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## A history of the German Valley-Blue Mounds area. 1955

German Valley School (Daleyville, Wis.)

[s.l.]: German Valley school, 1955

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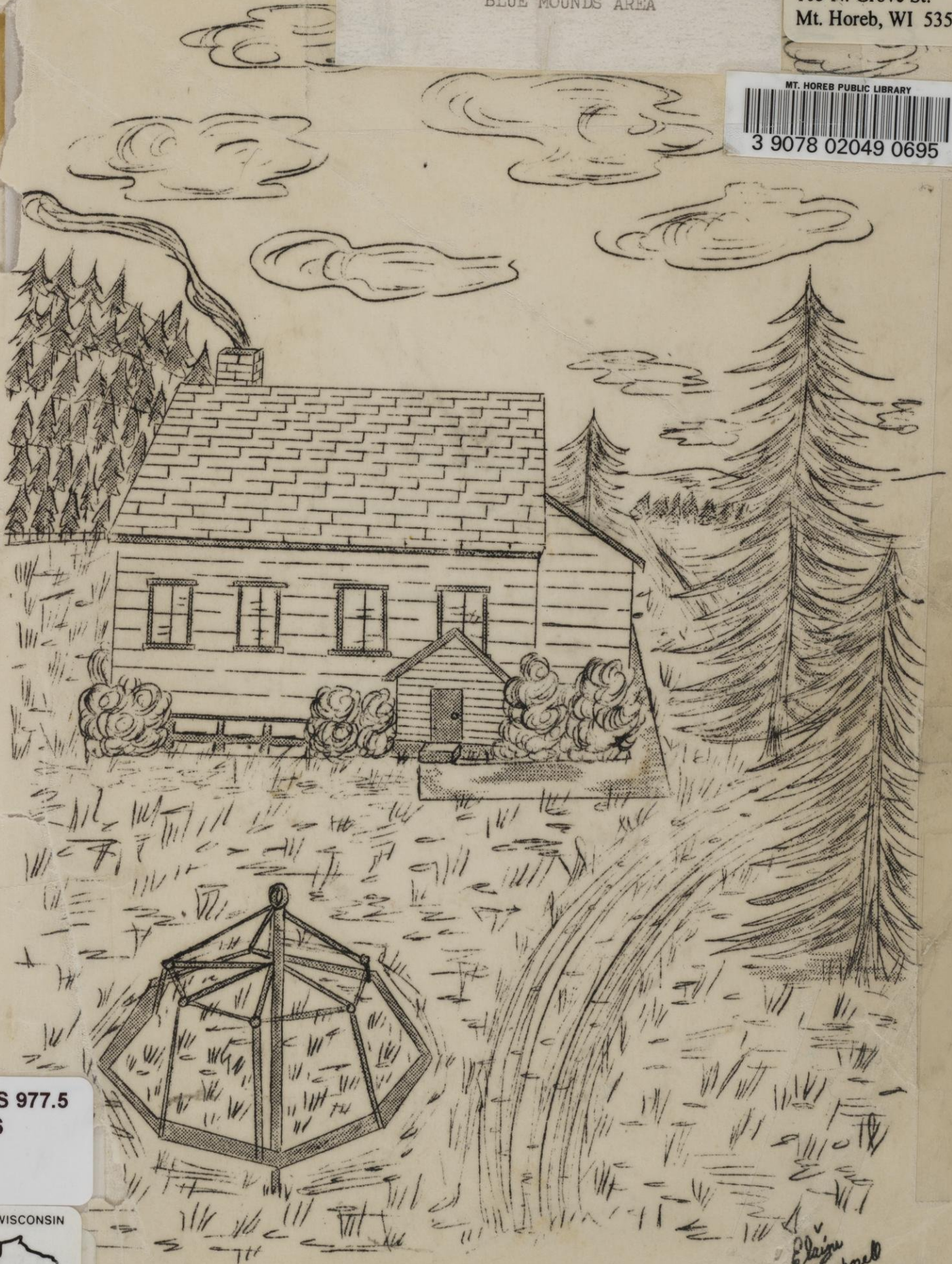
A HISTORY OF THE GERMAN VALLEY-  
BLUE MOUNDS AREA

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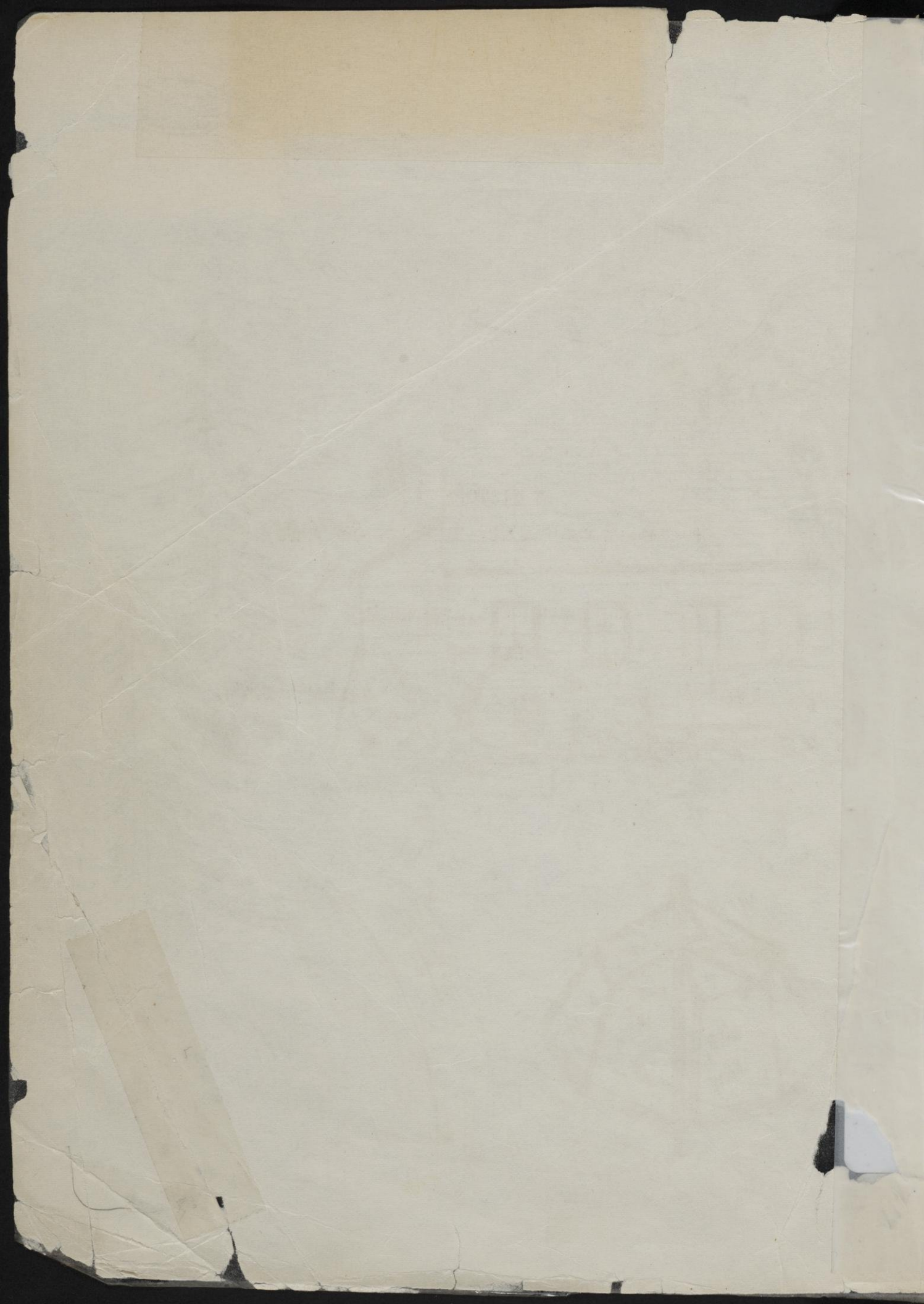


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WISCONSIN



*Elaine  
Furman*



A HISTORY  
OF THE GERMAN VALLEY-BLUE MOUNDS AREA

COLLECTED AND ASSEMBLED  
BY THE  
TEACHER AND PUPILS OF THE GERMAN VALLEY SCHOOL

1955

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## FOREWORD

Preparing the history of the German Valley Community and surrounding Blue Mounds area has meant work but it really has been fun too.

Much credit goes to Mr. Olin Ruste of Mount Horeb who furnished the splendid and colorful history of the first school (Steyer) which he attended. Mr. Ruste also gave valuable aid to August Becker and August Heuser in assembling facts for their farm histories. We thank you, Mr. Ruste! We also are grateful to the many other people whose contributions added so much to our efforts.

It is our sincere hope that this history will be preserved and that perhaps some time later, maybe when Wisconsin is celebrating her bicentennial in 2048, some one will add another to this, the history of the German Valley-Blue Mounds area.

The upper grade children of the German Valley School have been members of the Junior Historical Society of Wisconsin for several years. The purpose of this society is to develop an interest in state and local history.

The members are interested in the history of our state and have come to know a great deal about it through the study of BADGER HISTORY, a magazine published each month by the society and sent to each member. This interesting little magazine really makes history come alive with its thrilling stories of Wisconsin's past.

All over Wisconsin people are collecting historical stories of their own communities. They enjoy hearing the older citizens tell stories of their early life. Newspapers and old letters which contain facts and stories of historical interest are being collected and preserved.

## EARLY HISTORY OF THIS REGION

The land of this region was ceded by the Indians to the United States by a treaty that was made with the Winnebago tribe at Prairie du Chien on August 1, 1829.

The Indians stayed on for some time as this was a favorite hunting ground. Finally they had to be driven off.

Some of the land was sold to the settlers for \$1.25 an acre. The land office was located in Mineral Point.

As Fred L. Holmes writes in his book, OLD WORLD WISCONSIN, "We see today in Wisconsin the thrift, daring, patience, skills, and endurance of our early foreign settlers."

People of the old world heard of the cheap land and freedom of the middlewest and came to America. Between 1846 and 1847 the population of Wisconsin increased by 55,000, a gain of 30 per cent.

New Englanders from New York state were the first to settle in Dane County. Then the Norwegians arrived, settling in the southeastern part of the country.

After 1850 the Germans arrived and by 1860 there were nearly as many Germans as Norwegians. They

settled in groups such as the Germans in German Valley. By 1940 there were more Germans born in Wisconsin than any other nationality.

The climate, forests and animals resembled those of Germany and for that reason many came here and avoided the southern states.

Over a million and a half people have come from foreign countries to live in Wisconsin and many of the nationalities have preserved the practices and customs of their native country.

The first settlers, who came to German Valley over one hundred years ago, found the land covered with timber, as did all Wisconsin pioneers. Their first task was to cut the timber to clear the land and build log homes. The stumps had to be grubbed out by hand.

They followed the same pattern as all pioneers, using ox teams, spinning their yarn, weaving cloth, making candles and soap. Every farmer raised wheat to furnish the yearly supply of bread. After it was threshed with a flail the wheat was taken to Black Earth to be ground. (In later years it was taken to Elver's Mill.)

As the railroad passed through Black Earth before it did here, the farmers often drove stock to Black Earth to market.

Pokerville was the nearest trading center for the earliest settlers.



Butter was made at home and sold. It was often put into wooden kegs.

The present village of Mount Horeb sprang up after the railroad went through in 1881. Before that time there was a settlement at what is now known as Luhman's Corner about one mile west of Mount Horeb. In the early days this was Brackenwagon Corner. There was a store and post-office there.

BLUE MOUNDS VICINITY 100 YEARS AGO

(The following information was taken from a HISTORY OF DANE COUNTY, newspaper clippings, etc. furnished by the State Historical Society and Extension Division.)

German Valley is located in the town of Blue Mounds, one of the earliest settled regions of our state.

The first settlement in this area was made in 1828 by Ebenezer Brigham. He came to mine lead and entered a claim on section 5 and 7. He mined lead and opened an inn known as Brigham Place. This was for the accommodation of the travelers who were numerous in those days. The Blue Mounds road was one of the chief thoroughfares of the territory. It followed the ridge which extends from near Madison almost due west to the Mississippi River. This was the military road from Fort Winnebago (now Portage) to Fort Crawford (now Prairie du Chien.) This was probably the first wagon road maintained within the limits of Wisconsin.

The four-horse coaches of the United States mail, with nine passengers inside and more on top, passed each way daily. The old stage-coach, now almost forgotten, was then in its glory.

Among the best known of the good drivers of that day was Andrew Bishop. He would sound his horn to announce the arrival and bring his load of happy passengers up to the door of the Brigham Place for dinner.

When the Black Hawk War broke out in 1832 the Blue Mounds fort was built for the protection of the settlers against the Indians. The fort was situated on a high prairie and commanded a good view in every direction for many miles. The fort was sometimes threatened but never actually attacked by the Indians who were frequently seen in the neighborhood, so that it was never safe to be far outside the stockade. At different times they succeeded in killing three men of the garrison. Two of them were killed in plain sight of the inmates of the fort, but too far away to be rescued.

The two Hall girls, who had been captured by the Indians, were brought to the Mound Fort by the Winnebagoes and surrendered on the payment of ransom by Colonel Dodge. Their story attracted a good deal of attention and interest throughout the country and the Blue Mounds were brought into considerable notoriety by the fact that the surrender

was made there.

Nothing remains today of the Mounds Fort. A marker has been placed there by the State Historical Society. (The land where the fort stood is now part of the Rinehart Eckel farm.)

Charles Lycan, born in 1835, was the first white child born in the town.

Blue Mounds was set off as a separate town by the legislature on March 11, 1848. At that time it also included the present town of Vermont.

The first town meeting of Blue Mounds was held at the home of Ira Isham in April 1848. The first chairman was Ebenezer Brigham. He was the first postmaster of the region also.

The first school in Dane County was opened in the Brigham settlement in 1836. This school stood for over 100 years and was finally town down in about 1940.

The Military Road was built by the United States Government in 1831. It was used to carry army supplies from Fort Crawford to Green Bay.

A large part of the town of Blue Mounds was covered with timber in the early days. Settlers came to farm and to mine lead.

Blue Mounds had the first post office in this part of the state. It was located at Brigham's Inn and Ebenezer Brigham was postmaster. It was called Moundville.

The principal crop raised in the early days was

wheat. Some of this was raised as a cash crop. Later the dairy industry began to grow. In 1848 a cow was worth about \$12.00. Some farmers made butter and shipped it to Milwaukee. Later cheese factories were built in almost every township.

The total number of enlisted men from Dane County in the Civil War was 5840. Of these 746 died in service. Fifteen men from the town of Blue Mounds died in service.

A Dane County regiment (the 8th) carried the live eagle throughout the Civil War and came to be known as "The Eagle Regiment."

#### SCHOOLS

##### SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 3, TOWN OF BLUE MOUNDS--1855

Written by--Olin Ruste, Mount Horeb

The early settlers had only a one way ticket to America, and brought with them all their worldly possessions. As this was to be their permanent home, it was not long before they were longing for a school for their children. So it came to pass that Edward Dale recorded in the records of the town clerk, that school district No. 3, comprising the S. W. quarter of the town of Blue Mounds, was established and so organized, on April 9, 1855. This was the first tax supported school in this section of the township.

The pattern followed by these communities was somewhat similar. In every community there was a "bellwether" who carried the leading part in building

the school. Papers have been found to verify the fact that each family volunteered to bring a certain amount of logs and to put in so many days of labor to construct the school buildings. There can be no doubt but that this school was organized and built this same way. This school district remained intact until in 1898 when it was divided into two districts, namely the Ruste and the German Valley school districts. The growth and the development of the community and population increase causing the change. Not too much is known about the early years of the first school, but there are several who attended the school in its later years, still living, whose entire educational knowledge was acquired in that little log school house.

A little description of the log school house would not be amiss here. The size of the building was about 18 by 28 or 30 feet. Two windows on either side admitted the light. The length of the building was north and south with the door toward the south. Three rows of desks with a large Round Oak stove in the center front and a long stove pipe hung to the ceiling and entered a short brick chimney in the rear of the room. The one door entered from the south and opened inward. Behind it stood the teacher's desk, a home-made contraption with a hinged cover that opened into a large compartment that held the teacher's register and books. All

pupils desks faced south and were home-made also. The west row belonged to the boys, no questions about that, while the east row belonged to the girls, and woe be unto either girl or boy who had to sit in the center row. They were so bashful in those days. Four aisles permitted the pupils to go up to the recitation seats in front of the room. The back of the school room had a seat attached to the logs that ran the entire width of the room, while the desks on both sides of the room extended to the wall so as to accommodate 3 or 4 pupils in the last two seats on either side. The three rows of seats were home-made and were fastened together by a 2 by 6 running between the pupils and served as a dividing line for each pupil. In a crowded winter term Anton Bruflat sat on this 2 by 6 with three in a two seater. He was not too happy about it either. Nails were driven into the logs that served as coat and hat hangers.

Along after the Civil War there were but two terms of schools, the winter term of four months and the spring term of two months. The interesting thing about it was that the teacher hired out for either or both terms. Wages ranging from \$18 to \$26 were paid per month even up to the 1890's. The winter term commanded the higher wages. The winter term was attended by older pupils. Registers of schools in those days indicated that the age spread was from

16 to 22 years. Newcomers attended school for the sole purpose of learning the English language. Consequently, the teacher had pupils as old or older than herself. Among the teachers who taught the last decade of this school were Iver Clifgaard, Frances Post, Inger Skindrud, and Clara Kjorlie. By the time of the 1890's the school term had increased to eight months, a fall term being added.

The period of the age of the old Steyer district No. 3, to the present German Valley School, are as far apart and different as night and day. At that time roads were but trails and wagon roads. No one knew about concrete or gravel roads. A school child rarely saw either Blue Mounds or Mount Horeb. This accounts for much of the reserved nature and bashfulness of the boys and girls of the Steyer School. It also accounts for the scared feeling and "rough-necks", but they were few. Then the mode of dress!! Oh, what a difference! For headwear the girls all had a regular hood that they tied under the chin. If they were extra fancy they had an extension over the shoulder that kept the neck warm. Dresses were long, high button shoes and home-knit woolen stockings were worn. Boys suffered under the weight of heavy one-half inch thick felt boots with rubber overshoes. This, together with home-knit caps and over coats, made a heavy load for a mile or two walk to school.

Water to drink was a problem in those days. Mother insisted my brother Edwin and I take a bottle of milk to school every day. We had about one-half mile to walk. One cold morning we trudged off to school, Edwin carrying the dinner pail and I carrying a "kuriko" bottle of milk. Before we got to school the bottle froze hard enough to burst and sent the milk all over my coat and felt boots. That milk bottle came in for a lot of "kidding" as we were called "milk babies." With a school enrollment of from twenty to sixty at times, it required a lot of drinking water. The school possessed one sixteen-quart pail and one long handled dipper. At times it was considered a treat to get permission to get a pail of water. The well was on the Torey Erickson farm, now occupied by Melvin Framstad. Two youngsters dawdling for water could get out of some reading, writing, and arithmetic. I remember one hot day a couple of boys were sent for water. The rest of the pupils were hot from playing ball, and seeing the water coming ran to meet them, lined up for a chance to get at that one dipper, and emptied the pail before they came on the school grounds. Consequently, some did not get any water. So it was about face for another pail, and more lessons omitted. Winter time was the biggest problem. Then, for the most part, the children would get a large snowball and bring it around the stove, and



melt the snowball by placing it on the stove. They would suck the water from the snow and thus quench their thirst.

Baseball was one of the games the children enjoyed whenever the weather was favorable. Unlike our baseball of to-day, we had four bases and a home plate. Cross out was the only way to get any one out. The bat was never round, but was made from a flat board with the end tapered so one could hold it. To my best recollection Gertie Becker (Mrs. Peter Heuser) was a whirlwind of a player. She held the bat, like every one else, directly over her head, so the pitcher had to throw the ball over her, not over home plate, and if she ever hit that ball it would be sure to be a home run for her side. In choosing sides for a game she would be the first one to be chosen. And run! She could run like a deer.

We have all lived and have known days that were hot and drowsy, in fact, so drowsy we could hardly keep awake. It was just such a day that made an imprint on the mind of Peter Heuser, in fact it stands out so vividly in his mind that he remembers it as though it were yesterday. He was trying to be a good boy and study his lesson, but to no avail. Drowsiness and finally sleep overcame him, and he fell fast asleep with his head on the desk. Sensing some tittering going on in the school room the teacher spied Peter, fast asleep. Remembering that the next

class to recite was Peter's she carefully walked to his desk, and reaching on the wall for a hat, she placed it on his head. Then going back to her desk she called in a loud voice for his class. Peter woke up, grabbed his book, and walked up to his class with his hat on, much to the enjoyment of the whole school. Peter Heuser never again fell asleep in school.

I do not recall the Steyer School ever having a lamp, either a bracket lamp or a hanging lamp. If the school had an evening program the parents would bring their lanterns along and hang them around the room. Not many of the children had a tablet or writing paper. All the arithmetic examples were worked on a slate. Everyone had a slate. With the slate one must own a slate-rag. Some of the children had a double slate and would keep the slate-rag between the double slate. The rag was used to erase work, first by spitting on the slate and then wiping it with the rag. These are but a few of the many glimpses into the past. Needless to say that school district performed its duties as best it could with the conditions as they were at that time.

#### HISTORY OF THE PRESENT GERMAN VALLEY SCHOOL

After the Steyer school was discontinued the present German Valley School was built.

The deed for the land is still with the school records. It reads in part as follows:

"This indenture, made this 21st day of June in the year of our Lord 1899, between Justus Heuser and his wife Mary Heuser of the town of Blue Mounds, County of Dane and state of Wisconsin parties of the first part, and School district No. 9 of the town of Blue Mounds County of Dane and state of Wisconsin, party of the second part for the sum of \$20 etc."

This was signed by Justus and Mary Heuser and witnessed by A. F. Gramm, notary public, and Frank Heuser.

PRESENT SCHOOL HISTORY

The first teacher when the school opened in 1899 was Clara Kjorlie, who had also been a teacher in the old Steyer School, district No. 3.

1. Clara Kjorlie-----1899-1900
2. Julia Post-----1902-1903
3. Annie Nelson-----1905-1906
4. Lena Gulhand-----1907-1910
5. M. Gordon-----1910-1911
6. Jessie M. Wilson (Mrs. Luther Turnell)--1911-1912
7. Edna Becker-----1913-1915
8. Clara Thompson-----1915-1918
9. Mayme Thistle-----1918-1920
10. Leola Kahl-----1920-1921
11. Myrtle Opsal-----1921-1922
12. Kathryn Lloyd (Mrs. Robert Kirch)-----1922-1924

13. Erna Kahl-----1924-1925
14. Myrtle Opsal-----1925-1926
15. Catherine Thousand-----1926-1927
16. Alice Bjelde-----1928-1929
17. Hazel Everson-----1929-1930
18. Frieda Thoni-----1933
19. Sylvanus Aavang-----1937-1940
20. Doris Thousand-----1940-1945
21. Mrs. Mabel Espeseth-----1946-1949
22. Mrs. Mabel Uren-----1949-1951
23. Mrs. Vera Walsh (present teacher)-----1951-1956

The first school building was very small. Marks show where an addition of about 12 feet was added. In the early 1930's (at the time of the W.P.A.) a basement was put under the school. Later a furnace was installed. Improvements have been made at various times. In 1953 the greatest improvement of all was made. This consisted of installing indoor plumbing including a drinking fountain etc. Each bathroom has a sink with running water. The basement also is equipped for cooking. It has a large sink, a two burner gas stove, tables, cupboard, and dishes. Here the lunches are prepared for the Community Meetings which are held once each month.

We contacted one of the former teachers, Mrs. Luther Turnell, (Jessie Wilson) who taught in German Valley from 1910 to 1912. She informs us that there were about 20 pupils at that time. She mentions:

Fred, Otto, Hulda, and Katie Kahl,  
Elizabeth, Adeline, Clarence, and Arthur Bilse,  
Caroline and Edna Kahl,  
Tony and Rozella Disrud,  
Otto, Ruth, and Christine Heuser,  
Fred, Erma, Minnie, and Johnnie Matti,  
Louisa Klute, Herman, and Freddie Arnold.

In those days the teacher always boarded with a family in the district. Miss Wilson stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Peter Heuser. She says that the roads at that time were often impassable.

The board members were Frank Heuser, Henry Becker, and William Bilse. She remembers that she used a wood stove with a round jacket which consumed a lot of fuel but never produced too much heat.

In looking through the old school register we find three names more often than any other. These names are Becker, Kahl, and Heuser. Several generations of these families have attended. At present John Kahl is enrolled in first grade (1955). He is the fifth generation of Kahls in the district. Diane Kay Brattlie, whose mother was a Kahl, also attends. Her father, Donald Brattlie, attended this school and is now a member of the school board.

Walter Hiltbrand, whose father was one of the early cheesemakers in the valley, also went to this school and is now a member of the board. He has two sons, Bobby and Jimmie, who are now enrolled.

In the school year 1940-1941 the following pupils attended:

Rachel Heuser, Rebecca Heuser  
Shirley Becker, Elaine Heuser, Otis Heuser,  
Emma Kahl, Donald Arnold,  
Arnold Zabel, Vernon Heuser,  
Clifford Kahl, Phillip Kahl, Gordon Becker,  
Lena Friedli and Joan Heuser.  
Sylvanuz Aavang was the teacher.

SCHOOL YEAR 1954-1955

Today the enrollment is 17 as follows:

Grade 8. Bobby Hiltbrand  
Grade 7. Ronnie Lee  
Grade 6. Edward Paulson  
Grade 5. Janice Paulson  
Grade 4. Lavern Thompson  
Grade 3. Diane Kay Brattlie, Susan Mueller,  
Elizabeth Paulson, Laverne Landmark  
Grade 2. Jimmie Hiltbrand, Allan Landmark,  
Raymond Reeson, Chester Boley  
Grade 1. John Kahl, Steven Mueller, Bonnie  
Reeson

Teacher--Mrs. Vera Walsh, Blue Mounds

Board Members--Lamont Paulson

Donald Brattlie

Walter Hiltbrand

### CHURCH HISTORY

The Germans who settled in this region were Lutherans. From the History of Dane County by Keyes we learn that the Blue Mounds German Lutheran congregation was organized in 1858 with seven members. These were: Heinrick Kahl, Heinrich Bilse, Jacob Bilse, Philip Kably, Daniel Becker, Michael Bilse, and Ferdinand Steyer. Services were first held in the homes. A church was built in 1868. This proved to be too small and was torn down. The second church was struck by lightning and destroyed. The last church was built in 1907. Reverend Nitardy was pastor of this church for many years. The pastor of the first church was Rev. John Deindoerfer.

Finally the last church was also torn down. This was in 1953. It had not been used for many years as the people attended services in Mount Horeb.

At the present time a very modern and beautiful church has just been completed in Mount Horeb. It was dedicated July 31, 1955.

### CHEESE FACTORY

The first cheese factory in German Valley was built in 1888. The German Valley Cheese Company was organized at that time. In 1937 the factory was enlarged.

The cheesemakers were of Swiss decent, therefore, Swiss cheese was always made here. The following were cheesemakers: Mr. Strup, Dan Rothlisberger,

Rudy Schaller, Gottfried Schaller, Jack Matti, Leo Hiltbrand, Gottfried Friedli, John Burkharde (who died of heat stroke in factory), Thoni Klarer.

The factory closed in December 1953. As it contains living quarters, it is now rented as a residence.

In early days, before modern methods of cooling milk were used, it was necessary for all patrons to haul their milk twice each day, and the cheesemaker made cheese every forenoon and every night. He put in long days, sometimes not finishing until midnight.

Most farmers say that even though it is convenient to now have a truck come to the farm to pick up milk, they miss the cheese factory because there they met their neighbors and exchanged news each day. They had many friendly chats and saw their neighbors more often than they now do.

#### FARMS OF GERMAN VALLEY

#### T H E A U G U S T H E U S E R F A R M

(Information by August Heuser

Written by Olin Ruste)

In the late 1840's or early 50's my grandparents Peter and Sophia Heuser together with other relatives and friends from Ritanau, Germany settled in the town of Blue Mounds, Wisconsin. They had heard glowing and exaggerated accounts of unbelievable opportunities of free land ready to be planted, where every one was given equal rights. Why they chose this particular



spot or state is now only guess work on our part or shall we call it "fate". My grandparents, together with others from Germany, settled in the same community on account of the language question as well as for protection and fellowship with those of the same cultural background.

There were no railroads in this area at the time of this settlement. Mineral Point had been set up by the Territorial and State Government as a Land Office wherein settlers could file their claims and records, deeds and mortgages. It is believed that Peter and Sophia Heuser claimed and settled on this farm when they first arrived, for the first deed I have in my possession Peter and Sophia Heuser deeded this farm to my father and mother Jacob and Dorthea Heuser on April 11, 1862. I purchased the farm from them in 1915 and have now rented it to Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hiltbrand who have been occupants for the last 15 years. Thus the farm has been in the Heuser family for over 100 years. A tax receipt in my possession dated January 9, 1862 shows that my grandfather paid a tax of \$13.62 on 280 acres of land at that time. The first school district established in the town of Blue Mounds consisted of the S. W. 1/4 of the town, which includes this farm, was recorded on April 9, 1855 in the town clerk's records. Thus this farm has been taxed and a supporter of this public school by the same family for now just 100 years.

The Heuser family, Peter and Sophia Heuser and their seven children, came to this area by the way of New Orleans, up the Mississippi River. The crossing of the Atlantic Ocean required seven weeks, due to weather conditions. Much walking was done to complete the trip to German Valley. A wagon road had been established by the Territorial Government between Milwaukee and Waukesha was built in 1851, and was extended to Madison in 1854, then to Prairie du Chien in 1857. These early settlers came to this country for economic reasons. They settled in the valleys where there was wood and water to be had. Their first consideration was to build a log house for themselves. While the log house was under construction they lived in "dug-outs" in the hillsides for shelter until the log house was ready. Except for their food supply for the long voyage across the ocean, they brought very little of worldly goods with them.

Deer, jack rabbit, cottontails, prairie chickens, and quail were their main meat ration. Patches of ground were plowed with wood plows or spaded with shovels for the first years, and planted to wheat and barley. Crops were harvested with the scythe or cradle and tied into sheaves or bundles by hand and then stacked. Threshing was done on the clean frozen ground by spreading the sheaves and then walking the oxen over them, tramping out the kernels. The chaff

was fanned out by the hand-pan. The use of the flail by some was another method of threshing. For that period Elvers Mill in the town of Vermont was the closest grist mill for grinding wheat into flour. To bring a load of wheat to the grist mill was an occasion to remember, as enough was ground a time to last throughout the winter. There were no roads or bridges, so sometimes streams had to be crossed to reach a destination. Trails and weather conditions had to be picked with care when any one went on a long journey. Food for man and beast had to be provided from home, even in going to the mill as one had to wait his turn for grinding.

Letters from home or to the folks back home were few and far between in the 40's and 50's. As mining was an important industry in 1840's at Mineral Point it gradually extended to Pokerville at the foot of Blue Mounds, which became a thriving trading center and Trading Post. This was the closest contact with the outside world for some time. The horse drawn stage coach going through was an exciting event. Mount Horeb got its first post master in 1861

No great surplus of food was produced at this time, to provide for any cash income for these early settlers. Barter of labor, as grubbing of land, splitting of rails for fences, helping build houses in exchange for a setting hen and a dozen eggs, or a pig, a calf or a sheep was the order of the day.

All clothes were made from the wool which was sheared, carded, spun into thread, and then woven into clothes for the family by the industrious and thrifty settlers. Whenever possible, men folks sought work in mines or where ever work was to be had in order to get some cash to provide the family with necessities they could not get in exchange for labor. My father, as a young man, worked in Mineral Point in the brewery for some time to get some ready cash for farm necessities. As the flocks and herds grew so did the surplus food supply. With the coming of the railroad more surpluses of all farm products were realized because of the greater outlets established by the railroads. The opening of this larger market together with the coming of the Swiss from New Glarus, caused this state to develop into the dairy state that it now is.

(August Heuser, and his two sisters, Elizabeth and Caroline, now reside together in Mount Horeb.)

#### T H E A U G U S T B E C K E R F A R M

(Written by Olin Ruste)

One of the farms of German Valley which has remained in the same family for now a little more than one hundred years is the Becker farm. In 1853 Daniel Becker and his wife Catherine arrived in this valley from Germany. The crossing of the ocean and much of two continents was a voyage consuming from 12 to 16 weeks, depending upon the wind and weather. All boats were sail boats. The road from Milwaukee here

was a wagon road. No railroads had as yet been built.

Daniel and Catherine Becker, like all the other settlers were hard working, thrifty folks who wrested from nature their livelihood. They built their own log houses and barns and grew all their food, raised sheep for their wool, and spun and wove their own clothes. At first their sole cash crop was wheat, but shortly after the Civil War they, together with the Swiss and the Scandinavians, began to produce dairy products to supplement the cash for the wheat.

To Daniel and Catherine Becker three children were born. The **children were Henry D. Daniel Jr., and August.** When it came time for the old folks to retire they sold the farm to Henry D. Becker. Henry D. and his wife Augusta did their share to improve the farm and buildings. To this union five children were born. As their time for retirement came the farm was sold to their son August. August and Emma farmed their allotted time. They turned the farming operations over to their son, Robert. Thus this farm has been on the tax roll of the school for for over 100 years.

#### T H E B I L S E F A R M

Over one hundred years ago Henry Bilse came to German Valley from Germany. His wife was Maratha Bilse. They farmed for many years. The next owners of the farm was their son Jacob Bilse and his wife, Ann.

The first house was log and had two rooms. It was rebuilt over 55 years ago (present home.)

Jacob Bilse's son, William, and his wife Elizabeth were the third owners of his farm and lived here all their married life.

Clarence Bilse and Elizabeth Bilse Swenson are co-owners of the farm at the present time. Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Swenson occupy and operate the place.

#### D O N A L D B R A T T L I E F A R M

Henry Kahl, who came from Germany, was the first owner of this farm. About 52 years ago he sold the farm to his son Jacob Kahl who married Marie Heuser.

Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Kahl were the parents of eight daughters, Lydia (deceased), Edna, Erna, Elizabeth, Amanda, Caroline, Marie, and Dorothy.

One of the landmarks of German Valley is the old stone house on the former Kahl farm. This house was built for Henry Kahl by Peter Heuser (Jacob Heuser's father) who was an excellent stone mason.

The Kahl farm is now owned and operated by Donald Brattlie who married Dorothy Kahl. They have one daughter, Diane Kay.

#### T H E F R E D K A H L F A R M

John Kahl bought this farm in 1899 from Henry Becker. Their home was a two story log house with basement and it is still standing. The present nine room home was built in 1905.

John Kahl married Augusta Heuser. Their children are: Otto, Hulda, Kathryn, Fred, William, Arthur, and Raymond.

In 1918 Mr. and Mrs. John Kahl moved to Mount Horeb, and the children farmed. Fred married Marie Brattlie in 1920 and they rented the farm. They have two sons, Ralph and Philip, who are now married and operate the farm. Mr. and Mrs. Fred Kahl live in Mount Horeb. They bought the home place in 1952.

Ralph has two children, John and Cynthia. Philip has one son, Jeffery.

William Kahl, who was born on this farm, now has a position with the State Department of Public Instruction at Madison, as a school supervisor.

Otto Kahl operates a grocery store in Mount Horeb.

Ralph and Philip have received recognition for their successful and modern methods of farming.

#### OTHER FARMS OF GERMAN VALLEY

Many of the farms of the valley are still owned by direct descendants of the original owners.

Peter Heuser, who now resides in Mount Horeb, is owner of the farm occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Herman Brattlie. The Brattlies have operated this farm for many years.

Otto Heuser, Milwaukee, owns the farm of which the Clifford Mueller family resides. Mrs. Mueller is the former Grace Mae Brattlie, daughter of Herman Brattlies.

The present occupants of the Adolph Heuser farm (estate) are Mr. and Mrs. Dale Fawett. Mrs. Fawett is a daughter of the Heusers.

POKERVILLE--GHOST TOWN

The first settlers in German Valley did their trading in Pokerville. This was located just west of the present village of Blue Mounds. Nothing remains today of this once thriving mining town except three dwellings.

Pokerville was first called West Blue Mounds, but due to the gambling in the saloons the name was changed to Pokerville.

The nearby lead mines made the village prosperous and it grew rapidly.

Fortunes were won and lost every night over the tavern tables. Liquor flowed freely and bloodshed and killings were not unknown.

In the town were two saloons, several general stores and barrooms, the ten pin alleys, a blacksmith shop, a harness maker, a carpenter, and a physician. A large business was done in lead and part of it was hauled to Galena, Green Bay or Chicago.

Long lines of prairie schooners passed over the military road carrying settlers to Minnesota and to other points west of the Mississippi river.

The village of Pokerville figured prominently in the Black Hawk War which broke out in that locality in 1832. The Blue Mounds fort was built by the



inhabitants and they were forced to live in the fort for many days to protect themselves from the Indians.

Some years later the Barnum circus came to Pokerville. Since there were no railroads the elephants walked out from Madison. Some carried packs on their backs. One of the features of the circus was a sensational ostrich and horse race.

With sudden decline of lead mining following the Civil War the village experienced dull times and after some years but a few families remained. In 1881 the Northwestern railroad was built one-half mile east of Pokerville. A depot was built and the new area was named Blue Mounds. Several houses were moved from Pokerville ("old town" as it is called now) to Blue Mounds. Some of these houses are still standing.

Pokerville was the earliest settlement in Dane County. (Dane and Iowa Counties were not divided at that time.)

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A History of the German Valley-Blue  
Mounds Area

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