

### Chapter Three

Bernhard Eiring entered the world on January 16, 1842 in the village of Kerspleben, located in the Prussian province of Saxony. Soon after, he was christened and entered the baptismal record as Bernhard Heinrich Eyring. Bernhard's parents were Heinrich (1813-1884) and Cordula Wilhelmina Eyring (1820-?). Heinrich Eyring changed the family's last name from Eyring to Eiring after they emigrated to America in 1851. His reasons remain unclear as to why the spelling changed, but John Eiring had an interesting theory that Heinrich altered the spelling because "Eyring" might have been considered Jewish and Heinrich apparently did not want to deal with the anti-semitism and persecution that may have occurred if the name remained unaltered.

Like many Old World families of the nineteenth century, The Eyrings were of a clannish nature. Seven families directly related to Bernhard lived in homes that occupied a three block radius in the village of Kerspleben. Heinrich Eyring employed himself as a tavern owner in Kerspleben. His tavern and adjoining hall were frequented by college students from nearby Jena.

In 1848, when the German Revolution broke out, a squadron of Saxon Dragoons was quartered in Kerspleben, but did not remain long. Soon after, Bernhard witnessed Prussian infantry and artillery units rushing thru the village en route to nearby Erfurt, where the Prussian Army had begun to engage the revolutionaries. During this time, Bernhard and other members of the family became afraid, and later Bernhard recalled, "My Father (Heinrich) had disappeared, but two days later after the cannonading he

reappeared with a friend by the name of Limpricht. Both of them had been in the barricades at Erfurt fighting against the Prussian soldiers with other revolutionists.”<sup>1</sup> After the battle at Erfurt was over, young Bernhard and his friends would spend time roaming the battlefield, imagining what the fighting was like. On one of these occasions, t Bernhard and his other young friends climbed up in an observation tower that had been erected by Napoleon’s Army during the time France had occupied Germany.

Experiences like this sparked young Bernhard’s interest in history. In order to learn more about Germany and his heritage, Bernhard gained knowledge and valuable information from his maternal grandfather. Evidently, Bernhard’s grandfather had only one earlobe, Bernhard inquired about the missing earlobe and his grandfather told him that story: “He was a non-commissioned officer in a Saxon cavalry regiment, and when Napoleon invaded Russia, he was attached to a Saxon general on Napoleon’s staff. The emperor’s invasion was a failure, and while retreating across the Beresnia River on two pontoon bridges the pursuing Russians gave battle. It was most disastrous to Napoleon’s army. The bridges were destroyed, many thousands of soldiers drown and thousands more were killed or wounded.”<sup>2</sup> It was in that battle that Bernhard’s grandfather lost his earlobe and also was severely wounded. At the time Bernhard’s grandfather served under Napoleon, Napoleon’s army consisted of many Germans furnished by the Reinbund, a confederation of southern kingdoms and principalities, including Saxony, under Napoleon’s protectorate.

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<sup>1</sup> David Hennes, “Memoirs of Bernhard Eiring” 1991, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Hennes, “Eiring” 3.

Another instance that sparked young Eiring's interest in history occurred when he explored the attic in the house where he lived (the house was one of the oldest in the village of Kerspleben) and found the floor of the attic covered with cannon balls of all sizes as well as broken guns. Bernhard asked his father where the items came from and was informed that they were plowed up from the fields between Kerspleben and nearby Erfurt. "The cannon balls and firearms were left following three sieges: the first in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; the second by the French in 1806 after the Battle of Jena, and the third in 1813 by the Prussians."<sup>3</sup>

A large part of Bernhard's childhood involved his family celebrating events in German history. An important celebration for the Eyrings fell on October 18. The celebration on this date commemorated the Battle of Leipzig, which was fought in 1813, ending Napoleon's rule of Germany and the Rheinbund. In Kerspleben and the surrounding villages the citizens would light massive bonfires to commemorate the event. Celebrations such as the observation of the Battle of Leipzig undoubtedly led to the patriotism that Bernhard Eiring would later show in service to his adopted country.

After the Revolution of 1848 failed to bring about the changes that the revolutionaries desired, Heinrich Eyring decided to move his family to the United States. By this time Heinrich and Cordulla had four other children besides Bernhard. They included Martha (1834-?), Wilhelm (1852-?), Gustave (1848-?), and Louisa (1846-1888). The evidence does not reveal if Heinrich Eyring faced the same danger as the other revolutionaries, he probably did because the village of Kerspleben was a center of revolutionary personalities and ideals. Regardless, in November 1852, the Heinrich

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<sup>3</sup> Hennes, "Eiring" 5.

Eyring family left Kerspleben and emigrated to the United States, arriving on December 6, 1852 in New York<sup>4</sup> and moving on to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. By 1860, Heinrich Eyring had established himself as a butcher and soon owned a shop in Milwaukee's downtown district.<sup>5</sup>

Little is known about the life of Bernhard Eyring during the years of 1851 through 1859. He probably spent most of those years in school getting an education. His obituary mentioned that "he was one of the first students at the Peter Englemann School, later the Milwaukee University School."<sup>6</sup>

In the winter of 1859, with his school days apparently behind him, Bernhard Eyring traveled to St. Louis, Missouri where he gained employment at the Westliche Post as a printer. At the relatively young age of seventeen, Bernhard worked for the leading German language newspaper in the western United States. The Westliche Post was famous because some of the contributors to the paper were prominent members of the German "Forty-Eighters", such as Karl Schurz and Franz Sigel. While working in St. Louis, Bernhard became swept up in the excitement of the presidential campaign of 1860, featuring Republican Abraham Lincoln versus Democrat Stephen A. Douglas. After Lincoln was elected the excitement continued, and even increased, with the slave-holders and their adherents advocating succession. Missouri, as a slave state, was in the forefront of the debate.

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<sup>4</sup> New York Passenger Lists, 1851-1891. <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?i=indiv=1&rank=0&gsln=Eyring&db=nypl&gss=a...>

<sup>5</sup> Milwaukee County Census Report, 1860. 127.

<sup>6</sup> Milwaukee Sentinel, "Obituaries" February 2, 1927, 5.

In the spring of 1861 eminent danger lurked in St. Louis. The state militia made camp in the western part of the city, with orders to take the United States arsenal. The German-Americans, recognizing the obvious peril of the situation, organized into military companies, one of which Bernhard Eiring joined. Soon after, President Lincoln called for the first 75,000 volunteers, and the four German-American regiments from St. Louis under the command of General Franz Sigel were ready for immediate service. While the Confederate regiments drilled at nearby Camp Jackson, Confederate General Frost made his headquarters in the city, a few blocks away from the offices of The Westliche Post. In April, 1861 a riot commenced near General Frost's headquarters. Bernhard heard the commotion and recalled the event vividly," People were rushing toward Fifth Street. Imagining that there was trouble at Gen. Frost's headquarters, we hurried over there to find a crowd of about 1,500 people assembled at that corner. Many were engaged in fistfights, and a sentinel was pacing up and down before a cannon. Behind that was a rebel flag, a red star in a white field, floating in the breeze. The only English heard was the demand to haul down that emblem and to hoist the stars and stripes."<sup>7</sup> Not long after this incident, on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1861, Camp Jackson fell to a Union attack that included the four German-American regiments that came from St. Louis. However, Bernhard Eiring did not participate in that skirmish.

An urgent request (the nature of which is unknown) brought Bernhard Eiring back to Milwaukee a few days before the raid on Camp Jackson. On arriving back in Milwaukee, he found employment at The Seebote, another German language newspaper. By this time Bernhard Eiring, at the age of nineteen, had been influenced by his German roots and the ideals his father and other German revolutionaries believed. He despised

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<sup>7</sup> Hennes, "Eiring" 7.

slavery; the idea of forced bondage sickened him. He believed in freedom of all kinds for all men and the preservation of the Union. It is not surprising just two months after his return to Milwaukee from St. Louis that “on August 22, 1861, Bernhard Eiring enlisted in the freshly created Milwaukee Calvary with the rank of Private.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Department of Wisconsin, “E.B. Wolcott Post No.1, Grand Army of the Republic, Bernhard Eiring, Personal War Sketch, 337.