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THE FIRST GERMAN BREWER IN COLUMBUS

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by Donald M. Schlegel

The physical remains of Columbus' once-prosperous German Brewing industry can still be seen, stretching south from Livingston avenue on Front street. South and east of the above-named streets are the former buildings of Hoster's City Brewery. Louis Hoster was born in Bavaria in 1807, settled in Columbus, and began his business in 1836; he was a member of the German Independent Protestant church (1). A little further south and across the street, at the south-east corner of Blenkner and Front streets, a building extensively remodeled by Nicholas Schlee stands on the site of the Bavarian Brewery, founded by George M. Schlegel and John Blenkner in 1849. Schlegel was born in Bavaria in 1822; his family were members of the Lutheran church (2). On the west side of Front street, opposite Beck street, was the Capital Brewery of Conrad Born. Born was born in Bavaria in 1812 and arrived in Columbus in 1835, but he did not find the Capital Brewery until 1859 (3).

All of the above breweries and their owners are generally familiar to local amateur and professional historians. Less well-known, in fact almost entirely forgotten, is the pioneer German brewer of Columbus, Bernhard Bürck, a native of Baden (4) who landed in America before 1832 and settled in Columbus before 1834, and a member of the Catholic church. Crossing the innerbelt north to Fulton street and walking east across High street, one comes to the recently completed Franklin county garage. Standing there near its south-east corner, the brewery district is barely visible over the rise of High street. But it was there that German beer was first brewed in Columbus and there also that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered before there was a Catholic church built in the city.

On January 1, 1834, Bernhard Bürck signed a contract with Otis and Samuel Crosby which stated that for Bürck's performance of certain conditions and for a price of \$500, they would convey to him inlots 379 and 380 in Columbus (5). These lots are on the north side of Fulton street (then called South street), east of Pearl street, as shown on the diagram. Each lot measured $62\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide by $187\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep. The Crosbys, who were developers, were then in the process of acquiring these and many other properties from Columbus jurist Gustavus Swan. In 1833 the Crosbys had built a frame house on inlot 380 (6). Bürck was probably its first occupant.

The total value of the two lots in 1834 and 1835 was \$649 (7), which indicates that Bürck did receive some reduction in price for performance of the contract provisions. The Crosbys were interested in the development of Columbus, probably hoping to increase the value of their extensive real estate holdings. In 1833 they had donated a lot to Rev. Nicholas D. Young, O.P., on condition that a church be built on it and furnished for occupancy within five years. Their contract with Burck may have been similar, requiring him to build a substantial structure on the inlots, for in 1836 a brick or stone building, valued at \$1400 and measuring probably about twenty-five by fifty feet, was built on the western half of inlot 379 and part of inlot 380 (8). The transfer of the property to Bürck was complicated by the death of Otis Crosby, but after the Ohio legislature had passed an act allowing Samuel to act for his deceased partner, the two lots were conveyed to Bürck by a deed dated April 3, 1838 (5). The increasing value of the property is indicated by a deed of the same date by which Bürck conveyed to Leonard Beck the vacant eastern half of inlot 379 for \$250 (9).

It is impossible, nearly a century and a half later, to say with absolute certainty what use was made of each of the structures on Bürck's property and in what order they were erected. Taking together the property tax listings up to 1838, city directory listings, a description of part of lot 380 from an 1865 lease, and an 1856 map of the city, the following appears plausible. First, the large frame house half way back on 380 was erected by the Crosbys in 1833, where Bürck probably began brewing in a small way. Second, the brick or stone building on lots 379 and 380 was erected in 1836; this apparently was another house, for Mrs. Mary Schmidt and her two young children were living at that address in the early 1860's (10). Third, a frame building was erected strictly as a brewery on the front of the frame house in 1838 (11).

There is no doubt that the original frame house was large enough for brewing to have commenced there. Studer mentions that Mass was said "at the residence of John Burke, on South Street, between High and Third streets" at a period when the congregation had outgrown the rooms available at the house of George Studer (12). This tradition probably refers to the services, documented in Bishop Hartley's history, held on October 15, 1837, "in Mr. Bernard Burke's house on South Street." (Because suitable rooms could not be found, this Sunday Mass at the Bürck residence was the last said publicly in the city until the first High Mass was sung in St. Remigius church on April 29, 1838) (13). The size of the frame house is indicated by the 1850 census, which shows a total fifteen persons living there, excluding the Bürck family, who were living in the brick house (14). In 1860, twenty-four persons were living in the frame building (15).

On May 20, 1834, Bernhard Bürck and Maria, daughter of Christian Rader or Röder, were united in marriage by Wilhelm Schmidt (16, 17) pastor of St. Paul's German Evangelical (Lutheran) church. Maria's family were probably Lutherans and she appears to have never left that religion. There is, however, ample evidence of Bernhard's steadfastness in his own faith. In June, 1836, he signed the list of those willing to donate to the erection of St. Remigius church (18). In June of 1837, when some materials for the walls of St. Remigius had been gathered but little other progress had been made, Rev. Henry D. Juncker began the sacramental register of the new congregation. The very first entry in the register,

translated from Latin, says, "1837, June 18- I baptized Georg, born October 23, 1836, son of Bernhard Bürcke and Ann Ritter. Sponsors were Georg Studer and Elisabeth Jacobs." This was the second Bürck child; the eldest son, John, was born around 1835. Their other children were:

- (3) Margaretha, born 27 January, 1839, baptized at St. Remigius by Rev. H. D. Juncker on 1 May; sponsors, Georg and Regina Studer.
- (4) Karl, baptized at St. Remigius by Rev. J. M. Young on October 30, 1841; sponsors, Johann and Margaretha Breit.
- (5) Friedrich Franz Xavier, born September 26, 1843, baptized at St. Remigius by Rev. William Schonat on December 3; sponsors, Isidor Frey and Margaretha Breit. He died on September 4, 1846, and was buried on September 6.
- (6) Maria Anna, born September 10, 1846, baptized at Holy Cross church on December 27 by Rev. W. Schonat; sponsors, Isidor and Francisca Frey.

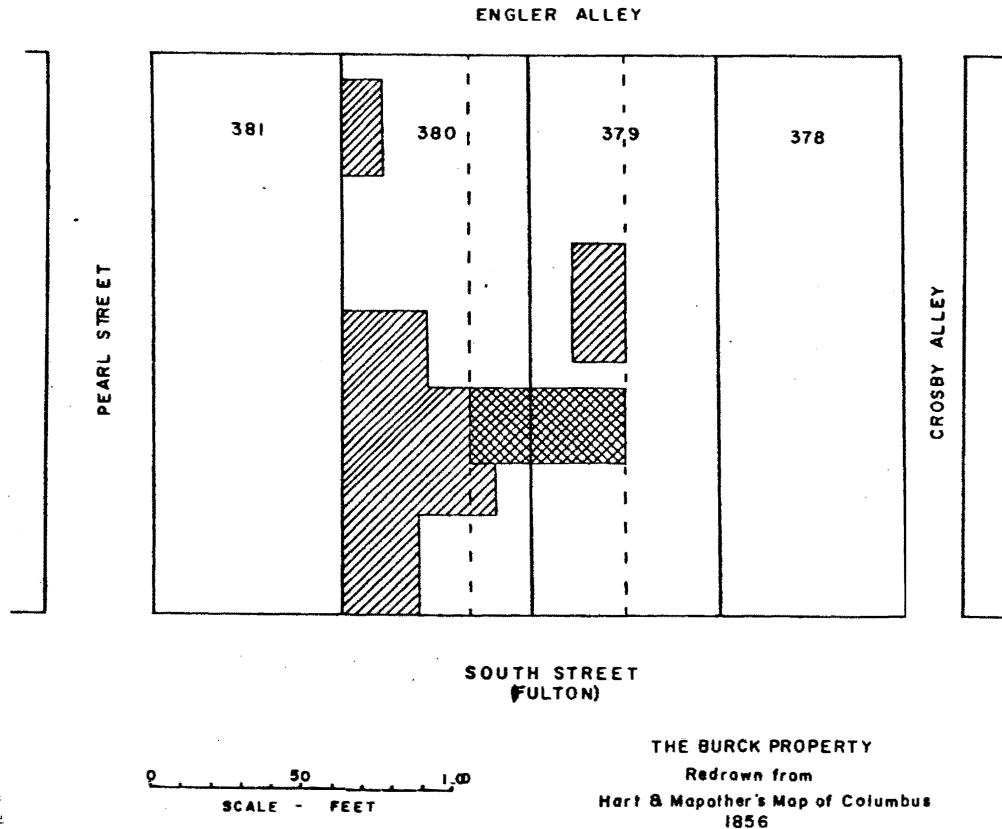
In addition, Bernhard appears in the St. Remigius sacramental register as god-father of Johann, son of Georg Studer (3838); of Catherine, daughter of Joseph Row (1842), and of Heinrich, son of Isidor Frey (1845). It is significant that his wife did not stand with him as sponsor on any of these occasions. His name, "Bernhard Buerk," appears on the subscription list for Holy Cross church, dated December, 1844 (19).

Bürck became a citizen of the United States on October 1, 1836, along with nineteen others in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas (4). His high standing in the German community of Columbus is indicated by his election as first lieutenant of the Deutsche Washington Artillerie company at its formation in October, 1841 (20). This group and the First company practised with small artillery pieces, uniforms, and martial music (21) until the outbreak of the Mexican War. It eventually was transformed into a mutual beneficial society.

The earliest absolute proof of Bürck's brewing activities is contained in real estate tax records, which list the brewery, valued at \$787, on inlot 380 in 1838 (11). The next references to the brewery are found in Columbus city directories of 1842 (22), 1845 (23), and 1848 (24), which list "Barnard Berck" or "B. Burk" as a brewer on the north side of South street. His brewery's name, the "Washington Brewery," and some indication of the physical arrangement of his buildings are provided by Hart & Maphtoer's map of Columbus dated 1856, redrawn for this article (25).

Unfortunately, by that time Bürck was no longer operating the brewery. He died of cholera on the morning of August 29, 1849, during one of the epidemics which swept through Columbus at mid-century. Ceremonies were supplied by Rev. William Schonat at Holy Cross church. His remains were no doubt interred in the Catholic Cemetery at Washington and Mt. Vernon avenues. His age, according to the burial record, was 45 years; according to the Board of Health report, he was 46 years old (26).

In his will, written only nine days before his death, Bernhard left his entire estate to his wife, Maria, provided that she not remarry. If she remarried, the estate, less her dower right, was to be divided among his children. In one article of the will, Bürck attempted to accomplish posthumously what most of the later German brewery owners of the city accomplished



while living: to bring his sons into the business with him.

In case my said wife should continued to remain sole, and my two sons John and George should arrive of age, my Executor is to transfer the property on which I now live and occupy to my said two sons, provided they should carry on or learn the same business I now or have carried on.....(27)

The two sons, who were only fourteen and twelve years old, did not take up their father's business.

Operation of the brewery was taken over by Frederick Zimmerman, Frank Wurm, and John Hartman in 1850 (14). On August 28, 1850, the Birck house was the scene of the marriage of Frank Wurm to the widow Maria Birck. The ceremony was performed by Konrad Mees (28), who was pastor of St. Paul's German Evangelical Church. The brick house (the west half of inlot 379 and twenty feet off of inlot 380) was sold by the administrator of Bernhard's estate to Gustavus Swan in March, 1851 (29). (The Swan family held the property for the next twenty-two years, but never lived there themselves.) The Birck family moved back into the frame house on the back of the brewery; there Mr. Wurm apparently died in the mid 1850's. Zimmerman continued the brewery operation as late as 1855 (30).

In 1860 the brewery was being operated under a three-year lease by John Moerch, aided by John Moerch, Jr., John Miller and George Letherer (15) (31). Letherer had married Margaretha Bürck in 1856; this ceremony was also performed by a Lutheran minister, Wm. F. Lehmann (32). In 1861 Moerch was still operating the Washington Brewery, but in 1862 he founded his own Scioto Brewery at the corner of West Main and Canal streets. In 1865 Maria leased to Erhard Stocker for five years, "the House called the 'Washington Brewery" with all appurtenances thereto belonging (except the Fram House in the rear end of the House) also the yard belonging to said Brewery and Ice House on the lot." Stocker owned his own "fixtures necessary for brewing business" (33). The property was sold in 1868 (34); the buildings were razed around 1871, after Stocker's lease expired.

During this period the entire Bürck family disappeared from the Columbus area, with the exception of George. The eldest child, John, was a boatman, according to the 1850 census, an occupation which took him away from home for extended periods. He left home around 1852 and was never heard from again, though his mother still reported him as a member of the household in 1860. The daughter, Margaret, died early in her married life; her small children and "John, commonly called George Lederer" moved to Cincinnati, where George continued to work as a brewer. The daughter, Mary, who married John Rothan, and the twice-widowed Maria, also moved to Cincinnati. Karl or Charles was a clerk, later a waiter, and in the spring of 1862 was proprietor of the St. Charles saloon on Town street. He apparently enlisted in the 108th Ohio Volunteer Infantry in July of 1862. After the Civil War he began travelling and by 1868 his whereabouts were unknown to the rest of the family (35).

George Burck, the first child of St. Remigius parish, married Catherine Lyons on November 2, 1861, before the Rev. Edward Fitzgerald, pastor of St. Patrick's church. George was a cobbler; in the early 1870's he was in business with John T. Sims as Sims and Burck, boot and shoe makers, at 114 North High street. His home was on the north side of Spring street, just east of High, for the rest of his life. In the late 1880's he served as police commissioner for the city. He was a member of the Knights of St. John and the Knights of Columbus, a member of the Cathedral parish, and a close friend of Bishops Rosecrans and Watterson. He died on September 27, 1910. At that time his sister, Mrs. Mary Rothan "of Alabama" was visiting (27).

George's only child, Josephine Burck, lived at the Normandie hotel until 1928. She was the last descendant of Bernhard Bürck to live in Columbus.

In the sixteen years before his untimely death, Bernhard Bürck was a leader in the Columbus German community. He built and operated the first German brewery in the city; he helped to establish the Catholic Church in the city and to build its first two edifices; and he gave the city a son who contributed in his own way to the life of his city and his church.

- (1) One Hundred Years of Brewing, Chicago and New York: H.S. Rich & Co., 1903, p. 204.
- (2) Schlegel, George J., Frankenohio Schlegels, Columbus, 1976, pp. 29, 44 and 50.
- (3) One Hundred Years, op. cit., p. 302
- (4) Franklin County Court Of Common Pleas, Order Book 8, p. 121.
- (5) Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 25, p. 426.

(6) Ohio Auditor of State Tax Duplicates for 1833 and 1834 (Ohio Historical Society).

{7) Ibid., 1835-1836.

{8) Ibid., 1836-1838.

{9) Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 25, p. 427.

(10) Lathrop's Columbus Directory, Columbus: Richard Nevins, 1862; pp. 6, 8, 80 and 94. The brewery was at 34, Mrs. Schmidt at 40 and Leonard Beck at 48 East South. Federal Census of 1860, Columbus, Ward 5, house 296.

(11) Franklin County Tax Duplicate.

(12) Studer, Jacob H., Columbus, Ohio: Its History, Resources and Progress, 1873, p. 163.

(13) Hartley, Rt. Rev. James J., Diocese of Columbus, The History of Fifty Years, 1918, p. 165.

{14) Federal Census of 1850, Columbus, Ward 5, p. 385, house 83.

{15) Federal Census of 1860, Columbus, Ward 5, page 247 reverse.

{16) Franklin County Marriage Record, Vol. 3, p. 92.

{17) Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, Chancery Record, VII, pp. 278 ff.

{18) Studer, op. cit., p. 164.

(19) Kappes, Rev. William E., manuscript history of Holy Cross parish (Catholic Record Society, Diocese of Columbus).

(20) Studer, op. cit., p. 419. Studer mistakenly associated the officers with the wrong companies, as shown by advertisements appearing in Der Westbote, October 26, 1843 (p. 3) and earlier. (Ohio Historical Society).

(21) Sittler, Margaret, The German Element in Columbus before the Civil War, MA Thesis, The Ohio State University, 1932, p. 25.

(22) The Columbus Business Directory for 1843-1844; Columbus, J.R. Armstrong, 1843, p. 115 (State Library of Ohio).

(23) Kinney's Directory of Columbus for 1845-1846; Columbus, Chas. Scott and Co., 1845, p. 21 (Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County).

(24) Directory of the City of Columbus for the Year 1848; Columbus, John Siebert, 1848, p. 102 (Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County).

(25) A copy of this map is in the Columbus and Ohio Division of the Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County.

(26) Der Westbote, August 31, 1849, p. 3; The Ohio Statesman, August 29, 1849, p. 3; The Ohio State Journal, August 29, 1849, p. 2. (The Ohio Historical Society).

{27) Franklin County Probate Court, case #2157.

{28) Franklin County Marriage Record, Vol. 5, p. 255.

{29) Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 44, p. 415.

(30) Columbus Business Directory for the Year 1855; Columbus, The Ohio State Journal Co., 1855, p. 126 (Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County).

{31) Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 70, p. 285.

{32) Franklin County Marriage Record, Vol. 6, p. 284.

{33) Franklin County Lease Record, Vol. 1, p. 17.

{34) Franklin County Deed Record, Vol. 95, p. 380.

{35) Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, Complete Record, Vol. 39, pp. 619 ff.

{36) Franklin County Marriage Record, Vol. 7, p. 660.

{37) Columbus Citizen, Sept. 29, 1910; Columbus Dispatch, Sept. 29, 1910, p. 2; Catholic Columbian, Sept. 30, 1910.

BERNARD MECHLING, ZANESVILLE'S FRIEND

1896-1937

It was in 1923 that Zanesville high school welcomed a new principal named Mr. M. M. Mansperger. At the end of the first student assembly over which he presided, he asked the students to sing their alma mater song, and was told that the school had none. He replied that the song they had just sung would be the alma mater song. They had just sung, "Zane, Zanesvillian," written by Bernard H. Mechling, an alumnus.

Bernard Mechling was the son of Harry D. and Mary Augusta Saup Mechling, members of St. Thomas Aquinas church, Zanesville, who lived at that time on Lennox avenue. Bernard, their only child, was born July 24, 1896, and baptized at St. Thomas' the following August 1. His godparents were Francis and William Saup. Father Thomas S. McGovern, O.P., officiated.

When Mr. Mansperger chose Bernard's "Zane, Zanesvillian" for the school song, it was suggested to him by Norris Schneider, an historian of the city, that what he had chosen was a pep song, and that a better alma mater song would be another of Bernard's compositions, "Like an Old Friend Ever Faithful," which was a solemn, dignified, hymn-like song. Mr. Mansperger agreed, with the result that the present alma mater song of the school, now entitled "Zanesville Hi," is what Mr. Schneider called "Like an Old Friend, Ever Faithful."

When Bernard heard that his song was selected, he applied for a copyright, and had it published. The original text has been slightly changed.

Bernard attended St. Thomas school in Zanesville, and was graduated from Zanesville high school. After leaving school he was employed by the Mark Manufacturing company. Later he became identified with the newspaper business. After some years he was associated with the company which operated the Liberty and Weller theaters. When the Zanesville Theaters, Inc., took over the business, Bernard continued as vice president and director.

Bernard gained prominence in early life as a musical composer, his songs attracting much attention. At the time of his death the Zanesville "Signal" wrote of him: "He was interested in theatricals early in life and took leading parts in composing, writing and producing shows, both for amateur players and professionals. His talents were diversified and he was always ready and willing to extend a helping hand to his friends and associates.

"Bernard was also a close student of journalism and served as sporting editor and columnist for the 'Zanesville Dispatch' during the time of its publication on North Sixth street. Through his work with the theatrical company he acted as press agent in connection with his duties as manager of the Imperial Theater."

Bernard Mechling died in Good Samaritan hospital, Zanesville, March 2, 1937. The funeral Mass was sung in St. Thomas church on March 5. He was survived by his father and mother and by a number of uncles and aunts. His mother died Feb. 10, 1843; his father, some years later.

Bernard's death was felt greatly in the Zanesville community. This is reflected by Violet Ray in her column, "Under the Rainbow," written during his last illness.

"That sunny disposition of Bernard Mechling's, which enabled him to turn our dark moments into lighter ones, has brought a rich reward. 'Bernie' has been in Good Samaritan hospital for only a week or so, but in that brief time more concern has been expressed about him than would be aroused over most people who would be absent for a longer time. 'How is Bernard Mechling?' is what I have heard constantly whenever I go into a home, a store or along a street, for the past week.

"Finally, I wrote to him one day this week and asked him if he knows everybody in town. The question about him comes from the young ones, the oldsters, the infirm, and the active, and from people in all kinds of professions and trades. He certainly is a 'friend to man.'

"During these days or weeks of recuperation, he will certainly have a lot of fun. Already he has been swamped with greetings, flowers, and expressions of felicitation about his condition, but what he has received is only a fraction of what is to come. This universal feeling of sympathy cannot be conveyed to him in one week.

"Isn't it a wonderful thing to be able to build up such a popularity? I suppose if asked about it, he would say he doesn't know how it was done. Never did he realize that his wise-cracks, his puns and funny stories which he tossed off in a frivolous fashion would sink into a heart here and there, and turn it from a dark side to a brighter one so that its owner would look forward time and time again to another greeting from the little showman.

"It took many talents, of course, to make Bernie so popular. First, he had to have a sympathy for human-kind which enabled him to understand his fellowman. His sympathy made him quick to respond to their demands and so he gave so much of service to the community.

"Back in his high school days he began this active service, having his hand in the school plays, athletics, programs and fraternities. He was 'Johnny on the spot' in everything that was going on.

"He wrote songs and music for the school. He can still turn out a poem, a play, or a short story with equal ease. He likes animals and loves to befriend them. So it is no wonder this spry little fellow, who was everybody's friend, is so much missed."

A devout member of St. Thomas' parish, Bernard was a daily communicant, and a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic at the time of his death.

In 1924 Bernard published a number of his poems in a small book entitled, Leaves of Life. It was dedicated to the memory of two friends, Carl C. Elliott and Frank S. Brush. The book has been presented to the Catholic Record society by Norris Schneider of Zanesville. It contains nineteen of Bernard's poems. They are not classical poetry, but human and have the common touch, quite suitable for children. Many of them teach a lesson, but the one given here leaves us with a smile.

Thanksgiving

All was ready for the feasting at a table set for five,
And the family gathered 'round it, each one eager for the dive
Into crisp, brown Gobbler and the gravy, steaming hot,
And the trimmings were there waiting for the fate that was their lot.
Father raised his hand for silence and all heads were bowed in prayer,
To give thanks for all past favors and more blessings hoped to share.
First the father gave his thanks for having such a happy flock,
And the mother asked for endless joy within the "family bloc".
Big brother, football hero, thanked for honors which he bore,
And sister thanked for beaux she had, and asked for many more.
The youngest, Bobby, only four, but just the same,
Was prepared to state his wishes when his turn for speaking came.
He looked long at the turkey, then they heard him softly beg,
"Dear God, we're glad for everything - and please give me a leg!"

