

NEW BERLIN ALMANACK

NEW BERLIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY is dedicated to the 4 Rs:
Rescuing, Restoring, Recording and Recreating authentic New Berlin history

HISTORY OF THE MEIDENBAUER LOG HOUSE

by Roy Meidenbauer

Today, the Meidenbauer Log House stands as a prominent and unique historic structure on top of Prospect Hill in New Berlin, WI. Built in 1853, it was relocated from the Meidenbauer Farm to New Berlin's Historic Park in the Prospect Settlement District in 1987. The following article relates the history of the log house from the settlement days through its acquisition, relocation, and restoration brought about by the combined efforts of the Meidenbauer family, the New Berlin Historical Society and the City of New Berlin.

The Meidenbauer log house was the first of four historic buildings to be relocated in Historic Park.

In 1848, Johann Konrad (J.K.) Meidenbauer bought an 80-acre farm from Francis Shaf on Lawnsdale Road in the Township of New Berlin. Francis Shaf and his wife had bought Homestead Land from the Federal Government for \$1.25 an acre in 1842 and built a small log cabin for a home as well as a log barn. They also proceeded to clear the trees from 25 acres of land to grow food for themselves and their cow.

J.K. was born in 1818 and married Katherine Schmer in 1848. Katherine was born in 1806. Looking at the manifest of the immigrant ship *Belinda*, we find Katherine Schmer's name next to J.K.'s. We have not been able to determine the exact date of their marriage. Katherine was not mentioned in the letter that J.K. wrote to his parents in summer of 1848.

The following five paragraphs were taken from a letter written to J.K. Meidenbauer's parents back in Germany. We can be thankful that J.K. kept copies of all his correspondence so we have this historic information available today. This information was translated in 1925 by J.H.A. Lacher, member of the Waukesha County Historical Society.

"I am writing to you from my own property on August 13, 1848. When I settled on this land, there

was work in plenty. The grain was ripe—the barley, wheat and oats."

"On the 10th of July, I purchased Shaf's farm, 80 acres, for \$800, the price including an old sow with three pigs, one sheep, six grown and six young chickens. On the 11th of July, the agreement was made and on the 12th, I took possession. Later, I bought these additional items from Shaf. One cow at \$13, a plow at \$5, a bedstead at 10 shillings (\$1.25), a pair of scales at 7 shillings, 3 yards of cloth, a grindstone, a hog, and 22 bushels of corn for \$4. Shaf remained four weeks in my home."

"25 acres are cleared: grain 1Y2 acres, wheat 1 acre, barley 1Y2 acres, buckwheat 1Y2 acres, corn 1Y2 acres. This looks fine, standing 9 feet high, which may seem incredible, but it is true, 3 acres meadow, one acre ???, very little cabbage, perhaps 50 head, winter wheat 7 acres, but the yield is not good this year, still it may amount to 3 stacks. We cut it ourselves, Mary Beeheim helping."

"Oats 4 acres. This may run to nine stacks. They look unusually good. I can't judge exactly, because the bundles here go about 3 or 4 sheaves each. Potatoes 2 acres. Garden, one acre. My garden contains everything: cucumbers, squash, pumpkin, beets, carrots, watermelons, celery, onions, and all sorts of flowers. The rest of the



JOHN AND ANNA MEIDENBAUER FAMILY PICTURE TAKEN ON THE FARM IN 1909
 VIOLA, ARTHUR, WALTER, HARRY, JOSEPHINE, EMMA, ANNA, SABLE, FRANCES, ANNA AND JOHN.
 EDWARD AND WILLIAM WERE AWAY WORKING ON A NEIGHBORING FARM THE DAY OF THE PICTURE.



Meidenbauer Farm 1909

These three pictures were all taken on the same day in 1909.

The top picture shows the Meidenbauer family in front of the 1853 log house.

The middle picture shows the family in front of the "new" three story wood frame house built in 1905 with seven bedrooms, two living rooms, a large kitchen, a front porch, and a woodshed. It must have been a huge task to feed, clothe, and house 12 children and their parents.

In the lower photo, behind the shed, you can see the pine tree planted by J.K. and Katherine as a memorial to their stillborn baby that arrived May 30 of 1850. One hundred and thirty years later, Arthur used the tree trunk to replace a decayed log in the log house. It is possible that the log barn on the extreme right side of the picture is one of two log buildings on the farm when J.K. purchased it in 1848.

Little did J.M. and Anna realize how important these three photographs would be a century later, when their descendants would be seeking information on the history of the family.