

## A Dwelling House Inscription

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An observant traveler in Europe, especially in its rural districts, may occasionally have paused in a stroll to decipher a quaint and pleasing inscription in the gable or over the door of a dwelling house; or, it may have been on a shield or a tablet underneath a little niche or canopy sheltering a statue of the Madonna or of a Saint.

As to contents, these inscriptions, at times, are indicative of the hospitable spirit, but more frequently of the deep religious faith of those who had them placed. As to form, they are in popular verse, at times taking liberty with prosody as well as with grammar and with spelling.

Aside from the cases here to be reported, the writer has not met with such inscriptions in our country. He does not have in mind the inscriptions on public buildings, nor commemorative tablets on historic buildings, nor the "Dine-Wine-Dance" variety of places of amusement; nor is he thinking of the slogans of commercial establishments, such as the possibly misleading advertising boast of a hardware store—"If you're looking for a nut, we have it." Still less is the writer here concerned with the abuse of a Scripture text that he saw somewhere painted in large letters on a barn or stable of a large sheep farm. The owner had used for himself the words with which Jesus, speaking figuratively, made St. Peter the Shepherd of His Church, "Feed my sheep." The stock-raiser responsible for putting these sacred words on his stable may not have intended any irreverence, but someone, pointing to this inscription when driving past on the highway, remarked to the writer, "It is almost blasphemous." The only inscriptions here to be dealt with are those on dwelling houses.

The writer has found two such inscriptions in southern Indiana. Of these, the second only is to be dealt with in detail both by reason of its unique character and because of its value for local history.

In the northeastern corner of Spencer County, Indiana, a farmer has painted on the outside of the door the Latin words, *Ora et Labora* (Pray and Work). These words, the motto of the monks of St. Benedict, which are expressive of a well balanced Christian life, are very appropriately placed

on or in any home or workshop. This farmer became acquainted with that motto probably through his contact with the nearby Benedictine Abbey at St. Meinrad.

In the southeastern corner of Dubois County, Indiana, in section thirty-five of township three south, range four west, about two miles east of the interesting town of Ferdinand, which in the spring of 1940 celebrated the hundredth anniversary of its foundation, there is a farm now owned by Raymond Werne. On this farm there stands an old stone house in which Mr. Werne and his family live. This house, about forty by twenty-six feet, has two stories and a two-story porch along its whole front; the frame lean-to along its whole rear is a later addition. The walls of the house are of sandstone, partly picked up in the fields and small creeks, partly quarried from the outcrop of layers of excellent building and ornamental sandstone found all through that country. Over the window on the west side is a lintel with a smoothed face four feet long and eleven inches high. On the full length and height of this lintel, there is chiseled a German inscription of four lines, though the letters are of the English cursive type.<sup>1</sup> The capital letters are three inches high; the small letters are one inch and three quarters. Linguistically and orthographically, the inscription is deficient in several ways, as is apparent from the following faithful reproduction, but it breathes an edifying religious spirit and a socially noble relationship between employers and employees:

*Bauher<sup>2</sup> Johan Gerht Eversmann und die Vrau Geboren  
Tepe Ruft Gott in allen Nöten an er wird Gewis bei  
euch ston er hilft ein ieder aus der noth wer nach seinen  
willen tuth und wo friede ist da ist Gott M Heembrok  
S. Kwante 7 tag 8m 1858*

A faithful translation of this inscription, but avoiding linguistic mistakes and observing a more appropriate apportioning as to lines (In the original, the latter could not be done for lack of space) gives us the following:

<sup>1</sup>The fact, by the way, that this type of lettering could be employed and that after eighty-three years the inscription still be found in a good state of preservation is indicative of the excellent quality of the sandstone of the near-by quarries, which at present are exploited commercially.

<sup>2</sup>*Bauherr.*

Builder John Gehrt Eversmann and wife, born Tepe.  
 Call ye on God in all your life,  
 He'll be your helper in the strife;  
 Seek but His will in all your needs,  
 And He'll assist you in your needs.  
 And God dwells in a home of peace.

M Heembrok, S Kwante. 7th day, 8th month, 1858.

As to the persons concerned in this inscription, the census<sup>3</sup> of the parish of Ferdinand taken in the 'fifties of the last century by the Reverend Ulrich Christen, O.S.B., pastor of this Catholic community, has this record of the man and his wife who had the building erected:

Born	Year	Member of Family	Descent	Married
	1812	Eversmann, Joh. Gerhard	Hannover	Cincinnati
	1810	Töppe, Anna Maria	Alshausen	1845. Nov. 1.

Also three children born to them are recorded. "Gehrt" is the popular "for short" in these parts for Gerhard. The same census records a Henry Heembrok. It is to be noted expressly that the letter "M" which in the inscription precedes his family name is not the initial of his Christian name but of his trade. A very old man at Ferdinand, of whom the writer inquired about Henry Heembrok's trade, answered at once that Henry was "*ein Maurer*" (a Mason). Similarly the "S" before Kwante (*Quante*) is the initial letter of "*Schreiner*" (carpenter). Franz Quante is still remembered as a good carpenter. Thus were perpetuated not only the names of those who with their money had the house erected, but also of those who contributed the skilled work of their honorable trades. Employers and employees may well meet fraternally on the common grounds of the noble sentiments expressed in the verses joining the two, proprietors and hand-craftsmen, in this inscription.

An uncritical glance at the number "5" in "1858" has resulted repeatedly in the reading of this figure as "3", but a careful examination reveals beyond doubt that it is a "5" and that the dating on this inscription is August 7, 1858. The reading "1838" is excluded also upon historical data. No German-American settled in or around the location of the Eversmann place prior to 1840.<sup>4</sup> According to the rec-

<sup>3</sup> II Quarter, 97.

<sup>4</sup> Albert Kleber, *Ferdinand, Indiana, 1840-1940: A Bit of Cultural History* (Ferdinand, 1940), 32.

ords of the United States Land Office, John G. Eversmann entered the land upon which he later built his stone house only on December 1, 1841. As appears from the parish record quoted above, John G. Eversmann married Anna Töppe only in 1845; hence he and his "wife" could not have built the house in 1838.

It is to be hoped that lovers of history who know of similar inscriptions, be these in Indiana or in other states, will receive an incentive from this article to report them, so that eventually there shall be both a collection of them and a literature concerning them.