

Louise Muxfeld (1853 – 1909)

Louise Muxfeld, known as “Lizzie” by all, was born as Johanna Louise Catherine Tobecksen on June 7, 1853 in the city of Schoenburg in the province of Schleswig-Holstein in Germany. She was the daughter of Ferdinand Johann Tobecksen from Schoenberg and Elizabeth Gedke Tobecksen from Freiburg, Hannover, Austria. Louise first came to America with her father when she was a child. He was a member of a circus troupe. Since she was a tiny child, she was part of a “casting act,” which involved performers leaping or being thrown in the air. Louise also walked the tightrope. The troupe toured through the southern states for one season before returning to Germany.

Upon their return, Louise’s one ambition became to return to America. In 1865 Louise’s father died of tuberculosis and the children were placed in an orphanage for a short time. Then, her mother opened a bakery and had the children deliver the bread. Louise’s dream came true when her mother moved the family to America, arriving in Bloomington, IL in 1872. Louise made her home with another local German family, the Meyers, who owned the Meyer Brewing Company.

While in Bloomington, Louise met August Muxfeld who had also come to America in 1872 from Leyde, a city in the Brandenburg province of Germany. The two married in Bloomington on January 10, 1873 and lived at 202 South Allin Street. They had five children: Ferdinand Martin, Freda Louise, Anna Elizabeth, Walter Christian, and Martha Gertrude. Their youngest daughter, Martha, died at the age of five.

For some years August was employed at Holder, Milner and Company’s agricultural implements business located at 108 West Washington Street and then at the Griesheim Clothing Store at 208 North Center Street as a salesman first. In July 1892, August independently established a large clothing store in Minonk, IL.¹

Louise was best known for her occupation as a superb midwife. Midwifery in America was still prevalent during her time but medicine was gaining legitimacy and power, calling for the abolition of midwifery and homebirth in favor of obstetrics in a hospital setting. But in 1900 midwives in the United States attended almost half of all births. Louise graduated from Madame Carpenter’s School for Midwives in St. Louis, Missouri and received her state certificate on June 21, 1886. She was one of seven women listed in the annual reports of the State Board of Health under physicians and midwives in McLean County. She was always listed in the Bloomington City directories as a midwife. She made quite a name for herself, to the extent that gypsies routed tours so that they could be in Bloomington when a baby was due. Louise also attended the births of many Christian scientists’ wives and wealthy women of Bloomington. It was estimated that Louise delivered about 1,500 babies throughout her career.

Louise and her husband were active members of the German Evangelical Lutheran United Peace Church, the youngest of the German church congregations in Bloomington.² This Protestant denomination was known as the Church of Peace, or Friedenskirche in German. The congregation was founded on October 15, 1840 in Gravois Settlement, Missouri and was originally known as the German Evangelical Church Society of the West. Louise’s husband August, was president of the Bloomington

¹ Julius Dietrich. *Bloomington’s German Population in Word and Picture, Volume I*, 1893, 118

² Dietrich, 33-34

congregation, and Louise was the one who presented the baptismal font to the newly formed church.

Not only was Louise involved in her profession and her church, but she was also a member of the Abraham Lincoln lodge of Daughters of Rebekah, also known as the Rebekah Degree. This organization was adopted by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, an organization still active today, whose purpose is to give aid to those in need and to pursue projects for the benefit of all mankind. The Rebekah Degree was founded in 1851 “upon principles of faithfulness, hospitality, purity and dedication to the principles of the Order as portrayed by women characters of the Bible.”³

Louise also owned a horse named Monk which was known for its stubbornness, giving most people a rough time, racing around the barn lot, and refusing to be caught and harnessed. However, when Louise needed Monk for a midnight call, he came to her immediately to be harnessed.

On March 22, 1909 Louise died suddenly of heart failure while doing laundry in the basement of her home. By all accounts she had been in perfect health. Her husband and daughter Anna came to check up on her and found her lying on top of a heap of clothes. The two called the doctor but after the doctor arrived, he determined that she had already been dead for several hours.

Louise’s obituary in the *Daily Pantagraph* stated that she was one of the oldest and substantial German citizens in the city. It stated that she “had quite a reputation as a nurse, being considered one of the most competent [in Bloomington].”⁴ She was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, IL.

By: Sarah Yoo, 2008

³ “The Sovereign Grand Lodge Independent Order of Odd Fellows,” <http://www.ioof.org>, 2008

⁴ “Meets Death Without Warning,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, March 23, 1909