

Julius R. Dietrich (1858-1910)

Julius R. Dietrich was born in September of 1858 in Heinichen Saxony, Germany. He spent most of his early life in Germany having been educated in schools and in college there. In 1878 he immigrated to the United States and attended Carthage College in Carthage, Illinois for two years.

In 1887 Julius moved to Streator, IL and took a job working at the town's German language newspaper, the *Volksblatt*. While still living in Streator, Julius married Anna Maria Neff on April 12, 1888. Anna Maria, born in 1867, was the daughter of Peter, (born in 1833, died July 29, 1894) and Mary A. Loser Neff, (born January 14, 1830, died March 3, 1910). Julius and Anna Maria had seven children, six of whom survived into adulthood: Emilia, (born in 1890), Anton, (born February 12, 1892, died February 20, 1953), Emma L., (born in 1894), Agatha, (born September 13, 1897, died January 25, 1982), Selma, (born in 1901), and Julius Jr., (born in 1908).

In 1891 Julius and his family moved to Bloomington, IL where he would spend the rest of his life. He continued his career in the newspaper business by purchasing the *Bloomington Journal*, Bloomington's only weekly German language newspaper. Julius was the owner and managing editor for the rest of his life.

Besides publishing the *Journal*, he also commissioned and published the *Bloomington Deutsche in Wort und Bild*, translated as the *Bloomington Germans in Words and Pictures*. In the introduction of this book he wrote that the idea which inspired him "for the edition of this little book was to draw solid outlines of an exact picture of the achievements and the importance of the local German spirit."¹ This book documented the activities of the German schools, businesses, churches, clubs, and biographies of the German community in Bloomington though he did not include a biography of himself or his family.

Besides being a publisher, Julius was also very involved in the community. He was a member of various organizations in Bloomington and even held several offices at both the state and local level. One of the most well known organizations in Bloomington of which Julius was a member was the Bloomington Turnverein. The Turnverein, or Turners as they were commonly called, was a national gymnastics organization started in Germany in 1811. In order to become a Turner, a person had to be from Germany or the child of someone from Germany. Women could also become members or, if they married a German, could become associate members. The Turners began a chapter in Bloomington in April 1855. Julius became the president in October 1899.

Julius was also active in the Illinois Skat League. Skat is a three-person German card game and is also the national card game of Germany. It was invented in 1810 and has spread throughout the world since. Julius was an avid card player and was elected the secretary of the Illinois Skat League in 1904.

Julius was also very active in the anti-Temperance and anti-Prohibition movement in Bloomington. Like many people of German origin he enjoyed beer and wine. Temperance was a movement that began in the 19th century and continued into the 20th century. Temperance opposed of the consumption of alcohol. People who followed the teachings of the Temperance movement blamed alcohol for the majority of problems in

¹ Julius Dietrich. *Bloomington Deutsche in Wort und Bild*. (Bloomington, IL: Reprinted in 1993 by McLean County Genealogical Society, original publication in 1893 by Julius Dietrich) 4

society like crime and poverty. Mostly women subscribed to the doctrines of the Temperance Movement. The Temperance movement culminated with Prohibition. Prohibition began in 1920, with the passage of the 18th Amendment, which banned the sale, manufacture, and transportation of intoxicating beverages.

Julius belonged to several anti-Temperance and anti-Prohibition organizations serving as the Chairman of the United German Societies of Bloomington, a political party against prohibition. He was also the president of the Personal Liberty League and a member of the Democratic Party. Julius also opposed the preaching of Billy Sunday, a well-known evangelist and pro-Prohibitionist at that time. When Sunday came to Bloomington in December of 1907 he was quoted in the *Daily Bulletin* that he would pay for the editors of the *Pantagraph* and the *Daily Bulletin* but not the *Journal*. Julius took this as a compliment noting that he apparently did not need intercession on his behalf to reach the Throne of Grace.

Besides these organizations, Julius was known for his dog ownership. He bred Boston Terriers, Great Danes, and was especially known for his Dachshunds. He won two awards for his dogs, first prize award for his Boston Terriers and first prize for his Tri Color Puppies. In January of 1909 he was even elected secretary of the Bloomington Kennel Club.

Julius also held memberships in the following organizations: the German Press Federation, vice president of the Illinois German Editorial Association, an honorary member of the German Veterans Society, the Odd Fellows, the Mozart Lodge #656, (the German lodge of the Free Masons), Improved Order of the Red Man- Osceola Tribe #28, the German Benevolent Society, and was elected as the Deputy Game Warden for the Peoria District, which included Bloomington and Normal. Julius was active in the community until the day he died.

Julius's health began to decline towards the end of his life. In May of 1910, Julius developed complications from surgery and died on May 13, 1910 at the age of 52. In honor of Julius who had also stood up for keeping alcohol legal, all of the saloons in Bloomington closed for one hour, from 2:30 to 3:30pm on May 16th, 1910, the day that he was buried. His funeral was very large because he was a very respected and well-known member of the Bloomington community. He was laid to rest in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

His wife Anna Maria lived for many years after Julius's death, having lived with several of her children and taking care of their daughter Emma. She followed Julius in death on July 21, 1936 at the age of 68. She was buried next to her husband in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

By: Candace Summers, 2005