

A Biography of Bernhard Eiring

Written by Ryan Eiring

---



## Introduction/ Chapter 1

This project is in large about the life and times of my Great-Great Grandfather, Bernhard Eiring (1842-1927), a German Immigrant and Union soldier. To write about his life effectively, the reader needs to understand the historical context and events surrounding his life. This will require an overview of German immigration to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the late 1840's to the early 1850's and a detailed sketch of Bernhard Eiring's recollection of his Civil War Service, which I am fortunate to possess.

For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in my roots and family. When I was younger, I constantly prodded my older relatives into telling me stories of the Eiring family. My grandfather, Hilmar Eiring Jr. (1911-1995) and great-uncle John Edward Eiring (1917-2004) were always willing to share their memories and stories of their grandfather Bernhard Eiring with me. My grandfather told me that Bernhard was in the Civil War and showed me his swords and pictures which fascinated me to no end. He shared with me some of the early recollections of his life, one that in particular, attending the popular Memorial Day and Fourth of July parades in downtown Milwaukee, WI. , to watch Bernhard ride his horse and march with other Civil War Veterans. My grandfather said that Memorial Day and the Fourth of July were really important to Bernhard because he was an immensely proud American. I also asked my great-uncle John Eiring about him as well. Uncle John was a bonafide U.S. History buff who was responsible for

wetting my appetite to learn more about Bernhard. Uncle John told me that Bernhard was in the Calvary and that he went to Missouri during the Civil War. Uncle John also told me that Bernhard was involved in a prisoner exchange while in the war. When he was a P. O.W., Bernhard became good friends with a Confederate doctor and the two men carried a correspondence for the rest of Bernhard's life. I thought this was really interesting and wanted to learn all that I could about Bernhard Eiring.

This thesis will chronicle the life of Bernhard Eiring, especially during his service years, using both primary and secondary sources to illuminate one of the many lesser known participants in the Civil War, and his contribution to his adopted country.

## Introduction/ Chapter 1

The German influence in Milwaukee, Wisconsin is hard to overlook. Many of the street names, festivals, and businesses reflect Milwaukee's German heritage. To this day it is very difficult to travel anywhere in Milwaukee without seeing many things that reflect the German influence. German culture has been important to Wisconsin in many respects. German social, athletic, and singing clubs have endured. Milwaukee sponsors *Germanfest* every Summer. The famous German celebration *Oktoberfest* is celebrated annually in many Wisconsin communities. Polka music, beer, and bratwurst are staples of the state of Wisconsin. The phenomena of the German existence in Milwaukee can be traced back to the year 1839. The specific reasons for the massive German immigration of the late 1840's thru the early 1850's will be identified and discussed at great length in the next chapter.

What especially attracted the Germans to Wisconsin and more to the point, Milwaukee? The answer was that the climate, land, and soil were very similar to Germany. More specifically, Milwaukee was located on Lake Michigan, which was a key for the market conscious Germans. Milwaukee and its location provided access to the Great Lakes and markets in the east. Second, there was still plenty of land on or close to Lake Michigan that the government was selling in forested sections. On top of that, the city of Milwaukee was starting to flourish. It was soon dubbed "the German Athens"<sup>1</sup> "The family business was growing; Wisconsin's agriculture was flourishing, and

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ethnicity in Wisconsin: Germans in Wisconsin.* <http://wiscnifo.doit.wisc.edu/mkilibrarv/ethn-his.html>

Milwaukee's vigor was enhancing the value of property."<sup>2</sup> For many Germans, Milwaukee, Wisconsin promised a land of great opportunity and potential that this group of European transplants was eager to benefit from.

By 1861, the German element was firmly entrenched in Milwaukee's society. They owned and operated a variety of businesses, ( most notably the Schlitz and Pabst Breweries) and even had several German language newspapers. Many of the Germans in Milwaukee had become immensely proud Americans in the short time they had been in the country. Many of them despised slavery and their newspapers and organizations reflected this. One such organization, The American Turners, was prominent in Milwaukee. The American Turners were a proud, ultra-patriotic group who aligned themselves with the Free Soil Party. In 1855, under the presidency of Carl Bauer, subsequently the editor of the Milwaukee Herald, they declared their "determined opposition to both slavery and slavery extension as unworthy of a republic and as contrary to the principles of Liberty."<sup>3</sup> In 1861 when Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States, the Turner order mightily approved. Later, when the Southern States seceded from the Union and President Lincoln raised a call to arms, many of the Turners in Milwaukee, including Bernhard Eiring, answered the call and enlisted in the Union Army to fight in the Civil War.

In the beginning of the Civil War, "President Lincoln called for a levy of 75,000 volunteers, of which Wisconsin's share was to be one regiment of ten companies."<sup>4</sup> The

---

<sup>2</sup> Nesbit, *Wisconsin*, 157.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Wild, *Chapters in the History of the Turners*, 130-133.

<sup>4</sup> Nesbit, *Wisconsin*, 247.

number of volunteers from Wisconsin far exceeded this number. “Of the fifty-two volunteer companies, twenty-six volunteered for service and were accepted.”<sup>5</sup> Bernhard Eiring was accepted with the rank of private in the Milwaukee Calvary on August 22, 1861.

---

<sup>5</sup> Nesbit, *Wisconsin*, 248.