THE PROVENANCE OF A CHAIR IN WHICH CARL SCHURZ SAT

A Story of History and Genealogy

Karl H. Muench, M.D.

**Connecting with a fourth cousin enriches, educates, and entertains.**

On his mother’s side Alexander “Sandy” Morehouse is a great-great-grandson of George Muench (1801-1879) of Augusta, Missouri and a great-grandson of Colonel Francis Lackner (1840-1928), a Union hero who was wounded at Gettysburg after serving on the staff of General Carl Schurz (1829-1906). On his father’s side Sandy is a great-great-grandson of Dolly Sumner Lunt Burge (1817-1891). Sandy lives at Burge ([www.burgeclub.com](http://www.burgeclub.com)), an historic 1000-acre farm in eastern Newton County, Georgia.

Burge survived General William Tecumseh Sherman’s March to the Sea during the Civil War. Dolly documented that survival in her book, *A Woman’s Wartime Journal, An Account of Sherman’s Devastation of a Southern Plantation*. She was the widowed owner living there in 1864 with her nine-year-old daughter, Sadai Burge (1855-1892). On November 9 Dolly saved her dwelling with a plea to a Union officer, Captain Webber of Illinois, who knew her brother, Orrington Lunt (1815-1897), a founder of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

She wrote, *“A Captain Webber from Illinois came into my house. Of him I claimed protection from the vandals who were forcing themselves into my room. He said that he knew my brother, Orrington…At that name I could not restrain my feelings, but, bursting into tears, implored him to see my brother and let him know my destitution. I saw nothing before me but starvation. He promised to do this, and comforted me with the assurance that my dwelling-house would not be burned, though my out-buildings might….In parting with him I parted as with a friend…Sherman himself and a greater portion of his army passed my house that day.”*

As a great-great-grandson of Friedrich Muench (1799-1881), George’s brother, I am Sandy’s fourth cousin. In 2012 my wife, Any, and I visited Burge as guests of Sandy and his wife, Betsy. They were magnificent hosts. As part of our pleasant and educational stay Sandy escorted us on a tour of the current house (a copy of the manor house at Johns Hopkins University), its attic revealing a virtual museum of antique photographs, paintings, furniture, and clothing. We came across a rocking chair with a message written on a piece of paper on its seat: “Fragile. Please do not sit here. Carl Schurz sat here.”

Carl Schurz, as in *THE* Carl Schurz, the greatest German immigrant of his era. Lawyer. Editor. Author. Union General. Minister to Spain. Senator from Missouri. Secretary of the Interior. Advisor to eleven Presidents from Abraham Lincoln to Theodore Roosevelt. And that Carl Schurz of the rocking chair in Sandy’s attic is a member of our extended family: Schurz’ sister, Antonie Schurz (1837-1923), was the step grandmother of Sandy’s maternal grandfather, Francis Alexander Lackner, born in 1879, son of Colonel Francis Lackner.

I asked Sandy about the provenance of the chair. His maternal uncle, Herman Lackner (1912-1998), had given it to him. In a genealogical, generational sequence Uncle Herman could have inherited it from his parents, who were Sandy’s maternal grandparents, Francis Alexander Lackner and Clara Luise Kirchhoff (1885-1955), and perhaps Clara Luise received it from her mother, Minna Muench (1849-1927), the daughter of George Muench. Alternatively, Uncle Herman had offered that the chair could have been in Schurz’ office in the White House during his term as Secretary of the Interior (1877-1881). However, with that version of the chair’s possible provenance the needed personal connections are not evident.

What is the evidence for the genealogical version? In 1867 Carl Schurz visited George and Friedrich in Augusta, Missouri, documenting his stay in his letter, dated July 8, to his wife, Margarethe Meyer (1832-1876), and published in his book, *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz.* The festivities of the visit included feasts, music and speeches over several days, and Schurz stayed for at least one night in George Muench’s home.

Schurz wrote, *“Our arrival had become well known in the town; and the population of Augusta, old and young, male and female, gathered together in a small grove to welcome us. They brought along their band, which was made up wholly of amateur musicians, but not at all bad. There was plenty of Augusta wine. Quite naturally, speeches had to be made… An evening meal at the home of a German doctor concluded the delightful affair. About eleven o’clock we went up and down the hills until we reached the home of the sixty-eight-year-old [George] Muench that offered us a welcome bed.”*

In 1867 Schurz could not anticipate that in 1907 his sister’s step grandson, Francis Alexander Lackner, would marry Clara Luise Kirchhoff, a granddaughter of George Muench. Thus Carl Schurz and the Muench brothers, not related by descent from a common ancestor, became related by a marriage of their descendants forty years after the Augusta visit.

When my brother, Larry, and I were about eight and ten years old and living on Greenwood Street in Evanston, Illinois, we accidentally met the then widowed Clara Luise, because she lived next door in the Greenwood Inn, a residential hotel. She spent many hours with us in her room, teaching us German. We wrote the vocabulary in little notebooks that she bought for us. Of course, we were too young to understand the rich history of Carl Schurz and the Muench brothers.

The available evidence supports my hypothesis that the rocking chair in Sandy Morehouse’s Burge attic was the chair in the guest bedroom occupied by Carl Schurz in 1867 in the Augusta home of George Muench. In four generations it passed to Sandy at Burge. This story could not have been known if I had not telephoned Sandy one day with no prior introduction and said, “You don’t know me, but please don’t hang up; I am your fourth cousin!”