

Dennis Kruse and Kevin Kurdylo Remarks for each slide;

Slide 1. *(Just the starting slide while we are getting arrangements set. No words.)*

Slide 2.

I uncovered the story of Henry Nehrling as I was, and still am, working on a book on the History of Freistatt, MO. Nehrling was Freistatt's very first teacher at their Lutheran parochial school, teaching them their lessons in German with a bit of English sprinkled in. Henry Nehrling had a remarkable life with a unique American rags to riches story, starting out as a poorly paid, one-room Lutheran teacher to become the Director of the Public Museum of Milwaukee. He eventually hobnobbed with the likes of Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and Teddy Roosevelt. Kevin and I will share a bit of his life in the short time we have with you here today.

Slide 3:

Nehrling's family immigrated from the Kingdom of Saxony in 1852, the year before Henry was born. His parents and grandparents had lived near Erfurt attending an "Old Lutheran" [AltLuthaner] church there. The Nehrling family was affiliated with the group of Old Lutherans that had earlier established Freistadt, Wisconsin in 1839, the very first German settlement in the state.

The Nehrlings lived in Sheboygan County, in the "Urwald" or what we would call today "Original Old Growth" forests of Wisconsin. They must have been amazed at the birdlife and unspoiled nature compared to Europe. At the time,

Wisconsin was still mostly wooded without the unending row crops we see today.

Nehrling wrote later of his boyhood: **“Stimulated by the idyllic—and at that time still half-wild—surroundings of my place of birth, I felt in my youth, a passionate love for the beauties of nature, and the FEATHERED world especially held a powerful attraction for me.”** He lived in Howard’s Grove on the family farm, next to Ernst Schlichting. Schlichting was the local Postmaster, the founder of their public school and known locally as the Buschkönig. Schlichting had a large, commanding presence. He loved to tell stories of the natural world, and show off his collections of caged birds he kept on his farm, many of which were from tropical climates in the Southern US. Nehrling visited the Buschkönig often and was childhood friends with his daughters, Hedwig and Else. Nehrling wrote: **“In spring and summer, this beautiful landscape with its birdlife was a wonderland to me. I knew almost all the birds by their voices and color but not by name.”** His parents and Grandfather, who helped to home school him, also could not name any of these birds as they only knew the birds from back home in Saxony. Here in America, there were so many more birds. Henry yearned for a book that could tell him the names of all these wonderful creatures and one which he could afford. This set him on his lifelong journey to publish his ornithological masterpieces which he hoped would **“inspire our young people with a tender regard for the feathered minstrels of our woodlands, fields, meadows, groves and gardens.”**

Slide 4:

Nehrling's parents decided to send him off to boarding school after he graduated from 8th grade. When he turned 16, in 1869, they sent him to an all-male Lutheran Normal or Teaching School in Addison Illinois, near Chicago. Nehrling wrote about himself there:

“The stay in Addison was the finest part of our life, full of ideals and hopes, expression to which would be given during our walks through field and prairie after lessons. I was even then a passionate lover of nature, but my enthusiasm was little appreciated by the majority of the boys, who looked upon me as a queer sort of fellow (Sonderling) and such a one, I have remained to the present day.” His time at the Lutheran teaching school were his only formal education past 8th grade.

Illinois was a foundational phase in Nehrling's life. Not only did he commence his teaching career, he found his wife,.....A first child was born,.... and he established himself as a writer. He wrote: **“My first attempts at writing were in 1875. At that time, I sent the editor-in-chief of the Germania in Milwaukee, Mr. Georg Köppen, a few essays about local birds, but my hopes of them being accepted were slim.** [Germania was the local Milwaukee German newspaper, published by Georg Brumder. Nehrling continues:], **After just a few days, however, I received a letter from the aforementioned gentleman, who in a friendly, encouraging manner requested new efforts. I have Mr. Köppen to thank in particular for the fact that I became a writer and that I continued to progress steadily along the path I had set out on.”**

While living in Illinois in 1877, George Brumder, the publisher, gave Nehling a copy of "*North American Birds*" by Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway and later, Nehrling was able to acquire Audubon's "The Birds of America". Nehrling wrote "**I soon became bored with the North. Audubon's glowing descriptions ignited an ever-increasing longing for the South.**"

After 2 Lutheran teaching jobs in the Chicago area, Nehrling decided it was time to move and pursue his dream of studying tropical bird species. He quit his Lutheran teaching job in Chicago in February of 1879 and took off for Texas, most likely assuring his wife, he would come back soon. She was 6 months pregnant with two children aged 4 and 2. He promised her once he found another Lutheran teaching job in Texas, he would move them all there.

Slide 5:

When Henry arrived in Texas that spring of 1879, he first visited a fellow student from Addison who was now teaching in Serbin, a Wends Lutheran settlement. Nehrling spent the summer most likely birding along the gulf coast. In the fall he had found a job teaching at a K-8 Lutheran School in Houston, and his wife and children did indeed join him there. One year later he moved the family inland a bit to Lee County, TX to a different school and church along the Yegua Creek in the hamlet of Feeedor.

In Texas, he continued writing articles for German-language newspapers and scientific ornithological journals, including a major list of the birds of Illinois for The Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, a prestigious group of University - educated bird scholars. Nehrling continued observing birds and documenting their arrival and departure dates, just as he had done in

Wisconsin and Illinois. He captured native birds, keeping them in cages, just like the Buschkönig in Wisconsin. He spent considerable time along Yegua Creek, collecting nests and eggs, and observing bird behavior. Not surprisingly, with lots of mosquitos along the creek, Nehrling contracted malaria. After only 3 years in Texas, Nehrling and his family decided to move once again and went looking for a new job, outside of malaria-infected Texas.

Slide 6:

Luckily, Nehrling found that teaching job, in Southwest Missouri, in the newly settled, German-speaking town of Freistatt, which had familial connections with Freistadt Wisconsin. After very short stays at his other teaching jobs, he stayed 5 years in Missouri. But it was a busy 5 years, with continued writing in scientific journals, taking detailed notes of local birds as well as trips to Indian Territory, (Oklahoma), Arkansas, and a big trip through Louisiana and Florida. He was honored with an invitation in 1883 to become a charter member of the American Ornithological Union, one of only 47 people in the US to receive such an honor. He was now considered part of the US's scientific, ornithological elite, even though he had never studied the subject at any university.[pause]

But was he really teaching full time in Freistatt? In fact, he was. He taught 55 students in a one room schoolhouse and also became the recording secretary of all the church's congregational meetings held multiple times a year. He took concise notes in a clear and precise handwritten German Kur-RENNT script.

Slide 7:

While living in Freistatt, in addition to teaching, Nehrling announced to the world in January of 1885, he would publish his ornithological book, Die Nordamerikanische Vogelwelt. Using the social media of his time, Nehrling wrote letters to various editors of German American newspapers. These newspapers as well as scientific journals announced the planned subscription model for his book and asked for interested parties to mail their requests to Freistatt, MO. His planned German publication even appeared in the English language Publishers Weekly.

For those signed up for the subscription model, they would each receive 12 “Hefts” with 64 pages of German text and 2 color plates over a two year period. Each heft sold for \$1.00 and the final bound book sold for \$15.00

Slide 8:

In May of 1887, Nehrling announced to the Freistatt Congregation that he would be resigning his teaching job and “**would now follow a secular profession.**” Nehrling, still unsure if he could find a non-teaching job, contacted his friend and financial supporter, Konrad Krez. Krez was an 1848 revolutionary in Germany and a Union Brigadier General in the Civil War, a District Attorney for many years in Sheboygan, and had recently been

appointed by President Grover Cleveland as Collector of Customs for the Milwaukee Port. In August, Krez offered Nehrling the job of Deputy Customs Inspector, joining Krez and his staff of 13 at their downtown Milwaukee Federal office building. Nerhling was now working within walking distance of Brumder's printing business and perhaps was able to even watch the production of "Die Nordamerikanische Vogelwelt".

Kevin will now tell you about the books themselves.

Kevin's Remarks:

In 1891, George Brumder published the monograph edition of Nehrling's Die Nordamerikanische Vogelwelt. This is a hefty, single tome with more than 600 quarto-sized pages, advertised as being "bound in full Morocco" (likely goat's skin).

Slide 9. Woodpeckers / Title Page Vogelwelt

The monograph compiled all of the subscription Hefte text and plates along with new prefatory material: an epigraph in the form of a poem, a Vorwort, and an Einleitung with information on the daily life of birds, their songs, nests, eggs, and migration; the ways in which birds help humans, the enemies of

birds, and bird protection. The color plate illustrations—created using the then fairly new technology of chromolithography, a process that those touring the Bindery later today will learn more about—are the work of Robert Ridgway of the Smithsonian Institute, Professor Anton Göring of Leipzig, and the artist Gustav Mützel of Berlin, and they follow Audubon’s example of placing the birds in their natural habitats, for, as Nehrling writes in his Vorwort, **“One can only really know a bird when one is thoroughly acquainted with the trees and flowers, the seasons, the climate and other conditions of its habitat.”**

Slide 9 Fly in of Dedication Page to Schlichtings

Nehrling dedicates the completed Vogelwelt to his school and childhood friends, sisters Hedwig and Else Schlichting, then residing in Milwaukee. These are the daughters of Ernst Schlichting, the Buschkönig of Howard’s Grove, Wisconsin. Hedwig corresponded regularly to share her ornithological observations with Nehrling over the years, and these were incorporated into the text throughout. In the section concerning the Bobolink, for example, Hedwig reports that in the **“German settlements of Wisconsin it was quite commonly and accurately called the Klingklangvogel.”** But Hedwig and Else contributed much more to the creation of Vogelwelt. During the time Nehrling was living and working in Freistatt, Missouri, the sisters worked with **“perseverance and diligence”** on the laborious task of preparing the manuscript for publication, including reading proofs and creating both the

systematic overview and subject index that form the end of the completed whole. Henry's appreciation for the sisters extended to the naming of his daughter, Hedwig Else Nehrling, who was born in 1893.

Overall, the introductory material for *Vogelwelt* speaks to Nehrling's supportive German American community, which is not surprising, as it is written in German.

Slide 10 Bird Pictures

Nehrling's knowledge of ornithology came largely through self-study. Unable to afford the more lavishly illustrated field guides, Nehrling made do with small manuals to at least learn the names of the birds he observed.

We suspect it was Hermann Dümling, Nehrling's professor at the Addison Teachers Seminary, who shared Alfred Brehm's *Das Leben der Vögel*, with him, which Nehrling said revealed to him “**the utter poetry of birdlife.**” We know that Nehrling's own bird observations are included in Dümling's book of North American birds, *Die Vögel*, which was published by Brumder in 1875, but was a much smaller book.

Nehrling goes on to thank, by name, several German American newspaper editors “**from ocean to ocean and from the shores of the Gulf to Canada**” for publishing his articles and promoting his book. These newspapers included the Anzeiger des Westens, the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, the Westbote, the Illinois Staats-Zeitung, and the Abendschule in St. Louis. Nehrling also thanks many natural scientists in Germany for publishing his writings and providing technical feedback, as well as for engaging in “**lively correspondence.**”

We also discover from the Vorwort that two poems were written—in German—to support the publication of Nehrling’s work: One is by Konrad Krez, wherein he urges “**das Deutschtum hüben und drüben zur Subskription,**” Krez’s poem recognizes Nehrling’s talent for vividly describing birds and their natural settings, but is blunt in saying, “**Buy the book for yourself, and don’t borrow it, for borrowing books is a sign of stinginess.**” [Man kauf es sich, und lese nicht auf Borg, denn Buecher borgen zeigt von Kanuserei]

The completion of his book is clearly the result of a communal effort, and its publication puts Nehrling on equal footing with the leading ornithological professionals in North America. The German American community is rightfully impressed with and proud of Henry Nehrling. On December 7, 1891, the Illinois Staats-Zeitung describes Nehrling’s work as bestowing “**honor not only on its highly deserving author, but also upon the entire German community on both sides of the great water.**”

Nehrling's work is also appearing in English, and is being well received, first in the subscription model and then in two bound volumes as *Our Native Birds of Song and Beauty*, published in 1893 and 1896. Advertised as being bound in American calf, with gilt edges, "**beautifully printed with rubricated margins and other typographical elegancies,**" \$11 per volume or \$22 for the set, a purchase that would feel like spending about 850 of today's dollars.

Currently there are 109 known examples of *Our Native Birds* in libraries worldwide, compared with just over 45 copies of *Vogelwelt*.

Slide 12 (English Title Page / Dedication

Whereas Nehrling dedicates *Vogelwelt* to his childhood friends the Schlichting sisters, in *Our Native Birds* the dedication page is less sentimental and more professional; Nehrling "inscribes" his work to those "**whose scientific investigations have done so much for the advancement of ornithology**": Robert Ridgway, J. A. Allen, Elliott Coues, William Brewster, and C. Hart Merriam. And we can argue that Nehrling's name be added to this list of prominent American natural scientists. His writings, now in both German and English, are valued by ornithologists for their detail and appreciated by the layman for having "**the spirit of the beautiful airy beings whose lives he portrays.**"

Slide 13 Vogelschutz

In both editions, Nehrling's desire to aid and protect birds is evident. Here we see models for several species-appropriate bird houses. We know that Nehrling kept a large number of native birds in cages in all the places he lived, but we have no indication he ever shot a bird. Surprisingly, this makes him a Sonderling among the leading American ornithologists at this time; nearly all their biographies note that, when boys, they were given guns which they used to begin their collections.

Slide 13 Fly in: Dead Birds

Indeed, up to the late nineteenth century, especially before cameras or even binoculars, ornithological studies were conducted primarily by collecting specimens of birds, which meant shooting, dressing, and bringing back the skins, sometimes to be mounted, of many thousands of birds. Often the meat of the birds, including songbirds, was eaten while on such specimen expeditions.

Slide 14 Bird Enemies

Nehrling's books were published at the cusp of a national attitudinal shift concerning birds and their conservation. The massive hunting of birds for sport, food, and fashion had been so extensive that Americans began to take note of the decrease in the number of their birds. In his section on *Vogelfeinde*, or Bird Enemies, Nehrling informs his readers that the leading enemies of birds at this time are hunters, focused on supplying the fashion industry, and American boys. First to the boys: In the mid to late nineteenth century, America fell under a "mania" wherein men and especially boys amassed, bought, sold, and traded bird skins and especially eggs. Egg collecting was seen as a wholesome, get-out-in-nature hobby for American boys, but often was little more than an excuse for them to plunder nests and kill birds. As Nehrling writes: **"In the vicinity of Milwaukee, Chicago, and St. Louis I have seen numbers of boys roaming around in the fields and forests on Saturdays and Sundays, engaged in shooting birds and robbing their eggs."**

Slide 14, Hat fly in

And now to the hunters, who were collecting massive numbers of birds, several million, for the fashion trade, specifically women's hats. As the Industrial Revolution improved the speed of production, luxuries such as hats became more available to the masses, and feathered hats—long a fashion

mainstay—became a craze. In 1886, the American Museum of Natural History's ornithologist, Frank Chapman, observed on a walk in New York City some 40 native bird species on women's hats, and the fad went beyond feathers: hats had become crafted assemblages that included wings, heads, plumes, or even stuffed bodies of birds.

To wrap up this section on the protection of birds, we have an observation of Hedwig Schlichting, included in Nehrling's book, wherein she notes that local taxidermists were being commissioned by a New York business house to each shoot five hundred hummingbirds, resulting in thousands of birds being killed.

Slide 14: Bird Legislation Fly In

To counter this alarming slaughter, the American Ornithologist's Union, formed in 1883, proposed a Model Law for bird preservation in 1886, which Nerhling reprinted in *Our Native Birds*. Around the same time the first Audubon Societies were being formed in various cities led by women who were directly opposed to the mass slaughter of birds for fashion.

Now I will turn the podium back to Dennis to share the rest of the story.

Slide 15:

With the incredible positive reception to his Vogelwelt book, in 1890, Nehrling was offered the job of “Custodian” or Executive Director of the new Public Museum of Milwaukee, which had recently opened in 1884. His timing was good, as two things happened while he was at the Museum. First, he was able to attend the famous Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, and when it closed, he negotiated the donations of the contents from many country and corporate pavilions to the Museum. And with all these new collections, a bigger, Museum space was built during Nehrling’s tenure. It was a 36,000 sq. ft space, tripling the size of the Museum’s previous building, collocated with the Milwaukee Public Library. Its neoclassical style was in synch with the recent Columbian Expo in Chicago and is still used today as Milwaukee’s Central Library building.

Slide 16:

One of the pavilions in the Chicago Expo that really excited the ever curious Nehrling was the botanical exhibits from Brazil. He fell in love with the exotic tropical plants there and decided to move to Florida after 12 years at the Museum. He joined a “free thinkers” society in Gotha Florida (near Orlando) set up by a fellow German from Saxony, named Henry Hempel who had made millions in the printing business. Nehrling’s home and gardens in Florida were on 40 acres of land he bought from the German Poet Franz Ziller, a fellow free thinker, back when he was living in Freistatt, MO and working on his Vogelwelt Book. Under Nehrling, the gardens became Florida’s first experimental

botanical garden, where Nehrling tested over 3000 new and rare plants for the US Dept of Agriculture.

Nehrling spent the rest of his life in Florida growing and hybridizing tropical plants focusing especially on caladiums which have become extremely popular house plants yet today. He also researched various species of rubber trees for Henry Ford and Thomas Edison at a later garden near Naples. Today his Gardens in Gotha, Florida are a public attraction known simply as “Nehrling Gardens” and his Naples gardens have become the “Naples Zoo and Caribbean Gardens”.

Slide 17:

So, was Henry Nehrling a Lutheran one room school teacher or a Scientist?

Well, at the end of his life, his remaining second wife and children thought he was definitely a Scientist.

Thank you very much.