

Museum Notes

by Kristen Parrott, curator
for the week of July 22 - 28, 2018

The World War I news of 100 years ago was that “Westby, too, discards German from curriculum of her schools.” This remark was in the *Vernon County Censor* of July 10, 1918. The U.S. had entered the war against Germany more than a year earlier, in April of 1917, and anti-German sentiment was strong. That made life complicated for many Wisconsinites. In 1900, 34% of the state’s residents were ethnically German.

Areas with large German populations, such as Vernon County and La Crosse County, were especially under scrutiny. Most German immigrants in Vernon County lived in the Towns of Bergen and Hamburg, closest to La Crosse. Others lived in pockets around the county, including Brush Creek between Cashton and Ontario, Bad Axe Valley in the Town of Genoa, and Dutch Hollow near Rockton.

I had heard that many schools in Wisconsin dropped German from their curricula during WWI, but this notice in the newspaper is the first proof I’ve seen of it happening in Vernon County. I’m surprised that the German course survived the 1917-1918 school year, with young men marching off to war almost every day.

The German language was also dropped in German churches in the area. For example, St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Town of Genoa was organized in 1893 as a German-language congregation. But, during WWI, it began holding worship services in English.

I have also heard that popular German food items in the U.S. were renamed during the war, such as *sauerkraut* becoming “liberty cabbage”. As yet, I haven’t found evidence of that happening in Vernon County. Some people wouldn’t even eat cabbage or anything made with it, like cole slaw, because it was so associated with German culture. Today cole slaw is again a favorite local food. No one who eats it is accused of being unpatriotic, and those with German ancestry do not face widespread hostility in the U.S.

Speaking of cole slaw, it is on the menu for the Pork Chop Dinner that will be held at the Sherry-Butt House on Friday, August 10. Dinner will be served from 4 to 7PM (or until the food is gone) on the lawn of the house at 795 N. Main Street in Viroqua.

The meal includes a pork chop, baked potato, baked beans, cole slaw, fruit salad, roll, and dessert. Dinners are \$10 each, and can be eaten there at tables on the lawn, or carried out. This is a fundraiser for the Vernon County Historical Society, so eat hearty!