

## BLOETSCHER BROTHERS BUTCHER SHOP – DETROIT MICHIGAN

George W. Stark's column "Town Talk" which appeared in the September 30, 1946 edition of THE DETROIT NEWS had the following headline:

### "The Soldier and the Sausage" (Excerpt)

"This might seem a little involved if I started with the Soldier. So, first of all, I had better tell you about the Sausage. There's a noble tradition there, which you would not expect to find in so prosaic an item as a sausage.

"There is something different about the Bloetscher Sausage though. Many old Detroiters will happily testify to that. I, myself, knew about the Bloetscher Sausage a good many years ago, in those days when a shortage was measured by the size of the customer's purse and not by the stocks behind the counter. In those blessed, far-off days, a little boy would be rewarded by the butcher with a generous slice of sausage when he came to pay the bill on papa's pay day.

"It was 57 years ago that Frederick and Bertha Bloetscher, opened a modest meat market at Magnolia and Fifteenth streets. Together, they slaughtered for the retail trade and they fashioned their own pure, all-meat sausages. They specialized in home-cured hickory-smoked hams and bacon. Frederick and Bertha have been gone for some time now, but if you can enshrine a couple's memory in such a homely object as a sausage, theirs is safe and warm and tender and the sausage emits a special kind of incense that would be associated only with them and with the little butcher shop in Old Detroit."

This article recently surfaced and created some interest in the background of the butcher shop that according to urban legend invented the concept of the "picnic ham."

Friedrich Blotscher (1860-1931) was born in Germany Sept.28, 1860, the second child, but eldest son, of Friedrich Blotscher. (1835-1898) and Cristina Franz (1835-1883). Faced with being forced into unwanted military service under Otto von Bismark, he decided to emigrate to America. He arrived in New Orleans, Louisiana in the mid-1880s and worked in the fields there until he was struck by lightning one day while working. Seriously injured, he was cared for by Roman Catholic nuns until recovery and was ever afterward grateful. (Nuns were always given special treatment and special meat in the butcher shop in later years. He never forgot how a Protestant young man was treated by Roman Catholic nuns.) He was left with a crippled back, unable to stand straight thereafter and developed severe arthritis in later years.

Friedrich made his way northward to Michigan, perhaps because his brother Johannes (1866-1948), a farmer like their father, was already living in Springwells, MI, in what is now Dearborn. Friedrich reportedly had a magic way with meat, so he worked as cook on the railroad line from Detroit to Mackinac. He was fond of telling about the time a bear came up to him and he pulled out a handgun, stuck it in the bear's ear, pulled the trigger and killed it. As the eldest son, he had undoubtedly had a great deal of experience on the farm in Glatten butchering animals and making sausage.

Therefore, he decided to start a meat market and diligently saved money until he had enough to buy a small store at Sixth and Willis in Detroit. Friedrich, along with his brothers Andreas and Jakob, launched their own business, "Bloetscher Bros. Meat Market". [NOTE: Since there is no umlaut in the English language, the spelling of the surname was changed to insert an "e" after the "o" to ensure correct pronunciation. Also the Christian names were Anglicized during the World Wars to avoid anti-German prejudice.] The location of the meat market changed several times in its early years. At the time, Detroit was the 4th-largest city in America. It was a bustling metropolis whose population had doubled during the previous decade, caused by the massive migration of workers needed to build Henry Ford's Model T.



Butcher Shop on 6<sup>th</sup> and Willis

Between 1897 and 1907, the store was located at 682 15th St., Detroit. At this time Andrew was living at the butcher shop. Granddaughter Marge wrote that an early "butcher shop was on Woodward Avenue near the Sanders [Soda] Store. ...Grandmother used to invite them [the Sanders] to dinner [at the flat, when Marge was about 17 years old]. She had become quite good friends with them. I remember setting the table and helping to serve them with all the fancy silverware and crystal under a big Tiffany type lamp."

Once he was established in Detroit, Friedrich "Frederick" met Bertha Paetzke, born in Berlin, Germany on Feb. 9, 1869, the daughter of Carl Paetzke. Bertha was working as a housemaid in one of the big houses in Detroit to which Frederick made meat deliveries. He married her and at first they lived in the back of the shop.

Sometime between 1910 and 1916, there was some sort of disagreement between Bertha and her brothers-in-law Andrew and Jakob (“Jack”). It ended with Jack leaving the butcher shop and moving to Cleveland. This argument may have had something to do with a large frame house right on the Detroit River on Grosse Ile, in which all three brothers had invested for vacation use. After his brother Jakob left, Frederick, and Bertha ran the shop, aided by their brother Andrew and their three sons—Carl, Frederick III and Andrew.

In 1915, the Bloetschers lived at 828 14th St., which number after 1924 became 3704 14th St., Detroit. The butcher shop was located nearby at 3606 15th St., the corner of 15<sup>th</sup> St. and Magnolia. They bought a stone house at the NE corner of 14th and Magnolia, where they reared their three sons, Carl (1890-1954), Friedrich III (1894-1958) and Andrew (1896/97-1964). The house still stands today. Once their sons were grown and had left home, Friedrich and Bertha built a two family flat at 3588 15<sup>th</sup> St. near the butcher shop and lived in the downstairs unit, about 1926.



Friedrich (1918) and Bertha Bloetscher (1880s)

Excerpt from “DETROIT FREE PRESS” Thursday, June 1, 1944 sent by Patricia Lynn Bloetscher:

“...did you ever notice the line of Cadillacs from Grosse Pointe and Bloomfield Hills in front of that little meat market out at Fifteenth and Magnolia? The lure is a line of homemade sausages a butcher named Bloetscher started making here half a century ago. Bloetscher is gone, but his sons carry on the business, under the sharp eyes of the wonderful old lady who helped her husband stuff those first casings.”

Officially they made 48 different kinds of sausage. For example, for bologna the meat had to be boned and the tallow and bones set aside to be sold separately. The meat was then seasoned not according to a recipe, but by taste and experience and placed in 400-pound-capacity wooden tubs in the refrigerator, to be aged overnight or so. After aging, the meat was chopped and mixed by machine, then stuffed into

natural casings, smoked using hickory wood and then simmered in water in large kettles. At last, the sausages were cooled almost to room temperature by running water and hung in the front of the shop to be sold. The process was varied according to the type of sausage being made.

They had their own smoke house for curing hams and other meats. Gand-daughter Marge noted that they “had a big barn out Northwestern Highway, where Dad [Fred Bloetscher III] made the sausage and smoked the ham.” The family legend is that Friedrich invented the process known as the picnic ham in this smokehouse.



The store located at 3606 15th St., Detroit after 1907. (SE corner of 15th and Magnolia)



The interior of the store located at SE corner of 15th and Magnolia

Friedrich died of pulmonary edema May 29, 1931 and was buried June 1, 1931 at Evergreen Cemetery. After Frederick II's death, his three sons, Carl, Frederick III and Andrew ran the butcher shop and their mother, Bertha, helped during the busy hours. In 1937, they modernized the interior of the shop, installing refrigerated counters, walk-in refrigerators, etc. Andrew and Carl worked mostly in the front of the shop with one or more hired workers, waiting on customers, while Frederick III usually supervised the sausage-making in the back. (The family has the State Sausage license issued to Bloetscher Brothers at 3606 15th St. for 1936-'37).

The three men worked long hours, 8 AM to 6 PM weekdays and 8 AM to midnight Saturdays. The sausage-making process had to be started by 6 AM so the sausage would be ready for store opening the next day. Usually Fred III would be there to supervise this procedure before his brothers arrived to open the store officially. Saturdays were especially long days. Home freezers were rare and most people bought their meat for Sunday dinner on Saturday. An added attraction was the sale (and samples) of hot bologna at noon on Saturdays. Then after closing the store, everyone would come in the back, finish boning the meat and place it in the refrigerator to prevent spoilage before going home; this frequently took until midnight.

Patricia Lynn Bloetscher sent the following article from the Nov.12, 1952 edition of the DETROIT FREE PRESS; the Second Front Page had an article by James S. Pooler headlined:

“Famed Meat Market Carries On Tradition” (Excerpt)

“They don’t put out the hot, homemade sauerkraut and samples of all the sausages any more for the free lunchers but Bloetschers’s Meat Market keeps flourishing nicely down through the years...

“Long gone is the day when Grandpa Bloetscher drove the elk he got from Buffalo Bill around Detroit and Grandma Bloetscher sniffed at people who asked for ‘hot dogs’ and wouldn’t serve them until they asked properly, for ‘viennas’.”

“But the old meat market still stands after 63 years at Magnolia and 15<sup>th</sup>, and a third generation of the family, Andrew Bloetscher Jr., has just taken over.

“What’s more Andrew Jr., who fought with the Air Force in the last war [WWII], has modern ideas and had the telephone put back in.

“It was taken out 27 years ago because Andy’s father and uncles decided the telephone was an impertinence that interrupted them from their real business of ‘waiting on customers’.

“And the limousines of Detroit – or maybe we should say Grosse Pointe still pull up daily at the old butcher shop. “The old families of Detroit rub elbows with the neighborhood folks particularly on Tuesdays, and Fridays, when , as of yore, the sign hangs out in front ‘Hot Bologna Today’.

“Andy Jr., is keeping on making the famous sausages – ‘no cereal or no powdered milk.’ And letting you call your cut of meat as you want it sliced and having the truck with ready-made cuts wrapped in cellophane.”

“[Grandpa Bloetscher’s] skill at curing and hickory-smoking Bismarck sausage (fresh ham and garlic), viennas, hot bologna, pork sausages of pure, fresh ham started old Detroit beating a path to his shop.

“It is the family insistence that Grandpa Bloetscher, among other things, invented the cottage ham (boneless shoulder ham, cured and smoked) which now has got so far away from its originator as to be called ‘California ham’.

“Grandpa Bloetscher cut quite a figure himself driving around Detroit with his elk hitched up like a horse. Buffalo Bill’s show left the injured elk behind and Grandpa nursed it back to health.

“Grandpa Bloetscher gave the elk to Detroit-- the first start of a zoo of any kind, but the City gave it back because it was too ornery.

“He kept driving it around for years until one day the elk shied and pitched Grandpa’s friend, John Isle, head first into three feet of mud and he darn near smothered before Grandpa could haul him out. He sold that elk to a farmer who thought plowing might cure him.

“There is no room here for the names of all the famous people who came to Bloetscher’s market and whose descendants still come in even from far away.

“...if you can picture another day, that men, who did some of the shopping then, came in during the late afternoon and the meat market got to be quite a visiting place for them.. Particularly, on the days when the hot sauerkraut was in the bowls and there were bits of sausage to be tasted.

“In 1913, the first Bloetscher turned it over to his sons...The second generation of Bloetscher’s have now pretty well retired from the business – except for Andrew Sr., who has meat markets in Petoskey, Mich. and Delray Beach, Fla., in case his other two sons, Loren and Bert, decide to take up sausage-making in the family tradition.”

As the three brothers were nearing retirement age and having health issues, the butcher shop was sold about 1953. Andrew started a butcher shop in Redford, MI (lasted for about 4-5 years). After he closed this shop, he helped his son Andy Jr., who had opened a meat market at the new Northland Shopping Center in Detroit. Andrew, Jr. was probably one of the original tenants when Northland first opened in the winter of 1956-‘57. His cousin Marge Caroselli recalls that Andrew Jr.’s shop was very nice, but small and “he had to put his meat in the basement storage, lacking sufficient lock-up space. Andrew Sr. also had a place up in Petoskey [MI} for a few years.”

Sometime before 1958, Andrew Sr. opened a meat market in Petoskey, Michigan, for the summers and one in Delray Beach, Florida for the winters, thus trying to take advantage of the tourist trade in both areas. (Cousin Carl Bloetscher of Beaverton, Michigan recently wrote that he and his wife used “to vacation in Petoskey from the late 1940s to the late 1960s. There was a Andrew Bloetscher Butcher shop at the edge of town.”)

The Father-Son Series of articles in the PETOSKEY REVIEW newspaper of August 4, 1949 had a photo of Andrew, Andrew F. and Loren Bloetscher, captioned “BACON, HAMS, BALONEY smoked the ‘old fashioned’ way are featured at Bloetscher’s & Sons, half mile west of the fairgrounds. This father-son team is now in its third generation.” The headline below read: “Bloetschers Are Trying To Keep Alive Old Method. The body of the article said:

“Americans don’t appreciate good food as they should. They’re always in too much of a hurry to taste it, and enjoy it as they should. They do not only eat too fast but aren’t as conscious of quality as they used to be. That’s the belief of Andrew Bloetscher, who with his son Loren is operating A. Bloetscher and Son, featuring specially cured hams, loins, bacon and cottage hams a half mile west of the fairgrounds. ‘The art of curing

meat is also being lost as a special craft,' Andrew declares, 'the big companies have taken over the curing of most meat and they produce in huge quantities and quality is suffering.' ....'The meat business is becoming a lost art because few are going into it as specialties. It is a craft that takes more time and is more costly than the present assembly line method of handling meat in most places.' ...It takes Bloetschers 42 days to cure a ham the way they want it. The big meat firms can cure a ham in one minute by pumping the arteries full of chemicals and soaking in brine for five days."

Karl and his wife remained in Detroit after retirements. Frederick III and Rosa spent their winters in Miami, Florida. Fred and Rosa spent the summers in Grayling, Michigan, at their cottage on North Down River. and Pine Rds., eight miles east of town. Frederick died on Feb.16, 1958 at North Miami Beach, Florida. Rosa died in Florida Feb.23, 1991 of congestive heart failure and was buried beside her husband. Andrew Jr. was the last of the family to make sausage for commercial sale. With his passing the legacy was lost.