

## Stephen Luecke

Nominated by Jennifer Witzel

Stephen Luecke was one of the legends of Marshfield's early days. Stephen lived a somewhat colorful and wild life as a saloon keeper both in Milwaukee and later in Marshfield. His name was mentioned frequently in the Marshfield newspapers throughout his life. He died suddenly at the age of 55 but he seems to have lived quite a full life in those years.

Stephen Luecke was born 20 June 1842 in Sdkirchen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany and baptized at Sankt Pankratius Catholic Church. His parents were Heinrich Luecke and Maria Franciska Helle and he was one of at least 8 children born to this couple. For reasons unknown, Stephen left Germany and made his way to Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Stephen married Marie Weigel on 21 February 1880 in Milwaukee. Marie had arrived in the US in May of 1877 with her brother Paul. The Luecke's lived in Milwaukee until about 1881 during which time they had a daughter Maria (April 1880) and hosted Marie's brother Herman Weigel as he sought a profession in cabinet making. The Luecke's first daughter died in July of 1880 and Herman Weigel moved to Marshfield to be near his brothers and work at the Upham furniture plant.

By the birth of the Luecke's second daughter, Maria Elizabeth, in January 1882, the couple was living in Marshfield. Stephen Luecke set up a saloon on what was the dirt road that would eventually become Central Avenue. By all accounts, the saloon was a booming business for the Lueckes and they had three more children: Paul, Herman, and Steven Jr.

Luecke's saloon was destroyed by the devastating fire in Marshfield on 27 June 1887 along with the majority of the city. Stephen famously buried as much of his supply of liquor as he could as the fire began to spread. Within an hour after the fire was out he set up a make shift tent as a stand and sold what he could salvage of his stock. He hung a sign advertising that 500 men were wanted to "unload schooners" outside his stand as a joke, a "schooner" was slang for a mug of beer.

Rebuilding Marshfield commenced within days and Stephen Luecke was the first to occupy his new brick building at 325 S Central Avenue after the fire. His saloon was on the east side of Central Avenue between 3rd and 4th streets. Stephen was mentioned as having occasional "disagreements" with his clientele and was once seen chasing a man down the street with a gun. In 1890, after Luecke got into some trouble over selling liquor to minors and constructing an ice house in the fire limits of Marshfield, it appears that he slowly began to phase out of the saloon business and into being a landlord. He constructed a new brick building in the space next to his saloon for more businesses. His building had space to be rented for a hardware



store, a shoe store, a restaurant, and enough room for the family to live above the bar and income from his tenants seemed to provide well for the Luecke family.

Stephen seems to have reinvented himself from bar keep into aspiring local politician around this time. When St. John's Catholic Church was building a new church in 1892-1893, Stephen Luecke donated money to purchase one of the stained glass windows that grace the East side of the sanctuary. At the time, the cost was between \$1225 and \$1500 per window. Stephen ran for alderman in his district in 1892 and lost.

In May 1894 Marie Weigel Luecke died of pneumonia leaving Stephen with 4 young children to raise. Stephen remarried to Catherine Mullenbach in September 1894 and rented out his saloon property to Peter Weber. Stephen kept running for alderman and finally won a seat for the 6th Ward in Marshfield in 1896. Stephen and Catherine would have a son, Ralph, in July of 1896.

Sadly, Stephen was killed in a freak wagon accident in October 1897. The wagon he was driving with his brother-in-law Balthazar Serwe overturned when the horse got spooked. Stephen died quickly from a severe head injury and Mr. Serwe was seriously injured but survived.

Stephen was bigger than life and he was an early pioneer of our city. He saw Marshfield destroyed and was here to help rebuild. He contributed to the building of St John's Catholic Church and he served our city as alderman of the sixth ward until his untimely death.