

# Yolo County Historical Society



January 25, 2019

## Prez Says

Another year has passed, and I am wondering how many people continue to make new year resolutions? Did you make a New Year's Resolution? I did and I already have that one completed. Some resolutions I have given up on as impossible! Never will those be completed.

We have not had a newsletter in a while. The entire end of the year was focused on the World War I Commemoration Parade. It was a lot of work, but in the end, the parade turned out to be a success.

There are many people to thank: Steve Venables, Mary Aulman, Fred Bailard, City of Woodland, The Train Depot, and all the people who participated.

And of course, we couldn't have done it without the financial support of our many supporters. We are still hearing complements and "Thank You."

from many of the people who saw the parade. It was a 'small town' parade with home-made floats. Many found it to be delightful. I've been asked if we are going to do it again. I said "yes, in another 100 years." Any volunteers?

This newsletter is devoted to the parade. Enjoy!  
As always, History Rules!

Kathy Harryman

## **A Huge "Thank You" to the following financial supporters: Few Society Funds Were Used!**

Steve and Lydia Venables, Fred Bailard, John & Kathy Harryman, Dennis Dingemans & Robin Dattel, Don & Pat Campbell, Yolo County Historical Museum, Kiwanis Club of Woodland, Charles Claudia Owens, Tom & Meg Stallard, Merrily DuPree, Mark & Mary Aulman, Ryan Baum & Alice Wong, Carol Danke, Jesse Ortiz, Jr., Bob & Judy Simas, L & S Printing, Ramon & Karen, Carol Rose, Marjorie Pearce, & Walmart Grocery.



*Enthusiasts Arrived in Authentic Nurse Garb*



*Some of the 300 spectators and 30+ participants gather.*

# WORLD WAR I 100TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION PARADE NOVEMBER 10, 2018



## **New Places in a New Century:**

### **Pauline Schmeiser's Letters**

#### **Home from**

#### **Switzerland and Germany**

**Merrily DuPree**

**Hattie Weber Museum of  
Davis**

*I've been a volunteer at the Hattie Weber Museum since my retirement seven years ago from the University of Nevada, Reno, where I was a member of the English faculty. Like Pauline Schmeiser, I'm an American who has lived between German and American cultures. As a young girl, I spent three years with my family in Bayreuth, Germany, as part of the American occupation. Several years later, we returned to Bavaria, this time to Nurnberg, where we lived for two years, and I graduated from Nurnberg American High School. When I first read Pauline's letters, I was highly impressed by her writing talent, and her ability to express the tensions experienced by a first-generation American while visiting the country from which both her parents had immigrated. She was a complex mixture of farmer and "cultured" Californian, who challenges simple definitions of the Western Woman..*

### ***Part One: A Talented Yolo Resident Justifies Great Expectations***

On April 20 of 1900, Pauline Schmeiser, a twenty-six year-old woman who lived with her parents and four of her siblings on a farm just to the west of present-day Davis, California, with her aunt and uncle Charlotte and Frank Ruhstaller, and their teenage daughter, Minnie, sailed from New York to England, on a five-month tour of England, France, Germany, and Switzerland. Although several years older than Minnie, Pauline had been invited to be her companion on the trip, which would introduce

the three women to homelands and relatives their parents (in Minnie's case, a parent and grandparents) had left behind when they emigrated to the United States in the 50s and 70s. As a child, Charlotte had traveled from Wanfried, Germany, in the state of Hessen, with her parents, Jacob and Catherine Oeste, and siblings John, Sophie (Pauline's mother), David, and William, first to Milwaukee and six years later to rural Yolo County, near the newly established town of Davisville. About the same time, Pauline's father, Gottfried Schmeiser, had immigrated from the German village of Jagsthausen, in Baden-Wurttemberg, to Philadelphia. Then In 1857, he became part of the swelling stream of migration to California, where he too settled in Yolo County. Charlotte's husband, the owner of the successful Ruhstaller Brewery in Sacramento, was looking forward to visiting his family in Einsiedeln, Switzerland for the first time since his departure more than twenty years earlier. It seems likely that Pauline was given the extraordinary opportunity of traveling with her relatives because of her reliability, her warm relationship with Minnie, and perhaps most of all, her dedication to what the nineteenth century called "culture": art, architecture, history and literature. Her literary talent, especially, had been recognized from the time she had been a student at Winters High School, where she composed poems for graduations and other occasions. As an adult, she had published both poetry and short fiction in area newspapers. Frank and Charlotte would have seen her as uniquely prepared to appreciate her European experiences, and they probably hoped that Minnie would be influenced by her enthusiasm. However, when she accepted their invitation, Pauline didn't know she would be more than a guest and a tourist. Hearing of her travel plans, the Winters *Express* asked her to write a series of articles, and the Davis *Enterprise*, too, wanted to publish something about the trip. Unexpectedly, the farmer's daughter and amateur writer was thrust into the role of professional journalist. Between May 15, when she and the Ruhstallers arrived in England, and September 22, when they sailed from France for New York, ten of her articles appeared in the *Express* and two in the *Enterprise*.

Pauline's published travel writing is carefully crafted, filled with vivid details and impressions of the cultures she encountered. Recently, more of her writing from the European trip has been uncovered, in two long letters and

fragments of several others sent to her family. Fair Oaks resident Carole Brewer, who is related to the Schmeisers through an aunt's marriage to Pauline's son Virgil, and her husband, Jan Brewer, donated these along with many other items associated with the family to the Hattie Weber Museum in 2015. The letters are fascinating because they show a different Pauline from the author of the formal articles, where she is necessarily concerned with satisfying the expectations of her community and her editors. In contrast, her letters home reveal a nineteenth-century woman completely at ease, free to dwell on her own interests, express her personal opinions (even liberal political ones), and chat about the latest developments in the lives of her Yolo County friends. Because of space limitations, I'll be discussing only the two complete letters here. Writing at top speed, Pauline used many unconventional abbreviations and punctuation (dashes frequently replace periods) and occasionally misspells words (in both German and English). For the most part, I've transcribed the letters as written, making corrections only when necessary for clarity.

## ***Part Two: An Enthusiast For Swiss Nature, Culture, Agriculture, Industry.***

The first letter, addressed to "Papa, Mama, and all" and dated June 14, is written on stationery of the Churte du Rhin [Falls of the Rhine] Hotel, in Neuhausen, Switzerland. It enthusiastically describes Pauline's most-recent experiences in her uncle's homeland. She gives most space to two of her personal passions: agriculture, in which she was immersed as a member of a farm family, and beautiful natural scenes, which she saw through the lens of 19<sup>th</sup>-century romantic literature. She begins by remembering that those at home are busy with the harvest, which she surprisingly prefers to traveling, "where every night we sleep in a different place, and are out late, and consequently get up late—It is really tiresome; my head has ached considerable, but I think in consequence of the irregular hours sleep and the men looking through the car-windows trying to see all that is to be seen." Their group had visited a cheese factory, "and we were shown all through it; saw the cheese in all stages, from the time it leaves the milk bucket until

the cheese is ready for the marketing." Here also "75 white spotless pigs, which are fed on the whey mixed with grains of flour, are kept in a house, and I assure you, had I not seen it with my own eyes I never could believe how cleanly they are kept, and how pigs even can be trained." Perhaps because the women of the Oeste and Schmeiser families were all skilled needlewomen, the group also toured an "embroidery manufactory," which shipped most of its machine-produced work to the United States, "and a duty of 66 percent is imposed on it making it, of course, very expensive by the time it reaches far distant California." Of course, they had driven to the countryside, where Pauline compared Swiss farming practices with those of California: "They raise a great deal of hay here—and use, to a great extent mowers of the Deere and McCormack make, they have machines to scatter or turn the hay but much of it is yet done with the scythe and turned by hand by women & children." She reveals a farmer's interest in the variety of plants that make up the hay when she reports, "On a space a yard square can be counted from 12 to 15 different weeds, grasses and flowers. . . . The hay is cut one day in the morning, put in Shocks in the eve—Strewn and scattered next morning and hauled up the same day; yet it smells very sweet."

For Pauline and the Ruhstallers, Europe had a vast number of California connections. Not only were they meeting their own relatives and those of California friends, but also California acquaintances who had returned to Europe. For example, while in Switzerland they visited the Gimpsches, whom they had known as the owners of the well-known Pioneer Bakery in Sacramento. The couple had returned to their native land after selling the business to a Mr. Rohr. Pauline saw Germany for the first time when Mr. Gimpsch took the party to Constance [today's Konstanz], where they boarded a steamer for a short ride up the Rhine River. Overwhelmed by its beauty, she reported, "On either side are forests—again extensive vineyards while the river itself is as clear, and of a beautiful green tinge—not a ripple stirred." Disembarking at Shaffhausen, they took a bus to the Churte du Rhin Hotel, whose verandas overlooked the famous Falls of the Rhine.

Not long after arriving at the hotel, she and one of her relatives (probably Minnie) arranged to be rowed out to the falls, an experience Pauline pronounced "very thrilling but well worth the undertaking." She couldn't resist bragging that "the boat men said we were remarkably cool—for only

about 10 out of a hundred persons have the courage to go out there.” From 3 o'clock one day, all the next day, till 9 o'clock the following day we spent there.” And the first night, “From the verandas, it was delightful to watch the falls—while the silver moon shone down upon the foaming, surging waters.” The scene affected her even more intensely than her first sight of the Rhine.

Eventually they did, however, break away for a day-long tour of a model farm: “We crossed through [a] pretty forest—and passed many fields of rye and grain, also many fields of hay—here we saw the pretty red poppies, and the corn flowers. We could not resist the temptation, so we had the driver stop—while we plucked a bouquet of them. Wish mama and papa could have been here to see and help pick, for they know how pretty they look—“

But then it had been time to move on to Germany. In fact, her descriptions of Switzerland were written in Altingen, their first stop after crossing the Swiss border, which disappointed her by being “a very old and quite shabby looking village.” Rather than expressing excitement at the prospect of seeing her parents’ childhood homes or the major cities of Stuttgart and Munich, she closes with thoughts of the United States, mentioning that “We meet people nearly every day when traveling who are Americans, and it does one good to hear English spoken,” and then confides that she had “dreamed of all [her family] last night again.”

### ***Part Three: Germany’s Old And New—Not Every (Modern) Prospect Pleases.***

The second letter, to her sister Louise, was sent from her mother’s village, Wanfried, and dated July 7, three weeks after the previous one. Here, her tone is often somber, and she is much more ambivalent about what she is seeing than she was in Switzerland. She often seems to be struggling between her loyalty to her parents’ homeland and her frequent disappointments with modern Germany, for which she was unprepared. She begins by reporting that she and Minnie are now not traveling with Tanta [her spelling of “Tante,” German for aunt] and Uncle”; when the group reached Cassel [today spelled Kassel], Frank and Charlotte had gone on to Dresden, while the young women were met by relatives Tanta Schmidt and

Hedwig, who took them to their hotel, “a real nice pleasant place, in the city.”

Backtracking a bit, she describes her enjoyment of the group’s recent trip to Southern Germany, especially Oberammergau, where they had seen the famous Passion Play, based on the story of the crucifixion, and nearby Chimesee [German spelling is Chiemsee], site of the castle of the mad Ludwig II: “The interior of this castle is the most beautiful in the World it really seems more like a dream than reality—words cannot describe it surely.” But she had been repulsed by Munich, complaining that “[there] one sees little outside of Beer halls—everybody there drinks beer until I really don’t see what they [page torn]. Women as well as children drink from early morning until late at night.” She was also startled to observe that women worked as laborers: “Here too the women are streetsweepers and I saw a building in course of construction where all the hod carriers and mortar miners were women.” “I really would not like [to live] in that place for I dislike it very much.” Although many of Pauline’s views seem strikingly modern, like most nineteenth-century American women, she supported a gender-based division of labor.

However, she was finding Cassel a pleasing contrast to Munich, perhaps because its energetic commitment to development reminded her of California. As she was driven around the prosperous city, she counted “in course of construction not less than 24 fine large brick structures. [No female workers are mentioned.] She was charmed by attractive houses with neat yards and gardens, set back from tree-lined streets, “the most homelike inviting place—with the exception of Lucerne—that we have thus far visited.” And she encountered further delights in an art gallery and a beautiful park, Wilhelms Hoe [German spelling is Hohe], which rises above the city.

She seems overwhelmed by homesickness, though, when she describes spending a “rainy and cold 4<sup>th</sup> of July” in Wilhelms Hohe. The “absence of all Red White and Blue” was depressing, as was the recent news of a terrible New York City fire that had taken many lives. Furthermore, learning about it through the German newspapers, which she could not fully understand, was tremendously frustrating: “Could I only sit for a day and have a pile of American papers describing the various chief happenings and topics I would be happy.”



She then goes on to answer questions from Louise about European opinions of the ongoing Boer War, in South Africa, a situation in which they both were interested: “Every one has the greatest sympathy for the Boers, France, Germany, and Switzerland—but the people are inclined to think America should have aided the Boers in their struggle for independence.” Germans, however, had now moved on to the recent murder of their minister in China, wanting to “fight to the Bitter end avenging the death.” At this point, however, Pauline reveals her independent thinking by expressing a very different opinion, one that undoubtedly would have met with disapproval if it had appeared in one of her *Winters Express* articles. “For every missionary that loses [her misspelling] his or her life in a foreign land, I have no sympathy—and do not think that any country should declare war, because of the death or murder of their missionaries in those lands. The Chinese are content with their religion—the Japanese with theirs Etc—and what would we say if China or Japan missionaries would come to America and try and convert us—try and convince us that their religion not ours was the proper one—Would we not too try to drive them off or lock them up—or do rasher things even than that?”

The letter’s final section is devoted to responding to the news (including a piece of gossip) of their Yolo County friends Louise had included in her last letter, and also to giving her impressions of the German relatives she had recently met, producing an eerie sense of the Schmeisers’ existence between Germany and the United States: “I was exceedingly sorry to hear of the accident that befell George Martin—Poor Woman—I presume she is prostrate for I think she likes Geo [ 19<sup>th</sup>-century abbreviation of George] so much and the loss of an arm is certainly most deplorable. . . I expected that Frank Russell, recently returned from the Spanish-American War] and Ester would be married soon [This didn’t happen!]. . . I went to the Gerlachs yesterday—they are both very refined men—and both assume a young appearance, they have a house keeper now and are well satisfied with her. Sophia Mainz is a very sweet and gentle girl—as is also a niece of hers who is visiting her. The nice [her misspelling] is Mathilda Mainz’s stepdaughter’s child. Toni Schmidt came home yesterday July 8<sup>th</sup>. She is a very jolly girl—full of

life and animation—Heinrich came with her—He is a very nice looking young man—One would not know him by looking at his picture. He goes back to Frankfort tomorrow—Toni has 2 weeks vacation—All the relatives here seem to be doing real well—they all live real nicely—Only Mama they all say if you were only there. How nice it would be.



**Yolo County Historical Society**  
**P O Box 1447**  
**Woodland, CA 95776**

**Address Service Requested**

**Dated Material**

**Vision Statement** *The Yolo County Historical Society strives to preserve, protect and acknowledge the diverse history of Yolo County through education, communication and advocacy*