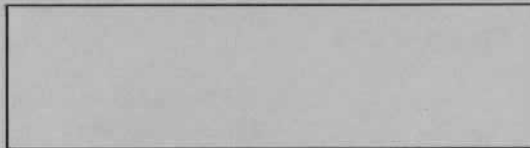


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### GERMAN SETTLERS MAKE GENOA TOWNSHIP THEIR HOME

Richard Behrens, Sr., was born in Hanover, Germany, July 3, 1812. Following in the footsteps of many before him, he immigrated to Canada in 1838 and to Genoa Township in 1844. Whether by design or not, many of Germany birth, i.e. Conrad, Dorr, Hartman, Westphal, arrived in Genoa about the same time. They were not alone in their struggles to make a home.

Within a few years, 1846, Richard married Magdalena Conrad, daughter of neighbor Charles, Sr. and Maria. By 1859, Behrens owned over 320 acres in Sections 14, 23 and 24 of Genoa Township. Much of Conrad's land was located around Crooked Lake in Sections 22 and 27.

The Behrens and their neighbors shared, besides their nationality, the experience of crossing the ocean in a sailing vessel. They, individually and collectively, cleared land, lived in log homes, built frame barns and finally had sufficient means, c. 1870 to build fine, large homes. Basements were dug, the plots graded, stone, gravel and lumber hauled to the several sites. Five of these homes were built of bricks from their own clay and baked on the spot. Experienced workmen were boarded during the construction.

Richard and Magdalena had ten children: Henry 1846, Mary 1848, Theresa 1850, Philip 1853, Charles 1855, Caroline 1857, Albert 1858, Amelia 1860, Richard, Jr. 1863 and Leonard 1867. These children and their neighbors attended Ratz School on Grand River and Kellogg Roads.

Charles and Henry succumbed to the lure of the Wild West and the silver and gold to be mined in Colorado. Charles married; a 1910 clipping sent thanks for condolences from a daughter, Mrs. J. D. Wilson of Kansas. Whether Henry married has not been determined nor where he is buried. All of their brothers remained single. Albert also spent some time in Colorado, but came back to Genoa to live with his sister, Caroline, in the old homestead. Caroline remained single, cared for her mother and kept house for brothers Phillip, Richard, Leonard and Albert in the big brick house.

Of the Behrens other daughters: Mary married neighbor George B. Ratz and had three children, Clara, Mayme and George W.; Theresa married Henry Herbst, becoming parents of Richard, John, Charles, Fred, Louis, Albert and Anna; Amelia married Albert Bauer, but they were childless. However, the Ratz and Herbst families assured there were enough cousins, many still in the area, to go around.

Bill Pless' father, <sup>CHRIS</sup>George, often told his son of the many fun times at the brick house. A for-instance - a springboard was mounted on the barn floor at the back of the basement barn. Running on the barn floor to the end of the board, one sprang up then head-over-heals into the remains of an old straw stack below. The girls were as good as the boys even though hampered by having to hold onto long skirts. Fields and woodlots were roamed, muskrats trapped and squirrels and ducks hunted. It was always fun to go to Crooked Lake for swimming. Phillip Behrens taught many boys to swim and dive when they were very young. Magdalena usually had a peppermint in the pocket of her black dress or a small toy to give a visiting child and always a smile. These small items she accepted for unpaid rent on a store she owned in town, The Racket Store, 428 W. Main.

A great, great, granddaughter and family now call the house Richard and Magdalena built home. That house was built to last. Her father, Merrill Herbst, lives in a single story home he built in 1975, just west. Richard, Sr. and Magdalena sleep with most of their children and several grand children in the St. George Lutheran Cemetery situated in a small corner of their original property. (Compiled by Marieanna Bair from writings of Bill Pless; census records; Ellis' 1880 History of Livingston County; St. George Cemetery records and an interview with Merrill Herbst. Additions, corrections requested. 810/229-6402.)