



Luxembourg Heritage Society of Southern Minnesota

NEWSLETTER



Volume 2 / Edition 2

Spring, 2009

Summer Happenings for Luxembourgers

As you may have learned from last summer, we have our own float! Our talented Treasurer, Gene Bertrand, has replicated one of the corner sections of the walls surrounding Luxembourg City.

He then has gotten help from his cousin and LHS-member, Leon Hoffmann, to mount it on a small trailer which is pulled by a 4-wheeler.

We march with the Luxembourg flag given to our group when we first formed, by Kevin Wester of the national LACS organization. We had a banner made and proudly march forward with a group of our members.

We wear whatever we think qualifies as being "Luxembourgish" – t-shirts, hats, pins, etc.

Our sole outing last summer at Sleepy Eye's "Corn Days," garnered many comments of support and calls from the side-walks, such as, "I'm a Luxembourger, too!"

Join us this summer as we march in the following parades. Contact Terry Sveine (507-354-1123 or tesss@newulmtel.net) for information on when and where to assemble. At minimum, try and attend the parade and cheer us on!



Luxembourg City Wall



When	Time	Where	What
July 19	12:30pm	New Ulm, MN	Bavarian Blast Celebration
August 8	2:00pm	Belgium, WI	Luxembourg Cultural Conference
August 22	6:00pm	Sleepy Eye, MN	Buttered Corn Days
Sept. 20	12:30pm	New Ulm, MN	Hermann's Victory Celebration

(The following 3 pages are my contribution to a chapter in a book of famous Luxembourg-Americans by Luxembourg native, historian and author, Fausto Gardini... Terry Sveine... March 21, 2009)

The Confusing Case of "Dummeldenger M'rei" ("Dommeldinger Mary")

In the March 02, 1891 edition of the *Luxemburger Gazette*, published by the renowned newspaper editor, Nicholas Gonner from Dubuque, Iowa, was a praiseful article that eulogized a woman who may, in fact, be misidentified.

The reasons for the debated identity of this woman stem from two distinct categories of information: Gonner's words come from a letter submitted to his paper from John P. Bertrand from Sleepy Eye, MN that identify the heroine as, Katherine George Schmitz; I will offer credible evidence from a variety of other sources that identify the heroine as, Mary Schmitz Ryan – a sister-in-law to Katherine.

It would appear that based on the sources, one of these stories is wrong and one is right.

Below is the translation of the original German text that Gonner published:

A Courageous Woman Has Gone Home.

As reported to us, after the fact, by our friend Mr. Bertrand from Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, a worthy and courageous woman went home to her fathers end December. We speak of: Dummeldenger Maré, who during the Indians' siege of New Ulm in 1862 sat in the basement on a keg of powder, a lighted fuse in her hand, ready to ignite the powder should the redskins have penetrated the city and the cellar. Women and children of the besieged sat in the cellar. We have immortalized Schmitze M'rei in our poem: "Eng courageiert Fra", "Prairieblummen", page 12. By the way, one can also read Al. Berghold: "Indians' Revenge or Days of Horror in New Ulm in the Year 1862".

Mr. Bertrand writes:

Katharina George was born in Dummeldingen, Luxemburg in the year 1829, was married there to Jean Pierre (John Peter) Schmitz, migrated to America in the year 1858, spent the winter with acquaintances in Bellevue, Jackson County, Iowa and moved the following spring to New Ulm, Brown County, Minnesota. About twelve miles above New Ulm her husband was treacherously shot by an Indian while building a home, and so, up to the Indian outbreak of 1862, she and her four small children lived with her brothers-in-law Peter and Nicholas Schmitz. After the Indians had been fended off, she moved to Shakopee, with nothing else than her children, where she provided for herself and her children through honest and hard work and then some years later she was married to Joseph Thiem. Since then they managed the Shakopee House - and after some years they built and managed the North Western Hotel up to the time of her death. Her husband Joseph Thiem and oldest son, Joseph Schmitz, preceded her in death. Three children from her first marriage and three children from her second marriage mourn their good and always so pleasant mother. Her funeral was a beautiful, real catholic one: solemn Requiem, Cross, Rector, choir boys and singers at the head, nearly the whole municipality walked the two miles to that remote cemetery - the women's association walked in unison - during the whole way they prayed loudly and forcefully for the departed soul. Dear reader, do remember her in your prayers!

This story seems to have been widely accepted and went on to be adopted into Luxembourg emigrant biographic studies and has immortalized Katherine George Schmitz as a heroine.

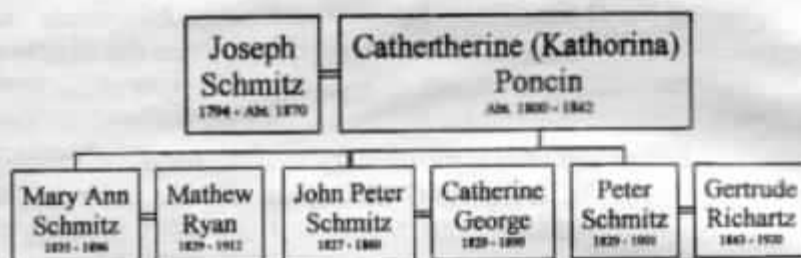
The above account, if true, seems pretty straightforward about who the heroine was. The fact that there was a "John P. Bertrand" living in nearby Sleepy Eye (15 miles west of New Ulm), who was related to the Schmitz family and should therefore know the true story, and was born in 1845 (and so a younger contemporary of the two women in question), all add elements of believability to the account.

If he is, in fact, the Mr. Bertrand that he appears to be (although there is no known source to prove this), he would have been in a position to know the story correctly. This only adds to the confusion! If there wasn't solid counter-evidence to the woman's identity, there should be no reason to contest the identity of "Dommeldinger Mary" as being whom Gonner and Bertrand say she is.



Mathew Ryan and Mary Schmitz

Descendants of Jof Joseph Schmitz



Without going into a detailed family history and genealogy (which I could do!), it is my contention that the real "Dommeldinger Mary" is not Katherine George Schmitz, but her sister-in-law, Mary Schmitz Ryan. I offer these facts as proof of that:

1. There is a plaque on the front of the still existing Erd Building (now, "Larson-Allen Accounting") in New Ulm in which the heroine sat with the gunpowder that reads, in part:
"...During the Battles of New Ulm in 1862, the substantial structure provided refuge for many women and children. A keg of gunpowder was placed in the basement of the building to be ignited should the Sioux capture the downtown area. In charge of lighting the fuse was twenty-six year, Mary Schmitz Ryan. ..."

This plaque was approved by the Brown County Historical Society and seems to be definitive.

2. A postcard mailed by George Graff in August of 1947 to Mr. Otto Oswald from Graff's home in Ivanhoe, MN reads:
*"Dear Otto,
 Mrs. Gabriel's maiden name was Sophie Baer born in New Ulm.
 Mrs. Louis Matter's maiden name was Kate Ryan... (sic) was also born in the community and her mother was the woman who sat on the gunpowder keg in Erd's basement and was instructed to blow up the building if the Indians got the best of it. She was my mother's sister.
 Kate's mother=Mary Schmitz Ryan / Kate Ryan's father=Mathew Ryan, Sr.
 Yours sincerely,
 Geo. Graff."*

George Graff was a life-long banker and respected member of Ivanhoe, MN and is generally considered the founder of that town. In other words, his reputation for honesty and integrity is difficult to challenge. It would appear that he would know the famous story of his aunt Mary!

3. Perhaps the very name of the heroine, "Dommeldinger Mary" may offer some clue to the true identity of the heroine. I am well aware of the fact that Luxembourgers are known to have bestowed nicknames on each other, sometimes with no apparent rhyme or reason, but the coincidence of this seems hard to ignore here.
4. Mary Ruth Kaech Northrup holds a Masters' Degree in Anthropology and is the great-great-granddaughter of Mary Schmitz Ryan. She has taken on the formidable task of writing a book on the Schmitz and Ryan families' history with the long name of, "*Matthew Ryan of Enniscorthy, County Wexford, Ireland and Mary Schmitz of Dommeldingen, Luxembourg, both of North Star Township, Brown County, Minnesota*" and has produced a fine piece of work (albeit not without some errors, as is often the case in protracted family histories) that, to my knowledge, is correct as regards this branch of the family.

Below she uses semi-primary sources for the following quote:

"Eva (Ryan) O'Callaghan told the story as related to her by her grandfather
(editor's note: Matthew Ryan, Mary Schmitz's husband):

...During the siege of New Ulm, my grandmother, her family, and many other women and children were confined to the brick cellar of a brick house (sic) which was being defended as a last resort. They attended the wounded, prepared food, and were instructed to set off kegs of powder to destroy themselves should the Indians succeed in breaking through the barricades."

Northrup adds in the footnotes:

"Eva Ryan O'Callaghan's story of the uprising is the same as Emma Kaech Northrup's, Emmett Ryan's and other grandchildren's."

In short, there are very strong family stories that Mary Schmitz Ryan was, indeed, the person in-charge of the gunpowder keg in Erd's building during the Sioux Uprising in New Ulm!

5. In 1856 Peter, Jacob Nicholas and Mary Schmitz left Dommeldingen, Luxembourg as an "advance scouting party" for their family, looking for a suitable place to settle in America. After a winter spent in Chicago, the trio came immediately to New Ulm, Minnesota, presumably feeling that they could live in harmony in that newly-founded, utopian German community.

The next year, the trio's widowed father and most of their siblings came to America. Brother John Peter Schmitz, his wife Katherine George Schmitz and their family joined them near New Ulm in 1858. (A further synopsis of Katherine's life is told in the Bertrand / Gonner account.)

Nowhere in Katherine's written or recorded oral family history, including her obituary, is her apparent act of heroism noted. However, in Mary Schmitz Ryan's family history, she is noted by several sources as being the person in charge of the refugees in Erd's basement.

How can this be?

It is my opinion that the case for Katherine George Schmitz hinges on one man's letter to Gonner, who then took that information and crafted it into a grandiloquent story of a Luxembourg immigrant's courage. However, the case for Mary Schmitz Ryan is substantiated by a wider variety of sources, including multiple family accounts and the Brown County Historical Society.

My name is Terry Sveine and I was born in New Ulm, MN in 1954, where I still live. For the last fifteen years I have been a student of my family and my town's history and I am in a position to have many primary sources available for my use. Mary Schmitz's brother, Peter, was my great-great-grandfather.

You might say that I am trying to defend a family connection by siding with Mary, however, Katherine would also be my family. Mary is my g-g-grandfather's sister and Katherine is his sister-in-law so I don't feel I have any prejudice that way - I'm related to both ladies!

In closing, it is my opinion that this will probably never be able to be fully reconciled. The two sources of information for us to judge with are both strong, but are too conflicting. No matter whom you side with, the story of "Dommeldinger Mary" is a story of courage on the part of a Luxembourg immigrant who was only doing what she had to do in order to survive in her new home.

Luxembourg is a Most Catholic Nation

Official statistics will tell you that Luxembourg is about 95-98% Catholic. This adherence to Catholicism has been true throughout the whole history of Luxembourg. Even in the recent 100 years of her history with the immigration of Italians and now of Portuguese, both predominantly Catholic nations, that tradition remains strong. Let us examine some reasons and examples for this.

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, a movement that really began in earnest with Martin Luther's nailing of his "95 Theses" to the church door at Wittenberg, Germany in 1517, virtually all of Europe was Catholic.

Oh sure, there were non-Catholics, atheists and other "protesters" prior to Luther, notably John Wycliffe in the 1300s and Jan Hus in the 1400s, but by a vast majority, Europe was a Catholic continent. However, Luther's movement came at a time when the western world was ripe for a change, or if not a change, then at least a reform of a corrupt and complicated church.

It should be no surprise that the Reformation was a consequence of the slightly earlier Renaissance period. One of the major changes during the Renaissance was its change from a religious-based outlook of life to a more humanist outlook. With the rediscovery of lost knowledge of past civilizations, most notably that of the Greeks, and the resultant growth in science and philosophy, educated men were attempting to explain for themselves, in provable terms, "how" and "why" things happened instead of attributing them to God's hand.

(I recall with a smile the response of my 8th grade nun, Sister Genevieve, whenever she was asked a challenging question about life or religion. She would exclaim with hands half-raised and upturned, "It's a mystery." It was likely her way to avoid a deep, inappropriate conversation with an entire class of 14 year-olds, but the essence of using "the unknowable" as an answer to a question, was in many ways how life was lived prior to the 1500s.)

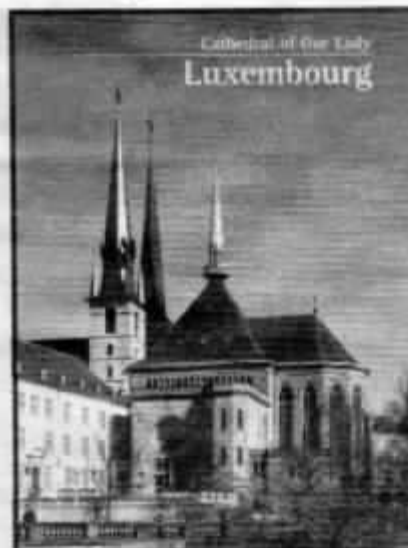
Luther's eventual break from the church instead of just reforming it, led to a Europe-wide revolution in religion that lasted until the mid-1600s. Attaching political gain to the wider issue of religion, Western Europe saw the devastating Thirty Years War rage from 1618 to 1648.

For most of an entire continent to need to either question, breakaway from, or defend the Catholic religion was unprecedented in history and it affected the world in ways unimagined prior to

Luther. One of the key resolutions to the war was the fact that citizens were now (theoretically) able to choose a religion for themselves instead of being forced to follow the religion of their ruler.



Peter Schmitz was baptized in this church in Dommeldingen, Luxembourg



“What was little Luxembourg doing during this period?” you may ask.

After the glory days of the Luxembourgish Holy Roman Emperors in and around the 1300s, Luxembourg had dwindled in importance and was taken over by the Burgundians (their lands were in today’s eastern France), who in turn turned them over to the Spanish Habsburgs, eventually ending up as part of France’s domains. All of these ruling “houses” were *very* Catholic and quite politically and militarily strong. So foreign domination was, despite being short on personal liberties, a sort of protection from religious reformers which meant that the Catholic traditions were never seriously challenged in Luxembourg.

With a more restrained national character that doesn’t invite deep emotion for radical changes and without a strong political base for reformers to hide within, Luxembourg was not a home to religious radicals. Her deep ravines and thick forests in the north also made for little international travel which in turn kept things more isolated from foreign influences. Be reminded that the national motto of Luxembourg, “We wish to remain what we are,” is hardly the battle cry for radical reform from suppressed voices!

Today you can’t travel far in Luxembourg without seeing a Catholic church. Whether ranging from the impressive Cathedral of Luxembourg City to hidden gems in the country side, Luxembourg wears her Catholicism on her sleeve. By the same token, no one will be pressing their views on you, so feel free to enjoy the country no matter what your religion or spiritual views. Add in national festivals, some with obvious religious elements, and you have “a most Catholic nation, indeed!”

Luxembourgers to Visit Us!

In the last Newsletter we reminded you of the exciting event of when Luxembourgers, led by our old friend, Rene Daubenfeld, will be visiting Sleepy Eye and New Ulm late this summer.

They will arrive in New Ulm on **August 31** where they will be greeted and given a City Tour of New Ulm, ending with an American-style picnic at the New Ulm home of LHS-members, Terry and Ellie Sveine. (507-354-1123 or tesss@newulmtel.net)

The next day, **Sept. 01**, they will meet in Sleepy Eye for a day of local touring. (Contact Judy Beech for details at 507-794-6961 or at judyb@sleepyvetel.net .)

Since the next Newsletter will probably not be out in time to re-announce this event, **mark your calendars** now and we’d love to see you at one of the venues to meet these fine people!

Luxembourg Heritage Weekend in Wisconsin

As most of you know, our Society is affiliated with our "mother" group, The **Luxembourg-American Cultural Society** (LACS) based in Belgium, Wisconsin. Belgium is about 20 miles north of Milwaukee and 10 miles west of Lake Michigan. It is a little town, maybe the size of Nicollet, MN, and it has a great small-town feel to it. By the way, most of its inhabitants are of proud Luxembourg descent!

(You'll have to attend the event to find out why their town is named, "Belgium!")

The first weekend in August will see Belgium come alive for the "3rd Annual Heritage Weekend" with many highlights:

- Thursday, **August 6** -starts with a tour of the many local Luxie sites near Belgium with a cocktail hour and Luxembourgish meal with your new friends at the local-favorite, "Curley's Restaurant."
- Friday, **August 7** -is my favorite day with a full day spent in nearby Sheboygan at a conference center in a full range of sessions on a wide variety of Luxembourg-related topics by expert speakers. Included will be a showing of the new movie about W.W. II, (Queen) "Charlotte - A Royal at War"!
- Sat. **August 8**
- experience the long-awaited dedication of the Lux-Am Cultural Center with ceremonies and an interesting site tour.
 - watch the L.H.S. (us!) participate in the city parade through downtown Belgium
 - enjoy music and fun at the festival in the city park
 - attend the evening "Green Heart Gala" in nearby Mequon for an elegant dinner and fund-raising auction. (Reservations required.)
- Sunday, **August 9** -enjoy local dignitaries and honored families recognized, an outdoor Mass, and an afternoon of food, drink and a great band from Luxembourg, "The Luxembourg Fun Brass Band."

This is just a partial list of the weekend's activities. For someone serious about learning of our ancestral country's past and present, I can think of no better way to do that than to **attend this event**.

It is a 7-hour drive from New Ulm to Belgium (figure the difference from your town) and as of now, there is room to ride with Ron Schmitz and Terry Sveine. Contact either of us to share a ride. I know it is a commitment to go that far, but maybe you could tie it in with a mini-vacation. If you can only spend a partial time there, I'd suggest the Friday sessions. I have been to the previous two events and can assure you that it will be **worth your time** spent there! Terry

For more information, contact the LACS people directly at **262-476-5086** or look on their web-site at www.luxamculturalsociety.org. You can order a flyer with the details or look on the web-site where the weekend's events are laid out there in detail.

Luxembourg Heritage Society
c/o Terry Sveine
904 North Minnesota
New Ulm, MN 56073
50-354-1123

Fun Facts and Recent Observations on Luxembourg

- *There was much political haggling over a recent decision to allow euthanasia in Luxembourg. It went so far as to involve changes in how the Duke and Parliament inter-act!
- *In a recent survey by CEPS/INSTEAD, a social research agency, we can be proud that the Luxembourgers ranked (along with the Portuguese and Italians) as more "social" than their neighboring Belgians, Germans and French. (Maybe that accounts for why our Board meetings take so long – we all want to talk at once!)
- *The Grand Duke of Luxembourg, Henri, celebrated his 54th birthday along with the 17th birthday of his son, Sebastian, on April 16.

He is the world's last reigning Grand Duke.

Henri and his wife, Grand Duchesse, Marie-Therese, are shown here en route to a birthday celebration.

