

Hieronymus Mueller Museum's Educational Materials

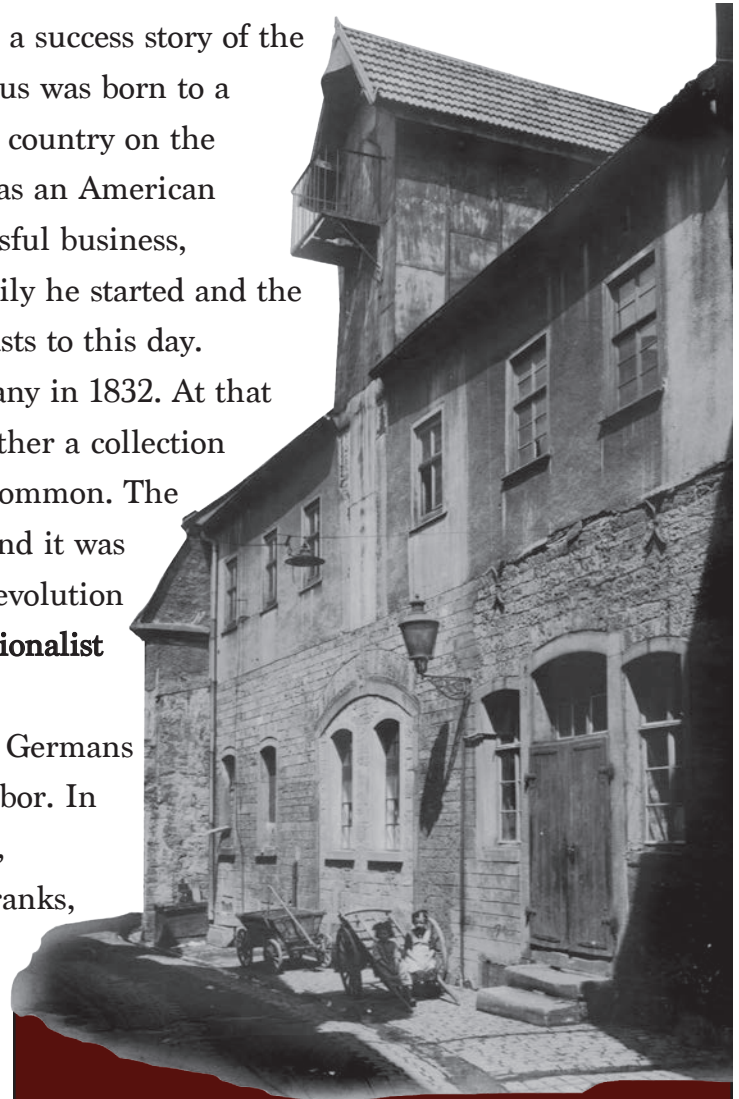
The Hieronymus Mueller Museum is dedicated to the collection, preservation, and interpretation of the history of the Hieronymus Mueller company and family. The museum promotes understanding and appreciation of this history and its association with local, regional, and national events.



Unit One: Hieronymus Mueller's American Dream Story

Hieronymus Mueller is often referred to as a success story of the American Dream, and for good reason. Hieronymus was born to a family of merchants and fishermen, in a war-torn country on the brink of a revolution. As an adult, Hieronymus was an American citizen, the proud owner of his own hugely successful business, and a highly respected inventor. Through the family he started and the business he built, Hieronymus Mueller's legacy lasts to this day.

Hieronymus was born in Wertheim, Germany in 1832. At that time, Germany was not an official country, but rather a collection of states unified by a language with little else in common. The area had long been in a state of political unrest, and it was further uprooted in 1848, known as the Year of Revolution in Europe. After the government suppressed a **nationalist** revolution in Germany in 1848, a flood of young, **disillusioned** Germans left their homeland. Many Germans were **proficient** in metal work and other skilled labor. In the wake of **America's First Industrial Revolution**, employers were eager to have these men in their ranks, and Germans were able to travel farther west due to their skills, making them more financially independent. Between 1820-1914 was the largest



Photograph of a home in Wertheim, Germany, birthplace of Hieronymus Mueller. The picture was taken by Mueller's descendants on a family trip in 1929.

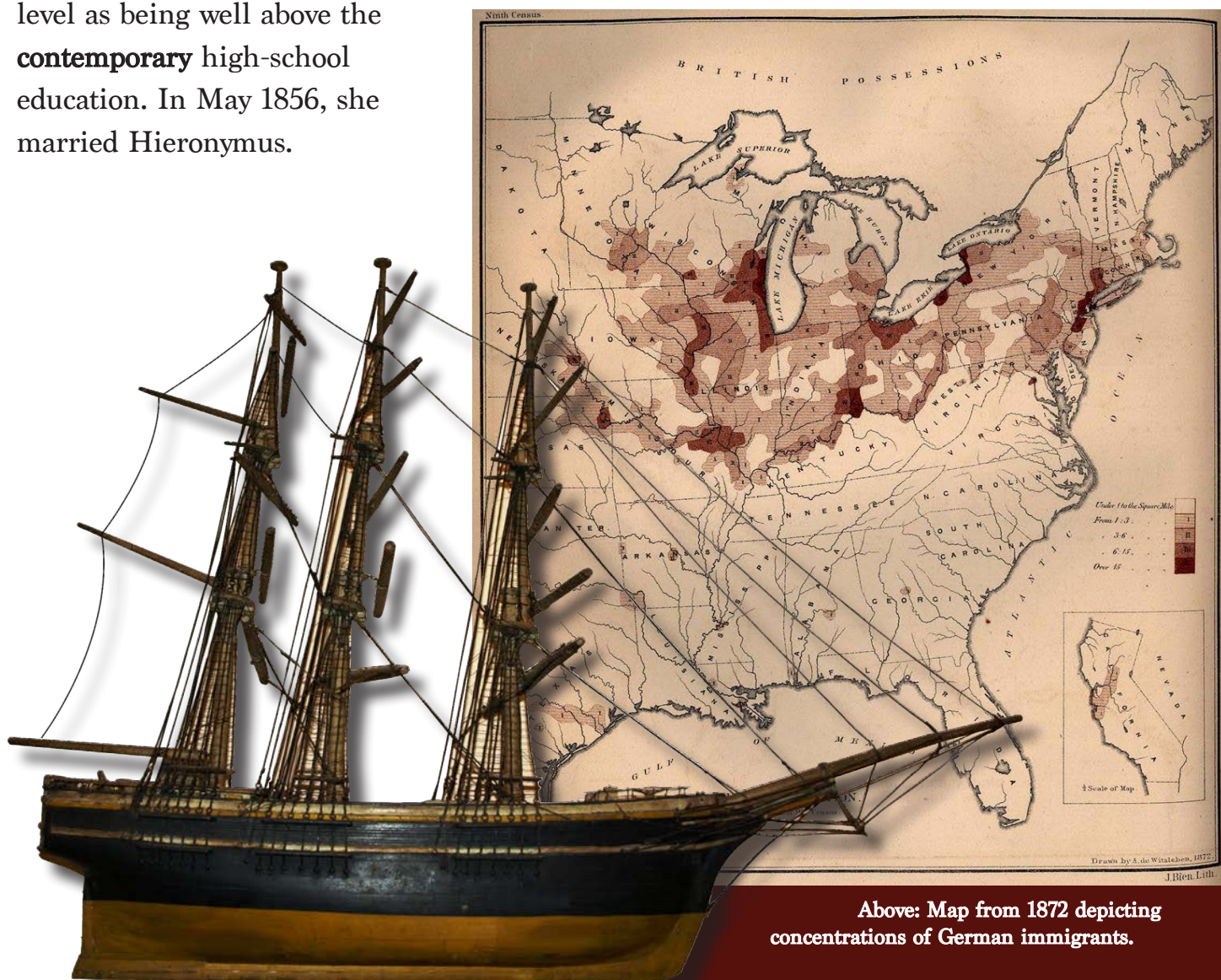
INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

In America, the period known as the Industrial Revolution lasted over 100 years, with the first phase taking place between 1790-1830. Compared to Britain, the Industrial Revolution lasted considerably longer in the US, primarily due to a higher availability of land combined with a smaller labor force outside of agriculture. Advancing the Industrial Revolution and United States immigration went hand-in-hand. The first phase of industry opened the country to immigrants, providing employment opportunity for both skilled and unskilled labor. Without immigrants, America may never have had the workforce necessary to transition into a manufacturing power.

wave of German immigrants to the United States. Some 6 million came to America during that time, and among them was Hieronymus Mueller. After an **apprenticeship** to a **machinist** in Mannheim, Germany, Hieronymus was anxious to join his two older brothers in the US and to distance himself from the rising conflict in Germany. Around 1850, Hieronymus booked passage and sailed out from the Netherlands.



The next few years Hieronymus spent working in machine and gun shops in **Freeport, IL**, utilizing his training as a machinist's apprentice. During this time he met and married **Anna Fredericka Bernhardt**, an immigrant from Minden, Prussia (part of the German empire). Fredericka, as she was known, came to America with her sister in 1850 to meet their father who had already settled in Freeport. In Minden, she was very well educated and proficient in Latin, English, and German. Newspapers in Decatur reference her education level as being well above the **contemporary** high-school education. In May 1856, she married Hieronymus.



Above: Map from 1872 depicting concentrations of German immigrants.

Left: A model ship on display at the museum. This model was built in 1901 by the first engineer Hieronymus hired for his company. Hieronymus would have sailed on a similar ship for 6-8 weeks to reach America.

Freeport was founded by William "Tutty" Baker, another German immigrant. In 1827, a wave of German settlers came through Pennsylvania and settled in the Freeport area, Tutty Baker being among them. Baker was well known for his generosity to travelers, often offering them free meals and lodging. As a tribute to his kindness, the town became known as "Free Port." Freeport was directly linked to Chicago by stagecoach, which helped the town grow immensely. By the early 1840s, it was an established haven for Germans new to America and eager to fulfill their American dreams. Given its proximity to Chicago and familiar German culture, it's no surprise that Hieronymus first elected to settle in Freeport.

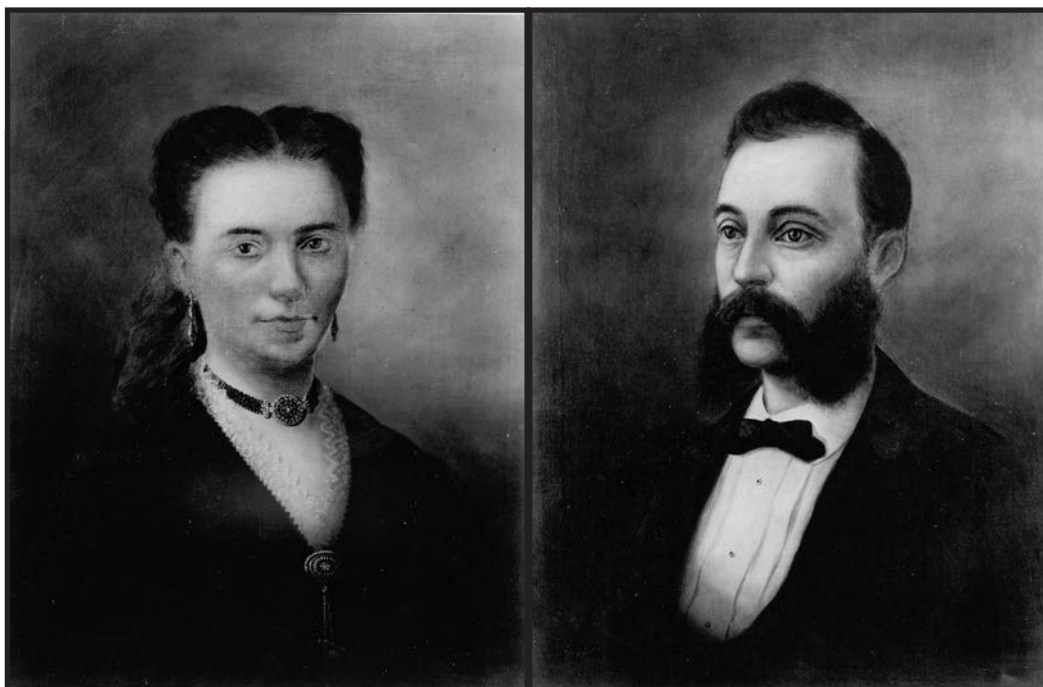
There was an elevated social scene in Minden that Fredericka was **privy** to in her early years. Minden was a fairly large town, particularly as a result of the revolutions in Europe. There were several troops stationed in and around Minden, and dances and dinners were often held to entertain the troops on leave.

Decatur's social scene was still very much in development. In her later years, Fredericka remembered her first dance in Decatur - no one knew how to dance and most of the ladies arrived wearing aprons - a far cry from her Minden days. If Fredericka missed the socialite life, she didn't show it. While she didn't shy away from anyone, Fredericka preferred her industrial life with her husband and sons, and took the opportunity to travel with them to trade conventions. Fredericka was confident in giving her business-related suggestions, especially on the wellbeing of the Mueller employees. Many of the older employees and their families were close, personal friends of hers. When she died in 1911, the Mueller plants closed for several days and hundreds of employees attended the funeral.

After their marriage and shortly after the birth of their first child, Hieronymus and Fredericka moved to Decatur, Illinois.

Hieronimus had begun to grow restless in Freeport and sought out the freedom and opportunity to begin his own business. He was advised by his brothers to find a small town to grow with, and he quickly saw the potential in Decatur, Illinois. Prior to 1850, Decatur was considered to be an agricultural village with a population of approximately 600. This changed dramatically in 1854 with the additions of north/south

and east/west railroad lines that opened up Decatur to new possibilities for industry. By 1860, Decatur flourished into a full city with newspapers, businesses, factories, better homes, and a population of almost 4,000 people. Among that population boom was Hieronymus and his young family, establishing a small gun and machine shop in a two-story building on the 100 block of West Main Street.



Oil portraits of Hieronymus and Fredericka Mueller, c1856.

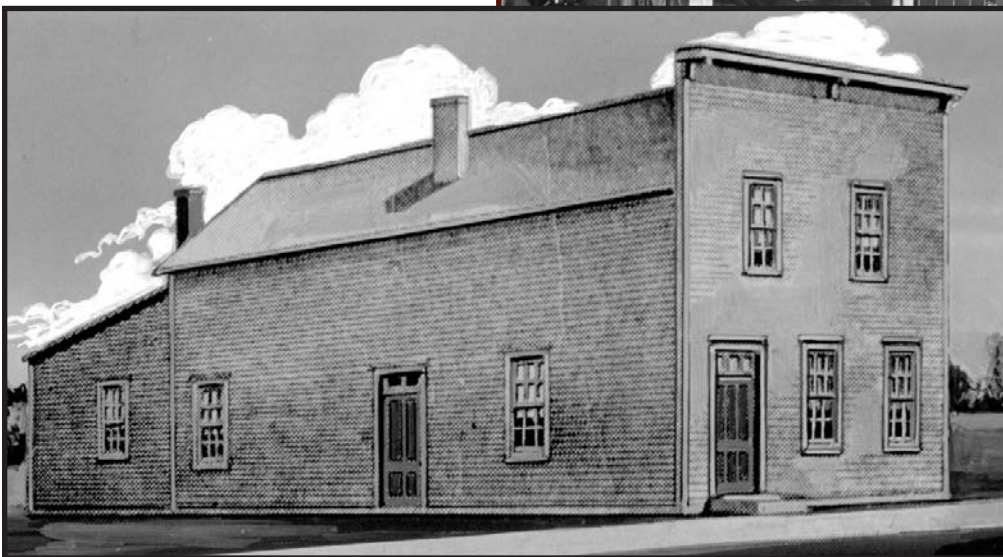


The Pike's Peak Gold Rush, later known as the Colorado Gold Rush, was one of the largest mining booms in United States history. Between 1858-1861, over 100,000 people "rushed" to Pike's Peak in hopes of making their fortune. The miners were often referred to as "Fifty-Niners" after the year 1859, the peak of the rush. A large number of immigrants traveled west in the hopes of securing enough wealth to support their families and start small businesses—immigrants like Hieronymus Mueller. Easy-to-reach gold deposits were almost completely exhausted by 1863, but the area continues to be mined for other precious minerals to this day.

Hieronymus closed his business for a short time in 1858 to take part in the **Pike's Peak Gold Rush**. Meanwhile, Fredericka moved to Chicago to live with Hieronymus' brothers and their families. With the exception of Hieronymus's trip to Pike's Peak, the couple lived in Decatur for the rest of their lives. At a family dinner in 1905, which was covered in the local paper, Fredericka recounted her younger days in Freeport and early Decatur. On the subject of Pike's Peak, she recalled Hieronymus returning to Decatur after eight months with about \$800 worth of gold dust and small nuggets. Inflation calculators estimate \$800 in 1858 is roughly worth \$25,000 of buying-power in 2020. Hieronymus was able to take his Pike's Peak findings and resume a bigger business in Decatur. He took on various projects including the manufacture and repair of guns, locks and fowling pieces, and also the repair of various mechanical devices, such as sewing machines and clocks. By 1859, Hieronymus Mueller needed to move his business to larger quarters on the 200 block of East Main Street, where the business continued to thrive and grow through 1872.



Interior of Hieronymus Mueller's 1899 blacksmith shop on Eldorado Street.

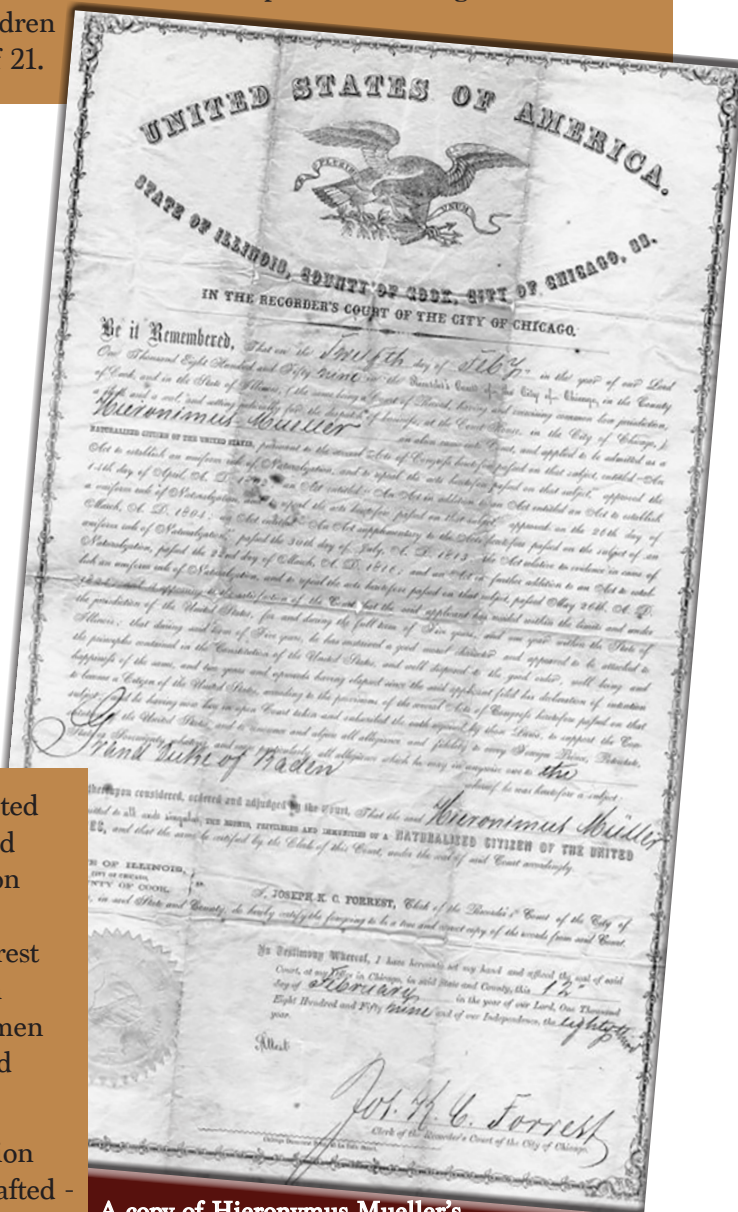


Artist's recreation of Hieronymus Mueller's first 1857 shop on West Main Street.

CITIZENSHIP

The process of applying for American citizenship was considerably different in 1859 than it is today. At the time that Hieronymus Mueller naturalized as a citizen, citizenship was only open to free, white persons. It was required to be a resident in America for 5 years, the individual's intention to become a citizen had to be publicly announced for three years before citizenship, denouncement of any allegiance to a foreign power was required, and the court had to be satisfied that the person was of "good moral character." Citizenship was then extended to any children of a successful applicant if they were below the age of 21.

Hieronimus achieved another major milestone in 1859, receiving his American citizenship. As soon as he came to the United States, Hieronymus committed himself to the American dream, finding what that meant to himself, and helping others in a similar situation. There were obstacles in his way: learning to read and write English, learning and adapting to American culture, and struggling to build a business with limited resources. Hieronymus quickly established his reputation in Decatur with skill, responsibility, and trustworthiness—qualities that continue to describe his company today.



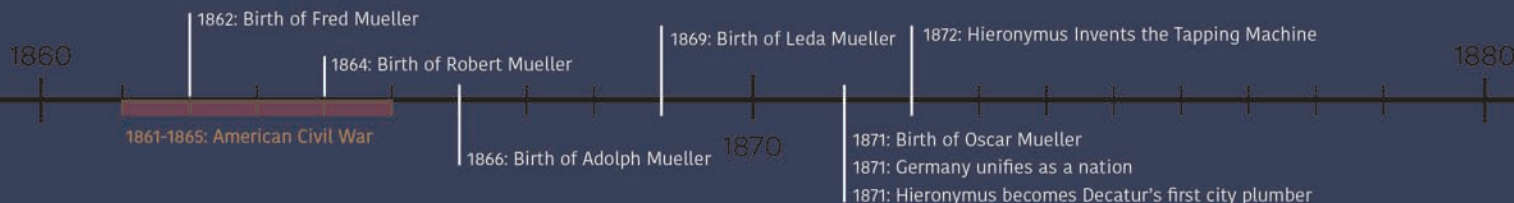
A copy of Hieronymus Mueller's naturalization papers. The certificate states on February 12, 1859, Hieronymus officially became a citizen and renounced any allegiance to "the Grand Duke of Baden." Baden was the state Hieronymus was born in, and it would eventually become part of Germany.

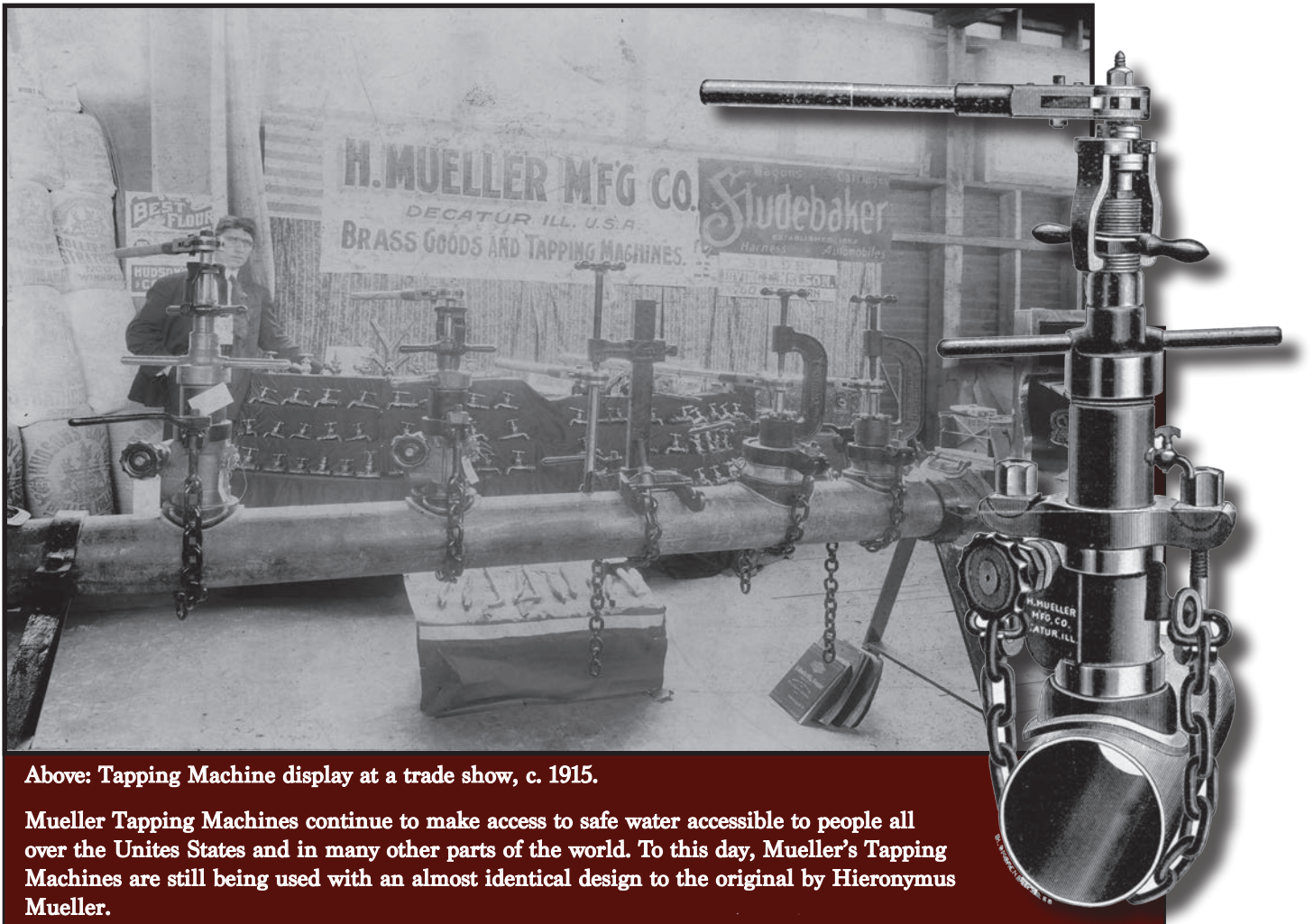
For decades, tension over slavery and state's rights existed between the northern and southern states of the United States, and things came to a head with the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln after his election in 1860. Many southern states believed he would not act in their interest as president, and they **seceded** from the Union to form the Confederacy. Between 1861 and 1865, 2.4 million men fought in the war, resulting in over 620,000 deaths and many more injured.

During the Civil War, 259,000 men served for the Union from the state of Illinois. Of those, 3,538 men were drafted - the rest volunteered for service. Additionally, men could pay a fee of \$300 (roughly \$5,000 in 2020) to avoid the draft.

Hieronimus is listed as a draft-able person in Macon County's records during the Civil War, but there is no record of him being drafted or paying to avoid the draft. Most likely, with a large family and a business, he was never drafted and did not volunteer.

CIVIL WAR



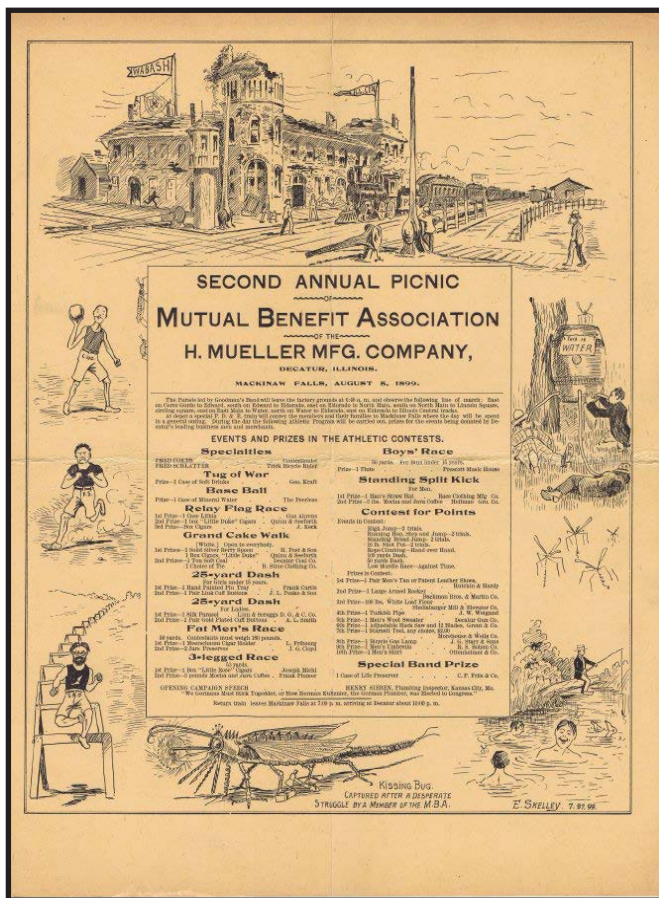


Above: Tapping Machine display at a trade show, c. 1915.

Mueller Tapping Machines continue to make access to safe water accessible to people all over the United States and in many other parts of the world. To this day, Mueller's Tapping Machines are still being used with an almost identical design to the original by Hieronymus Mueller.

The invention that changed the direction of his business forever was the Mueller Tapping Machine. In 1871, the City of Decatur hired Hieronymus as the first city plumber to install a city water system. At first, city water wasn't desirable to a large portion of the population who had access to water for free in the form of pumps and springs on their property. However, as people started to make note of the convenience of city water being pumped into their homes (available quickly and without making trips outside, especially in the winter), more homes wanted to be connected to the water main lines. At that time, water mains were primarily made out of wood reinforced with metal bands, and to add a new pipe connection to the main was a messy ordeal. The water had to be shut off to all the homes in the area, a large pit had to be dug for the workmen, and they had to physically break a hole into the water main. Because of all the water left in the pipe, the pit would quickly fill up with water and make the task of attaching a new pipe more difficult and miserable. Hieronymus Mueller's new invention was specifically designed to address these problems.

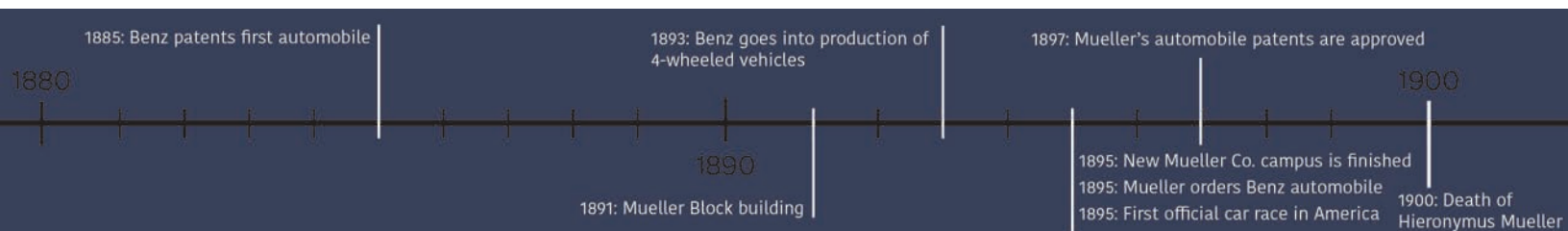
The Tapping Machine, patented in 1872, was designed to attach to the water main, create a seal, drill into the water main while under pressure, and securely place a valve that the new pipe could be attached to. With the Tapping Machine, all of this could be done without shutting off water to the neighboring buildings, and no more than a cup of water would be spilled with each additional 'tap' into the water main, making it easier and safer to add connections to city water.



Hieronymus Mueller and two of his grandsons at the Mutual Benefits Association (MBA) Picnic, 1899.

As Hieronymus transitioned into the plumbing industry, his business started to grow rapidly, and he hired more and more help. In 1891, Mueller had 34 men on the payroll, and that number grew to over 200 in the next six years. Many of Mueller's early employees were also immigrants, navigating their new American life, and he felt a fatherly-responsibility towards them. It was common during this time for family-owned companies to adopt **paternalistic** policies, encouraging living "the American Way" by investing in the wellbeing of their employees inside and outside of work. They motivated and sometimes helped employees become homeowners, promoted savings strategies, and developed recreational programs. The Mueller Company became particularly known for their annual picnics, beginning with the Mutual Benefit Association.

The Mutual Benefit Association (MBA) was a response to unhelpful and sometimes **predatory** life insurance policies prominent in the early 1890s. The MBA was founded in 1897 and included injury, sick, and funeral benefits—all of which were often necessary in a dangerous foundry environment. The program was supported by dues, 10 cents per month, but the introduction of unions began to make the MBA **redundant**. It was disbanded in 1904, but Hieronymus Mueller's sons found ways to continue other paternalistic philosophies after his death in 1900.

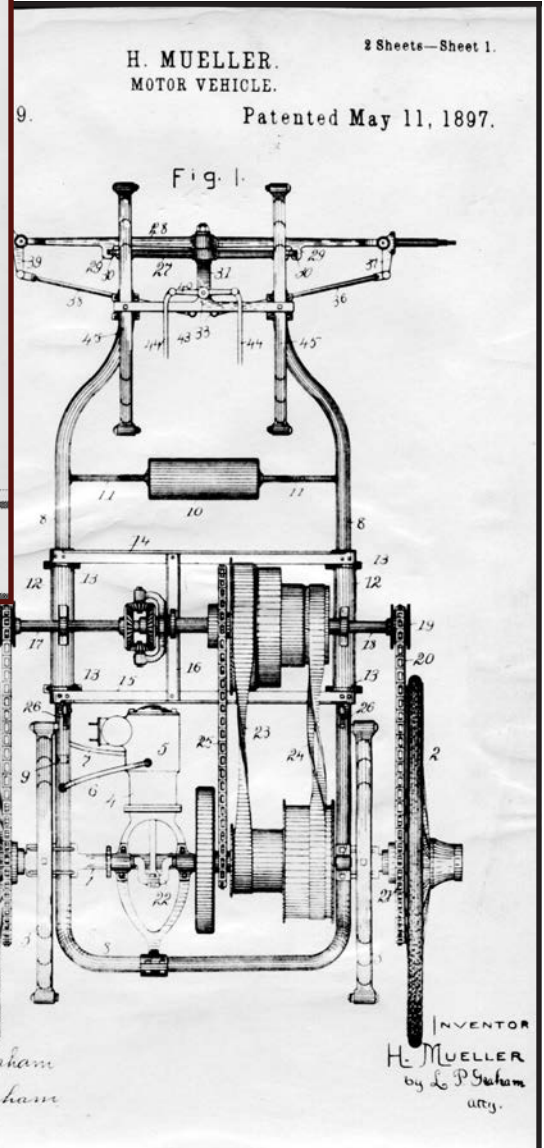




BENZ MOTOR WAGON, IMPORTED FROM GERMANY BY H. MUELLER, 1895. ONE OF THE FEW MOTOR VEHICLES IN AMERICA AT THAT TIME.

Above: Hieronymus Mueller's Benz automobile from Germany, ordered in 1895. Hieronymus quickly began modifying the car, and he made so many improvements it became known as the Mueller-Benz.

Right: A patent drawing from 1897 of one of Hieronymus Mueller's automobile inventions.

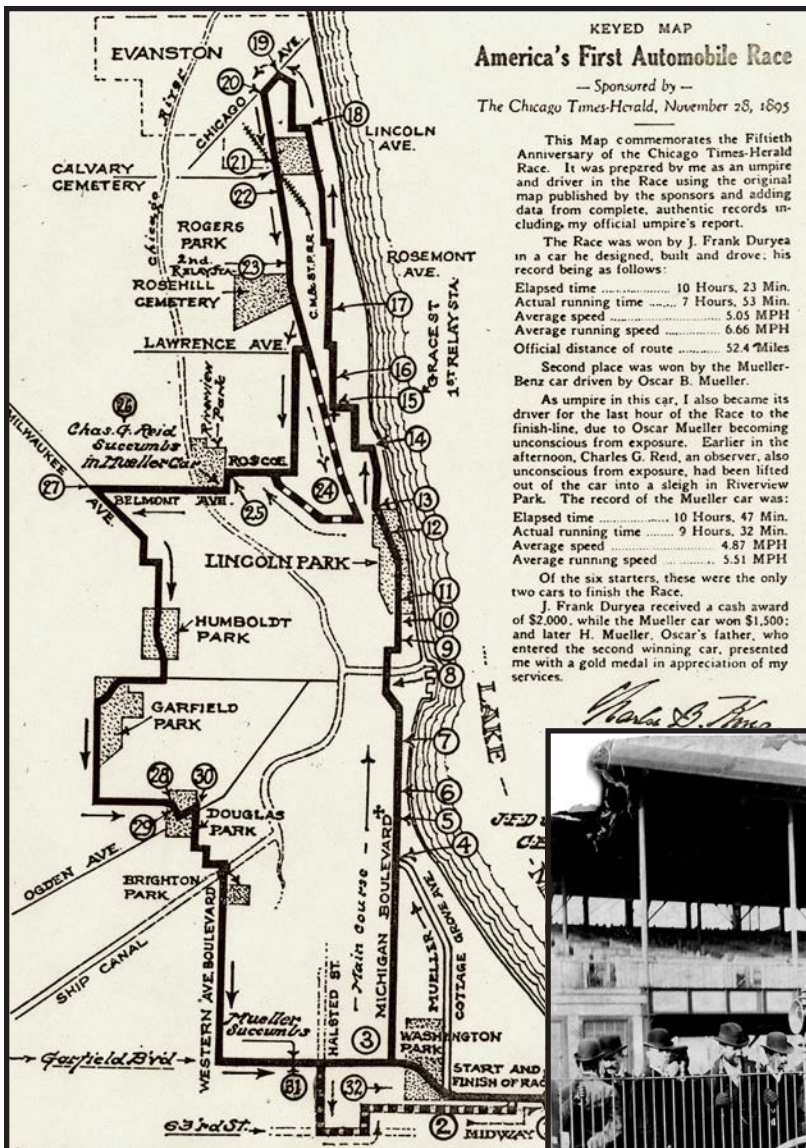


Hieronymus Mueller's inventor's instincts went far beyond plumbing equipment. According to family recollections, Hieronymus always had a strong dislike for horses, so when he heard of a mechanical replacement, he was immediately interested. Between 1880-1890, many people across the world were attempting a motorized, private transportation, making it difficult to pinpoint a sole "first inventor" of the automobile. However, many credit Karl Friedrich Benz with creating the first automobile in 1885 (patented in 1886). Benz founded his company on internal-combustion engines, and he started producing four-wheeled automobiles in 1893. Hieronymus still believed quite strongly in German engineering, so in 1895, he ordered an automobile from Benz.

Always an inventor, Hieronymus was quick to notice potential improvements to his new Benz automobile. He redesigned several parts of the vehicle, adding additional driving gears, a reverse gear, and many modifications to the transmission. Without **infringing** on any of Benz's patents, Hieronymus and his son Oscar received several of their own. Oscar is credited with inventing the first modern spark plug. The almost completely redesigned automobile became known as the Mueller-Benz. Mueller's auto was well-known throughout the state of Illinois, gaining much

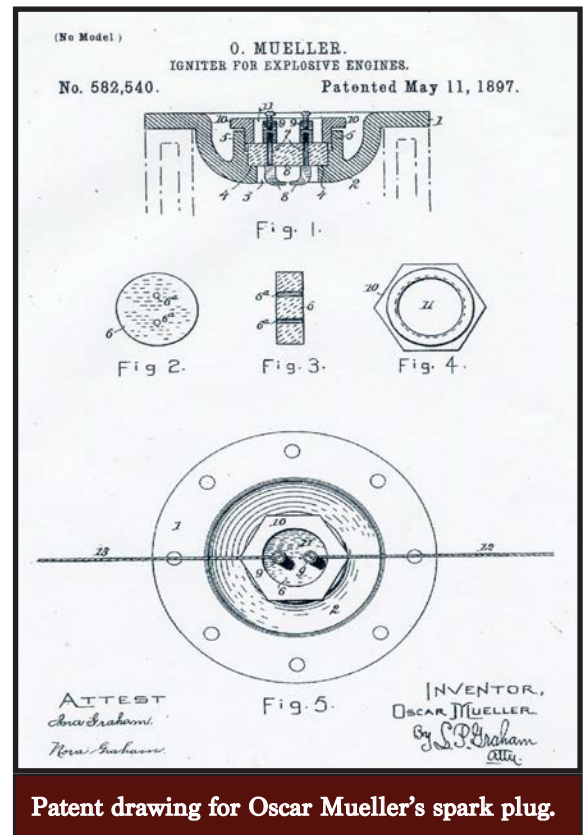
notoriety at the 1895 Illinois State Fair in Springfield. At that time, the trip from Decatur to Springfield was 5 hours, and the drive home took 6 hours.

The Mueller Benz participated in the first two automobile road races ever held in the United States, both held in November 1895, in Chicago. Race Day was originally set for November 2, 1895, however, requests to postpone the race from unprepared contestants came flooding in, and the first automobile race in America was delayed until Thanksgiving Day, November 28th.



Above: A map recreating the race course from 1895. Charles B. King used this map in a 1945 publication of his memories from the race.

Right: The Mueller-Benz at the starting line on race day.



Therefore, November 2nd was designated an "Exhibition Run." The parameters were to drive from Chicago to Waukegan and back (a total of 92 hours) in under 13 hours. The prize was \$500, and the money was to be split by all who completed the course in the allotted time. The Mueller-Benz and the Duryea car



were the only two to show up, and the Duryea car was reportedly forced into a ditch by a careless farmer and too badly damaged to finish the course. The Mueller-Benz, having finished the course in under 13 hours, won the full purse.

The official race took place a few weeks later on Thanksgiving Day in the midst of a snowstorm. Of the six entries to begin the race, the Mueller-Benz came in second, completing the 54-mile course in ten hours and 47 minutes and winning \$1500 dollars. Hieronymus' youngest son, Oscar, was the driver for most of the race until he became ill. Charles B. King, the referee riding in the Mueller auto, completed the race. Only two cars finished the Thanksgiving Day race, the Mueller-Benz and the Duryea car.



CHARLES B. KING

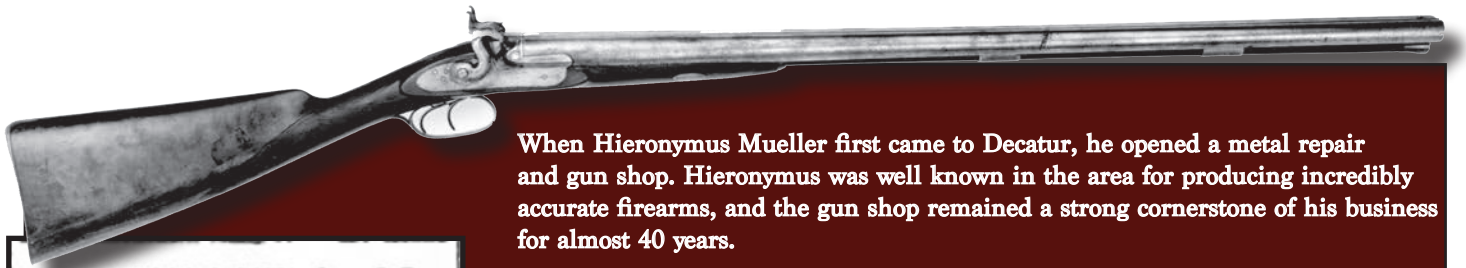
Charles B. King made his own historic contributions to the design of the automobile. Like many inventive minds of the day, including Hieronymus Mueller's, Charles King began to design his own motor vehicles. What appears to be his first attempt in 1893 was a motor tricycle with a traditional bike handle. Later that year, his designs began to take the shape of a more contemporary-looking automobile, some of the first that included a steering wheel and pneumatic tires.

King intended to run his own car for the 1895 race, and was one of the first ten entrants. His car was the only one from Michigan to enter the race, but ultimately, he did not have the car ready in time. King withdrew his entry, but he was asked to serve as an umpire—for the Mueller-Benz. The unfortunate collapse of Oscar Mueller meant that King drove in the race after all.

Charles B. King will forever be remembered by auto enthusiasts for proposing the American Motor League, the world's first automobile association, and for driving the first automobile on the streets of Detroit.



The Mueller-Benz was the first automobile on the streets of Decatur. In this photograph, Hieronymus Mueller is riding with William Jennings Bryan, who was running against William McKinley in the 1896 presidential race, making the Mueller-Benz the first automobile to transport a presidential candidate.



When Hieronymus Mueller first came to Decatur, he opened a metal repair and gun shop. Hieronymus was well known in the area for producing incredibly accurate firearms, and the gun shop remained a strong cornerstone of his business for almost 40 years.

Left: An ad for Hieronymus Mueller's gun shop from the *Decatur Daily Republican*, 1876.

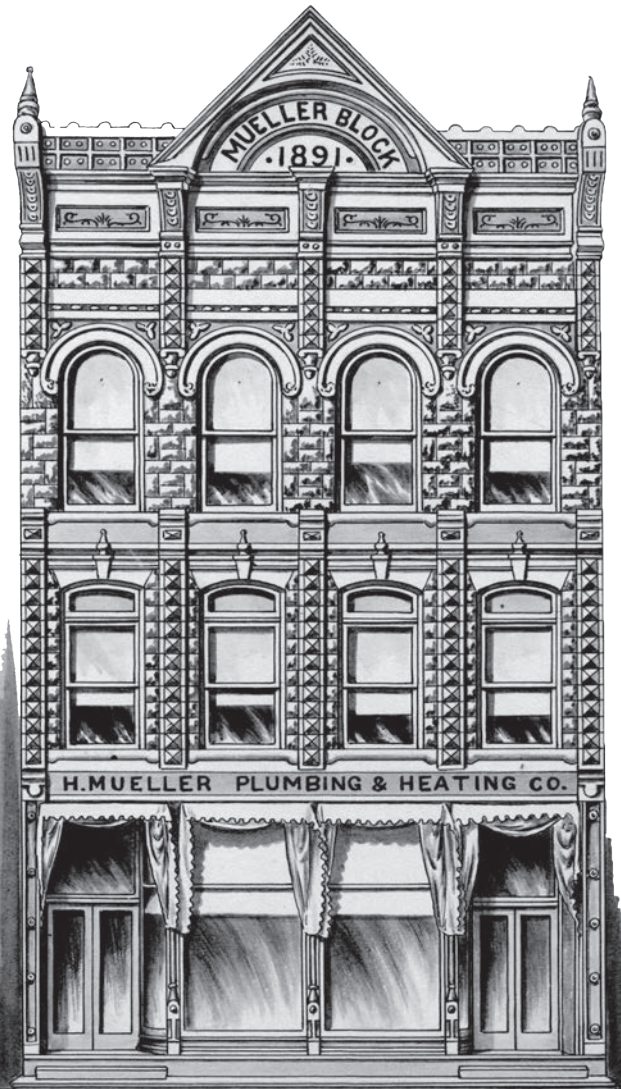
H. MUELLER & CO.,
DEALERS IN
GUNS, PISTOLS.

POWDER, SHOT, Etc.,
Gas, Steam and Water Pipe, Lead
Pipe and Sheet Lead,
**STEAM AND GAS FITTINGS
AND FIXTURES,**
HOSE, BELTING, AND ALL KINDS OF
MECHANICAL SUPPLIES.
Anti-Freezing Cistern, Deep Well, and
Force Pumps put up, and warranted.
Decatur, Oct. 30, 1875—dly

Meanwhile, Hieronymus continued to own his gun and sporting good store and his plumbing service shop in downtown Decatur. In 1891, Mueller built his own building to house the plumbing service shop on North Main Street. Originally known as the Mueller Block Building, Mueller sold the location to the Herald Newspaper in 1896. Today, the historic building still stands and is known as the Herald Block Building. Also in 1896, Hieronymus sold the sporting goods store, as the manufacturing business was taking up more of his time and attention.

From the time they were able to work, the Mueller sons all had some involvement in the development of the Mueller Company, and between 1895-1897, they began to close their own small business ventures to accommodate the expanding manufacturing business. Around this same time, it became necessary to expand the plumbing manufacturing business outside of the confines of downtown. Construction of the new manufacturing campus was completed in 1895, and the company continues to operate on the land to this day.

Artist's illustration of the Herald Block building as it originally appeared. Hieronymus Mueller had the structure built as a sales floor and a customer service area. He kept it in use until 1896. By that point, the manufacturing location on Eldorado Street was operational and took the majority of the Mueller family's time. After 1895, any spare time appears to have gone towards the Mueller-Benz.



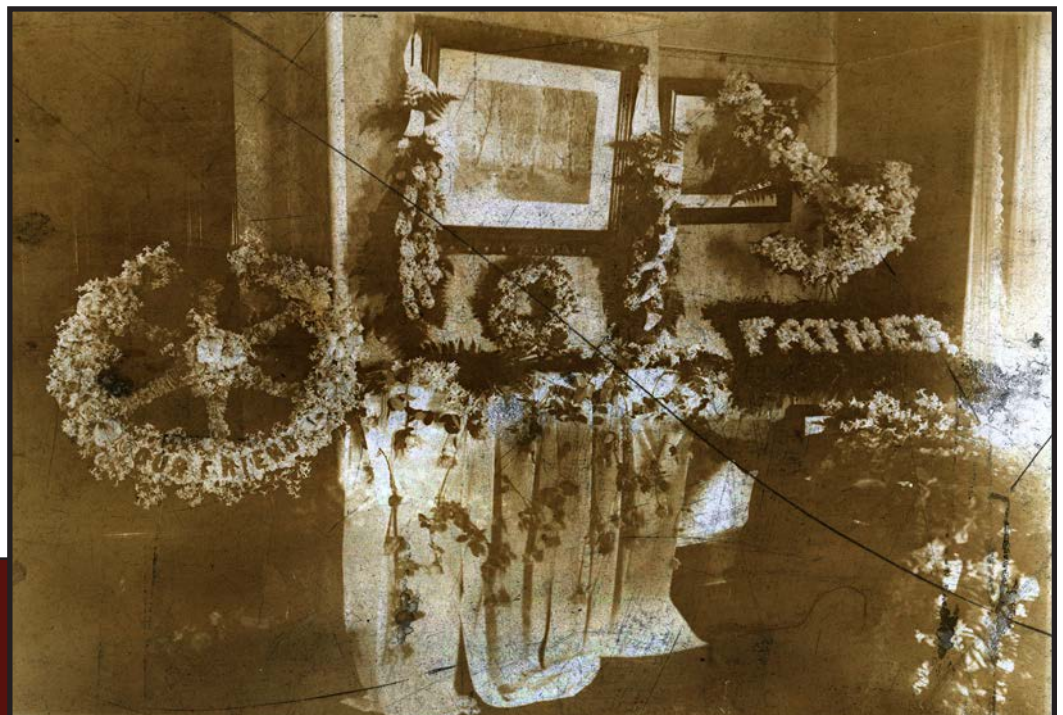


Mueller family portrait, c1885. Front, left to right: Fredericka, Leda and Hieronymus. Back, left to right: Oscar, Adolph, Robert, Fred, Philip, Henry.

Unfortunately, at the height of these successes, the Mueller family experienced a terrible tragedy. In 1900, Hieronymus had three distinct vehicles under construction. He and his sons had plans to form a new corporation for the manufacture of autos by their design and had begun seeking investors for this enterprise. However, these plans were dropped when Hieronymus died as a result of a tragic accident.

Details are not clear, but it appears that Hieronymus departed from his usual caution while experimenting with carburetors in late February 1900. He lit his pipe, igniting the gasoline that had spilled on his clothing. Billy Simpson, a Mueller employee, was nearby and had to throw him to the ground to put out the flames. Two weeks later, Hieronymus Mueller died from his injuries. All plans to undertake the manufacture of automobiles were dropped at this point. Perhaps at the urging of a grieving Fredericka, the Mueller sons sold all the auto parts and auto-related patents.

The death of Hieronymus Mueller brought about the end of the first era of the Mueller Company, but the story has just begun.



Flowers from Hieronymus Mueller's funeral service in 1900.



Glossary

Apprenticeship: a position as an apprentice; an arrangement in which someone learns an art, trade, or job under another

Contemporary: a person or thing living or existing at the same time as another; from the same time

Disillusioned: disappointed in someone or something that one discovers to be less good than one had believed

Infringe: actively break the terms of (a law, agreement, etc.)

Machinist: a person who operates a machine, especially a machine tool

Nationalist: a person who strongly identifies with their own nation and vigorously supports its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations

Paternalistic: a system under which an authority undertakes to supply needs or regulate conduct of those under its control in matters affecting them as individuals as well as in their relations to authority and to each other

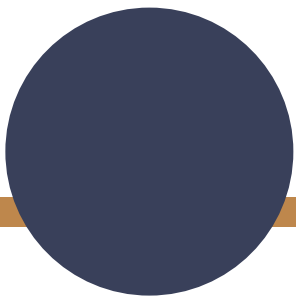
Predatory: seeking to exploit or oppress others

Privy: sharing in the knowledge of

Proficient: competent or skilled in doing or using something

Redundant: not or no longer needed or useful

Secede: withdraw formally from membership of a federal union, an alliance, or a political or religious organization



Select Sources

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A brief history of the Pike’s Peak Goldrush

“Naturalization Process in US: Early History” from socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu

A brief description of early legislation regarding immigration

“Who built the first automobile?” from history.com

Credits Karl Benz with patenting the automobile, in context

“Economic Growth and the Early Industrial Revolution” from ushistory.org

An informative, concise history of the First Industrial Revolution

“Unification of German States” from history.state.gov

Provides greater context to the slow build up to the 1871 unification of Germany, and what Germany as a country meant to the world-stage