

## Chapter Five

Soon after returning to Milwaukee after procuring his discharge from the United States Army, Bernhard married Doris Ollerich (1844-1927) on June 9, 1866. Together they had four children: Hilmar (1879-1955), Ida (1869-<sup>1936</sup>), Erwin (1874-1942), and Alma (1884-1975). (Bernhard & Doris also had a daughter Meta 1857-1872 who cause of death is unknown possibly TB or Typhoid fever.)

For a brief period of time in the late 1860's, Bernhard went back to work as a printer for the ~~Wisconsin~~ <sup>See bible</sup> ~~Wisconsin~~. In 1871, Bernhard served as secretary of the Friend Brothers Clothing Company, a job he would hold until around 1900. The Friend Brothers Clothing Company produced and distributed uniforms for schools in southeastern Wisconsin. The Friend Brothers Company made Bernhard a fairly wealthy and prominent man in Milwaukee. Bernhard became friends with many in Milwaukee's high society including the famous brewer Frederick Pabst, who Bernhard met during the Civil

War. In 1888 he commissioned architect Alfred Clas to build him a home on 2918 Cedar Street (now 2825 West Kilbourn Avenue). Alfred Clas later earned fame as one of the architects that built the Pabst Mansion and the Milwaukee Library.<sup>34</sup> Today the house still stands. (See Picture in Appendix). The home is a robust example of the Victorian Romanesque style of architecture that was popular during that time and is greatly admired now. The Eiring mansion has had an interesting history since Bernhard's death in 1927. One of Milwaukee's former mayors, John Koch's son Edward, purchased the house in 1927 and his family lived there until 1941. Then as the general neighborhood began to decline," the mansion has served as an elderly convalescent home, a Muslim meeting house, and as the Milwaukee School of Engineering's Triangle Fraternity House."<sup>35</sup> Since the early 1990's, the Eiring mansion has served as a residence for a couple of different families who have refurbished the interior and exterior trying to recapture the property's original characteristics. In 1998, the city of Milwaukee assessed the Eiring Mansion's property value at \$80,000.<sup>36</sup> This is a fairly low figure, not because of the house, but because of the crime that has ravaged that particular part of Milwaukee for the past thirty years.

Bernhard had much energy, ideas, and varied interests. He made some fairly large land purchases on and around Eagle Springs Lake, located near Eagle, Wisconsin. Between 1891 and 1914, Bernhard owned an estimated twenty-five percent of the land on the Northwest part of the lake.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that though Bernhard owned the land, the Waukesha County Plot Maps of 1912 and 1914 list the owner as "Mrs. Doris

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<sup>34</sup> Shannon Stevens, "People and Places," *The Business Journal*, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1999, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Stevens, "People", 56.

<sup>36</sup> Stevens, "People", 56.

<sup>37</sup> Waukesha County Plot Maps, 1891, 1912, 1914.

Eiring”.<sup>38</sup> The evidence does not give a reason for this peculiarity, but perhaps Bernhard placed his properties in his wife’s name in case anything happened to him. Bernhard started a farm on some of the Eagle property and it was said that “He was so fond of the potatoes and spring water he got at Eagle that he refused to eat or drink either unless they, or it came from there.”<sup>39</sup> Little by little, Bernhard sold off most of his property on and around Eagle Springs Lake save for a few acres that his son Hilmar Eiring Sr. built a Summer home, Sleepy Hollow, on in 1906. During the Great Depression, Hilmar Eiring sold his property in Milwaukee and took his family to live on Eagle Springs Lake year round. In 1950, long after Bernhard’s death, Hilmar Eiring sold approximately half of his remaining property to his son John E. Eiring Sr. for around five hundred dollars. In 1973, David and Wendy Eiring were given a small island on Eagle Springs Lake as a wedding gift. The Eirings will always keep a connection with the lake and area that Bernhard loved so much during the later part of his life. ❀ ❀

Music became another interest for Bernhard. He helped found the Milwaukee Musical Society and served as its president for many years.<sup>40</sup> He passed along his interest in music to his children, especially his eldest daughter Ida, who became a piano instructor in Milwaukee and New York. Bernhard also demonstrated a few eccentricities. Through out his life, he disregarded style for comfort. Bernhard claimed never to be susceptible to cold weather and often wore more clothing in summer than in winter. This fact must have carried a bit of truth. The man lived to the age of eighty-five.

After the Civil War, Bernhard remained active in Veterans’ causes and events. In 1871, while leading a detachment in the Memorial Day parade in Milwaukee, Bernhard’s

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<sup>38</sup> Plot Maps, 1912 and 1914.

<sup>39</sup> Hennes, *Eiring*, 1.

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horse threw him to the pavement when it slipped and fell. Bernhard, stunned though not harmed, remounted and continued with the parade. This incident was recalled in a column in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* on May 27, 1921.<sup>41</sup>

Several years after the organization of The Grand Army of the Republic (An organization similar to the American Legion formed after World War One), Bernhard joined the Robert Chivas Post Number Two. For reasons not present in the evidence, on June 21, 1889, Bernhard took a transfer card and became a member of the E. B. Wolcott Post Number One. There existed another veterans' organization that Bernhard could have joined, the Loyal Legion, but he refused to join because "In my (Bernhard's) opinion they have a tendency to aristocracy and exclusiveness to which I am opposed."<sup>42</sup>

An event that disturbed Bernhard greatly occurred in 1914, when World War One began. He did not like the way that German-Americans were being persecuted and ridiculed. In a preface to his *Memoirs*, Bernhard included an excerpt on his feelings about the subject:

"The following narration of my experience is positive proof that the security of the country does NOT rest in the language—and that the German-Americans in 1861 were the true loyal and patriotic citizens they are today! That in spite of insinuations by even the chief executives during the World War that they were disloyal because naturally in sympathy with their mother country.

While not making much outward display of their loyalty, the German-Americans have an inherent feeling of duty to their adopted country. That is why they are among the first to respond when their country is in danger. The mass of our


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<sup>41</sup> Incidents That Occurred on This Date 50,25, and 10 Years Ago, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 27, 1921, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Hennes, *Eiring*, 16.

people are sadly ignorant of general history, but if that subject had been taught in our schools—giving information about the merits and defects of other people as well as our own—I feel certain our people could never have been misled to the unwarranted and insulting persecution of our German-American citizen which they passively had to endure. Instead, our schools have been crowded with unimportant fads.”<sup>43</sup>

As the quotation reveals, Bernhard Eiring’s immense patriotism and respect for his heritage were driving forces in his life.

Bernhard spent the last years of his life shuttling between his house on Cedar Street and Sleepy Hollow, thirty miles west of Milwaukee on Eagle Springs Lake. While he kept himself busy with his organizational endeavors, he found plenty of time to spend with his beloved wife Doris, their children (who besides Ida had married and lived in Milwaukee), and their  grandchildren. Bernhard Eiring died on January 30, 1927, at the age of eighty-five of natural causes. His wife Doris joined him eight months later.

Bernhard Eiring definitely lived a very full and prosperous life. He rose from the ranks of a poor German immigrant to a Lieutenant in the Union Army and finally to a citizen of elite status in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. After researching this project, I have reached some of my own conclusions about my great-great grandfather. While going through numerous official records concerning the battles that Bernhard participated in and comparing them to how Bernhard recalled the battles in his *Memoirs*, It astonished me to find out how similar Bernhard’s descriptions were to those of the officers’ reports

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<sup>43</sup> Hennes, *Eiring*, 8.

in the Official Civil War Records. I feel that if Bernhard had the desire to stay in the service of the United States Army that he probably would have made a great officer.

I also know for a fact that Bernard Eiring's immense patriotism and service for his adopted country influenced the direction that the lives of a few of his grandchildren took, especially Hilmar Eiring Sr.'s sons. All of them served in the United States Armed Forces during World War Two. The Eiring boys were not drafted, they all enlisted to serve their country. Hilmar Eiring Jr. (1911-1995) served in Army attaining the rank of Major in the Army's Materials Handling Division. He spent time stationed in Alaska during the WWII and later spent a significant portion of his service stationed at Ft. McCoy, Wisconsin. Robert Eiring (1916-1979) served in the Navy attaining the rank of Lieutenant. He served in the Battle of Iwa Jima as a frogman where he successfully performed the dangerous task of dismantling Japanese sea bombs. John E. Eiring Sr. (1917-2004) served in the Army's Cavalry Division, shortly before they stopped using horses. During his time in the service, John was stationed in Mexico, in case the German forces tried to attack the United States from the south. While stationed in Mexico, John contracted malaria and nearly died. Walter Eiring (1920-2003) served his country admirably in the Air Force. The patriotism of Bernhard Eiring lived in these men and I am sure that he would have been very proud of their service and accomplishments.

This project has been a very rewarding and yet difficult experience. Writing about the life of one of the Civil War's lesser known participants has been fraught with many obstacles. Other biographical subjects such as General Ulysses Simpson Grant or Babe Ruth may have been easier to write about, because of the large number of sources

that exist on those subjects. However, the life of my great-great grandfather has been fascinating to explore and write, and I am thankful for the opportunity to have done so.