

“The Palatine Immigrant” Volume XXVI:4, September 2001, pages 190-194; the Journal of the national German genealogical organization “Palatines to America”

Indiana Medical History Museum
German-American Connections
by **Robert A. McDougal, M.D.**

The Indiana Medical History Museum, 3045 West Vermont Street, is located on the near-west side of Indianapolis, on the grounds of what was Central State Hospital. It is managed by a non-profit corporation which has a lease on five acres and the building known as "The Old Pathology Building". The Museum hosts thousands of students each year, from grade school to university level nursing, psychology and medical students, and is open for individual and group tours. The Museum "...is quite simply without peer in the entire country. What sets it apart from the competition is not its collection...but rather the incredibly well-preserved building in which the collection is displayed" (1). A prime source of information about the building was written by Laura Bachelder (2) as her graduate thesis at IUPUI: "Inaugurating a Scientific Era" is available from the Museum by itself or with a more complete history of the hospital plus maps and an index of patients buried on the grounds (3).

It has many German-American connections: A, the superintendent who had it built; B, his successor; C, the architect; D, the German pathologist who spent his entire career there; E, its collection of late 19th and early 20th century German-language or German-author medical text books; and F, a well-known local artist who was a patient.

The Superintendent was Dr. George F. Edenharter, who was appointed in 1894. He dreamed of a building on the grounds devoted to laboratory sciences and medical education. Only Bellevue Hospital in New York had built such a building before, in 1884 with Carnegie money (recently torn down). With the help of architect Adolph Scherrer he built the two-story, nineteen room edifice which when opened was reported by the *Indianapolis Sentinel* (December 19, 1896): "Physicians who have studied in the pathological laboratories of the old world (Europe) say they have seen nothing to surpass it." It had far more laboratory and research space than any other Indiana hospital at that time, and comparable to the pathologic institutes of major universities. Dr. Edenharter died in December 1923, to be succeeded by Dr. Max A. Bahr. At that time the position of pathologist was vacant. In 1924 Bahr met a visiting young German pathologist Dr. Walter Ludwig Bruetsch and hired him; Bruetsch stayed until he retired in 1967. In 1969 a group of physicians and citizens led by Dr. Charles Bonsett * organized the non-profit corporation which opened the Museum to the public in 1971. A 99 year, renewable lease was obtained from the State in 1986, so even though the Hospital closed in 1994 the Museum will be enjoyed by generations yet to come! (4) Indianapolis recently bought the remaining Central State property from the State.

Dr. Edenharter was born of German immigrant parents in 1857 in Piqua, Ohio and died in Indianapolis in 1923. His father John, a Catholic cabinetmaker, emigrated in 1848 from Bavaria to Cincinnati ; his mother Elizabeth Roseberg was from Saxony. They moved from Piqua to Dayton so their two sons could have a better education. The parents came to Indianapolis 1875-77, George in 1878. After working as a cigar maker, he studied medicine and obtained his M.D. from the Medical College of Indiana in 1886. He served on the City Council, was appointed Superintendent of the City Hospital (now Wishard Hospital) in 1892 and of the Central Indiana Hospital for the Insane (Central State Hospital) in 1893. The Hospital had been founded in 1848, and by 1896 had 1,500 patients.

Dr. Edenharter married Marion Swadener in Dayton, OH during 1888. They had one son Ralph E. G. Edenharter, an attorney who lived in Reading, PA. Ralph died in 1927. His son Friedrich is now Senior Judge in Reading, and has a son named after the Doctor, George F. Edenharter. (5)

Dr. Edenharter's brother Frank was an Indianapolis attorney who was a member of the Socialer Turnverein, or Athenaeum Turners, and attorney for a German Savings Association. (6)

The Turnverein apartments, the Old Pathology Building, the Indiana Capitol, and many other buildings were designed and built by Adolph Scherrer (1847-1925) who was born in St. Gaul, Switzerland. Trained at universities in Vienna and Budapest, he came to the USA in 1870, spent some time in New York City, then two years in Chicago, and came to Indianapolis in 1873.

He joined architect Edwin May as chief draftsman. May had the commission for the Indiana State Capitol (finished 1888), but died before it was started. The State then authorized Scherrer to finish the building. As any visitor to the newly refurbished, beautiful building will attest, Scherrer did a fine job. He also designed several buildings at the Central Indiana Hospital for the Insane, including the Department for Women, known as "Seven Steeples" because only seven of the eight steeples could be seen from any adjacent site. In 1894 he was awarded the commission for the Pathology Building by Edenharter. Blue prints of the building are on exhibit in the library at the Museum. (7)

Dr. Max A. Bahr (1872-1953), who succeeded Edenharter as superintendent of the hospital, was a graduate of Shortridge High School, and of the Central College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1896. He was employed by the hospital in 1898, but "Realizing that American psychiatry was far behind that of the Germans..." (4) he obtained a degree of Doctor of Psychological Medicine from Berlin in 1908. After the death of Dr. Edenharter in 1923 he became superintendent.

In 1924 Dr. Bahr met a young German physician, Dr. Walter Ludwig Bruetsch (1896-1977). Born and educated in the classics in Heidelberg (he wrote his doctoral

thesis in Latin), he was wounded as a German soldier in 1916. Interned in Switzerland, he came under the care of the noted neurologist Babinski and started pre-medical schooling in Davos, Switzerland. He received his M.D. from Freiburg, Germany in 1922. Viennese researchers found during the war that infection with malaria could cure syphilis of the brain, the most common cause of insanity until the mid-1940s. Bruetsch brought with him this European treatment, deliberately infecting with malaria patients with tertiary syphilis, and Indianapolis became the center for this moderately successful regimen. He was a teacher as well as researcher, as all of the medical students in Indianapolis attended classes at the "Old Pathology Building" from its inception until Larue Carter Hospital was built on campus in 1956 (1,4).

Dr. Edenharter from the first felt that a well-stocked library would encourage his staff physicians and medical students. There were some 500 books in the large, well lighted library on the second floor when the building opened, and several thousand in a few years. Some of those (22) from the late 19th and early 20th centuries were in German and many more translated from the original German, since medicine in general and psychiatry especially were most advanced in Germany. The library has been left intact, and many additional books added since the Museum was founded, such as the 1875 edition by Dr. Benjamin Rush on the German Inhabitants of Pennsylvania (7). I have available a bibliography of about 11 pages of books in or translated from German, or about German subjects. In addition, Nancy Eckerman, librarian of the rare books section of the Ruth Lilly Medical Library at the IU Medical School, prepared for me a bibliography of 14 pages of journals/periodicals in German, and 18 pages of books in German at the library. Copies are available for interested scholars.

The artist-connection is John Zwara, whose water-colors now fetch hundreds and thousands of dollars. He was born in the early 1880s in Austria, came to America in 1900. His first paintings in Indianapolis date from 1933. A "street person", like many of them today really suffering from schizophrenia, he earned paint and food money by selling his paintings to Lyman Brothers and the H.L. Lieber Co. He was befriended by Alexander Vonnegut, who realized his need for psychiatric care and arranged his admission to Central State Hospital in 1938. According to Mr. Vonnegut, Zwara had attended schools in Prague and Berlin. While a patient, he was provided supplies by Dr. Bruetsch, who then acquired and stored his paintings, and after retirement, presented them to the Museum. Zwara left the hospital after only six months, and spent his last days with the Little Sisters of the Poor, then located in Germantown or the Lockerbie historic neighborhood. (8)

[The Museum is open to the public Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and other days for groups of 10 or more by appointment, Phone 317/635-7329 or e-mail Edenharter@imhm.org for information. Vermont Street does not cross the White River, so to get there from downtown, you must go west on either Michigan Street, to Warman or Tibbs, south one block to Vermont, or west on Washington Street to Warman or Tibbs, and go north to Vermont.]

References:

- (1) Lipp, Martin R.: Medical Landmarks U.S.A.: A Travel Guide, St. Louis: McGraw-Hill, 1991.
- (2) Bachelder, Laura M.: "Inaugurating a Scientific Era": The Pathological Department / Central Indiana Hospital for the Insane (1896-1996) 1996.
- (3) McDougal, Robert A. et al: Central State Hospital Cemetery List.... , Genealogical Society of Marion County, 2000.
- (4) Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, articles about Bruetsch by Dr. Charles Bonsett *, Bahr and Edenharter by Dr. Charles Hazelrigg,, Indiana Medical History Museum by Katherine McDonell.
- (5) Personal communication from Judge Frederick Edenharter.
Pictorial and Biographical Memoires of Indianapolis ... Goodspeed Bros. 1895.
Jacob Piatt Dunn: 1910 Greater Indianapolis... , Indiana Historical Society.
Stone, R. French: Biographies of Eminent American Physicians and Surgeons... 1894.
McDougal, Robert A: George F. Edenharter, M.D.,... GSMC Family Quest, Vol. 2, No. 3, Fall 1997, p. 83.
- (6) McDougal, Robert A.: Composite Index to Five Lists of Members of the Athenaeum Turners... , Indiana Chapter, Palatines to America, 1995.
Hoyt, Grossmann, Lang and Reichmann, Editors: Theodore Stempfel's Festschrift: Fifty Years of Unrelenting German Aspirations in Indianapolis 1898, republished by Indiana German Heritage Society 1991.
- (7) McDougal, Robert A., Editor: Articles in the Newsletter of the Indiana Chapter, Palatines to Indiana.
- (8) John Zwara: Indiana Medical History Quarterly, Volume I, No. 1, pp. 2-5, July 1974.
The World of John Zwara, prepared for an exhibit of his work at the Medical Museum in the early 1990s (Another exhibit is planned for later in 2005).

The author is a long-time member of both the Indiana German Heritage Society and Palatines to America, a volunteer and Board member of the Museum, and a retired hospital pathologist and Clinical Professor of Pathology, Indiana University School of Medicine.

* Dr. Tom Bonsett, now active in the IGHS is the son of Dr. Charles Bonsett.

May 2000, revised February 2005

