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K-State Keepsakes: A forgotten WWI casualty

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A FORGOTTEN WWI CASUALTY

In 2017, communities throughout the United States will commemorate the centennial of U.S. involvement in World War I. At K-State, we have traditionally said that 48 Wildcats died in the Great War. One way they have been remembered is with the “Lest We Forget” memorial that resides in Gen. Richard B. Myers Hall [1. “Lest We Forget”]. However, a handful of individuals were not included in that list. One member of that overlooked group was the first World War I casualty with a connection to K-State: Private Otto Maurer. He was a German

infantryman who died in Belgium in November 1914 [2. German infantry.]

for the Agricultural Experiment Station. He had graduated in 1907 from Königliche Oberrealschule (Royal Secondary School) in Heilbronn before enrolling at the University of Wisconsin for two years. After working as an assistant bacteriologist for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company for about a year, he came to K-State and had a campus office in Leasure Hall and resided at 501 Laramie Street.

His research focused on increasing efficiencies in the production and distribution of eggs. He presented some of his studies to the campus Science Club in October

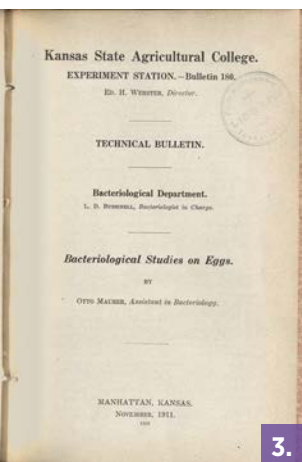


Maurer, a native of southern Germany, arrived in Manhattan in June 1910 as a research assistant in bacteriology



2. German infantry on the battlefield, August 7, 1914. *Underwood & Underwood. (US War Dept.)*

1911, and a portion of his paper was published the following month in an experiment station bulletin titled "Bacteriological Studies on Eggs" [3. Bulletin cover]. His citations



3.

included English, French, German, and Italian sources, showing the breadth of his research as well as his language skills.

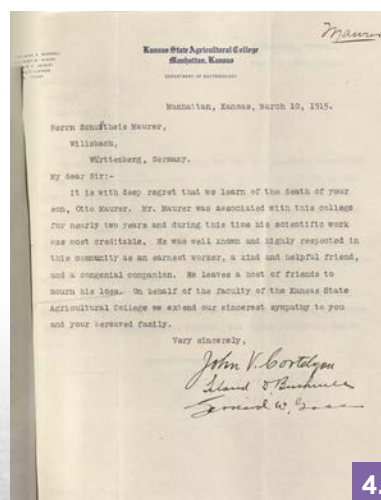
During his time associated with K-State, Maurer was an inaugural member of the Cosmopolitan Club that formed in March 1912.

A campus newspaper, "The Kansas Industrialist," stated the group's purpose was to provide "social life for the foreign students, and the eradication of national prejudice." Twenty students and staff from countries that included China, Germany, Japan, the Philippines, Romania, Russia, Scotland, and Sweden began the group.

Maurer resigned in September 1912 and sometime afterward returned to

Germany for graduate study, which he was pursuing when World War I broke out in Europe in July 1914. He became part of the German army in its campaign to establish the line for the Western Front. The Battle of Messines occurred between British and German forces during the last half of October and early November 1914. In the final days of this battle, Otto Maurer was killed in action.

When word of his death arrived at K-State, it became a discussion topic at the January 1915 faculty meeting. Botany professor Herbert Roberts suggested a letter of condolence should be written to Maurer's family. The letter writers were German professor John V. Cortelyou, bacteriology professor Leland D. Bushnell, and pathology professor Leonard W. Goss, who wrote the following in English and German to Otto's father, Schultheiss Maurer: *It is with*



4.

deep regret that we learn of the death of your son, Otto Maurer. Mr. Maurer was associated with this college for nearly two years and during this time his scientific work was most creditable. He was well known and highly respected in this community as an earnest worker, a kind and helpful friend, and a congenial companion. He leaves a host of friends to mourn his loss. On behalf of the faculty of the Kansas State Agricultural College we extend our sincerest sympathy to you and your bereaved family [4. letter].

Otto Maurer was one of over 11 million military personnel who died in World War I, each with their own story. Unlike the 48 K-Staters who have been recognized for their sacrifice in the Great War, Maurer's account had been buried and left untold. Stories like his are waiting to be discovered at the Morse Department of Special Collections.



Anthony R. Crawford, the previous university archivist, created K-State Keepsakes, a series of stories about K-State's history that appeared on K-State Libraries' blog from 2006 to 2013. Now, we continue the tradition in this new format. Most images and information come from collections in the Richard L. D. and Marjorie J. Morse Department of Special Collections.