

J. MEYENBERG, PRESCRIPTION DRUGGIST.*

BY MARGARET COUSINS.

There are few circumstances which have exerted a more auspicious influence on the history of Texas, especially from a cultural viewpoint, than the German emigration which took place between the years following the Texas Revolution and the outbreak of the Civil War. Oddly enough, this is a brightly colored leaf in the book of Texas, which most historians have chosen to ignore. Thus it is that all the poignant romance of the German Adelsverein, that strange society of noblemen, formed for the purpose of directing emigration to the new Republic, has remained locked in the prim, bright little hill towns of Southern Texas, which to this day, have about them the scrubbed and shining look, the neat, wholesome attitude of Bavarian villages.

Not many Texians have so much as heard of the Adelsverein and how it was fostered by the flamboyant novels of the anonymous *Sealsfield*, whose real name was Carl Postl. Sealsfield, who is reputed to have lived on a plantation in Louisiana, produced such vivid and alluring descriptions of Texas landscape and resources that it turned the jaded faces of European society toward the brave, new world and went so far as to produce an organization of German lords and princes who had vague notions of establishing within the boundaries of Texas, a German state.¹ It was even hinted in international circles, that Queen Victoria of England was interested in the financing of the intrigue. Although the aims of the Adelsverein came to a tragic ending and even the small matter of commercial profit was wiped out, the society of nobles served the purpose of implanting in Texas soil, the roots of many fine, Germanic families whose names have been associated with the cultural and scientific progress of Texas.

Especially was this German emigration important to pharmacy in Texas. From the earliest days of the Republic it insured for the people of Southern Texas, trained scientific men who dispensed in the raw, new country, the very way they had dispensed in the old world. From the records of Prince Solms-Braunfels, negotiator for the Verein, we have the following notation, "There were as members of the first expedition for the colony of the Verein, a physician, a surgeon, a geometer, an engineer, carpenters, saddlers, masons and many apothecaries."¹

The vast difference between these colonists brought over by the Verein and the average Texas citizen of that day is hardly to be calculated. The inhabitants of early Texas who came from the United States were recruited from many walks of life. They came for various reasons; some to make their fortunes, some to escape justice, many merely for the sake of adventure. The reputation of Texas was very unsubstantial and is responsible for many anecdotes. One proud Southern woman, whose husband had decided to pull stakes and come to Texas, looked toward the soft Carolina hills and said, "Good bye God, I'm going to Texas." The population as a whole was somewhat motley. German emigrants to the Verein colony were chosen for their talents. An apothecary, educated and apprenticed in the German tradition, could not fail to contribute to a new culture.

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¹ Rudolph Biesele, "The History of German Settlements in Texas."

This, then, is the story of one of those emigrants and perhaps the underlying principles of race account for the fact that the drug store which he founded seventy-one years ago is still in active operation and has been continuously in one family since the doors were opened. Perhaps these same principles are responsible for the fact that this drug store has always been primarily interested in the practice of Pharmacy, has never installed a soda fountain or served food and has persistently discounted its bills.

Julius Meyenberg, the founder of this business, was born in Celle, Hanover, in 1819 and received a classical education in the Gymnasium of that city. When he was twenty-five years old, he emigrated to America, with his eyes set on Texas. He landed in New Orleans where he took a boat for Texas and in 1845, a year later, he was located in Frelsburg in Colorado County, where he had purchased a farm. Meyenberg came of an adventuresome family. His brother, Franz Ludwiga, had lived a number of years in Brazil, where he had served as captain in the Portuguese Army. Franz Ludwiga had taken up his residence in Texas also and in 1847, he persuaded Julius to join him in New Braunfels.

At this time, New Braunfels, which was the most flourishing colony of the Verein, was a bit of the old world set down in the lush beauty of the new. The flavor of the place was predominantly foreign, but the indigenous shrubs and flowers of Texas were trained over the smooth, thick limestone walls of the houses in a picturesque way. German gentlemen could be observed drinking beer in the small, green gardens in the cool of the evening. The band played the marches and polkas of the Fatherland and the singing societies lifted their voices in sweet accord. On Sunday nights, there was dancing in the German way. Many of the young men of the town dined at a restaurant, kept by the former cook of a South German nobleman. Around this groaning board gathered princes and barons, merchants, students, farmers, physicians and apothecaries and mayhap our Julius Meyenberg, smoothing his moustaches and blowing the foam from his beer.

In 1850, Julius Meyenberg forsook the gay life of New Braunfels and went to Fayette County. He purchased a farm on the Bluff and settled down and reason enough, for he was courting Miss Kunigunde Oske, who had been born on March 4, 1828, in the province of Saxony-Prussia. That same year he made her his wife and for fifteen years, Julius and Kunigunde Meyenberg lived on the bluff and here were born seven of their eight children.

In 1865, Mr. Meyenberg took his family to La Grange, the county seat of Fayette, and established a drug store. The drug store was a one-story building which bore across its face in very large, bold letters the word *Apothecary*. It had two mullioned windows, one on each side of the door, flanked by heavy wooden shutters. Inside were the many bottles and jars which contained the ingredients of prescriptions. The drug market was in New Orleans and all goods had to be brought in on wagon trains. This required a great deal of time. Work was plentiful in this drug store where everything was done by hand.

In 1867 the dread scourge of yellow fever hovered over the little community of La Grange. The writhing victims died in great numbers and Mr. Meyenberg was very busy dispensing medicines which the physicians hoped would ease their pain. Eventually Mr. Meyenberg came home to find his own family in the throes of the fever. On September 16th, his five-year old son, Alexander, succumbed.

A week later, Frank, twelve years old, was taken off. The following day, the fever claimed his eldest boy, Max. The hardest of all to bear was the death of his faithful Kunigunde, who contracted the fever and nothing could save her. A year previously he had lost his daughter Elsie in a childish illness, so that his family was now reduced by more than half. Julius, Jr., who had been born in La Grange, August 17, 1863, was two years old when his mother died. Herr Meyenberg sent his motherless children back to the Bluff while he continued to operate the drug store in La Grange.

Julius, Jr., the youngest son was destined to carry on his father's work. The child was sent to the common country schools of the place and when he was thirteen, his father took him into the drug store as an apprentice. He learned pharmacy by application and hard work. When he was sufficiently adept, Herr Meyenberg turned the business over to him.

Mr. Meyenberg lived to a ripe old age. When he was eighty-three the La Grange paper, printed a short biography of him. "In lonely hours," said the notice, "Mr. Meyenberg cherishes the memory of his wife and three children whom he lost in the yellow fever epidemic. Mr. Meyenberg has always been a sympathizing friend and true adviser to the German immigrant and he is gratefully remembered by them. He has gained the high respect of his fellow citizens and a great many of them speak of him with veneration."¹ It is an almost certain fact that the German immigrants needed sympathizing friends for the Verein fell on evil days, got out of funds and otherwise had many difficulties settling their colonies due to land complications.

In addition to his talents as an apothecary, merchant and farmer, Mr. Meyenberg was a naturalist of marked ability and "it may be remarked here that he possessed one of the finest collections of insects and butterflies as is hardly equaled by the great institutions of learning in this country."²

Of Mr. Meyenberg's oldest daughter, Helen, the La Grange paper makes no mention. His second daughter, Selma, grew up and lived in La Grange. His son Edmund went into the saddlery business. Eventually he purchased a saddlery at Pecos City. He was assassinated. Julius, Jr., continues to operate the La Grange Store. He is seventy-one years old.

Deprived of a classical education, Julius Meyenberg, Jr., made good use of his apprenticeship. He learned to do everything that needed to be done in an apothecary shop and how to carry on in every emergency. In 1880 the first railroad was built from Columbus to La Grange and freight became less of a problem. Changes came to La Grange and more drastic changes came to the drug business, but J. Meyenberg, Prescription Druggist, pressed on. To-day Julius Meyenberg, Jr., is alert and interested. He has just finished a term as president of the Veteran Druggists' Association of Texas, and surely there could have been no better choice. He is a regular attendant at meetings of the Texas Pharmaceutical Association.

If the walls of this La Grange Drug Store had words, no doubt they could be made into charming personal history. From the viewpoint of social theory, it is quite possible that the long life span of this institution has no special importance.

¹ *La Grange Newspaper.*

² *Ibid.*

To have survived seventy-one years, to have kept one clerk for thirty-eight years, may not be essential facts in history. From the vantage of human interest, it is a warm, compelling story. One cannot regard its record without dreaming a little, seeing in his mind's eye the neat, picture-book houses of the colony, blue-eyed Kunigunde from Saxony, Julius Meyenberg, the bearded patriarch, brooding over his memories and then young Julius, in the tightest of all Victorian trousers and flagrant necktie, his black mustachios drooping elegantly above his mouth, his hair combed up in a pomaded swirl, dispensing medicaments and spices and confections, behind the leaded window panes of the apothecary shop which flourished in the shade of a live oak tree.

THE PERFECT HISTORIAN.*

BY ROBERT W. RODMAN.

A half century ago Macauley, the noted English statesman and writer on historical subjects, described the perfect historian as one in whose work the character and spirit of an age is exhibited in miniature—one who does not merely describe men and events but who makes them intimately known to us.

This goal of perfection has stimulated many men to transcribe facts and events of various periods in order that others, and particularly those of future generations, may have an accurate understanding and a keen appreciation of the heritage which they have received from those who have gone before.

The individual who has taken part in an event of historical interest or importance is undoubtedly the most capable of recording its details, not merely accurately but also with the flavor and spirit of the age.

Until recently the written word was his only means of transcribing his thoughts for permanent recording. Although many historians have very successfully injected into their writings those characteristic manners and trends of thought of a particular period which help us to receive a true picture of what has taken place, the greater majority have found that when they transposed their story to writing, it became a stilted, prosaic, factual presentation. Such is not difficult to understand for it is hardly to be expected that the man who makes history should also be able to write of it with facile pen in the manner of a skilled historian. Many men, therefore, have contented themselves with telling the story to others and permitting them to set down the facts for posterity.

To-day, however, we have a new medium for transcribing the stories of those who make history. Through the development of radio, electrical recording and amplification, it is now possible for one to tell his story into a microphone and have it permanently etched on a disk of cellulose acetate which may be played hundreds of years hence and bring to that generation the word of mouth story of facts and events of to-day.

The Rutgers University College of Pharmacy, at Newark, N. J., has been one of the first to take advantage of this medium. Up until a little more than a year ago Dr. Philemon Hommel, one of the founders of the college and its first dean, was

* Section on Historical Pharmacy, A. Ph. A., Dallas meeting, 1936.