

**MARIA SOPHIA (KOEHLER or KAHLER) BACH (1836-1917) and William Bach Sr. (1829-1911).** Maria Sophia was the wife of pressman and political dissident, William Bach Sr. Both immigrants from Germany, the couple met in Philadelphia and were married there in 1855. With the outbreak of the American Civil War, William enlisted in the Union Army, leaving his family behind which consisted of his wife Sophia and three children.

Sophia (Koehler or Kahler) Bach was born October 12, 1836 in Gelnhausen, Germany near Frankfurt. She was the daughter of Conrad and Sophia (Koch) Koehler.<sup>1</sup> Conrad was a stone smith by trade. In 1839 the family immigrated to the United States. Little is known about Sophia's childhood. She had seven brothers and sisters: twin sister Susan, Louisa, Jacob H., Mary A., Elizabeth (Lizzie), Catharine (Cassie), and George.<sup>2</sup> Mary A., Elizabeth, Catharine,<sup>3</sup> and George were born in Pennsylvania.

Ten years after Sophia's arrival in the U.S., her future husband William immigrated to the country in 1849. William's journey from Germany to Philadelphia lasted a total of seventy days.<sup>4</sup> As William and Sophia's crossing of the Atlantic predated the development of steam-powered ships, both he and his wife's travels to the United States were aboard wooden-masted vessels. In a feature article published in *The Daily Bulletin* concerning some of the more interesting details of William's life, the interviewer, Mme. Annette makes explicit reference to the archaic means of transportation by which the Bach's undertook their respective trans-Atlantic travels, saying:

“We live in such an age of wireless telegraph, liquid air, horseless carriage and other remarkable inventions that any locomotion would be no surprise to us. We would doubtless be no more surprised to be told some fine morning ‘to pack your wardrobe, get into the pneumatic tube and wafted across the ocean to Europe in a jiffy,’ than Mr. Bach and his companions, fifty years ago, would have been had someone said to them, ‘You can cross the Atlantic ocean in two weeks’ time (which is a long time across nowadays).”<sup>5</sup>

William was born February 26, 1829 in Werthemburg, Germany. He was known to have been well educated and was described as a “man of unusual intelligence.”<sup>6</sup> The son of Frederick and Wilhelmina (Palm) Bach, his father was a strict and law-abiding Lutheran minister. William was “given the best high school education obtainable in Germany” prior to his pursuit of higher education in the study of law at the University of Stuttgart (*Universität Stuttgart*) in Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg.<sup>7</sup>

It was during the time of his study that revolution swept across the continent of Europe. The year 1848, known by many names including the “Spring of Nations,” “Springtime of the Peoples,” and the “Year of Revolution,” marks the “March Revolution” in the German states.

---

<sup>1</sup> “1850 U.S. Census,” <http://www.ancestry.com> (Date accessed May 23, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> “Mrs. William Bach Dead; Expires in Winnetka Sunday...,” *The Pantagraph* (September 16, 1917), “1850 U.S. Census.”

<sup>3</sup> According to the census record, in 1850 the family was residing in Philadelphia Lower Delaware Ward, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>4</sup> Mme. Annette, “A Life of Activity” *The Daily Bulletin* (February 19, 1900).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> “William Bach, Sr., Answers Death's Call; Expires Late Friday Night; ...” *The Pantagraph* (March 25, 1911).

<sup>7</sup> “William Bach, Sr., Answers Death's Call;” “Fred W. Bach rounds out 50 year service to Pantagraph,” *The Daily Pantagraph* (December 26, 1925).

This was an anti-monarchical movement led heavily by students and intellectuals whose aim was to unseat the Kaiser and to establish a pan-German republic in order to unify the German-speaking states. At the age of twenty, William was forced to leave Germany for his participation in a thwarted attempt to achieve such revolutionary aims.<sup>8</sup> If he had not left, he would have faced imprisonment or possible execution. Reflecting on the time of his departure, William recalled that after getting “a little mixed up in the trouble of 1848,” he decided that the “new and free country of America” was “just the place” for him.<sup>9</sup>

Upon his arrival in America, William did not “find the El Dorado of some of the fairy stories, but a country where [he] had to learn a trade and cast [his] lot with other hardworking and ambitious young men.”<sup>10</sup> That being the case, upon reaching Pennsylvania William began his training as a pressman for the Ketterlinus Lithographing Establishment, a printing business that was owned by two of his cousins who lived in the area.<sup>11</sup> William continued in this line of work until his death with only a temporary leave from the trade during the years of the American Civil War when he was enlisted in Battery M of the Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery, 152<sup>nd</sup> Regiment. He served from December 4, 1862 to November 9, 1865.<sup>12</sup> During the time of his service, William made use of his past professional experience when he was asked to assist with the publication of a military newspaper at Ft. Monroe in Hampton, VA.<sup>13</sup>

Men from all over the state of Pennsylvania rendezvoused in Philadelphia to be mustered into service in the 152<sup>nd</sup> Regiment. The regiment consisted of batteries A through M. As previously noted, William was mustered into Battery M, which was primarily a siege battery.<sup>14</sup> The company served in the Army of the James and was involved in siege operations against Petersburg and Richmond from May, 1864 to May, 1865.<sup>15</sup> According to a report in *The Pantagraph*, William “saw no hard battles” and “saw but nine months of actual military duty” before he was assigned to serve under General Butler with headquarters at Norfolk, VA.<sup>16</sup>

William and his regiment were then ordered to relocate to Fortress Monroe. While stationed there, in late May or early June of 1865 defeated President of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis was imprisoned at the fortress. This event provided William with the opportunity to make a name for himself by guarding the traitor.<sup>17</sup> William was one of six guards

---

<sup>8</sup> “Fred W. Bach rounds out 50 year service to Pantagraph”

<sup>9</sup> Mme. Annette, “A Life of Activity”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kessler, *Home Town in the Corn Belt*, vol. 3, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-5*, vol. IV (Harrisburg: B. Singerly, State Printer, 1870), 757.

<sup>13</sup> “His Quarter-Centennial.; Mr. William Bach, at Sixty-Four, Completes Twenty-Five Years of Continuous Service With This Newspaper,” *The Pantagraph* (January 22, 1894).

<sup>14</sup> During the American Civil War, artillery was classified according to weight and caliber. Once divided into classes, the artillery was specified by type, i.e. guns, howitzers, and mortars. According to [civilwarartillery.com](http://civilwarartillery.com), most artillery can be divided into the following categories: “*field* (light and easy to maneuver through difficult terrain); *mountain* (quickly broken down for transportation on horseback); *siege and garrison* (heavy, but could be transported to different positions on siege lines or mounted in fortifications); and *seacoast* (heavy, cumbersome weapons which were usually mounted in forts or other areas along river banks and coastal waterways).” Winona L. Melton and Henry Higgins, <http://www.civilwarartillery.com/basicfacts.htm> (Date Accessed May 29, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Alice J. Gayley, “3d Artillery/152d Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers,” PA Roots, <http://www.pa-roots.com/pacw/artillery/3dartillery/3dartorg.html> (Date Accessed March 19, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Mme. Annette, “A Life of Activity”

<sup>17</sup> “Guarded Jeff Davis; Recollections of William Bach; Bloomington Man’s Recollections Do Not Justify Recent Charges of Cruelty to Confederacy’s President,” *The Daily Pantagraph* (March 22, 1905); “William Bach, Sr., Answers Death’s Call; Expires Late Friday Night; ...”

assigned to watch over Davis, and one of two who were assigned to the prisoner's room. William only guarded Davis for four hours, but in that time Davis made a discernible impression on the young Union soldier. When asked to recount the details of the brief night watch, William said that there was "nothing hard about [Davis], but a character of that fine, old southern family, aristocracy stamped on every feature and good breeding on every act." William went on to say, "Say about Jeff Davis what they will, he was a gentleman, though he was on the wrong side of his country's troubles."<sup>18</sup> When allegations arose in the early 1900s that Davis was in some way treated cruelly while being held prisoner by the Union Army, William made a public statement against such accusations. He cited the extra attention paid to the rebel's requests that his room be kept quiet and that his food be prepared to meet his standards as evidence that Davis did not suffer any ill-treatment.<sup>19</sup> In the opinion of Rev. John W. Kaye, a lieutenant in the Pennsylvania Third artillery, Davis's claim seemed to be based entirely upon the fact that the prisoner was placed in irons.<sup>20</sup> In Kaye's recollection, Davis is quoted saying that he would rather die than be handcuffed. Procedure dictated however, that irons be used whenever the commandant of the post thought it necessary.<sup>21</sup> In light of the dejected attitude that Davis adopted while shackled, which included his refusal to eat, the prisoner was granted freedom from having to be handcuffed while under guard. Kaye admits that there were preliminary restrictions placed on the prisoner but once those restrictions were removed, the Union soldiers' "social interaction with the prisoner became familiar and pleasant."<sup>22</sup>

Prior to the outbreak of the war, William met Sophia in Philadelphia and the couple was married in 1855. While in Pennsylvania, Sophia and William had three children: two daughters, Emma and Louisa, and one son, Frederick. After they moved to Illinois, they had four more children: William Jr., Katharine (Katy), Clara, and an unnamed child.<sup>23</sup>

Though most women were spared the experience of combat, the war posed its own challenges for wives, mothers, and sisters who were left to maintain the homestead while the men were away. At one point before moving to Ohio to live with her parents, Sophia went three months without hearing from William while he was at the front. It later became known to Sophia that William was ill with typhoid and was unable to send word to his wife concerning his condition.<sup>24</sup>

While her husband was away fighting, Sophia contributed to the war effort in her own way. Sophia was employed by the US government to make trousers for soldiers through the arsenal (a place where arms and ammunition are made, maintained, stored, issued, or repaired) at Philadelphia. On average, Sophia made eight pairs of pants by hand per week.<sup>25</sup> Many women similar to Sophia were engaged in activities that included sewing garments for soldiers, donating various items to be sent to those fighting at the front, and participating in local organizations through their church or hospital. In her analysis of a collection of letters and diaries held by the

---

Davis was President of the Confederate States of America from 1861 to 1865.

<sup>18</sup> Mme. Annette, "A Life of Activity"

<sup>19</sup> "Guarded Jeff Davis; Recollections of William Bach; Bloomington Man's Recollections Do Not Justify Recent Charges of Cruelty to Confederacy's President"

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "1870 U.S. Census," <http://www.ancestry.com> (Date Accessed May 23, 2013); "1910 U.S. Census," <http://www.ancestry.com> (Date Accessed June 13, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Mme. Annette, "A Life of Activity"

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania and written by women during the Civil War, Kristin Leahy suggests that, “[t]he women who wrote of a husband, brother, or son participating in some way were more likely to feel the need to contribute themselves... Those who did not mention the war service of a family member, however, had less of a tendency to do something for the war effort, and if they wrote of the war at all it often consisted of war news culled from local newspapers and gossip about their local areas.”<sup>26</sup>

Sophia’s memories of the war have been described “as interesting as those of her husband, but of a different nature.”<sup>27</sup> In an interview with Mme. Annette of *The Daily Bulletin*, Sophia is quoted as saying that images of Fort Delaware made her “heart ache for the rebel prisoners.”<sup>28</sup> Though her support was in favor of the Union men with whom her husband was fighting, she recounts that when she would go out with her young son Frederick, she was “frequently accosted by rebel soldiers, who would say, ‘Oh madame, do let us see your little son; let us speak to him; hold him by the hand, for I have little ones at home whom I will probably never see again.’”<sup>29</sup> Sophia did not deny the soldiers the opportunity to dote upon Frederick, for she “would not deprive even a rebel the comfort of speaking with a child.” According to Sophia, “[i]t did [Frederick] no harm and them much good, and those were the times when a little ray of brightness shone a long time and was valued accordingly.”<sup>30</sup> In keeping with her evident willingness to show compassion and sympathy for those who aligned themselves with the enemy camp, as well as her personal dedication to furnishing supplies for the soldiers, the description of Sophia as “a woman of unusual character and endowment. ...intensely patriotic in her makeup and remarkable in her energy and industry”<sup>31</sup> is seemingly justified.

When William returned home after the war, the couple moved to Chicago. Upon their arrival, William acquired a position of pressman at the German-language newspaper *Staats-Zeitung*, published by Wash Hesing.<sup>32</sup> The Bach family lived in the city for two and a half years before moving to Bloomington in 1869. Sophia was not fond of the ‘newness’ of Chicago in comparison to the ambiance of Philadelphia.<sup>33</sup> The Bachs were residents of Chicago prior to the fire of 1871, thus at the time of their residence the city was largely characterized by wooden sidewalks and buildings. Lincoln Park, a site that the Bachs frequented during daytime outings, was a “general picnic ground” in contrast to the “fashionable residence locality” that it became following the growth and rebuilding of the city that took place after the fire.<sup>34</sup>

In January 1869, the Bach family moved to Bloomington, IL. They lived at 311 E. Mulberry Street.<sup>35</sup> After relocating to central Illinois, William maintained his role as breadwinner through his continued employment in the printing business by immediately securing a position with the local newspaper, *The Pantagraph*.<sup>36</sup> William worked for *The Pantagraph* for more than twenty-five years, serving first as a pressman and then as Superintendent of the

---

<sup>26</sup> Kristin Leahy, “Women during the Civil War,” The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (2012), <http://hsp.org/collections/catalogs-research-tools/subject-guides/women-during-the-civil-war> (Date Accessed May 15, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Mme. Annette, “A Life of Activity”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> “Mrs. William Bach Dead”

<sup>32</sup> “Fred W. Bach rounds out 50 year service to Pantagraph”

<sup>33</sup> Mme. Annette, “A Life of Activity”

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *1873 Bloomington-Normal City Directory*

<sup>36</sup> Kessler, *Home Town in the Corn Belt*, vol. 3, 2.

Mailing Department. He continued in this role until health concerns necessitated his retirement in October 1907.<sup>37</sup>

On January 12, 1878, William and Sophia suffered the loss of their daughter Clara. Clara, three years old at the time of her death, was poisoned after accidentally eating the green eyes off of a candy toy horse that her sister Katie had brought home after attending a Christmas Eve event at the First Methodist Church in Bloomington. After eating the candy, the Bach's youngest daughter was stricken with "spasms and violent pains in the head indicating cerebral trouble," and died later that evening.<sup>38</sup> An investigation into the ingredients of the candy indicated that Paris green, or copper acetoarsenite, had been used to color the confection. Paris green is an inorganic compound that was once used as a rodenticide and insecticide. The compound was first used to kill rats in Parisian sewers (hence the name). The article that reported the details of the toddler's death suggested that William intended to take legal action against the "manufacturer of the vile stuff," though the effectiveness of William's supposed endeavor is unknown. Clara was buried in her family's plot in Bloomington Cemetery (today part of Evergreen Memorial Cemetery).<sup>39</sup>

Seven years later, William and Sophia lost another daughter, Katharine, on November 18, 1885.<sup>40</sup> Katie's death was very sudden, though the cause is not known. In an article about her funeral in the *Daily Pantagraph*, it was said that less than a week before her death "she walked in the beauty of her maidenhood and rejoiced in health and strength and looked hopefully into the future." Her death was said to have been a terrible blow the family as she was just 16 years of age. It was also said that she was "a lovely girl, a dutiful daughter and sister, and a true and affectionate friend."<sup>41</sup> Sophia and William's daughter Emma, who had lived with them all of her life, passed away on August 7, 1910 at the age of 55. The cause of her death is not known either. Both daughters were buried in the family's plot in Bloomington Cemetery.<sup>42</sup>

Following the death of her husband on March 24, 1911, Sophia moved to Winnetka, Cook County, IL (eighteen miles north of Chicago) to live with her daughter Louise.<sup>43</sup> Her daughter Louise had married Louis Kreiter (Kreuter or Kreider) on March 11, 1879 in Bloomington.<sup>44</sup> It was there in her daughter's home that Sophia passed away September 16, 1917. Sophia had been ill for some time, but her death is reported to have been peaceful.<sup>45</sup> Several of her surviving children were present during her final moments.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> "William Bach, Sr., Answers Death's Call"

<sup>38</sup> "Death in the Bonbon; Death of Clara Bach From Eating Poisoned Candy," *The Pantagraph* January 14, 1878.

<sup>39</sup> Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, [http://www.evergreen-cemetery.com/search-results/?thepage=1&search\\_lname=Bach&search\\_category=&search\\_department=&search=search](http://www.evergreen-cemetery.com/search-results/?thepage=1&search_lname=Bach&search_category=&search_department=&search=search) (Date Accessed May 29, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> McLean County Cemetery Records *Bloomington Township Cemeteries- Old City Bloomington, some Evergreen, Volume 12-1*, 5

<sup>41</sup> "The Funeral of Katie Bach," *The Daily Pantagraph*, November 21, 1885

<sup>42</sup> McLean County Genealogical Society. *Illinois McLean County Cemeteries Vol. 19 Bloomington Township Evergreen Memorial Cemetery: Part Formerly Known As Bloomington Cemetery*. (Normal, IL: 2001) 17

<sup>43</sup> "Mrs. William Bach Dead"

<sup>44</sup> *Marriage Record of McLean County, Illinois Vol. I 1872-1885*, p. 45

<sup>45</sup> "Mrs. William Bach Dead"

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

According to her obituary, Sophia was preceded in death by her husband and four of their children. While there is evidence to support that her two sons, Frederick and William were living at the time of her death, it is unclear whether or not her daughter Louise Bach Kreiter had in fact passed away before Sophia.

In likeness to remarks that had been made on the quality of character of her husband, Sophia reportedly had a “remarkable memory” and was knowledgeable on a variety of topics.<sup>47</sup> Sophia was a member of the First Methodist Church and the National Women’s Relief Corps, as well as a charter member of the Old People’s Society, a German social organization.<sup>48</sup> Sophia’s funeral service was officiated by Rev. A.K. Byrnes of the First Methodist Episcopal Church and was conducted by members of the Women’s Relief Corps.<sup>49</sup> Sophia was buried in the Bach family plot in Bloomington Cemetery alongside her father, her husband, and several of their children.

By: Hannah Johnson, 2013

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

*Old Time Memories. Fifty-Sixth Anniversary of the Organization of the First United Methodist Episcopal Church, of Bloomington, Illinois* (1881), 6-7 ; *Centennial of the Construction of the First Church Building Between Chicago and Springfield, May 31, 1936* (1936).

The National Women’s Relief Corps was originally established as an auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic in order to organize the mothers, sisters, wives, daughters of Civil War veterans in a way that would “bring them into closer friendships and assist the ex-soldiers in the maintenance of their organizations.” The Women’s Relief Corps still functions today, though membership is no longer limited to relatives of veterans. According to the organization’s website, the mission of the Women’s Relief Corps today is “to perpetuate the memory of the Grand Army of the Republic,” “to assist such Veterans of all wars of the United States of America,” and “to maintain true allegiance to the United States of America. According to an article published by *The Pantagraph* in 1904, the Women’s Relief Corps was the “largest beneficent and patriotic organization of women in the world.” At the time that the article was published, membership in the organization numbered almost 150,000. The organization was the first to introduce the Pledge of Allegiance to schools and to promote the observance of Flag Day. Edwin C. Aborn, “Warsaw’s Post of the Grand Army of the Republic Now Numbers but Nineteen,” <http://www.yesteryear.clunette.com/garhistory.html> (Date Accessed May 22, 2013); National Women’s Relief Corps, <http://suvcw.org/WRC/mission.htm> (Date Accessed May 22, 2013; “To the Unknown Dead, Monument to be Erected by the Women’s Relief Corps—History of the Project,” *The Pantagraph* (April 9, 1904), p.5 cols. 3-4.

<sup>49</sup> “Mrs. William Bach Dead”