

Breyfogle Sentinel Dispatch

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From the Editor

As we prepare to complete the first full year of publication of the Breyfogle Sentinel Dispatch we wanted to begin by thanking everyone on the mailing list for accepting our invitation to receive this publication. With all the information available to us these days we know how hard it is to keep up on reading our mail, regardless if the mail is print or electronic. We hope that your experience with our efforts meets your approval.

Our goal for this edition was to research the German immigrant Christmas traditions in America during the mid 18th century. Unfortunately it is very difficult to find this topic covered at any length for this time period. So instead we looked at traditional German Christmas traditions and tried to select topics that had origins in the middle 1700's or before thinking that perhaps Johann Petar Breyvogel would have brought a few of these traditions with him.

Regardless of how you celebrate this holiday season Sandy and I want to wish all of you a Froehliche Weihnachten (Cheerful Christmas) and the very best wishes for 2006. I would be remiss in not offering a final thought to keep our military troops in mind this holiday season, their on-going efforts help make our freedom to celebrate this religious holiday possible.

German Christmas Traditions

Regardless of what country we looked at concerning their Christmas traditions it seems they can be divided into the secular and religious. Although the birth of Jesus is the center of most traditional Christmas celebrations, many of the traditions that mark the season have their origin in what one site called pre-Christian Germany, and over time the traditions blended into one winter holiday event. One on-line source spoke of German Christmas traditions as follows:

“According to legend, on Christmas Eve in Germany, rivers turn to wine, animals speak to each other, tree blossoms bear fruit, mountains open up to reveal precious gems, and church bells can be heard ringing from the bottom of the sea. Of course, only the pure in heart can witness this Christmas magic. All others must content themselves with traditional German celebrating, of which there is plenty. As a matter of fact, there is so much celebrating

that it has to begin on December 6th, St. Nicholas Day.

As in many other European countries, on the eve of Dec. 6th children place a shoe or boot by the fireplace. During the night, St. Nicholas, the patron saint of children, hops from house to house carrying a book of sins in which all of the misdeeds of the children are written. If they have been good, he fills the shoe or boot with delicious holiday edibles. If they have not been good, their shoe is filled with twigs.

Unlike Christmas in modern day America the German Christmas Eve begins with the presentation of the Christmas tree prior to the evening feast. As we will explore below, the Christmas tree, as we know it, originated in Germany and the tree in German practice has a mysterious magic for the young because they are not allowed to see it until Christmas Eve. While the children are occupied with another room with one parent the other brings out the Christmas tree and decorates it with apples, candy, nuts, cookies, cars, trains, angels, tinsel, family treasures and candles or lights. And like in America the presents are placed under the tree.

We also learned that brilliantly decorated plates for each family member, loaded with fruits, nuts, marzipan, chocolate and biscuits are set out near the tree. When the tree and decorations are ready a bell is rung as a signal for the children to enter this Christmas fantasy room. Carols are sung, sometimes sparklers are lit, the Christmas story is read and gifts are opened.

Our research was not able to tell us if these more recent traditions began in the 1700's, but we suspect that many of them reach back far enough that many of the second generation of Breyfogle's in America may have observed similar traditions. What we can assume from reading history is that the German's immigrating during the middle 18th century had strong religious beliefs and that their religious observance would most certainly have marked the birth of Christ and any celebration would have centered on the religious rather than secular beliefs.

Since the second generation of Breyfogle's is buried in a Lutheran cemetery we can assume that any Lutheran tradition of the day would have been part of these early Christmas celebrations.

The Christmas Tree - Der Tannenbaum



The Christmas tree is fairly well documented as a German tradition dating as early as 1605 when a citizen of Strasbourg wrote that "at Christmas they set up fir trees in the parlors and hang upon them roses cut from many-colored paper, apples, wafers, gilt-sugar, sweets, etc." Further research of the Christmas tree reveals that many middle age traditions for bringing greenery into the home was fairly widespread but that the Germans are best known for making it part of the observance of Christmas specifically.

The first known written mention of a Christmas tree in America is found in the 1821 diary of Matthew Zahn, a resident of Lancaster, PA. Most sources credit the Germans for bringing the Christmas tree tradition to America, with trees being fairly common by the 1820's. We did learn that the first known Christmas tree was set up in 1419 in Freiburg, Germany by the town bakers, who decorated the tree with fruits, nuts, and baked goods, which the children were allowed to remove and eat on New Year's Day.

The town guilds and associations first brought evergreens inside their guild houses and decorated them with apples and sweets. Candles were eventually added to the decorations. Since the Middle Ages, ordinary Germans had been bringing yew, juniper, mistletoe, holly, evergreen boughs - any plant that maintained its green color through the winter months into their homes. It is noted that even in areas where forests were sparse, the tradition took hold. To this point one source points out that people in Northern Germany used Christmas pyramids (Weihnachtspyramiden) in lieu of Christmas trees. The pyramid form was created using sticks that were then decorated with fir branches. By 1800, the custom of bringing a tree into the home was firmly established in many German-speaking regions and continued to spread throughout Europe, and eventually, around the world. Most sources we found indicated that although there is no exact date for the introduction of the tree in North America, most scholars point out that German-speaking immigrants brought the tree tradition with them to Pennsylvania and Ohio in the 18th century.

Another source indicated that the custom of trimming and lighting a Christmas tree, commonplace in America today, had its origin in pre-Christian Germany, the tree is said to symbolize the Garden of Eden. It was called the "Paradise Baum," or tree of Paradise. We could not determine how long it took for custom of decorating the tree with cookies, fruit and eventually candles to evolve but most sources record that other countries soon adapted the custom of tree

decorating. Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870) in writing his 1850 Christmas essay for the journal Household Words called it "The Pretty German Toy," thus giving the German people credit for this tradition.

"Beltznickel"

I must confess that up until a few months ago I had never heard of the word Belsnickel. My introduction to this was from the holiday newsletter from the Kutztown Historical Society. This tradition seems to be centered in the Pennsylvania Dutch area and the Historical Society uses this as part of their holiday open house and fund raising raffle.

This year's event is centered around a quilt raffle and an open house at the historical society and it included at least one hand made Belsnickel character to be given away.



Merry Old Santa Claus – Thomas Nast
Harper's Weekly, January 1, 1881

As most of us know, the modern Santa Claus evolved over many centuries to what he is today. In Germany December 6th was St. Nicholas Day as it is for other Catholic countries of Europe. The Rhineland area is said to have become known as the center of a St. Nicholas cult. With the Reformation these saints' days disappeared, and Protestants changed the focus to Christmas Eve and the arrival of Beltznickel (Belsnickel).

He was a figure to be feared, wearing a hat, wig, and long, heavy coat. In addition to his bag of goodies, he could also carry a switch to "punish" naughty children. In the old tradition, this figure could visit at any time during Advent, arriving with ringing sleigh bells and gifts of nuts, candies, and fruits for the children. John Joseph Stoudt describes the old tradition as follows...

He throws the gifts on the floor, demanding a "piece" performed by the children. They have prepared for this for months, and they say a poem or sing a song. He remains stern, with grim, forbidding countenance. When Beltznickel's whip rattled the windows the children were frightened and he was a creature to be feared.

The Amish Country Newsletter, in its on-line version, tells us that Sunday School Festivals in the Pennsylvania Dutch countryside continue this tradition of saying a "piece" for him, even though he may not show up.

In a separate article we found this German children's verse that we suspect may be an example of the piece mentioned above:

Lieber guter Weihnachtsmann,
sieh mich nicht so böse an.
Stecke deine Rute ein,
will auch immer artig sein.

(Loosely translates to: Rather good Christmas man, see me not so badly. Put away your rod I will always be good.)

Indeed, even "Kriss Kringles" may come from the German for Christ Child (Christ-Kindel). In the 1800's, children were told it was the Christ Child who brought gifts for them at Christmas. Children left baskets of hay for His mule at the door on Christmas Eve. Apparently many Pennsylvania Germans were displeased as the name and identity changed to become associated with Santa Claus, a secular character, and may be the reason they prefer the Belsnickel tradition.

We will conclude this discussion with an article that discussed the history of the secular traditions in America. This article is reproduced below as we found it at the Ball State University web site:

Santa Discovers America

Europeans first brought Saint Nicholas to America in the fifteenth century. On his first voyage, Columbus named a port in Haiti for Saint Nicholas; and the Spaniards originally called Jackson, Florida, "Saint Nicholas Ferry". When the Dutch immigrated to America they took their beloved saint with them. At the prow of the ship in which they sailed to the New World in 1630 was a figure of Saint Nicholas. He wore a broad-brimmed hat and held a long-stemmed Dutch pipe

But at the same time the Reformation was fiercely dividing their homeland. A ban was placed on the celebration of Saint Nicholas Eve, forbidding passing out of cookies and cakes to children, a custom that had been as entrenched as our own trick-or-treating on Halloween. St. Nicholas never regained his widespread popularity and virtually disappeared as 17th century Dutch New Amsterdam was becoming 18th century English New York.

With their arrival, the Dutch Sinterklaas did become forerunner for Santa Claus in the United States. German immigrants brought with them a positive attitude toward Christmas and they brought their custom of setting out hay in the barnyard for the Christchild's donkey on Christmas Eve. On Christmas Day they would

find the basket filled with snits (dried apple slices), choosets (candy), walnuts and gingerbread. As the Germans intermarried with the English, the dialect "Christ-kindle," from the proper German Christkindlein, became "Kristkingle" or "Kriss-kingle." Eventually the "Kriss Kringle" replaced the Christchild figure entirely, a substitute akin to Santa Claus. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, Kriss Kringle was the most common Christmas bearer in Pennsylvania.

Pelznickel (Saint Nicholas in furs), another Old World German Christmas servant, was better known as "Belsnickel." He had been portrayed as someone out to have some fun by scaring children half to death, before changing character and giving them sweets. In more southern states of the America, Belsnickel was said to kidnap bad children and carry them away to who knows where.

Children's imaginations called up fates worse than anything the adults might suggest. He rattles at windows with a horsewhip and would wrap it around the wrist of the first child to reach for scattered candy without his permission. Gradually "Belsnickeling" became the custom of going from door to door collecting food and money for the poor and survived well into the present century. Jon Kankus is similar to Belsnickeling in theme and location.

Possibly the Christmas tree may have had limited occurrence in America by Upper Rhine Pennsylvania Dutch as early as 1710. According to legend Christmas trees were introduced to America by Hessian troops, but there is no documented evidence. Washington crossed the Delaware without resistance in 1776, since the Hessians were supposedly celebrating Christmas. Hessians are credited with introducing the tree to children at Newport, R.I. Another undocumented reference is that in 1804 U. S. soldiers stationed at Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) hauled trees from the surrounding woods and placed them in their barracks for Christmas.

The Pennsylvania Dutch probably introduced the Christmas tree to America. First documented occurrence was Matthew Zahm, Lancaster Co., Pa., 1821. It was popular in New England after widespread distribution of a penny pamphlet reprint of a page in Retrospect of Western Travel, Harriet Martineau, 1838.

Commercially cut trees were in Philadelphia markets by 1848 and tree cutting in the Catskills by Mark Carr, 1851 created a market in New York City. A Christmas tree at the White House, Washington, D.C., was decorated by Franklin Pierce (friend of Nathaniel Hawthorne) in 1856 and the annual lighting of the Christmas tree at the White House began in 1923. The tree was cut and sent to President Calvin Coolidge from Middlebury College in his native state of Vermont. National Living Christmas Tree was

planted at Sherman Square near White House, 1924.

www.bsu.edu/web/01bkswartz/xmaspub.html

A Visit to Germany



Although not part of a discussion of Christmas traditions, we received a nice article from Steve Breyfogle, one of our contributing writers, about his recent visit to Germany

and his contact with a Breivogel family. We offer his report below.

In April 2005, I was on a business trip to Germany and was traveling with my sister, Cindy Douglas. We're both avid travelers and lived in Germany as Air Force brats. After completing my business, we made a whirlwind trip throughout Europe. Our travels took us to the Rhine's wine growing country. Before leaving on the trip, I had found the Weingut Breivogel (pronounced Vinegoot Bryfogle...Weingut means winery) on-line and contacted them.

They invited us to visit if we were near their area, how could we resist? Their winery is in a small town by the name of Ober-Flörsheim (pronounced floors hime), population about 8,000, which isn't far from Worms and only about 45 minutes from Frankfurt. We arrived in Ober-Florsheim in early evening after some intense map reading and getting lost (yes, Cindy, I admit I was lost). We knocked on their door and of course, it was a little awkward at first, since only Andreas and his father, Rudolf, spoke any English.

Andreas (Andrew, or Andi, as he likes to be called) had previously been to Chicago to visit a friend and his English was quite good, given his limited ability to practice it. Their gasthaus (restaurant) was only open seasonally, so they told us where we could find a place to eat in town. I had a Wienerschnitzel (breaded veal cutlet), with wine, was only about \$5.00. I hadn't seen a meal for that price in many years, so it pays to get away from the big city. After dinner, we returned to their place and Andreas offered us a chance to try their wines. I tried several different ones and enjoyed them all.

This is a family owned and operated business (Andreas and his father are the vintners) and their wines are distributed only in Europe. Andreas took us on a tour of the winery and explained the entire process to us and answered all our questions. We even had a glass of wine right out of a fermentation tank. It was great to get our own tour of winemaking from a medal-winning German winemaker who is very likely a distant relative, to boot.

Andreas is very interested in genealogy and has their family tree on the wall in the gasthaus going back to the early 1700's. And coincidentally, one of their early ancestors was also named Johann Peter Breyvogel. I shocked when I first saw the name, thinking this could be our link to Germany. However, it's not the same Breyvogel that immigrated to the USA in 1744, as their ancestor remained in Germany and had many children there.

I found it interesting that the spelling of their last name in those early days was the same as ours was when our ancestor, Johann Peter Breyvogel, came to the US. They were most gracious hosts and served us a typical breakfast in the morning, consisting of boiled eggs, meat, fruit, juice, brotchen (hard rolls), locally made jelly and coffee. We had to be on our way to meet with some friends in Heidelberg before flying home, but not without buying some of their fabulous wine to take home.



Left to right: Steve Breyfogle, Andreas, Elke and Rudolf Breivogel

If you would like more information on the Weingut Breivogel, you may find their website at www.Weingut-Breivogel.de. There is an English Flag which provides the English translation for the website. There's links to photos and information on their wines, etc.

Current Christmas Traditions

As each of our families approach the Christmas season we begin to pull out our box full of traditions. This may mean decorating the outside of the house and our yards with lighted displays, or it may mean a simple tree indoors with those old ornaments that the kinds made while in school. Heck, there may even be a gaily-lit silver tree left over from the 1950's.

We sit down to write the dreaded Christmas letter, or labor over the Christmas card list that seems to get longer each year. Of course there is the annual shopping trips to find the perfect gift and the often heard phrase will again be heard, "What the heck are we going to get Dad this year?"

Regardless of how you prepare for the Christmas holiday we bet that, like our family, food is a big part of the event. For us it is about all sorts of special candy that are made for each special person, which may be peanut brittle for Dad, Magic Cookie bars for one child or another, or that special event of baking

sugar cookies with a child and watch as they do their best to decorate them with colored frosting.

In our research for German traditions we found many recipes for holiday treats and selected the following for your consideration. Please know that we have not tried this recipe so if you have good luck with it drop us a note and we will share your report with the rest of our readers.

Lebkuchen - German-style Gingerbread



Lebkuchen has existed in German-speaking regions since at least the turn of the 14th century. Because its production required the use of ingredients that had to be

imported, the first Lebkuchen was baked in cities that were centers of trade.

German Lebkuchen is different from the gingerbread known in the English-speaking world as it may or may not contain ginger and has a somewhat different consistency, both because it is chewier and contains nuts and fruits. And the German confection has a lemon glaze or icing on the top and is sometimes dipped in chocolate.

Ingredients

3 - Cups flour	1 ¼ - Tsp. nutmeg
1 ¼ - Tsp. Cinnamon	½ - Tsp. baking soda
½ - Tsp. Cloves	½ - Tsp. allspice
¾ - Cup packed brown sugar	1 - Egg
1 - Cup dark molasses	½ - Cup honey
½ - Cup slivered almonds	
½ - Cup mixed chopped candied fruits & peels	

Lemon glaze:

1 slightly beaten egg white
1 ½ cups powdered sugar
½ tsp. finely shredded lemon peel
1 Tbsp. lemon juice
A dash of salt

Preparation

Stir dry ingredients together. In a separate bowl, beat the egg. Add the brown sugar and beat until fluffy. Stir in honey and molasses and beat until well mixed. Add dry ingredients to the mixture, stirring well until combined. Stir in nuts and fruits. Chill overnight.

Roll chilled dough on a floured surface into a 14-inch square. Cut into 3 ½ X 2-inch rectangles or use cookie cutters to form the desired shapes. Place 2 inches apart on greased cookie sheet and bake at 375°F for 12 to 14 minutes. Let cool 1 minute before moving to wire rack.

While Lebkuchen is baking, make the lemon glaze. Combine all ingredients and mix well. Brush onto the cookies while they are still warm.

Based on a recipe from Better Homes and Gardens New Cookbook.

Mom Breyfogle's Oatmeal Raisin Cookies

While we are sharing recipes we thought we'd share a bit of the Breyfogle Family tradition from our side of the family tree. This recipe was one of my mother's favorites when she wanted to treat my father to a taste of home. The recipe card is labeled "Mother Brey's Oatmeal Cookies" and came from my grandmother Emma Christine (Sins) Breyfogle. These are not necessarily a Christmas treat but I know that mom baked them often. We are not sure where Emma got the recipe, perhaps her mother Mary Matilda (Spindler) Sins, who was the daughter of Joseph Spindler, a German immigrant.

1 ½ - Cups Brown Sugar	½ - Tsp. Nutmeg
1 - Cup Shortening	1 - Tsp. Cinnamon
2 - Beaten Eggs	1 - Tsp. Cloves
1 - Cup Boiled Raisins	1 - Tsp. Soda
2 - Cups Sifted Flour	5 - Tbsp. raisin water
2 - Cups Quick Oatmeal	1 - Tsp. Vanilla
½ - Tsp. Ginger	Nuts is desired

Boil raisins in small amount of water, enough for 5 tablespoons needed in recipe. Mix ingredients in usual manner. Drop by teaspoon on lightly greased cookie sheet.

Bake 350° 10 – 15 Minutes

Coming in January

This newsletter marks the end of the first year of publication for the Breyfogle Sentinel Dispatch. We had editions in March, June, September, and now in December. In our first edition we noted that this newsletter would not have any regular publication date but have now settled into a quarterly schedule, which seems about right from our end.

Our plans for 2006 include editions at the end of the months of January, April, August, October, and perhaps one in December if we get enough response to our request for your family traditions.

In January, as mentioned in previous issues, we plan an entire edition dedicated to the research by Mary Jane Foster, granddaughter of her subject, Grace (Breyfogle) Jones. We have some of the preliminary articles and know in advance that you will find this work of interest.

Convergence 2006

As the end of 2005 draws near we are beginning work on the 2006 Convergence details. As of this time we have had 65 responses to the 124 invitations sent to this mailing list. Of the respondents, we have 38 confirmed attendees with an additional 28 showing interest but unable to confirm at this early date.

Plans for a meeting room are set at the Holiday Inn here in Mason City so now it is a matter of completing plans for the event. We plan separate mailings for the Convergence to detail the event so those attending can complete their planning for the trip to Iowa.

A Final Word

As we conclude this newsletter we wonder how many Breyfogle Christmas Traditions are out there that are based on traditions from your branch of the family tree. We thought it would be interesting to collect these traditions for the December 2006 newsletter. If you'd like to share your tradition for publication please drop us a card, letter, or e-mail. We'd love to hear from you.

This issue of the *Breyfogle Sentinel Dispatch* is dedicated to the loving memory of Betty Jean (Paris) Keeler, Sandy's mother, who passed away in the early morning hours of Christmas Day 2003. She is greatly missed since in her lived the true expression of what Christmas is all about, which is family, love, and hope for a bright future. Children were a special part of her life and many of our traditions are based on the special way she presented Christmas to every child who entered her home at this time of the year.

You may contact us with questions or articles at the address below:

Mason City, IA 50401 dan@breyfogle.com



Mackey Methodist Church – December 4, 2005

On a recent trip to Boone, IA to visit relatives we passed a small country church that seemed to typify Iowa in the winter and thought we'd share it. The church and nearby cemetery lies beneath a fresh blanket of snow from the day before. This church is several miles northwest of Gilbert, IA — located on a gravel road slightly north of County Highway E18 between County Highway R38 and State Highway 17.