest immigrants were skilled craftsmen and business entrepreneurs from Baiern, Württemberg, Coburg, Darmstadt, Baden, Elsass, Preussen, and Sachsen. There were also German-speaking immigrants from Switzerland.

In Rochester, there were German military bands, one led by Lieutenant George Ellwanger. There were a German Turnverein (gymnastics and athletic club) competing with counterparts in Buffalo, Dunkirk, et al. There were German choirs, and a Schiller Society where German poetry was read. Between 1849 and 1854, there were three German newspapers in Rochester: Rochester Germania; Rochester Deutsche Zeitung; and the Beobachter am Genesee. It was noted in the 13 June 1849 issue of the Rochester Germania that the total number of baptisms in all the German Protestant and Catholic churches for the past 12 months was 238, while deaths numbered 90.

Thirty years earlier, in 1819, before the completion of the aqueduct of the Erie Canal, the Aqueduct Brewing Company was established in Rochester. It was the first brewery to open in the Flour City. By 1900 there were about 50 small breweries operated mainly by Germans.

Genesee Brewery, which started as Rau & Reisky Lager Brewery in 1857, was one of 50 breweries in early Rochester, most of them operated by Germans.

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The Charles Rau (1823-1911) mausoleum is in the cemetery's north entrance area.

in the Rochester area. One of the larger breweries, the Rau & Reisky lager brewery with its "first class saloon" and a bowling alley, was opened in 1857. Later it was known as Reisky & Spies Brewery and was purchased in 1878 by Mathius Kondolf. Its name was changed to Genesee Brewery, which is still operating as one of the largest in the eastern region of the U.S. From its location on a bluff above High Falls near downtown Rochester, it sends forth its famous products, such as Genesee Cream Ale and Benny Light.

Some of the most accomplished, famous, and ultimately richest citizens of Rochester were of German descent. In 1853, John Jacob Bausch from Württemberg opened an optical shop in Rochester, selling spectacles, field glasses, microscopes, hourglasses, etc., which were imported from Germany. The next year, he borrowed $60 from his friend, Henry Lomb, a cabinetmaker from Hesse-Kassel, which soon led to a partnership in the fast-growing optical business. (Henry Lomb volunteered to serve as a sergeant in the NYS 13th Infantry Regiment of the Union Army during the Civil War and was quickly promoted and later mustered out as an army captain). Bausch discovered that vulcanite could be used for eyeglass frames, which served better than metal, and the business soared. Bausch & Lomb Optical Company became the first to manufacture high-quality lenses and microscopes in the U.S.

In 1887, Edward Bausch, a son of John Jacob, invented a shutter for cameras based on the human iris. In 1971, Bausch & Lomb was the first company to market soft contact lenses. It is no accident that the University of Rochester has one of the world's leading departments in optics. As of 2010, the Rochester Institute of Optics had granted over 2,400 degrees, approximately half of all degrees awarded in optical physics, applied optics and optical engineering in the United States. Today, there is a Bausch & Lomb four-year College of Optometry in Hyderabad, India has the largest population of blind or nearly blind persons in the world. Bausch & Lomb is still the largest global provider of eye-care products in the world, and one of America's oldest continuing corporations.

The Edward Bausch mausoleum is located on Grove Avenue in Mount Hope.

The design of the Henry Lomb headstone matches that of John J. Bausch.
Dr. Edward Bausch (1854-1944), son of John J. Bausch, in his laboratory at Bausch & Lomb.

George Ellwanger (1816-1906) was a famous horticulturist operating the largest nursery in America in the 19th century.

Ellwanger was born in December 1818 on a small farm in Württemberg, the son of a winemaker. He read of the opportunities in America and apprenticed himself in 1830 for four years to a leading nurseryman in Stuttgart. In 1835, he sailed to America. To reach relatives settled in Ohio, Ellwanger journeyed on the enlarged Erie Canal across New York State, and was particularly impressed by the potential of Rochester with its lake-effect climate for establishment of a nursery. He returned to Rochester at the end of his first summer in America. With his partner, Patrick Barry, an Irish Catholic and a well-trained nurseryman, they established one of the largest nurseries in America.

[In 1841, hundreds of Rochester citizens gathered to watch a strange ceremony, partly sponsored by George Ellwanger, in front of the Zion German Lutheran Church on Grove Street where an evergreen tree was lighted by candles. This social and family holiday tradition from Germany was introduced to the New World.]

In 1844, Ellwanger journeyed through England, France, and Germany collecting buddings and graftings from widely scattered nurseries. Back in Rochester, Ellwanger & Barry not only sold plant stock to settlers passing through Rochester to new homes in the Midwest, but they also became the chief supplier for the western market where demand was rapidly expanding for flowers and fruit trees. Their effectiveness was undoubtedly much greater than that of the legendary Johnny Appleseed. Ellwanger & Barry helped make Rochester over from the Flour City to the Flower City.

In Rochester, individual tailors working at home began making clothing for transient passengers on the Erie Canal in the 1820s. However, it was not until the 1840s, with the invention by Elias Howe of sewing machines capable of making a lock stitch, that the industry was centralized in factories for mass production. Cutters continued to work at home and in small shops, but the final assembly was accomplished at the factory.

Mire Greentree, who may have been the first Jewish settler in Rochester, arrived in 1843. In 1844, he married Elisabeth Baker, a non-Jew, who was the proprietor of a small clothing shop that manufactured children's clothing on Front Street. In 1847, Mire Greentree with Joseph Wile, another German Jew with an Anglicized surname, started the first company to produce men's suits from standard patterns. Two years later, the...
second wholesale manufacturing business to produce men's clothing in Rochester was founded by Germans, Altman and Stettheimer. Many others soon followed. In the economic downturn of 1857, as milling in the Flour City was losing its dominance, the Jewish clothing manufacturers saved the local economy.

In the 1870 census, 1,416 tailors were still working in small shops or at home, but the companies had taken over the design, marketing, and sale of products. By 1880, Rochester rivaled New York City, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and Chicago as a production center in the garment industry. In 1884, local historian William F. Peck rated clothing above shoemaking and horticulture as the principal industry of Rochester. By 1900, there were 37 clothing manufactories in Rochester.

Waterpower had been replaced by electricity. Sewing machines no longer had to be powered by rocking a foot pedal. The cottage industry gradually disappeared, but clothing manufacture continued in Rochester well into the 20th century. Uniforms worn by U.S. naval officers in World War II were made by Michaels-Stern, but the company could not compete in the postwar environment and declared bankruptcy in 1977. Americans now dress in clothing manufactured overseas by multinational corporations.

Of the many great clothing manufacturers in Rochester, only Hickey-Freeman remains today, which makes it especially interesting in historical perspective. At the age of 19 in 1886, Jeremiah Griffen Hickey took a job as an assistant bookkeeper at Wile, Brickner, & Wile, clothing manufacturer. Hickey quickly determined that to succeed in the clothing business, he had to learn German, to which he applied himself diligently. He soon earned the confidence of manufacturers, workers, traders, and customers. Jerry Hickey was particularly friendly with Jacob Freeman, an immigrant from Hungary, whose tailor shop was under contract with Wile, Brickner, & Wile. By their industry, savings, and investment connections, Hickey, Freeman & Mahon Company was established in 1899 on St. Paul Street, in the heart of Rochester's old garment district.

By producing especially high quality men's suits for a niche market segment able to survive economic cycles and to pay a high price, the Hickey-Freeman Company endures into the 21st century. Today, they are still operating in the "Temple of Fine Tailoring" on North Clinton Street and Avenue D, built as a model factory in 1912 for an industry better known for its sweat shops in other cities. Its expensive suits are "Made by union labor in the U.S." but many of its workers are foreign born. The future of Hickey-Freeman is anything but certain in the 21st century.

After the Civil War, shoe factories were established by Germans and staffed largely by German workers. In 1870, the shoe industry employed 300 laborers. By 1900, there were 1,200 employees. One of the largest was the Utz & Dunn Company. Henry J. Utz was born on 28 March 1850 in Württemberg and came to America at the age of 18.
Frank Ritter was a cabinetmaker born in Astheim, a small village near Würzburg in Bavaria in 1841. He was building furniture in Rochester by 1882, when he was contacted by Dewell Stuck of Grand Rapids, Michigan, who suggested a prototype padded chair for dental patients. The chair evolved into an all-inclusive, ergonomic dental unit with all the equipment and tools readily available to the dentist. Encouraged by the reaction, and cognizant of the potential demand, he opened the first factory of the Ritter Dental Manufacturing Company in 1887.

Ritter manufactured the first chair to use hydraulic pressure for raising and lowering it farther than any other dental chair on the market. Ritter manufactured and supplied equipment to a worldwide market, and a derivative company still survives but is now based in Germany. The latest Ritter X-100 Model J, Ritter X-2000, and Ritter Knight Model L chairs are completely motor-driven without any hydraulics. Recently, I noted that the examining table in my physician’s office complex bears the name Ritter.

Kaspar Pfaudler was not an ordinary immigrant but a master brewer who was unable to find financial support in Germany for developing a revolutionary concept for replacing wooden barrels with glass-lined steel tanks. In 1884, the Pfaudler Company was founded in Rochester. Soon, not only the beverage and food industries were clamoring for glass-lined steel tanks, but the higher demands of the chemical industry for corrosion resistance, mechanical strength, chemical resistance, and adhesive strength expanded the market exponentially. Heatable reactors with Pfaudler glass became a foundation for subsequent success in the chemical industry. Many pharmaceuticals are produced in Pfaudler glass-lined reactors. Today, Pfaudler manufacturing facilities are to be found in Germany, Great Britain, and Rochester, N.Y.

It is not surprising that so many of the early founders of American businesses were immigrants. What is surprising is that a 2011 study by the National Foundation for American Policy found that almost half of 50 top venture-backed companies in the United States were founded or co-founded by immigrants, many of them from India and Iran. Immigrant chief technical officers were found in well over half (37) of the 50 companies. When top-level production
and management positions were combined, the number of companies with immigrants jumped to 74 percent.

Lillian Wald, born in America of German immigrants, went from Rochester to train as a nurse in New York Hospital and, in 1893, helped found the Henry Street Settlement and established its public health nursing center. With the current trend away from healthcare delivery in specialized hospitals to preventive care in community clinics, her philosophy of healthcare is being vindicated. Lillian Wald is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery in Rochester, N.Y.

In 1892, Max Brickner was the first foreign-born president of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce. By the turn of the century about half of the people of German descent in Rochester had been born and educated in America. Sermons in English were finally permitted in the major German congregations. Until the eve of World War I, Germans exceeded all other foreign nationalities in Rochester. By 1920, the largest proportion of the 47,282 Germans in the city were American born.

Editors Note: The author, William Wykoff, was graduated from Penn State University and studied at the Free University of Berlin. He was awarded a fellowship at Cornell University where he acquired a Ph.D. degree. After he retired from Cornell, where he was a research associate in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, his wife, Lydia Manying, found employment at Strong Memorial Hospital and they moved from Ithaca to Rochester. Knowing that he had great, great grandparents buried in Mount Hope Cemetery. Prof. Wykoff researched and recently published a history and genealogy of the Hoffman and Dingfelder families (lulu.com 2013) from which the above text is extracted. Over several generations, members on both sides of the family were employed by companies founded by fellow German immigrants in Rochester.

German Poet Honored In Schiller Park

By Richard Reisem

Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) (his full name was Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller) was a leading German poet, playwright, and historian. When he was an adolescent under the rule of a petty tyrant, Schiller was confronted with the situation of the use and abuse of power. This theme was developed in many of his poems and plays. When financial difficulties arose for Schiller, a man of considerable means, Christian Komer, supported him. In his jubilation over Komer’s hospitality and financial help, Schiller wrote “An die Freude” (“Ode to Joy”) which Beethoven later used in the choral movement of his Ninth Symphony.

Schiller met Goethe in 1794 and the two became lifelong friends. One of Schiller’s plays, William Tell, presents the assassination of a tyrannical Austrian governor by the play’s bronze plaque at Schiller Park

Bronze plaque at Schiller Park
growth, industrialization, and culture. The enormous effect on Rochester's German immigration donated by the German-American population of Rochester. German immigration had an enormous effect on Rochester's growth, industrialization, and culture. From Schiller's creative works. Further, the society sought to bring Friederich Schiller to the attention of all Rochesterians and organized the effort to acquire a bronze sculpture of their hero and erect it in a park located near German commercial activities.

**BOOMTOWN BROTHERS' BEARDED BEACH BASH RAISES MONEY FOR FRIENDS OF MOUNT HOPE**

By Anna Jannes

By chance several months ago, Dan Ross, the president of the Boomtown Brothers Facial Hair Club, and several other club members, watched the WXXI television documentary, *A Walk Through History in Mount Hope Cemetery*, which introduced them to the nonprofit organization, the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery. The group, being very interested in Rochester history got an idea.

Each year, The Boomtown Brothers, so named to honor Rochester, America's first boomtown in the 1820s, stage a facial hair competition to raise money for local historical charities. After watching the documentary, rich in local history, the group decided that their 2014 charity should be the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery. All the Brothers agreed and plans for a three-day celebration were made for this August.

Over 100 beards of all shapes and sizes from Rochester and surrounding areas, and from as far away as Canada, participated in the events. Participants brought their families and invited sponsors to the three-day event called The Bearded Beach Bash. Day one started on Friday, August 22, with a tour of Mount Hope Cemetery, led by tour guide and Friends trustee, Don Hall. The main event occurred on day two, Saturday evening August 23, at Lakesiders Bar & Grill in Charlotte with a silent auction, and then the facial hair competition.

As the charity of choice, the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery had a table set up for the evening with tour schedules, membership forms, and general cemetery information manned by me, Friends trustee Anna Jannes. The final day, Sunday, concluded with a celebratory brunch for all involved.

On September 3, Dan Ross and two other Boomtown Brothers representatives, Adam Hill and Jake Juice, came to the Friends of Mount Hope board meeting and presented the money they had raised for the Friends—a whopping $1,971, all in cash!

The Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery would like to thank the Boomtown Brothers for donating this impressive amount to the Friends where we will use the donation to continue our work of preservation and promotion of Mount Hope Cemetery.

![Author Anna Jannes with Boomtown Brothers Vice-President Robert DeSimone, left, and President Dan Ross, right.](image)

Dan Ross, president of the Boomtown Brothers, hands FOMH President Marilyn Nolte $1,971 in cash, while, left to right, FOMH Treasurer Dennis Carr, FOMH Finance Director Chuck Chapin, Boomtown Brothers Adam Hill and Jake Juice look on.
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Basic annual membership is $20.
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