

Henry Kummerow

Fond du Lac

1861 – 1902

Henry Kummerow was born in Mecklenburg, Germany in March of 1832 and arrived in Sheboygan as a 'day laborer' in 1858 already trained in his craft:

*"[Henry Kummerow] was a native of Germany, whence he emigrated to the United States in his early manhood, becoming a resident of Wisconsin. He was married in Milwaukee in 1858, and the same year removed to Sheboygan. In 1861, he located in Fond du Lac, where he established a pottery business which he conducted successfully, until 1902. In the later year he withdrew from active business and lived retired until his death on the 17th of February, 1912."*¹

"Paul F. Kummerow, who owns and conducts a wholesale liquor establishment at 89 South Main Street, has passed the entire period of his business career in Fond du Lac. He was born in the city of Sheboygan ... on the 11th of June, 1860, and is a son of Henry and Agnes Kummerow ... "

1860 found Henry Kummerow (30) living in Sheboygan with wife "Annis" (Agnes, 28), also from 'Mechlenberg', and their 1-year old daughter Annis (Agnes). He gave his occupation as "Day Laborer, Potter." In 1861 he moved to Fond du Lac where he would establish his pottery in an area already associated with clay ware and kilns:

*"Two horse thieves who escaped from the county jail [in Fond du Lac] in 1857, when Geo. W. Mitchell was sheriff, were followed so close that they hid in the flues of a brick kiln near the present Bowen factory, when they were yet so hot that it was wondered how they ever stood it."*²

In 1864 Kummerow applied for and was granted status as a naturalized citizen of the United States. By 1868 he reported working as an engineer at C. J. L. Meyer Co., a manufacturer of wooden sash, doors and blinds on Western Avenue between Court and 1 Military, and lived on Western between Military and Brooke.³ A local directory in 1876 described him as married with eight family members living in the household, his occupation as potter, residence at 16 South Street and language as German!⁴

Kummerow placed an advertisement in a local directory in 1876:⁵

He continued to advertise his pottery in 1880, and also is mentioned as a notable member of the Fond du Lac Turnverein Society, a vigorous gymnastic fraternity founded by and popular among German American men with athletic talent:

"Organized April 1855, has about 80 members and is one of the most flourishing organizations of the kind in the west. Its hall is on Portland Street, just north of Division,

and contains everything usually found in an institution of this kind in the way of scenery, musical talent, etc... H. Kummerow, First Master of Gymnasium."⁶



Figure 1 1876 Kummerow Advertisement

The 1880 Census found the Kummerow family still at 16 South Street, father Henry incorrectly said to be 84 (he actually was 48), occupation as "Pottery", 'Agnis' (50), and their six children Paul (of later liquor business renown) 20, 'works in Pottery', Henry Jr. (18) a Carpenter, Louisa (12), Agnis (10) and Carl (8) at school and little Otto (6) at home.⁷ By 1884 it appears that Henry remained alone in the pottery at 16 South street; Henry Jr. still was living at home as a carpenter while Paul F. (2) had become a telegraph operator on the North Western Railway, also living at home.⁸ Henry Kummerow continued to advertise his pottery in state business gazetteers in 1888, 1891, 1893 and 1895. In 1895 the pottery and residence were identified at 24 South Street and occupied by Henry, Miss Agnes, Charles (a bookkeeper at Fond du Lac National Bank) and Otto, then also listed as a potter. Charles Kummerow now was 2nd speaker for the Tumverein Fond du Lac organization while youngest son Otto served there as financial secretary. Son Paul F. bought a house at 17 Elm Street and was a "baggage man" for the Chicago & North Western Railroad Co.⁹

Father Henry continued to advertise his pottery in 1899 and reported a year later that he was employed at his business 6 months out of the year. He modified his listing in 1901 to read "resident", suggesting the pottery no longer was in operation at that time (although the local history stated it closed the following year). He now gave their address as 221 E. Second Street along with Miss Agnes, a clerk in a dry goods store, and Otto, then working as a clerk for an unnamed railroad. Son Paul established a successful business of his own two years later which today is well known among today's collectors of advertising liquor jugs:

"On May 1, 1903 [Paul Kummerow] became associated with Theodore E. Menge and together they opened a wholesale liquor house at 89 South Main Street. The business is

well established and is yielding profitable returns. Mr. Kummerow owns the building where his store is located and also the house where he resides at No. 255 Elm Street."¹⁰

The small-scale and seasonal operation of the pottery point to a redware business, whereas the Kummerow & Menge advertising jugs seen today are stoneware made at the Red Wing factory in Minnesota and have a modern zinc or Bristol glaze. The jugs were supplied to the liquor business on a contract basis in half-pint, and one-half, one-, two-, and four-gallon sizes, plus a miniature size with wire bail handle. At least one four-gallon Kummerow and Menge jug is known which carries the Red Wing trademark, but it is not clear whether this represents a standard package size or whether it might have been a unique piece made for and displayed in the liquor establishment as an advertising piece. (Similarly, a gaudily decorated L. M. Pierron crock is known which was manufactured in Red Wing as the Pierron Pottery in Milwaukee transitioned from manufacture to acting as a jobbing house for the Minnesota factory. The Pierron crock's lettering appears upside down so that it could be displayed in an inverted position for advertising purposes.)

Henry Kummerow ware described in his advertisement is a major piece of evidence of the wares that he produced, basically a broad product line serving the dairy farmer (milk pans and crocks,) the gardener (common and ornamental flowerpots and urns,) home decorators (vases and hanging baskets.) However, he probably did not mark most of his pieces, as attribution of extant pieces is almost entirely by circumstantial association, i.e., found in the Fond du Lac area or associated with birch beer brewers in Fond du Lac who apparently commissioned Kummerow to make them bottles.



Figure 2 Hanging flowerpot found in the Fond du Lac area. Kummerow's ads specifically mention earthenware hanging flowerpots as of their products.



Figure 3 The Albany slip glazed bottles turn up in the central Wisconsin area and appear to be stoneware, but not of the type made by Gunther, Bachelder or Hermann. The flowerpot with the attached underplate was purchased from a descendent of Kummerow with attribution. It also has a dark "Albany" glaze like the bottles. It is unusual for a small potter to make both earthenware and stoneware, it is certainly a possibility. Whoever made these pieces would have needed to import clay because local clays cannot be used to make stoneware. All pieces are in private collections.



Figure 4 Four bottles made by the same pottery. From left to right: "P. SEVERIN [Fond du Lac]. "J.H. LOCKWOOD" [Fond du Lac], "P.A." [Philip Altpeter, Milwaukee], "A. Z." [La Crosse]. All are from small beer brewers contemporary to Kummerow. They probably contained Spruce, Birch, Ginger, or Root Beer. The unusual printer's type font used for the name stamps on all four pieces is the same. Like the pieces in Figure 2, these may or may not have been made by Kummerow. All in private collections



Figure 5 Bottom view of the four bottles from Figure 3. The swirled wipe marks are similar on all four.



Figure 6 Bottles attributed to Henry Kummerow. They were found in the Fond du Lac area – the smaller one dug in the city. In private collections.



Figure 7 Zinc-glazed Kummerow & Menge jug made after 1902 when Kummerow went into the wholesale liquor business. The manufacturer of this jug is not known, but it was not made in Fond du Lac.

One truly remarkable object stamped inside 'KUMMEROW / POTTERY / FOND DU LAC / WIS' appears to be a cheese or food cover, possibly for tavern use on the bar to protect the "free lunch" victuals from flies. It is a red, terra cotta-like clay modeled or molded log cabin approximately 8 1/2 inches long by 6 inches wide with a textured gable roof. It has no bottom, suggesting possible use as a food cover, though given its modest dimensions this is by no means certain and it may instead represent an advertising prop. A simulated sign board over the single door reads 'HOMESTEAD BITTERS' and the date '1847' appears on the door, which is flanked by two simulated windows. Raised lettering on the front roof reads 'BEST BLOOD PURIFIER / AND / APPETIZER IN THE WORLD'. A scar appears on the roof, suggesting a chimney once was attached to function as a knob or lifting handle. Aside from the cabin, the authors have not seen any redware pottery marked Kummerow or Fond du Lac. This figural cabin also appears to have original polychrome paint and is likely a survivor of a very limited run for the Fond du Lac pharmacist, Doctor Burkhard, whose amber, square "Homestead Bitters" bottles occasionally turn up, much coveted by bitters collectors.



Figure 8 Homestead Bitters Advertising Food Cover. The stamp on the inside reads "H. KUMMEROW / POTTERY / FOND DU LAC / WIS." It might be a tile stamp. From a private collection. This piece is the only marked piece of pottery from the Kummerow Pottery that we are aware of

Kummerow probably produced drain tiles as the clay they used resembles tile clay and the stamp on the cabin is of a style often used on tiles to identify the manufacturer. With diligent investigation, we might find that marked tiles turn up in street excavation work in Fond du Lac and nearby communities. Tiles generally are not an exciting collector's item and could be easily overlooked as insignificant if unearthed during street excavations.

A listing for Henry in 1903 still carried the "resident" tag, but by 1907 it seems that he opened a poultry farm at 509 E. 2nd along with Miss Agnes and Otto. It is unclear whether these address changes represent real movement from one to another location, or whether municipal officers simply were renumbering local addresses. As stated earlier, Henry Kummerow died in Fond du Lac on February 17, 1912 at the ripe old age of 80.

¹ McKenna, *Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin*. p. 115.

² *Incidents and Anecdotes of Fond du Lac*. p. 125.

³ *Fond du Lac County Gazetteer for 1868*, pp. 100, 110.

⁴ *Centennial 1876 Directory of Fond du Lac*, pp.63, 133.

⁵ M. G. Tousley & Co. *Centennial 1876 Directory of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin, Fond du Lac*, p. 86.

⁶ *Holland's Fond du Lac Directory for 1880*, p. 36-37.

⁷ 1880 U.S. Census, 1st Ward, City of Fond du Lac, p. 30 microfilm P41531.

⁸ *City Directory Fond du Lac. 1884-5*, p. 129, 237.

⁹ *Wright's Directory of Fond du Lac, 1895-96*, p. 120.

¹⁰ McKenna, *Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin*. p. 115.