





# **A Perfect Pair**

## **The History of Landjaeger in Green County, Wisconsin**

By Jesse Brookstein

Illustrated by Zach Nichols



Karate Fight Publishing  
Madison, Wisconsin

A Perfect Pair: The History of Landjaeger in Green County, Wisconsin

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## Intro: Bringing *A Perfect Pair* to Life



**My very first memories of landjaeger** aren't really of what I know landjaeger to be these days, but more-so just a delicious meat snack my uncle, Doug Sango, would bring up to our family's Upstate New York camp on Third Lake – just outside of Old Forge, in the beautiful Adirondack region. Apart from devouring these snacks at any opportunity I had, I also remember there being some debate as to whether you peel the casing or leave it on. Beyond that, I distinctly remember enjoying the caraway, and that sometimes they'd be a little harder and easier to peel. That's about it.

Year after year, Doug would bring these to camp, and I believe they soon became a part of additional family gatherings as we visited one-another from Camp Sango, to Clinton, NY, to Doug and his family's homes in the Albany area. Who knows, maybe landjaeger was around more often than my memory serves? I *was* just a kid, and spending years researching landjaeger wasn't yet at the top of my to-do list. What I do know is these meat sticks were synonymous with our camp, and they're one of the many fond memories I have of our family's time on that beautiful plot of land.

As I grew older, Doug – ever the wise sage – continued to bring or send landjaeger to me and my ma, and my admiration for them never wavered. Doug had told me they were from a German shop in Albany, NY called Rolf's Pork Store, but that was about the extent of my background. And upon moving to Boulder, Colorado in the summer of 2006, I sort of fell out of touch with landjaeger.

Not only was I 1,700 miles from Doug and my Albany family, Colorado itself isn't necessarily a meat market kinda state. Having worked at a shop in Clinton called The Jolly Butcher, and having access to other CNY staples such as Meelan's Market outside of Clark Mills and Hapanowicz Brothers Meat Market in New York Mills, I pretty much assumed that's how things worked in every state – the same way I was shocked to discover the regionality of other CNY delicacies such as chicken riggies, salt potatoes, and half moons (but that's a whole other book for a whole other day).

In early 2015, I befriended an amazing fella named Brian Albano, who was opening il porcellino salumi just down the road from where a few friends and I were opening Call to Arms Brewing Company (in Denver, CO). At the time I met Brian, I actually wasn't eating a ton of meat, and he helped rekindle my love affair with locally-made products such as andouille, 'Nduja, summer sausage, pork rillettes, and the very first head cheese I found myself able to enjoy. While I'd been able to enjoy many a summer sausage with my good pals, Steve Wadzinski, Jon Moldenhauer, and Matt McMillin (who I worked with at Avery Brewing Co), this was the first time in almost ten years that I'd found someone producing such a wide array of Colorado-processed sausages and snacks.

Fast forward to the end of 2017, and my girlfriend and I decided it was time to make a change. The thought of moving wasn't easy; Colorado truly is a beautiful place, running the brewery was more-often-than-not an amazing experience, and – more than anything – both of our moms live in Colorado and it was definitely heartbreaking to not be right down the road from them on any given day. Unfortunately, Colorado had become rather expensive over the years and the opportunities to find good-paying work or buy a house grew slimmer and slimmer by the hour. At the very same time, my

girlfriend was offered an opportunity to work in a postdoctoral position at UW-Madison. Having been to Madison a few times myself over the years (and loving everything the city and Wisconsin had to offer), she accepted the position and we moved to Madison – with all of a month’s time to plan, pack, and uproot our lives – in the late-night hours of January 6, 2018.

One thing I always loved about Wisconsin was how much it reminded me of CNY. The landscape, the people, the culture, and the local appreciation for all things meat and cheese. As an outsider who had really only heard Wisconsin stereotypes before moving here, I can wholeheartedly say that most – if not all – of the stereotypes are absolutely true. Wisconsinites *love* their cheese. Wisconsinites *love* their beer. Wisconsinites *love* their Packers. And Wisconsinites *love* their brats. Like a lot. I’ve read other authors say that meat shops and butchers hold an almost-godlike status in Wisconsin, and I do not disagree. For crying out loud, the Green Bay Packers are named in honor of the Indian Packing Company that first sponsored the Packers in 1919 – so it’s inevitable that Wisconsin meat producers would be loved and cherished (if even subconsciously).

Another thing Wisconsinites adore are meat snacks: be it the traditional vacuum-sealed brands you’d maybe associate with a gas station more than a mom & pop shop, or the very item that has brought us here together: landjaeger sausage snacks. As far as meat sticks are concerned, it’s largely true that corporations have popularized them to a point where you can find numerous examples at most checkout counters across America. But, more often than not, the meat sticks you’ll find in Wisconsin are made with as much love and care as any other product you’ll find in a local meat market. Many of these recipes have been passed down for generations, often using high quality meat, and regulated in such a way that you’re guaranteed to enjoy top notch, quality products.

And then there’s landjaeger. It doesn’t take long for any visitor to Wisconsin to have their first landjaeger sighting – especially if you’re in Green or Dane Counties. In Madison, the state’s capital, all you’d need to do was grab a seat at the bar of The Old Fashioned, and you’d see Ruef’s landjaeger hanging proudly for all to admire. Pop around town a little more, and you could also find yourself some Bavaria landjäger at Stalzy’s Deli, or Zuber’s landjaeger anywhere from the Regent Market Co-Op, to One Barrel Brewing Company, to Ken’s Meats & Deli. And if you finally made your way down to Green County and the world-famous New Glarus Brewing Company, you’d be sure to find landjaeger staring right back at you as well – this time in the brewery gift shop, and courtesy of Hoesly’s Meat Market just down WI-69.

And once you notice – and taste – landjaeger, you can’t get it out of your mind. It’s the perfect accompaniment for almost any occasion, especially when you’re enjoying a beer at the bar or walking around New Glarus Brewing’s beautiful grounds. And it was my own personal draw to landjaeger, and the environments you often find it in, that demanded I begin researching for this book. The more I casually browsed the web looking for insight on landjaeger and where I could possibly find some new options, the less info I could find. Even in 2018 on the world wide web, I simply could *not* find articles or books that really tackled landjaeger history or production. Having worked in production environments myself, and being a huge fan of history and writing, it was almost set in stone that this book needed to come to life. And...well...here we are!

As 2019 came to a close, I made it my 2020 New Year’s resolution to complete this book. My 2019 New Year’s resolution had been to visit local bar & chicken wing hot-spot, Chicken Licks (Lips), once a month, every month – and that had gone over with flying colors. So why not this as well?! And to be honest, I was on a roll over the first two and half months of 2020. I’d been able to interview

every landjaeger producer in Green County, plus our Dane County friends at Bavaria and local legends, Heinz Mattmann and Dr. Jeff Sindelar. The info was rolling in.

Then. A pandemic struck. And somehow talking about smoked sausage snacks took a bit of a back seat while we all began to figure out our new lives in the midst of so much uncertainty. We hoped that everyone would stay healthy; we hoped that small businesses would be able to come out on the other end; we hoped that friends and loved ones wouldn't be adversely affected by the sickness or the fallout of the most dynamic virus we'd seen in over 100 years.

To this day, I've tried to stay in touch with the folks I'd interviewed before Covid-19 first reared its ugly head, and while we did see Ruef's ultimately shut down after 55 years of operation in New Glarus, we also know that Chris and Nita Hessling's operations are safe and sound at the Green County Locker in Monroe, Wisconsin. And at the time of publishing, all the other shops you'll meet within *A Perfect Pair* are still open and doing reasonably well given all the circumstances.

At the outset, my plan for this book was to actually visit and document every single landjaeger producer in Wisconsin – and when I first started drafting the outline, I was only able to find between 5 to 10 landjaeger producers throughout the entire state. Maybe I was just naive, or maybe I just hoped the number was that low so I could wrap up all the interviews and get the book done and published. Either way, while the pandemic did limit my in-person interactions, it still allowed me the time to travel all around the state in search of new shops producing landjaeger.

What I came to find through my travels was an unexpected and altogether exciting world of landjaeger production, spread far and wide across the great state of Wisconsin. And at the time of writing, I've been able to locate 28 landjaeger producers spread over 19 counties – with my travels having taken me to 21 of those shops spread throughout 13 counties.

In years past, my travels to new and random villages, towns, and cities always took me to breweries, and now these travels were taking me to meat shops in Thorp and Marathon. To West Allis, Colby, Lake Tomahawk, and Lodi...and really all points in between. What I learned along the way was 1) Wisconsin really loves landjaeger, and 2) the idea of what landjaeger is varies widely between each producer and shop. Some were paired, while others were not. Some were flattened and rectangular, while others were rounded in the way you'd commonly expect to find a standard sausage. Some, I think it's fair to say, weren't even landjaeger at all, and in fact variations such as Polish kabanos.

After all these state-wide travels, time and time again, I just kept coming back to Green County. Not just because those interviews had already taken place, but because as a concentrated region, the landjaeger producers between Green County and Bavaria Sausage make what I consider to be the most traditional, authentic, and finest-tasting lineup of landjaeger in all of Wisconsin.

So, what do I consider a traditional landjaeger? Happy you asked! I'll start by saying I'm in no way the world's foremost expert on landjaeger. But I have eaten a lot of it and researched it extensively, and for me, these five characteristics define a true, authentic landjaeger:

- **Come as a joined pair (hence the very clever book title)**
- **Are hickory smoked**
- **Are flattened (often forming a rectangle-like shape)**
- **Are comprised of pork, beef, or a combination of the two meats**
- **Are shelf-stable**



You'll notice the emphasis on *joined*. I think it's safe to say that the great majority of landjaeger I've tried came in pairs (though I have been to at least a half dozen spots where it's served as singles or by the pound). But to create them as a joined pair is crucial in allowing them to hang over the wooden or acrylic display cases you often see scattered around Wisconsin (more on that later), and according to some of the folks I spoke with, this is reminiscent of the way landjaeger is displayed in open markets and brick & mortar shops back in Europe.

Hickory smoking seems to be the most common practice amongst Wisconsin producers. And apart from the well-known Nueske's Meats in Wittenberg, WI (which prides itself on applewood-smoked meats), I have yet to speak with anyone who didn't use hickory smoke, either due to affordability or the carrying on of tradition – nor did I taste any that seemed to have the presence of other wood varieties. So for this criteria, it's simply listed due to it being a surefire, standard part of the process.

The flattening is a tricky one. While all the producers we cover here do flatten their landjaeger in what they call molds or forms, other producers – such as Milwaukee's well-known Usinger's Famous Sausage – create a rounded product more reminiscent of a cooked brat. Usinger's landjaeger is quite delicious, and who am I to question their 140+ years of sausage-making experience? But for the sake of clarification, and based off old recipes and practices I've heard about or studied, I would still argue that flattening is the traditional landjaeger practice.

The combination of beef and pork seems to vary widely. While some meat products you'll find around Green County feature veal or venison, I have never come across a producer, recipe, or book that mentions any meats in landjaeger other than beef and pork. And while it does seem common to use *only* beef, I have also never come across a recipe calling for *all* pork – and as you'll learn later, much of this beef/pork formulation is based on the addition of fat and a producer's ability to get consistent, federally-regulated meat that adheres with their high recipe and process standards.

If the last criteria has you shaking your head, it does me too. And to be honest, I don't know if any landjaeger I've tried wasn't shelf-stable. I mean, it's the very point of landjaeger as we've come to know it: for the land hunters to take with them without fear of spoilage. That said, I visited more than one shop that, when asked about the “Keep Refrigerated” message on their product label, didn't seem to understand why I found that odd. “Yeah, you'll want to keep them refrigerated,” being one of the responses I received. There is no denying the beautiful evolution of landjaeger once it's been removed from a vacuum seal and exposed to oxygen, so it was especially painful to follow those recommendations when trying to really explore that landjaeger's depth of flavor.

Going back to the wooden and acrylic cases I'd previously mentioned, these are regularly found within the walls of all the producers mentioned here (and often when you find their products in retail shops across Wisconsin). This is yet another part of the deep, Old-World Swiss and German heritage that permeates every inch of these landjaeger producers and their products. Not only are the Green County (and Bavaria Sausage) shops some of the very few – and perhaps *only* – producers who use paper tags & string to mark their company and the style of landjaeger, these producers also made sure to sell their landjaeger in the Old-World chalet-inspired display cases (or the modernized acrylic variants if needed). Grabbing a pair of air-dried landjaeger from these racks is an incredible part of the landjaeger experience, and undoubtedly part of why they're so eye-catching and popular.

And now that I've caught your eye, let's explore the history of early settlers and producers in Green County, Wisconsin...

## Early Producers of Green County



**What is it about Green County** that makes for such a vibrant love of cheese and meats? That can basically be wrapped up in one word: authenticity. With the specific history we’re covering starting as far back as the 1820s, Swiss immigrants are largely cited for founding and creating the Green County you see before you today. These immigrants, as has always been and continues to be the case, brought with them history, knowledge, skills, and tastes that ultimately changed the course of their new homes forever. In the case of Green County, that often seems to veer towards cheese, beer, and a predilection for making delicious meat products. Let’s explore....



**Village of New Glarus**

Think of New Glarus, Wisconsin, and most folks will likely shout “Spotted Cow!” Or better yet, “Spotted Cow Brewery!” If beer isn’t the first thing that comes to mind (who do you hang out with?!), the next best bet will be “Isn’t that the Swiss town?” In fact, both would be mostly correct, and New Glarus is likely the best-known community – and tourist destination – in Green County.

Luckily for us, New Glarus also offers up some incredible landjaeger. While Ruef’s Meat Market may have closed by the time this book is published, the shop and Willy Ruef’s legacy will undoubtedly live on for years and years to come – and I was very lucky to chat with Chris Hessling

and grab some photos before they closed the doors in March of 2021 (and as I write this, I'm already talking with folks about a follow-up book chronicling Ruef's, specifically).

And right across WI-69 you'll find the equally-amazing Hoesly's Meats, offering landjaeger so delicious they've become the sole landjaeger offering at the aforementioned New Glarus Brewing Company – who, in non-pandemic times, can draw hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. The dynamic effect this brewery has on New Glarus and Green County as a whole simply cannot be understated, and we saw just how much their brewery tourism meant to the shops and citizens of New Glarus over the course of 2020-2021.

According to the Swiss Historical Village website ([www.swisshistoricalvillage.org](http://www.swisshistoricalvillage.org)) the origins of New Glarus as we know it began in 1845 when “Appeals Judge Niklaus Dürst and blacksmith Fridolin Streiff, sent by the Emigration Society of Canton Glarus, Switzerland, search for land in Illinois, Missouri, Iowa and Wisconsin.” It's said they purchased some 1,200 acres in Green County on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1845. Later that year, the website says “131 of the 193 colonists who left Glarus in April arrive at ‘New’ Glarus. An additional 80 acres of woodland are purchased for the colony.”

A large part of what makes New Glarus so incredibly historic and charming is its situation in the vibrant and beautiful countryside, with buildings that have remained from the very founding. According to the website, what is now the New Glarus Hotel (one of my favorite watering holes), was originally the New Glarus Haus, built in 1853 and originally serving as New Glarus' first hotel.

The Swiss Historical Village website also says New Glarus' first brewery was built in 1867, and a cheddar cheese factory was opened in 1873. And while the site doesn't list any butcher or meat shops in its timeline, I know from talking with Dennis Hoesly – and via Barry Adams' 2011 *Wisconsin State Journal* interview with Jim Zuber – that Palmer "Butch" Strickler and the Strickler family were prominent meat shop proprietors back in the day, and their shop may have been operating in New Glarus as early as the first decade of the 1900s.

Luckily for us meat geeks, I was able to dig a little further and found this fun bit of info within Carol Lohry Cartwright's *Architectural and Historical Survey of New Glarus, WI*:

“The Hoesly Block (421 2nd Street) also contributes to the history of retailing in New Glarus. Built in 1904, the building was a double storefront block where one of the businesses eventually took over the entire building. In 1906, Eugene Strickler came to New Glarus from Switzerland and opened a meat market in this building. By the mid-1910s, Strickler was a half owner of the building and by 1924, he was sole owner.”

Cartwright goes on to say:

“Strickler was a noted sausage maker and later turned over the business to his son, “Butch” Strickler. The meat business grew in the mid-20th century at this location and during the 1960s, a large addition was made to the east side of the building to increase manufacturing capacity.”

She documents that the Strickler business was sold to New Glarus Foods, Inc. in 1978, and that New Glarus Foods went on to build a warehouse in the New Glarus industrial park in 1987 – with all of the meat processing operations moving to that same industrial park site (which is now home to a company that produces Jack Link's sausage products). And if you happen to be new to New Glarus

and spot the massive Jack Link's sign, you'll know that Hoesly's Meats and their delicious landjaeger is just up the road!



**A large New Glarus Foods mural still resides on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in New Glarus.**

Cartwright continues: “The Hoesly Block adds to the historic significance of the potential 2nd Street Commercial Historic District because it was constructed as a modern double-storefront building that was the home of a meat market that eventually became an important industry in the community.” And in addition to bringing meat to the masses, Cartwright says, “Capitalizing on the connection of Eugene Strickler to Switzerland, this was one of the first buildings in downtown New Glarus to be given Swiss style decoration, a trend that would continue in the late 20th century.”

Here we see that, not only was the meat industry an important part of the New Glarus community, but the design of Strickler's shop itself helped drive the entire Swiss look and feel that we've come to know and love about New Glarus. And let's not forget New Glarus is also home to the Swiss Center of North America – a vital connecting point and vast archival resource for Swiss heritage far beyond Green County (more info at [www.theswisscenter.org](http://www.theswisscenter.org)).

In more current meat developments, we also know Willy Ruef began working at Zemp's Meat Market\* in New Glarus in 1960, eventually purchasing the business that would become Ruef's Meat Market in 1966. Willy's son, Bill is said to have taken over in 1999, and as we've touched on earlier, the shop was most recently owned by Chris and Nita Hessling up until March 2021.



\*While I had a hard time finding any information regarding Zemp's Meat Market, I was able to find a couple records for Peter Zemp. A 1940 US Federal Census has Peter listed with an estimated birthyear of 1896, with his occupation "Butcher" at, what I believe to read, "Farm's Meat Market." A World War II draft registration notice lists his birthdate more specifically as February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1896 in "Kt Luzerne, Switzerland." At the time he signed the draft notice in 1942, Peter lists his employment as "Self", in New Glarus, Green County, WI. And while I was unable to find an obituary, it looks as though Peter passed away on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1963, in New Glarus, at the age of 67.



**Village of Monticello**

Departing from New Glarus and driving just 8 minutes further down WI-69, you'll find the charming village of Monticello, home to Gempeler's Supermarket and their Alpine Boy Sausage brand. Monticello welcomes you right away with its expansive Montesian Gardens and beautiful Lake Montesian sitting alongside the highway. Monticello also offers a charming downtown, and there's a very good chance you've heard of their Edelweiss Creamery – which, according to its website, has been located in the same spot since 1873 (I'm partial to the Tuscan Dream, myself).

Monticello seems to have come to life around the same time as New Glarus, and while records regarding the history of Monticello are a little more difficult to come by than those of New Glarus or Monroe, it sounds as though Monticello's modern history can be traced to 1843. According to *Monticello Past and Present, 1976*, available via the Monticello Area Historical Society, and compiled by the Monticello Bicentennial and Historical Committees & unnamed individual contributors: "The first white man to see possibilities in the site was Robert Witter...[who] registered this land in the Mineral Point Land Office as an agent for his brother, Chester, in 1843."

From there, *Monticello Past and Present, 1976* says the property changed hands multiple times between 1843 and 1850, starting with A.F. Steadman purchasing the land and platting the village in 1846. From there, the authors list the first store building being erected in 1851; the first shoemaker

arriving in 1853; the first harness maker establishing shop in 1862; and the formation of the Monticello Union Cheese manufacturing company in 1878. And if you're wondering about early Monticello meat markets or butchers, *Monticello Past and Present, 1976* does reference the Tanner & Aeberhard Meat Market, but mainly due to Alfred Aeberhard being the butcher there at the time, and more-so recognizing him for opening and operating Monticello's largest mink farm.

And though I wasn't able to find much more info in print, I was able to visit the Monticello Area Historical Society for myself in May 2021, and as luck would have it, they were hosting an exhibit that prominently highlighted *Meat Markets and Groceries*. Not only did the exhibit list Schwers Meat Market being open from 1911-1964, they also documented Tanner & Aeberhard opening in 1933, which was eventually sold to Karl Duerst and ultimately became Gempeler's Supermarket. I'm incredibly lucky to have stumbled across this exhibit when I did, and many thanks to Nancy Rufener & Karen Brugger for the great information and conversation!



**I never thought I'd stumble upon this gorgeous 1946 promotion calendar from Schwers Market.**

As for Gempeler's itself, their website says they opened for business on April 10, 1972, with "three aisles, one cash register, and a half dozen employees. One year later, Ernie & Sharron purchased and remodeled the adjacent, vacant building formerly occupied by Karl's (Duerst) Meat Market\*, which doubled the size of the grocery store." The Gempeler's website also offers a brief timeline of the store's ongoing upgrades, listing the addition of their meat processing operation and the launch of Alpine Boy Sausage as key moments in their history.

\*Much like the Peter Zemp's background, I had a hard time finding much info on Karl Duerst, but I was able to find his obituary from June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014 that stated, "Karl owned and operated a butcher shop in downtown Monticello for several years. He later worked at various butcher shops before retiring from Monroe Cheese Corp in the early 1990s."





**City of Monroe**

After our lovely stop in Monticello, it's time to hop back on WI-69 and head south for about 15 minutes as we approach Monroe – or as it's otherwise known: “The Cheese Capital of the U.S.A.” In a state with some 1,200+ licensed cheese producers, that's not a nickname to be taken lightly. According to the National Historic Cheesemaking Center Museum, the dairy industry has been a normal way of life in the Green County area since 1830, with modern output resulting in “over 200 varieties and types of cheese and a combined total annual production of 200,000,000 pounds of cheese” from a combined 16 cheese factories in Green County and the surrounding area.

While you're at it, why not add to the list: A biennial Green County Cheese Days festival that draws folks from all over the world to Monroe's beautiful downtown area; the aforementioned National Historic Cheesemaking Center Museum; and the one-and-only Baumgartner's Cheese Store & Tavern – which has been in business since 1931 and lays claim to being Wisconsin's oldest cheese store. But in a town known for cheese, Monroe also knows how to landjaeger with the best of 'em.

Home to Zuber's Sausage Kitchen and the Green County Locker, Monroe's timeline seems to overlap heavily with New Glarus and Monticello. According to the Wisconsin Historical Society, Monroe was officially incorporated in 1882, but the first settlers arrived almost 50 years earlier (around 1835) to mine for lead.

The Wisconsin Historical Society site goes on to say: “European immigrants came to populate the area by the 1860s, particularly those from Switzerland. The dairying knowledge that these Swiss settlers brought with them was crucial to a shift toward agriculture in the late 1800s.”

While I wasn't able to find a ton of direct info regarding early Monroe meat shops or butchers, I did come across some places throughout Green County such as Helland's Food & Locker Service in

nearby Juda, and a *Yesteryears* collection from the UW-Madison library featuring early Albany-area meat markets dating back to 1883. Names like Thomas Gravenor, Arthur Smith, J. Annis, Simmons Chesebro, Graves & Barton, and Eugene “Mickey” Crawford dot the meat market landscape, as do Harry Thurman, George Keller, and Ronald Larson – who owned shops in the 1940s-1970s.

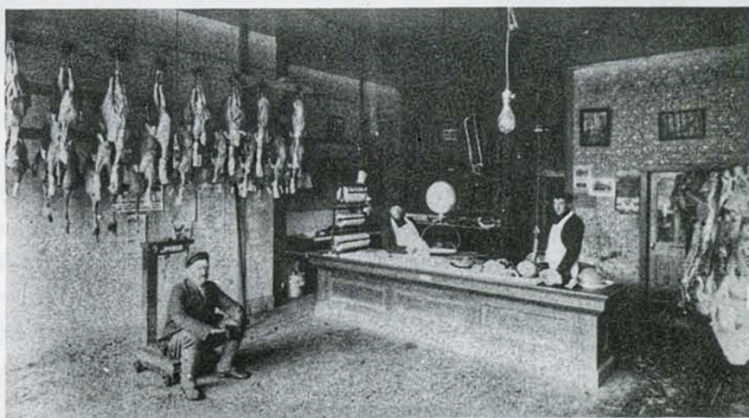
Other Monroe/Green County names pop up throughout my research, such as Virgil Keller, David Lee Eley, Sr., Richard H. Wiesenberg, and Fritz Rudolph Baumann, and area stores Hein & Francis, A & P, Brennan's, and Sentry. We also know about the Green County Frozen Food Market, which was the first business to occupy the building that the Green County Locker currently calls home.

At the end of the day, Monroe *is* the largest city in Green County, and there is undoubtedly a rich history of grocers, butchers, and lockers I have yet to explore. In more modern Monroe history, we know Jim Zuber started renting space in Monroe's Green County Locker as far back as 1991, with his mentors being Palmer "Butch" Strickler, Willy Ruef, and Heinz Mattmann. And as you'll see later when we sit down with the producers, there is definitely a lot of overlap within the Green County meat production community – especially when it comes to the last two names on that list.

According to another piece by Emily Massingill for *The Monroe Times*, the Green County Locker was most recently owned by Mike Buol and his wife, Deena (themselves having bought it from Larry Gordon). Sadly, Deena passed away January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019, just a month before she and Mike were to celebrate their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ownership. Mike has since sold the space to Chris and Nita Hessling, and the three of them work together daily as part of an all-star meat market trio.

Needless to say, at a time when artisan food and drink is revered, sought-after, and highly-coveted, Green County has basically been working at their own artisan pace for over 175+ years. It was this connection between the producers and their products to the neighboring community that first drove me to write this book, and I'm incredibly proud to bring some attention to the many folks who have worked tirelessly for decades to create unique, handmade, and deeply-authentic products for their customers. Be it cheese, beer, or landjaeger, if it's made in Green County, you can bet your bottom dollar it's crafted with love and care.

*A modern meat market in the early days. There were no refrigerated meat display cases or prepackaged meats in the days when Graves and Barton ran the meat market. Dressed geese and other poultry hung from hooks along the wall, as did hams and other fresh meat.*



**Graves & Barton meat market c. 1898? Photo courtesy of the University of Wisconsin Libraries.**



## What the Heck is a Land-Jagger?



**Even with our brief intro, you may still be wondering “what exactly is landjaeger?”** How does it differ from its more popular cousin, the aptly-named meat stick? How does landjaeger differ from other smoked meat snacks we’ve come to know such as beef jerky, summer sausage, or even the Polish kabanos I mentioned in the intro? And how the heck do you pronounce it?!

Let’s start with the last question, since it’s the most straightforward – though as you’ll see later, the name definitely generates an ample amount of comical variants, both from humans and recording apps. According to every producer and expert I talked to, the proper pronunciation is *Lond-Yay-Gurr*. Just think of “Land” with an “O,” and everyone’s favorite shot to take when they least need a shot: Jägermeister. Yes, the spelling is different, but we’ll address that a little later as well.

Secondly, landjaeger and jerky are similar only in the fact that they’re both meat products. Without selling jerky production short, the process for creating jerky largely involves spicing and drying – a process than can be completed over the course of a single afternoon. While delicious, we’re not going to spend much more time on that conversation. Where things get more interesting is when you start talking about sausages, and more specifically, fermented and smoked sausage snacks.

We’ll go over the process of making landjaeger in detail with our producers and Dr. Jeff Sindelar, but the most common landjaeger process involves the following steps:

- 1) Mixing the meat batter with spices, cure, sugars, and a lactic starter culture
- 2) Stuffing the batter into pork casing to form a pair of sausages (some producers use beef casing)
- 3) Placing the sausage into stainless steel “molds” or “forms” (specialized plates that give landjaeger its iconic rectangle-like shape)
- 4) Stacking the formed landjaeger, and allowing it to sit for a number of days in a cooler to help retain its iconic shape (some producers will skip this step and go right to the smoker)
- 5) Placing the formed landjaeger into a smoker and conducting a fermentation process to develop unique fermented flavors and textures until the desired pH is achieved (normally 5.2)
- 6) Raising the temperature within the smokehouse to destroy any dangerous bacteria
- 7) Removing landjaeger from smoker & allowing it to dry to 30% moisture loss from stuffed weight
- 8) Complete process by vacuum sealing landjaeger or hanging them in display racks

As I mentioned in the intro, the other major factors that make landjaeger so unique involve them coming as a joined pair, being hickory smoked, being flattened (often forming a rectangle-like shape), being comprised of a combination of beef and pork, and being shelf-stable.

Hickory was always referenced as the choice wood, so I don’t feel we need to dive too deep there; we have plenty of other items to chew on. And we’ll discuss the molds and shelf-stability later in the producers section and when talking to Dr. Jeff Sindelar.

Now let’s jump right into the substance that makes up the very backbone of landjaeger – the meat. This was one of the very first indicators that much of what I’d read online was wrong or half-true: that landjaeger was almost always made with a mix of beef and pork. As it was explained to me over the course of many interviews, that blend is completely up to the producer and their specific tastes.

Hoesly's and Bavaria both solely rely on beef, and if you know their landjaeger, you'd know Hoesly's offers a decadent amount of drippy beef fat, while Bavaria's are contrastingly lean. Alternatively, Ruef's, Gempeler's, and Zuber's all use specific blends of beef and pork.

This is partly due to personal choice, but it's also due to consistency in meat sourcing and federal regulations. And it's these same regulations that make it so many – if not all – of the producers are unable to use locally-sourced animals in their landjaeger. Not only is cost a factor for a time-consuming product with small margins to begin with, the meat that each shop receives must also follow stringent federal and state government regulations (in addition to approved Food Safety programs that each shop needs to have in place). While it would be an interesting selling point to produce an all-Wisconsin, farm-to-sausage landjaeger, we can also rest assured that the meat these producers are using is of the most consistent and regulated in the country. While the producers I spoke with always had some funny or frustrating stories involving inspectors, they also realize the importance of their symbiotic relationship in creating the best products possible.

As for coming in pairs, that's still not exactly understood – but as you'll see later, it's believed this was simply a matter of form following function: it allowed the meat vendors to hang them in their stores or shop booths for display (either on a wall or on racks), and two landjaegers seemed to be better than one when those who enjoyed them had a hankering for that meaty landjaeger goodness.



**Finished, smoked pairs of landjaeger hang proudly at Ruef's Meat Market.**

Now – who *were* these hungry folks? Apart from average meat geeks like you and me, landjaeger is said to be named after a set of individuals who enjoyed them so often, their livelihoods eventually intersected with their sausage snacks. Spelled *landjaeger* in Swiss, and *landjäger* in German, both spellings roughly translate to “country hunter” or “land hunter.” That makes sense, right? Hunters in need of sustenance while traveling the early European countryside turned to landjaeger because it’s fermented, cured, shelf-stable, packed with protein, and altogether delicious.

And if you’re wondering, I use the Swiss *landjaeger* spelling throughout *A Perfect Pair* due to the fact that all the Green County producers follow that spelling as well. The one variation being our Dane County friends at Bavaria Sausage, who, as you can image, utilize the German spelling.

But even with the translation being so direct and seemingly obvious, the question remains: who or what exactly do the terms “country hunter” or “land hunter” refer? What seems very straightforward is actually much more confusing, and even after extensive research, I still don’t have a conclusive historical answer (though I have come to a personal conclusion, which we’ll discuss later). For now, we’ll start with some basic introduction info one can find, followed by a more studied analysis:

In the most basic of searches, the website Cookipedia.com says “landjäger” were “originally a kind of **mounted police** in some German provinces,” and that it’s a “Southern German dried sausage made of roughly equal portions of beef and pork with lard, sugar and spices.”

And a quick trip – as of this writing – to perhaps the most famous collaboratively-edited website, Wikipedia, had this to say: “Landjäger is a semidried sausage traditionally made in Southern Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Alsace [French region bordering Germany and Switzerland]. It is popular as a snack food during activities such as hiking. It also has a history as **soldier's food** because it keeps without refrigeration and comes in single-meal portions.”

A small “Landjager” section in *The Art of Making Fermented Sausages* (basically the bible of fermented sausages), by Stanley and Adam Marianski, never mentions the origin of the name, but they do list another product from Italy, Cacciatore, which they describe as: “Italian small dry sausage. Cacciatore means ‘**hunter**’ in Italian and the story goes that hunters carried this sausage as a snack on long hunting trips.”

Interestingly enough, *Men’s Journal* did a piece on landjaeger where they said it’s named “after the **hunter-policemen** that patrolled the rural German-speaking countryside and made the sausage their staple.” They even go so far as to say “Landjäger originated in the Tyrol and Voralberg regions of Western Austria in the 18th century. Its popularity soon spread throughout other German-speaking regions of Western Europe – Bavaria, Switzerland, and Alsace (where it’s referred to as gendarme, or, policeman).”

Knowing how hard it is to track down the origin of the name (or landjaeger’s true history), it seems pretty bold to make a claim on landjaeger’s exact hometown regions. That said, the policeman explanation does correlate with Heinz Mattmann’s statement – which you’ll see later – that back in his part of Switzerland, they did refer to police officers as landjaegers – and it’s almost like calling a police officer a “cop” or “copper” in America.

The *Men’s Journal* piece is also interesting in that, similar to the Wikipedia content, it also references the Alsace region of France – which absolutely makes sense given its neighboring location to both Switzerland and Germany. One also has to take Wikipedia information with a grain of salt as well,

since the Alsace information provided on the Wiki page may have been added by an individual who read about it in the *Men's Journal* piece. Ah, the joys of open editing.

And while it may seem silly to add more Wikipedia information after just mentioning the website's unpredictability, the following notes were just too unique and ridiculous to skip over. Says Wikipedia as of publishing: "According to the Swiss German Dictionary, the name Landjäger was possibly derived from the dialect expression lang tige (n) 'smoked for a long time, air-cured for a long time.' The humorous reinterpretation in sense of **'mounted police'** may be inspired by the comparison of the stiffness of sausages with the perceived military rigidity of a police officer." Additionally, some earlier Wikipedia edits had the stiffness and rigidity associated with a particular *body part* of a police officer...but we'll just leave that up to the imagination.

So thus far we've heard "mounted police" mentioned twice, and "soldier's food," "hunter," "hunter-policemen" mentioned one time each. While seemingly connected, we're still left searching for a more specific origin – and after a little more digging, in addition to some information you'll read later, **I personally believe the name landjaeger stems specially from game wardens.**

Part of my conclusion comes from Michael Hinckley's *The History of Game Wardens* (which I found at <https://classroom.synonym.com/the-history-of-game-wardens-13583238.html>):

**"Game wardens are a critical part of our modern hunting culture,** ensuring that only licensed hunters operate within specific boundaries and within a specified time of year. **Their job preserves the prey of hunters (and fishermen) for future generations,** but also has very deep roots that many people are unaware of. Knowing a bit more about game wardens will help you appreciate the difficult tasks they must perform."

We dig a little deeper alongside Mr Hinckley into Medieval England:

"European kingdoms often set aside the choicest lands for the personal use of the king. It is upon these lands that the king and his party would hunt deer, boar, bear and other beasts of the forest. **Initially, a game warden was used as a coordinator of the hunt,** managing the dogs and peasants used to flush game. **Later on, his duties came to include patrolling the forests and streams on the lookout for poachers.** This duty became increasingly important in the late middle ages as the king's lands encompassed more and more territory, forcing many hunters to turn to poaching in order to make ends meet."

And we then find the icing on the game-warden cake when Mr Hinckley speaks about German *Jagermeister* specifically:

**"The German equivalent of a game warden is called a "jagermeister" (YAY-ger MY-ster) which translates into "land master." Jagermeisters were similar to English game wardens in preserving the lands of the local noble from poaching,** but also kept up the trails and pathways through the woods as well as oversaw logging and other forestry programs. **Jagermeisters are still used today in Germany,** often employed by the state and patrolling in specially marked vehicles."

Here we connect the dots with *jagermeisters* and *landjaeger* – though, if we're basing our translation on current usage, Mr Hinckley does seem incorrect in translating *jagermeister* to "land master," when it would seemingly translate to "hunter master." I'm sure terms and true translations vary widely and

have changed over time, so I'll stop there. One could also say that "jager" is a common-enough term that we can't say for certain. And that would be correct. That said, this does bring together two dominant schools of thought – hunter and police officer – in one neat package. And while we still have an inconclusive answer, one is led to understand that game wardens did take part in hunting while keeping an eye on the hunting of others, and the game warden occupation did precede police officers as we know them today. Much more to come, I'm sure!

Moving on from the etymology of our favorite smoked sausage snack, another interesting part of landjaeger is the blend of spices used by each producer – blends that are strictly proprietary and help to play a large part in giving each pair of landjaegers its unique and distinct identity (with other major factors being acidity, smokiness, and shape).

While I never asked the producers to outright tell me what spices they use, I did offer a list of spices that seemed to pop up in different articles and books: **caraway, coriander, black pepper, allspice, celery seed, garlic cumin, and nutmeg**. I then typically asked if these represented spices the producer knew to be common in landjaeger production – and all said yes to some degree.

Some shops like Hoesly's and Gempeler's have their spices pre-mixed for them, allowing them to create many large batches without having to measure out the blend of spices for each and every batch. While efficient, it was explained to me that this does open the door to other producers potentially knowing what's in your specific formulation (mainly due to loose-lipped sales reps). It seems the benefits outweigh the negatives, however, since the producers still order the pre-mixed spices and didn't seem too concerned that their secrets would end up in the competition's hands. On the flip side, Bavaria takes their in-house spice blending very seriously and they mix all their own spices for each and every product by hand – no small feat when you see the scale of their operation.

As you'll see throughout the book, my mind often wanders to beer production while talking with these producers, since so many of their day-to-day processes overlap with those of a brewery. And that overlap plays out with spices as well since, even if another landjaeger producer were able to see your spice bill, there is little chance they could replicate the same exact product – with factors such as starter cultures, meat and wood sourcing, in-house protocols and practices, and general meat shop *terroir* inevitably creating a shop-specific product. That very same thing can be said for brewing, wherein someone may know exactly what grain, hops, yeast, and water a brewery uses in a specific beer, yet they'll inevitably have a hard time creating an exact replica due to each brewer or brewery having their own established way of doing things. And this is what makes each producer so unique.

So there we have it. As I touched on earlier, there is a lot more technical ground to cover in regard to bringing landjaeger to life, but this is a basic synopsis of what makes landjaeger such a fascinating and unique product in a world of seemingly-endless meat snacks and sausages. Now, without further ado, we'll begin to meet the makers behind Green County's world-famous landjaeger....



## The World-Famous Landjaeger Producers of Green County



**I have to admit, I faced a decent amount of internal back and forth** in putting together this list of landjaeger producers. Not *who* would make the list, per se – that was pretty much set in stone. My indecisiveness stemmed from questions like “How would I list them? Maybe alphabetically? Maybe based on the interview date? Based on the number of producers in each city or village? Perhaps we’d arrange it like we’re traveling north to south in Green County; or vice-versa?”

The sudden and sad closing of Ruef’s Meat Market threw another curveball. As I mentioned previously, a decades-old establishment like Ruef’s is demanding of its own book, let alone a single chapter. And with Ruef’s most recent owners moving their production to Monroe, there was no way I’d miss listing the Green County Locker as well. Then came the Dane County landjaeger experts at Bavaria Sausage (just north of Green County), and how to work them into our travels.

At the end of the day, a north-to-south road trip won out. We’ll begin our journey in the village of New Glarus, make our way down to the village of Monticello, and end our Green County conversations in the city of Monroe – before popping straight up to Dane County!

These initial five producer interviews – and those with Heinz Mattmann and Dr. Jeff Sindelar – took place between January and March of 2020. Since then, I’ve added a section on the Green County Locker and subsequently followed up with every producer and expert to triple-check and update any facts – and the info you find here is up to date as of June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 (happy birthday, ma!).

Join us now, as we take a trip through Landjaeger County, USA...





# Ruef's Meat Market

538 1st St.  
PO Box 251  
New Glarus, WI 53574

Tel: (608) 527-2554

Website: [www.ruefsmeatmarket.com](http://www.ruefsmeatmarket.com)

Email: [ruefsmeatmarket@gmail.com](mailto:ruefsmeatmarket@gmail.com)

Proprietors: Chris & Nita Hessling

Interview Date: January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Closing Date: March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021



*Ruef's is now closed. All the information in this section was collected at the time of interview. Chris and Nita now own the Green County Locker in Monroe, WI, which we'll visit later.*



**Proprietor and Master Mustache Maker, Chris Hessling**  
Photo courtesy of Chris himself.

**Ruef's holds a special place in my heart for a number of reasons.** Not only was Chris the first person I ever sat down with to begin interviewing for this book, but the shop itself was always such a joy to enter. I say *was* because Ruef's sadly shut its doors in March 2021 – a closure that brought an incredible local legacy to an end. According to Chris, the building first housed the New Glarus Meat Company as far back as 1914, and he always displayed the original 1912 blueprints alongside an assortment of other meat shop novelties. In typical small-town fashion, Chris also noted that the great nephew of the gentleman who drafted the blueprints would visit the shop to buy landjaeger.

As you'll read, Ruef's has served as a meeting point and launch pad for several local landjaeger producers. Willy Ruef, who owned Ruef's from 1966 to 1999, employed both Jim Zuber (Zuber's Sausage Kitchen) and Heinz Mattmann (Master Sausage Maker, most recently of Bavaria Sausage), and he also helped train Chris in the ways of the landjaeger. And over the course of this book, you'll hear about Willy's influence in ways big, small, direct, and indirect.

Ruef's closure did strike an immediate blow to local landjaeger production and the storied history of Ruef's Meat Market, but luckily for us, Chris and Nita had already purchased the Green County Locker in June 2019. And while they're not currently using the Green County Locker space to produce landjaeger, Chris and Nita have kept themselves incredibly busy and they already have a few new ideas up their sleeves. And now, a conversation with Chris Hessling...



**The entrance of one of Green County's most legendary meat markets.**



## **Can you tell me a little about the history of your establishment, and how you started incorporating landjaeger into the mix?**

Right out of the gate, Chris tells me he was born in Iowa – and after traveling around Iowa and Nebraska, he made his way to Wisconsin, where met his now-wife and business partner, Nita, while working together at a restaurant. Chris, Nita, and their children live in New Glarus, and Nita’s actually from the village of Belleville, WI (just 10 miles down the road from New Glarus). While Chris had hopped around between the cities of Lincoln, Omaha, and Des Moines prior to meeting Nita, he – much like so many who’ve traveled there – fell in love with the community and peace & quiet that New Glarus had to offer.

Chris had been a Wisconsin-based chef in the ten or so years prior to his role as co-owner of Ruef’s, having ran a restaurant in Monroe, a couple restaurants in Madison, and helping to open Sprecher’s Restaurant & Pub in Wisconsin Dells. Needless to say, dining and hospitality run thick in Chris’ veins, and you can easily see how those skills transitioned over into Ruef’s Meat Market – where Chris had always been the main person who’d greet you at the deli case (though his father-in-law was always willing to jump in and offer a helping hand as well).

It wasn’t too long before Chris and Nita started having kids, and feeling the need to be closer to family, the two of them relocated to New Glarus when their first daughter was born. As luck would have it, Chris and Nita heard from a friend that Ruef’s was available for purchase. At the same time, Bill Ruef had an ad on Craigslist for a sausage maker/hired hand, and Chris began working with Bill for 2-3 years, learning how to make sausage and manage the shop – and perhaps most significantly, witnessing first-hand how Bill’s dad, Willy, ran things back in the day.

When Chris first started, Willy would come in a couple days a week to help out, which ranged from making sausage to just hanging out and chatting. Being small-town New Glarus, Willy and his wife, Annette, lived just up the road, and Chris would often find himself working with Bill for a few hours and then walking over to talk with Willy about the ins-and-outs of running the shop. (Note: Annette still owned the building when I wrote this, and it was her passing at the age of 78 that played a part in Ruef’s closure and the Hesslings transitioning out of New Glarus.)

While Chris didn’t know the exact details, he mentioned Willy coming over from Switzerland and working at Zemp’s Meat Market – which, as we discussed earlier, Willy eventually took over in 1966 upon the passing of Peter Zemp in 1963. While I have yet to bridge that three-year gap between Peter’s passing and Ruef’s “official” opening, Chris does confirm that a lot of the present-day recipes started when Willy took over. (And after a little digging, I was able to confirm that Willy was born in Switzerland on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1939, and he made his way to the US in 1951.)

Luckily for meat geeks and New Glarus’ history as a whole, Chris was also able to get recipes that pre-dated Willy, such as smoked tongue and veal loaf. Chris tells me that, much like other old-school sausage makers you’ll read about later, a lot of these recipes were tucked away in Willy’s head – though it sounds like Willy also had old recipe/process books laying around the shop.

While the idea of owning a meat shop may sound romantic and relaxing, it was a ton of work, and Chris asked Nita if she could give him five years to learn as much as he could while accruing enough money to eventually buy the shop. Nita was on board, and life being what it is, it only took two and a half years for Chris to have the opportunity to take over when Willy passed away in early April

2017, and his son, Bill, didn't want to run the business. Chris was handed the keys to Ruef's on May 1st, 2017, and luckily for everyone, he had all the plans in place to hit the ground running.

Unsure of how things would work after Willy's passing, Chris and Nita took the space over rather quietly – with no advertising and without telling too many people. The window display areas that Chris would eventually decorate were basically empty apart from a sausage stuffer, some Ruef's banners, and an "open" sign. Sparse was the word Chris used to describe the interior design scheme.

What I found most amazing was how much it sounds like the retail shop had changed since Chris and Nita took over. The Hesslings painted the walls white and added decorative wood, bells, and Swiss canton crests. Nita picked up decorations at shed and garage sales, and they found vintage saws and cleavers in the basement. Chris had also been building quite a collection of items throughout the years that he was working with Bill, some of which included the two sets of original blueprints I mentioned earlier. Touchingly, two of the items Chris most cherishes are an early picture of Willy Ruef as owner in 1966, and another photo Chris took of Willy making landjaeger – which he thinks may be one of the last pictures of Willy to be taken at the shop.

Chris tells me that Jim Zuber used to work for Willy, and this is my first introduction to the many connections between meat shops and sausage makers in Green County – and to be honest, it was even at this point where I felt my book could encompass Green County specifically (rather than a full-state rundown). Chris mentions the good sense of camaraderie that exists between the landjaeger producers, and he credits Bill with helping to introduce him to a number of local folks. He also mentions a time, soon after he took over ownership of Ruef's, when Dennis Hoesly came over to say hi and quickly recognized him as someone who bought lots of meat at Hoesly's.

At the time of this interview, it sounded like Bill Ruef was running Some Nerve Brewing Company in Manitowish Waters, WI. Being a beer guy, this obviously piques my interest, and Chris goes on to mention a homebrew setup Bill had stashed in the basement of Ruef's. And while Ruef's Meat Market may have changed hands, Chris and Nita both feel honored to continue the traditions that Willy, Annette, and Bill started so many years ago.

Beyond Ruef's, Chris tells me that he and Nita had also purchased the Green County Locker in June of 2019. Located in Monroe, WI, the Locker is a 5,000 sq ft processing facility previously owned by Mike and Deena Buol (and, as we'll find out later, the Green County Locker was also a previous home for Zuber's Sausage Kitchen in the early 1990s). Mike and Deena Buol had been working with farmers to process their cows and hogs, and Chris discussed their intentions to keep it operating as such – possibly with a small retail market aspect as well. At the time of this interview, Chris called the acquisition "serendipitous," and as the world would play out between our conversation and my time of publishing the book in July 2021, that couldn't be closer to the truth.

### **Origin of the name:**

Chris mentions the oft-cited mounted police – similar to a game warden or rangers for Bavarian forest. "It's hunter's sausage," he tells me, while explaining that Willy and Bill both described it as such. (This also correlates with my belief that game wardens are the most precise origin of the name *landjaeger*.) Chris laughingly tells me he hears every pronunciation under the sun when folks come in to order landjaeger. "Land-jagger. Jagggers. Little hangy sausage." And for those who push back on trying to pronounce it in the first place, well...chances are Chris will make you!

## **What makes your landjaeger unique?**

Chris feels the factors that really set Ruef's landjaeger apart would be that they're still packed and formed by hand, and they continue to stick to the old recipe. While Chris says he "changed the back end a little," he still worked hard to protect the flavor. It's at this point Chris tells me they don't use a starter culture, and we'll find later that this is more common than I would have expected (and what ultimately led to Chris having to jump through a lot of hoops when first taking over the shop).

More than anything, Chris wanted to protect the recipe and he went about making some changes to the process to comply with federal and state-level regulations. He mentions something I hear often throughout my interviews: how the small, independent meat shops have to play by the same rules as their massive corporate competitors such as Jack Link's, Johnsonville, and Klement's. And while all the producers know it's necessary, the regulations can be daunting at times.

Chris goes on to say, "Landjaegers are a weird one, and [as far as regulations are concerned] they fall kind of in between a smoked sausage and a jerky. They're very regional so there's not a lot of federal studies and supporting documentation in supporting shelf stability."

And being new owners, Chris and Nita were not grandfathered into the old way of processing their landjaeger. As part of getting issued their licenses and permits, inspectors had to go through and take a look at all aspects of the Hessling's operation – and since the previous thorough inspection, things had definitely changed. Chris needed to add a water activity meter and lab equipment to show that the way producers had been making landjaeger for "hundreds of years" was still okay by current federal regulation standards. It took a long time to ensure the end product was true to Willy's legacy, and for 6-8 months after first opening Chris had to explain to customers all day, every day why they didn't have any landjaeger available for sale.

In one of Chris' best nods to Willy Ruef, he told me: "Willy said having small producers comply with federal regulations is like painting stripes on a tiger. It's hard to do, it pisses off the tiger, and the stripes were already there in the first place. As in, if he created a product that made people sick, they would be the ones to lose business."

### **Ruef's Landjaeger Production Schedule:**

**Days 1-2:** Fill the casings with batter. The sausages come out round (as we often think of sausage), and they press them flat. Ruef's fits 5-6 layers of flattened landjaeger on a cart, which is then stored in a 33-36F cooler for two days. This begins the curing process and helps to retain shape.

According to Chris, Nita is the "landjaeger presser extraordinaire...and that's why they look so pretty." With Chris stuffing and Nita pressing, you can be assured of some top-notch landjaeger.

**Day 3:** This is where Chris hangs and smokes the landjaeger, with their smoking regimen lasting between 6-7 hours. He begins with a slow smoking regimen up to predetermined temperatures, and this timeline can change depending on other factors such as external temperature and humidity.

**Day 4-9:** This is when the smoked landjaeger is hung to dry. Chris will ensure shelf stability by testing water activity and pH. There are a lot of variables, and again Chris states that landjaeger isn't jerky, and there are factors such as smoking time, drying time, and having a fermenter (starter culture) that can play a part in a successful process and final product.



**Chris takes a peek in the smoker.**

The concept of starter cultures and sausage fermentation is easily one of the most interesting aspects of landjaeger production, and hearing that Ruef's doesn't use a starter served as an early affirmation of why I'd started this research in the first place.

"This is where it gets tricky," Chris said. A large part of the 6-8 month period when they weren't able to sell landjaeger revolved around him showing inspectors why he didn't have to add lactic acid (starter culture) of any kind. Chris said that while this led to a longer process from start to finish, he knew he could get the pH where the inspectors wanted it to be. Why the pushback on a starter culture, you wonder? Chris says the addition of a starter changes the flavor and texture – essentially creating a product that differs sharply from what Willy would have been making. Chris notes that the additional regulations are obviously incredibly important, but by making people follow a new process, you inevitably change the result of the final product.

After dozens of tests, the Hessling's version of Ruef's landjaeger was once again available for sale, and as expected, it had become the best-selling product at Ruef's – with Chris saying Nita and him can press out 1,000 pairs if needed, depending on the other products they're working on and the season or holidays that are taking place.

This being my first interview, I expected Chris to say their landjaeger meat mix was a 50/50 blend of beef and pork – another common talking point online. Chris told me this was not the case at Ruef's, and he tends to lean heavier on the beef while using lean beef and fattier cuts of pork to make up the remainder of the mixture.

When I ask Chris about their ability to use local meat, he mentions something I'll hear from almost every producer – which is a general impracticality due to pricing, supply, and regulations. And while Ruef's is one of the few places I talk with that does little-to-no processing for private hunters and families, they acquired the Green County Locker to do just that.

In a perfect world, Chris says he would love to hand-source the beef that'll be used in their landjaeger. And beyond that, he has dreams of pasturing their own cows, processing them at the Locker, turning them into sausage at the meat market, and serving them at a farm-to-table restaurant they too would own. Chris says they have “no plans to stop having fun.” This may lead to some inspection changes due to the differentiation of retail and wholesale, but “time would tell” (and I'm excited to discuss this more in the Green County Locker section).

#### **Any criteria you feel landjaeger must follow? Or what should absolutely be kept out?**

Chris says: “Willy always said, as did inspectors, that the round ones are made by a machine and not pressed by hand. They have a vacuum stuffer that will control it by portion,” leading to identical landjaeger that are great when looking at consistency and costs. He goes on to say that his own uncle won't eat Ruef's landjaeger, and apparently his uncle is a Usinger's guy through and through. Chris does say his uncle really enjoyed some fresh landjaeger right out of the smoker. “It's not really a finished landjaeger at that point, but my uncle thought it was amazing.” And if you think his picky uncle has it good, Chris said he'll often specially *double* smoke bacon just to keep his mom happy (and apparently she's a big fan of Nueske's bacon!).

#### **Would you be open to sharing some of the spices, tricks, tips to your landjaeger preparation?**

In addition to not using a starter culture, Chris feels their spice blend is what really sets Ruef's landjaeger apart. As expected, he tells me that everyone keeps spice blends close to the vest – though he agreed with all the spices listed on my potential list, and says he has all of them stocked in their spice room at any given time. Chris *is* quick to point out that he makes his landjaeger in a Swiss town, so German, Hungarian, Czech, or other regional interpretations may be different.

#### **How much landjaeger do you produce each year? Is it your best-selling item?**

Landjaeger definitely sits high atop the popularity list, according to Chris. He mentions making shipments to Florida at one point, and slowly he began to see more orders from Florida. The word of mouth has been very helpful, and he says you can see overlap with German and Swiss communities, along with other areas and regional pockets where Wisconsinites tend to congregate. All makes perfect sense!

Chris says he actually made 300 pairs of landjaeger the day before our interview, with 300 more in the smoker day-of. In normal times, he estimated Ruef's could sell through 300 pairs in a couple days. Not too shabby for their relatively small shop and operation. Additionally, Ruef's also has some larger wholesale accounts, one of which was Bobby Nelson's Cheese Shop that closed in 2019, but not before gifting Chris the fantastic landjaeger sign you'll find at the end of this book.

He mentions how The Old Fashioned in Madison – which is a Wisconsin institution in-and-of-itself – had become a close partner with Ruef's, and that Nita and Chris had spent many wonderful evenings there over the years. And while Ruef's hasn't been focused on working with convenience stores, it's restaurants like The Old Fashioned that fit the kind of establishment where he enjoyed seeing their product prominently displayed.

Additionally, Ruef's sales are 100% in-state. They receive out-of-state wholesale requests on a regular basis, especially being so close to Illinois and, more specifically, Chicago. Chris has zero desire to do so, citing the need for increased regulation – though he does say shipping rates are also ridiculous, especially during the winter when they're shipping to Arizona and Florida every single week. If the time came to really push nationwide, Chris says it would be via online sales, where you can find the right clientele without having to jump through the regulatory hoops.



**Two photos of Willy Ruef still hung proudly in the shop. The photo on the left dates back to 1966, and Chris believes the photo on the right may be the last known shot of Willy in Ruef's – still hard at work.**

### **Any thoughts on branching out into other styles of landjaeger?**

Ruef's sells Traditional and Spicy (cayenne) landjaeger most times of the year, and if given the chance to create a special one-off, Chris quickly lists off a "hyper garlic" landjaeger. Having already made some test batches, he mentions the possibility of doing so in the slower times of the year. Apparently, his dad used to make pickles when Chris was a kid, and he would make certain jars he called "hyper garlic." Chris was all about the flavor then, and he sees the name and idea as a chance to experiment with flavors while also giving a nod to his pops.



He says they also created a blueberry landjaeger at one time, along with a cherry & Swiss cheese summer sausage – both of which sound right up my alley.

**Besides your landjaeger, which of your own meats are you especially proud of?**

Chris quickly rattles off their kalberwurst, schublig, Swiss meatball mix, bacon & blue cheese brats, smoked tongue, and landjaeger as their year-round staples. Beyond that, the different, esoteric meats sell themselves. He says Bill encouraged him to take the more unique products home on a regular basis, to fully realize what’s different about their flavor profiles, casings, textures, and the equipment that gets you those results.

Of the products Chris is most proud of, he lists the natural casing wieners. And while he loves eating them, he definitely doesn’t enjoy making them – citing the extremely labor-intensive process of braiding them up by hand with a super fine grind and very small sheep casing (which gives the wieners their distinctive snap). While landjaeger is also quite labor intensive, Chris says that in the time it takes to make 100 pounds of wieners, he could do 300-400 pounds of landjaeger.

Other Chris favorites are their aged summer sausage, schublig, and their farmerwurst. And with many of Ruef’s customers having visited Ruef’s for years and years, Chris says he gets a special thrill when folks are excited about a new product they’ve never tried. And if you want to go the brat route, Ruef’s went from twenty-some brat flavors to over forty – including a popular taco brat, and a mac & cheese brat that took over a year to perfect.

**Do you have any knowledge related to the history of the chalet-inspired display cases?**

As far as display cases are concerned, Chris says Willy made the majority of the ones still hanging around the shop – a wood-working theme I find to be very common amongst the old-school Green County landjaeger producers. Chris did mention that he and Nita had started making some cases themselves, sometimes jazzing them up with assorted rocks in true Swiss-chalet style.

He then mentions how Willy used to talk about a guy with one arm who could wield a cleaver with one blow, and that Willy himself was missing a part of his index finger. Chris says he stood there time and again watching Willy tying casings and pressing landjaeger better than him, and he finally worked up the nerve to ask “Which piece of equipment do I need to look out for?” Willy looked at Chris and told him he’d lost the part of his finger while wood working after retirement. Of course!

At the end of the day, I ask Chris why he thinks landjaeger is so popular in Wisconsin: “I can’t speak for anybody else, but for me, a big part of it is that when you’re getting a Ruef’s landjaeger, I’m literally handing it to you over the counter. I’m taking it out of a little Swiss chalet, I’m putting it in a piece of wax paper, I’m putting it in your hand, and you’re standing in a 100-year-old meat market and you eat it. That’s part of it.”



## Odds & Ends:

- While popular with the masses, Chris actually doesn't care for Ruef's Spicy landjaeger. That said, Nita once caught him...wait for it...dipping a Spicy landjaeger in some peanut butter. And though she wasn't sure at first, it sounds as though that snack combo has become Nita's go-to. Chris says he's since shifted away from the spicy landjaeger & PB combo, but part of me wonders...

- Chris' quote to remember: "We just make sure that every day we're having fun. We figure the rest will take care of itself."



**What more needs to be said?**





~ Ruef's Finest ~

# Hoesly's Meats

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**Proprietors: Dennis & Lillian Hoesly**

**Interview Date: February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020**



**Dennis Hoesly gives us a glimpse of some recently-smoked landjaeger.**

**Dennis Hoesly was a hard man to track down.** I'd been told it was best to call him rather than send any emails (not uncommon during this adventure), and when I first called the shop and connected with Dennis, he almost seemed surprised that someone was interested in chronicling the history of landjaeger. That said, he was immediately and incredibly open to the idea, and after another phone call or two, we were finally able to connect in early February of 2020.

Once I made it to the shop, I realized Dennis is *not* a hard man to track down at all – and he held court with at least three different parties before we finally sat down to discuss landjaeger. What I also realized was that Dennis is something of an amateur historian himself, having read a number of historical books related to New Glarus and Green County, and having traveled to – and hosted visitors from – Switzerland in an effort to keep the New Glarus and Swiss connections as tight as ever. And as you'll see throughout the course of our conversation, Dennis is also a meticulous note-keeper and scrap-booker, and this interview was incredibly helpful in further understanding the landjaeger and meat shop community in Green County.

This day was a two-for-one as well, since I got to head across WI-69 after this interview and meet with the man, myth, legend that is Heinz Mattmann at the one-and-only Puempel's Olde Tavern. Needless to say, I learned a ton of info between these two men, and both seemed as excited as I was to discuss the past, present, and future of landjaeger in Green County. Into Hoesly's Meats we go...

**Can you tell me a little about the history of your establishment, and how you started incorporating landjaeger into the mix?**

Dennis tells me that Hoesly's as we know it was established on May 1st, 1983, with Dennis and his wife, Lillian, starting the business and eventually adding their children, Dusten and Devon, into the mix over the last several years.

Much like other families I talked to throughout this process, it sounds like Dennis' dad, Cloyance, was the Head Sausage Maker at Strickler's Market of New Glarus, and Dennis knew he wanted to follow in dad's footsteps. It sounds as though Dennis most certainly did that, having worked at Strickler's on *three* separate occasions over the years. At one point, when already working as a sausage maker, Dennis was moved into a Packing Supervisor role. Without the opportunity to work alongside his dad on the sausage-making side of things, Dennis decided his next course of action would be to purchase the neighboring Stuessy's Grocery store (and Cloyance would join Dennis when he retired). The purchase of Stuessy's was made, and Hoesly's Meats was born.

Starting out, all Dennis had to work with was a wooden cutting block, a handsaw, and a brick smokehouse he fired up with wood. Heck, the shop was so new and small, Dennis remembers standing on top of the Pepsi delivery truck to hang their first sign. And while Cloyance was still working at Strickler's, he would come down after work and teach Dennis how to make sausage.

When it came time to introduce landjaeger, Dennis says his father would just bring the landjaeger forms over from Strickler's. As for Strickler's landjaeger itself, Dennis says they produced batches every week, and that Strickler's and Ruef's were the "only ones that made the real landjaeger" at the time. What's so interesting to me here is how Hoesly's landjaeger is, in effect, a descendant of the Strickler family recipe – in the same way Chris' current landjaeger at Ruef's is descended from the Ruef's family recipe (which in-and-of-itself, may be descended from the Zemp family).

Our conversation comes around to inspections, and how sausage makers often keep their recipes quite secretive. Dennis says it was around 1963-1964 that state inspection started to become more focused for his father and the Strickler's team. He tells me, "Strickler's started with old man Strickler's recipes from the old country, and a sausage maker doesn't tell his secrets." And he recollects Alfred Weiss coming over with his own recipes as well, quoting Weiss as saying "This is my job security. If someone else knows how to make sausage, they can get someone else."

Time and time again, the inspectors told Alfred he needed to document his recipes, and Alfred continued to say no. Over a number of years, Cloyance was able to pay attention to Alfred's day-to-day operations and eventually documented many of the recipes – though Dennis says Cloyance felt a sense of guilt for having done so, even if it was in the best interest of the market. After hearing this, it comes as no surprise that Cloyance didn't write everything down either, and Dennis says he still had some digging to do when he took over the recipe book. Old habits die hard.

During their first ten years in their original location, the Hoesly's remodeled three times – from installing a modernized smokehouse to adding a much-needed cooler. When I ask if the new smokehouse improved efficiencies, Dennis lights up, telling me of the time he tried to use the wood-fired smokehouse to smoke some fish...only to come back and find they'd gotten too hot and dropped into the fire. They also improved from a four-foot meat case to a twelve-footer, and eventually ending with a twenty-foot case. And even after all this change and growth, Dennis still remembers his first customer – back in 1983 – being an old classmate of his.

Life changed quickly for Dennis and the Hoesly family after about two years of operation, when Cloyance unexpectedly passed away of a heart attack while walking home from work at the age of 61 – just five months shy of his 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday. Dennis remembers the timeline well since Cloyance was planning to retire at the age of 62 and partner with Dennis in ownership of the family business.

While the loss of Cloyance had a much larger impact than the meat market's operations, Dennis says he was lucky to find the help of Bill Palmer, a former employee of Strickler's who helped Dennis get his feet under him. Though he wasn't a Master Sausage Maker, Bill helped Dennis with many assorted jobs; and being a former Strickler's employee, Bill would also bring over some of the recipes he'd worked with over the years (having personally created a recipe book of his own). And while the book was a starting point, it was very vague and more-so written "where you take this batter, then this, this, this to make wieners, or bologna" – with the rest hidden in Bill's memory.

One of the more touching parts of Dennis' recollections of Bill comes in their agreement of payment for Bill helping to make landjaeger on Saturdays. It sounds as though, in what seems to be typical New Glarus fashion, Bill said he wouldn't take a cash payout of any kind, but instead simply asked that Dennis buy breakfast for the two of them at the Land Haus afterwards. Years later, when Dennis' daughter started helping him with landjaeger production, it sounds as though she requested the same breakfast deal Bill had made – both of which Dennis was happy to oblige.

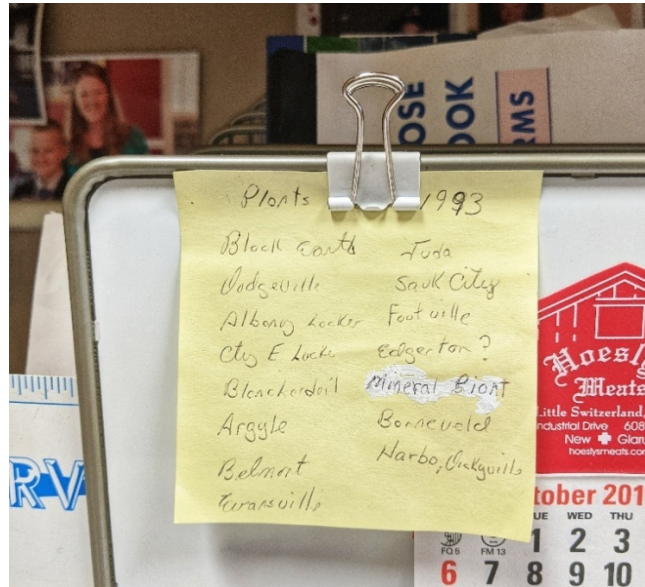
And while it seems like the current Hoesly's location on Industrial Drive has been established for years, Dennis tells me they've added four additions to that space as well. "One in every corner," he says, going on to tell me, "We should expand again, 'cause we can't keep up."

If you're wondering how much landjaeger it takes to drive such a growing business, it sounds as though Hoesly's main business – like many of the folks I talked to – is actually meat processing for local hunters and families. While I'm sure this has changed by some degree over the last year of



uncertainty, Dennis told me at the time that they butcher about 25 beef and 25 hogs a week – with customers being booked through February 2022. Dennis adds that their portfolio of sausages is a big part of their operation as well, but their living is made in processing meat.

And while it sounds as though Hoesly's was doing well, he does show genuine concern for the closing of many local meat shops – going so far as to show me a document (re: sticky note) he's kept of all the meat shops that have closed within 20 miles of their location. "A lot are mom and pops," he says, "and the kids didn't want to do it." And while many local shops are closing, there still seems to be a growing need for private processing – and when people are surprised that they can't get in for a year, he references this very list as a large part of the reason for the long wait.



**Dennis' list of closures, which served as even greater motivation in documenting this amazing history.**

Dennis then shows me how Hoesly's butchered 133 animals in 1993 (between just Dennis and Lillian), where 2019 found the Hoesly's team butchering 2,200 animals. And if you're wondering where Dennis keeps these numbers, you'd be correct if you guessed on a homemade spreadsheet made of *Christmas cards*. "Because they're the right size," Dennis says. Talk about old school!

Dennis and I talked for what seemed like hours, and at one point he grabbed a pair of landjaegers to cut up and enjoy – all-the-while showcasing the meat-to-fat proportions and describing what he enjoys about their particular flavors. We talk about Heinz Mattmann; he tells me Willy Ruef was a "great man;" we discuss how helpful Jeff Sindelar has been to Hoesly's and the local meat processing community; we discuss the different spellings and pronunciations of Hoesly's (the Swiss pronounce it: *Huus-lee*, and *Hoes-lee* gets a chuckle since it means "short pants"); and he also introduces me to his son, Dusten, a graduate of the UW-Madison Master Meat Crafter course.

I must say, speaking with Dennis about the history of Hoesly's was a crash course in the history of Strickler's and the New Glarus of decades past. Apart from Jeff Sindelar, it was this producer/expert interview that proved the most time-consuming. Dennis is a history buff and I wanted to ensure I was giving all the previous producers and meat shops their proper credit. This conversation was especially powerful for that very reason, and it was another reminder of how much deeper we could dig on this history for future volumes. Till then, let's talk a little more about landjaeger!



**An old photo of Fred Stuessy, whose shop Dennis purchased to start Hoesly's Meats in 1983. To this day, Dennis still uses Fred's ring bologna and wiener recipes. Photo courtesy of Dennis Hoesly.**

### **Have you heard any unique stories of landjaeger's history in Europe, or here in the Midwest?**

Dennis' story about the Old World is great because it's about Dennis' *own* adventures. He tells me that whenever he goes to Switzerland, he bolts off to try every landjaeger he can get his hands on (turns out he's a meat geek, through and through). Luckily, this has become a known part of their family getaways, and whenever they lose one-another, his family knows they can often find Dennis in the closest meat shop, either talking to the butcher or sampling their offerings.

### **Origin of the name:**

In contrast to what Chris Hessling had to say, Dennis tells me he thinks the name is directly linked to hunters and not game wardens. More to come on this front!

### **What makes your landjaeger unique? Any criteria you feel landjaeger must follow? Or what should absolutely be kept out?**

Dennis does feel there are cases where landjaeger producers are simply creating a meat product and slapping the popular "landjaeger" name on there. He mentions a producer who was making what he called venison landjaeger, but it was basically summer sausage in a hog casing. They tried to flatten them a little bit, but they weren't the same thing. Seems as though, at least according to Dennis, the flattened shape truly matters in differentiating landjaeger from other sausage snacks.

Dennis tells me they've never changed their landjaeger recipe, and walking through the space with him is a lesson in decades of perfected landjaeger production.

## Hoesly's Landjaeger Production Schedule:

**Day 1:** Grind the meat.

**Day 2:** Stuff with batter & flatten. Dennis says they “put them on a board and put weight on them.”

**Day 3:** Hang sausages in smokehouse (normal smoking regimen is around 12 hours).

**Day 4-11:** Move landjaeger out of smoker and into the drying room.

**Once Ready:** Place them in the freezer so they don't dry out anymore.

Dennis echoes the sentiment that the timing depends on the weather. In the winter, their landjaeger dries out in about a week, but the drying process can often take about two weeks in the summer. I was interested in the freezer process, and he confirms they go that route rather than vacuum sealing.

Unlike Ruef's, Hoesly's landjaeger is all beef – which may help to create that distinct Hoesly's mouthfeel and flavor. But, like Ruef's, Hoesly's does not use a starter culture, and this is definitely becoming one of the more interesting differences between what I've read and what the actual producers are incorporating into their time-honored recipes and protocols.

What I did find very interesting was the fact that Hoesly's uses beef rounds for the casing. Dennis says pork casing is a softer product, and unlike almost everyone I talk to (or any recipes I've come across), they prefer to not go the pork route for any of their landjaeger production.

Having eaten landjaeger for decades, Dennis tells me they weren't always fully cooked as they are today – and he feels those older methods made for better landjaeger. He discusses how they now need to hit upwards of 140F in the smoker, and that the previous peak temperature was around 132F or so. While he follows the current regulations, he seems adamant that the higher heat lessens what he considers an even more enjoyable landjaeger experience.



Hoesly's three pairs of landjaeger molds alongside a pre-packed mix of their proprietary spices.

Dennis too says their shop is unable to work with local cattle farmers for landjaeger, and much of it has to do with knowing the trimming they're receiving. He says Hoesly's buys choice chuck or round, they know exactly where it comes from, and they have to certify that with the inspectors.

This is when Dennis breaks out a pair of some Hoesly's landjaeger, and he points out the elevated fattiness of their product. He says that's what carries your flavor, and the more you dry them, the more it presses the fat and brings out the overall flavor upon each bite – notes that directly reflect some of my flavor comparisons later in the book. I have to ask: does Dennis like them right out of the smoker, like Chris at Ruef's? He says he actually likes them when they're a little more dry – maybe a day or two after the smoker.

Dennis says that, due to the length of time it takes to bring landjaeger to the masses, they usually start their process on Fridays. And while they can fit upwards of 400 pounds of summer sausage and 300 pounds of bologna into the smoker, they can only fit about 250 pounds of landjaeger for any given batch. And whenever the first 250 pounds is almost gone, they start to make the next one.

The legend of Hoesly's landjaeger has spread far and wide, and Dennis tells me they have a lot of people swing through to pick up larger orders. He also says they don't deliver...unless Puempel's needs some fresh landjaeger, at which point Dennis makes sure to run them over and sometimes "spends an hour or so there." All in a day's work!

### **Would you be open to sharing some of the spices, tricks, tips to your landjaeger preparation?**

When we head into the spice room, Dennis is as secretive about their spices as any producer I meet – but he does open up about the basic makeup of their blend. He agrees that my list is common for landjaeger spicing, and he discusses the relationship he has with a large spice company which allows him to make 50-100 lb batches of landjaeger without having to tackle the blending in-house.

He says he really liked the flavor of one particular summer sausage he found at a convention, and they were able to adjust their own spicing regimens – and for producers who are perhaps just trying out a new product for the first time, the spice company can send you a sample of another product they make. If you like it, they'll get you started with a similar blend and away you go.

The spice room is also where Dennis keeps their landjaeger molds. He talks about landjaeger initially looking like a fresh bratwurst after they're stuffed. They then twist them in the middle, add the sausage into the landjaeger mold, smooth them out, lay them on a board, and eventually lay one layer on top of another. All of Hoesly's immense landjaeger output is done with two molds – and maybe three if Dennis has time to help.

### **How much landjaeger do you produce each year? Is it your best-selling item?**

In addition to their strong partnership with New Glarus Brewing Company (where Hoesly's is the feature landjaeger in one of the nation's most popular destination breweries), Dennis also mentions a Swiss club in Chicago that orders a great number of landjaeger. Dennis also notes that they make a *lot* of venison landjaeger for hunters, sometimes having to ramp up production to two times a week. It takes a lot of work for producers to shift their standard operations from beef/pork/in-house products to venison operations for private hunters, so that two-a-week schedule is definitely saying something. To this point, Dennis agrees that sales do go up around hunting season, and he feels venison landjaeger has become one of the more popular options for Wisconsin hunters.



For as popular as Hoesly's landjaeger has become, Dennis says it's not really a profitable item for them due to the select cuts they bring in and the extensive needs for manual labor. He then mentions Zuber's automated landjaeger machine (which you'll definitely meet later), and he says they'd definitely like to bring one in for their own operations.

As to why landjaeger is so popular, Dennis cites the portability and overall flavor. He also mentions a friend of his who found a pair of year-old landjaeger in his tackle box, and just ate it up without asking any questions. One can imagine it was more than a little crisp, but don't for a second say you wouldn't do the same thing!

### **Any thoughts on branching out into other styles of landjaeger?**

Dennis says quite quickly that he doesn't want to make any other kinds of landjaeger, especially because they already produce numerous assorted flavors of snack sticks and jerky (amongst many other fresh and frozen products you can find in their store).

### **Besides your landjaeger, which of your own meats are you especially proud of?**

Dennis doesn't bat an eye: "Kalberwurst." He says it's a staple of their lineup, and Hoesly's is one of three shops he knows making it – alongside Ruef's and Gempeler's.

He explains that, because of the milk and crackers involved in their kalberwurst recipe, they strategically begin production on Wednesday. He says you can't let it sit; it'll spoil. He mentions customers heading down to their shop from Wednesday to Friday to pick it up fresh, and they then freeze whatever is left over on Friday or Saturday.

Dennis says their schublig and cervelas are popular as well (and I can personally attest to the deliciousness of the schublig, especially around the campfire). Hoesly's also makes veal brats and veal loaf for sandwich meat, adding that while some Polish sausages may be spicy, any traditional Swiss sausage is likely mildly-spiced.

He also touches on their braunschweiger, which they sell in abundance to the world-famous Baumgartner's in Monroe, WI – a town we'll visit just a few stops down the road.

### **Do you have any knowledge related to the history of the chalet-inspired display cases?**

While Dennis didn't know of any direct Old-World origins, he knows that Butch Strickler's father-in-law made them locally. Basically, if a store agreed to sell Strickler's landjaeger, they would build them a case. He tells me the chalet case they have in their shop (which may actually be the most detailed and robust examples I've seen) was one of these originals, and that Dennis acquired it from Bill Palmer after Bill had been working to sell landjaeger to different accounts.

Dennis tells me the daughter of the original Strickler's woodworker came through to buy the chalet case, but he just couldn't part with it – it was too special in his own upbringing as a New Glarus local and landjaeger producer. He also says local school kids in New Glarus and Monticello have built some cases for Hoesly's, and while they're maybe not as fancy as some of the decades-old chalet cases, the kids still do a great job.



**Dennis and Lillian greet their very first customer in 1983. Photo courtesy of Dennis Hoesly.**



**Dennis and Lillian in front of their then-new market. Photo courtesy of Dennis Hoesly.**

## Odds & Ends:

- There's a Hoesly's meat market in Switzerland as well, and Dennis has even woken up at 6am to get a glimpse of their specific production methods. This man knows how to vacation.
- Believe it or not, even though Hoesly Lake and Hoesly Drive sit right next to their establishment, neither are associated with the meat market. Apparently it was the site of an old Hoesly Farm, seemingly unrelated to his side of the family. I did not see that one coming.
- When moving into their current space, Dennis was actually looking to buy the very location that would become the original home to New Glarus Brewing Co. Perhaps we should all thank Dennis for allowing Deb and Dan Carey the chance to use that space so many years ago.
- Ever the history buff, Dennis also spends time working with the Swiss Center – and at one point, he donated a couple of trunks he'd found in the attic of their house. He went so far as to cut a hole in the roof to get them out, and from there they tracked the history of the families who brought them over from Switzerland. While he says they were nothing fancy, these trunks had made the trip all the way from Switzerland to New Glarus and the names were still on each piece. Wonder what his tackle box buddy would have done if he'd found a pair of landjaeger in one of *those*?



**You're welcome.**





**~ Hoesly's Finest ~**

# Gempeler's Supermarket & Alpine Boy Sausages

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Proprietors: Ken Gempeler, and his sister,  
Connie Von Der Heide

Interview Date: March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020



When not preparing landjaeger, you'll likely find Ken Gempeler behind the deli case.



**Gempeler's and Monticello are two of the greatest hidden gems in Green County**, though by the size and growth of Gempeler's, I'm sure their team would question my use of the word "hidden." While I had seen their sausage and meat stick brand, Alpine Boy, in select shops, I had never come across their landjaeger – and it took a little more research and my conversation with Dennis Hoesly to confirm such a thing truly existed. What I found was, not only does it exist, it's also very popular and some of the most uniquely-spiced landjaeger in Green County.

Once I was able to touch base with Ken Gempeler, I made my way to Monticello as soon as possible. Ken, like Dennis before him, was much more of a phone call kinda guy and also incredibly open to the idea of discussing landjaeger and its impact on Green County. And while I think Ken may have forgotten about our meeting the day I arrived, he quickly passed along some duties he had planned and joined me for a quick conversation at one of their in-house dining tables (where folks can enjoy their fantastic hot dishes, pizzas, sandwiches, soft-serve ice cream, and of course, landjaeger...or really anything their robust and bustling store has to offer).

Gempeler's seems to act as a true backbone of the Monticello community, and I even took part in some grocery shopping in addition to my interview. And if you're strictly talking meat, their selection of snack sticks & snack stick bites is perhaps one of the most robust I've seen at any other meat shop in all of Wisconsin. If someone has more variety, I'd be blown away. Add this bounty of snacks to Gempeler's powerhouse landjaeger and you're setting yourself up for a meat geek paradise. And now, let's pop on into Gempeler's to talk shop...



**Front entrance to Gempeler's, Monticello's largest grocery store and home to Alpine Boy Sausage.**

**Can you tell me a little about the history of your establishment, and how you started incorporating landjaeger into the mix?**

Ken tells me he was 7 years old when his parents purchased Streiff's Grocery in 1972 and reopened it as Gempeler's Supermarket. His dad is Swiss and his mother is Norwegian, so it seemed like only a matter of time before his dad would start a meat department at Gempeler's – and the Alpine Boy brand stemmed from this desire to showcase their meats apart from the grocery store itself.

Ken tells me he worked on his uncle's farm throughout high school, but he soon transitioned to the supermarket upon graduating. He says he was always a fan of Ruef's take on landjaeger, and they used to sell a lot of Ruef's landjaeger at Gempeler's before they started producing their own Alpine Boy version of our favorite sausage snack – which once again shows the dynamic impact Ruef's, and Willy Ruef himself, had on the landjaeger community in Green County.



**The deli case at Gempeler's, featuring steaks, cold cuts, bratwurst, landjaeger, and pretty much everything you need for an afternoon around the grill. And don't miss their hot to-go section!**

Fast-forward a few decades and Ken and his sister, Connie, are both working at the store every day. He tells me Connie had previously worked as a law librarian with the state of Wisconsin, but her help was needed in Monticello as the store grew larger and larger. At the time of our interview, Connie was managing the front end, office work, scheduling, and a million other things, and Ken runs the deli, bakery, maintenance, and meat department (and a million other things!).

And if you thought for a second that their father, Ernie Gempeler, had given up his post, you'd be very wrong. Ernie still manages the produce and liquor sections while keeping a watchful eye on everything around the store. Ken also tells me there's a new generation taking over, with his daughter, Julia, heading up the packaging, labeling, and wholesale aspects of the business. At a time when it seems more meat shops are closing due to younger family members not wanting to take over, it's inspiring to see such strong family ties at play throughout the course of my interviews.



With so much going on, I ask Ken if it gets to be a lot balancing the supermarket, Alpine Boy, and all the tasks that come along with small-business ownership – and while Ken says he feels a little underwater some days, it’s “those days when the customers thank you; that’s what makes it count.”

He regularly sees folks come in just to try their house-made meats and landjaeger, and a number of hunters choose Gempeler’s for their venison processing – with word-of-mouth being a great resource. Ken also mentions Jeff Sindelar (a common theme), saying how Jeff helps a great deal with pH and water activity analysis, and with any questions that might arise during inspections.

### **What makes your landjaeger unique? Any criteria you feel landjaeger must follow?**

Ken is definitely proud of his landjaeger, and he tells me he tweaked the recipe himself over a number of test runs and trial and error. He probably messed with the recipe for a couple years before he got it where he wanted it, and the landjaeger has been gaining popularity ever since.

From the very beginning, Ken started working closely with his spice company. They had a time-tested landjaeger recipe, and he added his own touch to get it where he wanted it. And as luck would have it, they now have their own Gempeler’s spice blend for landjaeger and a bunch of different products (all of which are protected by Non-Disclosure Agreements).

He tells me that people comment on how Alpine Boy landjaeger isn’t as greasy as others they’ve tried, which Ken purposely shoots for. And at the end of the day, Ken feels it’s their heavier smoke, unique spice blend, and overall leanness that separates their landjaeger from the pack.

(And to my earlier point about their unique spice bill, I have to say I almost get a curry-like flavor from Gempeler’s offering. It’s faint, and that description may not resonate with everyone, but that particular curry flavor just bursts for me every time I snap into their landjaeger.)



**This beautiful Alpine Boy Sausage engraving was crafted around 1975 by C.A. Gafner.**

## **Would you be open to sharing some of the spices, tricks, tips to your landjaeger preparation?**

Alpine Boy uses the 50/50 pork and beef mixture I'd read about before starting on this quest, and they try to use leaner cuts whenever possible. Hickory is always used for smoking, and Ken agreed the spice list I rattled off sounds about right for landjaeger spicing...but he would never spill the beans on what they actually add in the final product.

### **Alpine Boy's Landjaeger Production Schedule:**

**Day 1:** Grind the meat.

**Day 2:** Mix meat and spices, stuff the casing, flatten them, and immediately hang the sausages in the smokehouse. They'll smoke overnight for 7-8 hours, at temps ranging from 110-160F.

**Day 3-14:** On the morning of day 3, they remove, hang, and begin the drying process. While up to 10 days is normal, it can take up to 14 days depending on the weather and humidity.



**Ever an inventive bunch, Ken has developed this clever and space-saving way to dry their landjaeger.**

Ken wholeheartedly agreed with other producers who told me the last three months of the year are often when the meat department is most busy, with hunting and the holidays in full swing. They tend to start ramping up in August, he says, and they produce a great deal of landjaeger for hunters that come in with their own animals.

Like all the producers I talked to, Alpine Boy is unable to work with any local cattle farms, but what I did find incredibly interesting is that they, too, do not use a lactic starter culture – putting them in the same category as Ruef's and Hoesly's. Ken then discussed the balance of acidity and water activity, and inspectors have definitely asked why they don't add a started culture or lactic acid (mainly just as a time-saving mechanism) – but, like Chris and Dennis, Ken feels the culture affects flavor in such a way that he prefers to go without. Tradition at its finest!

## How much landjaeger do you produce each year? Is it your best-selling item?

Ken tells me they will often create up to 600 pairs of landjaeger at a time, every couple of weeks – with Ken running the stuffer and two guys flattening them over the course of about two hours.

As Ken said earlier, Julia takes care of Alpine Boy's wholesale program, and you can find their products featured at the Hop Garden taproom in Paoli, WI, and a number of grocery stores and cheese factories that sell landjaeger, snack sticks, and summer sausage. The cheese shops, in particular, always draw a lot of tourists, who Ken feels are often drawn to the novelty of landjaeger. It's also Ken's understanding that part of their popularity stems from people not having to refrigerate them, which goes hand-in-hand with why they're such a great snack in the first place.

And while Ken tells me their snack sticks may be more popular overall due to their assorted flavors, landjaeger is definitely their single most popular item. And I must note that in addition to their landjaeger and snack sticks, Gempeler's also makes a *landjaeger flavored snack stick* (in full and bite size). I had to try them for myself, and needless to say, they were excellent.

## Any thoughts on branching out into other styles of landjaeger?

It sounds as though Gempeler's did experiment with some Door County cherries and Wisconsin-grown cranberries, but they never turned out to be great sellers.



**Do not adjust your set. Landjaeger *snack sticks* are real, and they're delicious.**



### **Besides your landjaeger, which of your own meats are you especially proud of?**

Ken again states that Gempeler’s is definitely known for their snack sticks – with New Glarus Brewing Company selling a *lot* of them on a weekly basis. Sticking to the beer theme, it sounds as though the Grumpy Troll Brewpub in Mt Horeb buys their 7 Pepper snack sticks for their popular Bloody Marys. And as you’ll see later, landjaeger, beer, and Bloodys seem to be great bedfellows.

As far as overall snack stick sales go, Ken says their best-selling options tend to be Original, Honey BBQ, Pepper Jack, and Cheddar & Jalapeno. “Really anything with cheese,” Ken says.

### **Do you have any knowledge related to the history of the chalet-inspired display cases?**

Ever-clouded in uncertainty, Ken, too, didn’t have a ton of details related to the origin of the chalet-inspired landjaeger cases. He tells me Gempeler’s used to have wooden ones, but inspectors told them they needed to switch to acrylic. I found this a bit surprising given the fact that several shops in Green County still use wooden display racks, and Ken was a bit surprised to hear that as well. As is so regularly the case with laws and regulations, there are often several interpretations of the same protocol – and one would hope the chalet cases are always a part of landjaeger’s existence.

Whatever the *case* may be, Ken and his team are making some amazing landjaeger, and I highly recommend adding Monticello and Gempeler’s to your list of must-visit locations in Green County, Wisconsin! And be sure to try the pizza and hot dishes before you leave – they won’t disappoint!



**Be sure to check out the Swiss Canton coats of arms on your way out. They’re another sign of Green County’s deep and ongoing connection to Switzerland, and these pieces were handmade by C.A. Gafner – the same gentleman who crafted the Alpine Boy engraving. Also notice the Norwegian flag variant to the right, which the family had specially-made in honor of family matriarch, Sharron Gempeler.**



~ Gempeler's Finest ~



## Zuber's Sausage Kitchen

905 19th Street  
Monroe, WI 53566

Tel: (608) 329-6500

Website: [www.zubersmeats.com](http://www.zubersmeats.com)

Email: [info@zubersmeats.com](mailto:info@zubersmeats.com)

Proprietors: Kalyn & Jim Zuber

Interview Date: January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020



**Kalyn and Jim Zuber, and one of my most heartwarming interviews.**

**Without any specific numbers backing this up**, it's safe to say if you've seen landjaeger in a Wisconsin convenience store, there's a very good chance it's from Zuber's. Not only do they have a large in-state distribution footprint, they also offer a wider variety of landjaeger than any other producer in Green County – and for that matter, perhaps any producer in Wisconsin. What flavors, you ask? How about Traditional, Cajun, Italian, and their famous Door Country Cherry offering.

After speaking with Kalyn and Jim, I quickly realized this was Jim's plan right out of the gate. Like all Green County landjaeger producers, he was first-and-foremost aiming for quality – but rather than rely on on-site retail sales, he realized early on that there was a desire for folks to grab landjaeger at any given c-store or shop around the state. Whether you call him a visionary or someone who was in the right place at the right time, there's no denying Jim's sincere dedication to a product he's been making for decades (and long before he even opened his own sausage kitchen).

As fate would have it, Jim suffered a stroke in 2014, and the time came for Kalyn and the Zuber family to make a decision: shut down, sell, or keep it within the family. Kalyn picked the latter, which brought with it numerous hurdles and obstacles, but ultimately allowed Kalyn to carry on Jim's legacy and hard work – all while giving Green County landjaeger the attention it deserves.

I have to say this was one of the most heartfelt visits I made in my journey, and Kalyn was so very gracious in welcoming me into Pleasant View Nursing Home to speak with Jim directly. Jim also brought so much charisma and happiness to the interview that it was almost hard to leave, and I could have kept picking their brains for hours while listening to Jim's endless stories of friends and colleagues from years past. Journey with me now as we head into Zuber's....

**Can you tell me a little about the history of your establishment, and how you started incorporating landjaeger into the mix?**

My interview with Kalyn is a fun one in that, now when I write it, it almost feels like I'm taking part in a film covering several periods of time. We start a little more recently, and then pop back and forth between the current and past operation of Zuber's – which also has a lot to do with Kalyn having somewhat recently taken over operations from Jim. Kalyn starts in the near-present, telling me about a fire that took place about a year and a half before our interview (in May of 2018). The fallout from the fire kept Zuber's operations closed until January of 2019, which is no small amount of time for a small business.

According to Kalyn, the fire was caused by an electrical issue. And more specifically, it sounds as though their smokehouse at the time was internally turned on without any of them knowing. Kalyn recalls the smokehouse becoming so scorching hot that it started the roof on fire. She says she was just sitting down to eat, and someone called her to say the building was going up in flames.

When the firemen arrived, she says they were unable to get in the front door and were about to use a battering ram until she turned up with a key to let them in a little more traditionally. While the fire was a massive blow for their family and the business, Kalyn says they were very lucky to have good insurance, especially since they were thinking it would only take about one or two months to get back in the shop. From the fire in May 2018 till they reopened in January 2019, the insurance paid the wages for their three part-time and three full-time employees.

As if starting the business from scratch, Kalyn says they needed to replace just about every piece of equipment – which included a brand-new Knecht LJM 240 landjaeger forming machine (with Jim

having added their first LJM in January of 2000). Manufactured in Bergatreute, Germany, these amazing machines are built specifically for landjaeger production. This was the same machine Dennis Hoesly talked about wanting to bring in, and in addition to Kalyn's sincere appreciation for the LJM 240, the folks at Bavaria use a Knecht as well. Clearly this is a top-notch machine.

Popping back in time, Kalyn tells me that Jim started working at Ruef's Meat Market in high school (going in when classes let out), and eventually working there full-time with the legendary duo of Willy Ruef and Heinz Mattmann. From there, Kalyn says that Jim ended up getting a job at Hoesly's, but with a young family and advanced skill set, Jim decided to branch out on his own.

Zuber's, like Hoesly's, is actually in their second location since launching the brand, with their first operation running out of the Green County Locker (which is now, a few owners later, in the hands of Chris and Nita Hessling). Kalyn says it was a great place for Zuber's Sausage Kitchen to start off due in part to the low rent – though Jim still worked off-hours cleaning office buildings to make a paycheck while she was home with their daughter.

Eventually, Zuber's bought the whole Locker building and they tried to run the entirety of both operations: the Zuber's retail side, and the meat locker processing side. After giving that a go for about a year, Zuber's ended up selling the building to Larry Gordon and paying rent for the back section – where they stayed for another 15 years until their operations began to outgrow the space. Kalyn says they were actually planning to build their second location from the ground-up, but they randomly came across their current location on 19<sup>th</sup> Street (which, in true meat & beer Wisconsin fashion, used to be a beer distribution warehouse). Kalyn says the space had four walls and a cooler, and it was up to Jim and Jim's brother to remodel the space into what we see today.

Jumping back in time again, Kalyn tells me that, prior to taking over daily operations at Zuber's, she had worked at a bank and a local gift shop (the latter of which was owned by her father).



**The size of Zuber's operation comes into perspective when you visit their sprawling facility in Monroe.**



It wasn't until about 10 years prior to our interview that Kalyn started working at Zuber's, and it was Jim's stroke in 2014 that drove her into her current management/ownership position. She mentions, quite modestly, that there was a lot on her plate following Jim's stroke – and apart from trying to figure out how to keep the business afloat, she also made sure to be with Jim as he made his way through hospitals, rehabilitation sessions, and nursing homes. Kalyn mentions Jim dealing with a great deal of swelling of the brain due to his stroke (over the course of seven months), and it really starts to hit home how trying the stroke and rehab must have been for their entire family.

Kalyn goes on to say that, at the same time as Jim's stroke, there were two Zuber's employees who were planning to retire. She says they were very gracious and both men stuck around until she got her feet under her, with each of them knowing the company they'd worked for could potentially fold without their expertise and hard work. She says they both helped train a new generation of Zuber's employees, and they both finally retired around 2017. Kalyn says it quite thankfully and bluntly: "They could have walked out, but they stuck around."

She tells me it took all of three weeks for her to decide if she was going to keep the business running – and ultimately, it meant a lot to her and their family to keep the Zuber's brand alive. And while part of that decision was to keep it for their children to take over, it sounds as though none of them were very interested at the time of our interview. She says that one daughter works there part-time, and part of Kalyn wonders if a band of employees will potentially take it over one day. This fits the theme I hear all too often when making my way through Green County, and it's a theme we've seen played out in farms from Upstate NY, to the Midwest, to the west coast, and all points in between. Meat processing and farming require hard work with often little reward financially, and nationally we're seeing that younger generations have shifting thoughts on employment opportunities, home-ownership, and whether they want to live in cities or more rural communities.

**After talking with Kalyn, we head over to the Pleasant View Nursing Home to speak with Jim Zuber himself.** Right out of the gate, Jim recounts Zuber's starting in March of 1991, with the back room of the Green County Locker all set up for their landjaeger operations. He says they started out with their own grinder, mixer, and stuffer, and from there Jim started crafting different landjaeger spice blends. He'd smoke it, taste it... "Just not right," he'd say. Then he'd blend, smoke, and taste again. And again. Until one day, the then-owner of the Locker, Rich Coplien, said "This is it!" He also tells me that Rich said "If you can get 10% of the people to like it, you can do well."

Jim knew they had to keep costs down at first, and he was ready to do all the hard work himself rather than hiring employees – and he assures me it was his plan right out of the gate to be in a number of wholesale accounts across the state. With that in mind, Jim started visiting each store himself, seeing if they wanted to bring a few pairs of landjaeger in. He found out quickly that a number of stores were selling out in a couple of days, and he'd have to quickly scramble back to deliver more. He says he got to a point where they were self-distributing to a number of stores, and it was soon after that larger distributors started seeing if they could carry Zuber's landjaeger as well. I ask if it ever got to be too much in those early days, and Jim simply says "I enjoyed my work."

Jim tells me that prior to the forming machine, they always used traditional landjaeger forms as well. And he tells me about one memorable day when he stuffed a whole bunch of sausages, only to realize he'd forgotten to add spices. He then had to go back through and remove all the batter, re-spice it, and re-stuff each and every one of them. In case there was any doubt how much time and love went into making landjaeger...



## Hard work and lots of sausages

**C**heese aside, few other foods embody Wisconsin cuisine like the sausage does, and few people embody the Wisconsin work ethic like sausage maker Jim Zuber of New Glarus.

Since starting Zuber's Sausage Kitchen in Monroe four years ago, Zuber, 34, has not had a single vacation, but has worked day and night to build his one-man business from scratch.

Within the next year, he says, he hopes to buy Green County Locker, the custom meat-processing plant on 18th Avenue where he currently rents space, and hire one or two employees to relieve him of some of the work. Then, he says, he might go on vacation.



Dating back to 1995, this article from *The Monroe Evening Times* captures Jim Zuber just 4 years after opening the business. Article written by, and photos courtesy of, Terje Langeland.

Jim says it again: he just liked making sausage. He liked formulating flavors and blending seasonings together (which is also something I remember him mentioning in his 2011 *Wisconsin State Journal* interview with Barry Adams), and it's something that possibly sticks out to me since I also love diving into the intricate, layered flavors that exist in beer and food.

As for his years of training prior to opening Zuber's, Jim says he started working at Ruef's by the age of 16. He says that Willy Ruef and Jim's parents were talking one day, and Willy mentioned needing some help. Jim started with casual cleaning shifts such as sweeping saw dust, mopping and drying the floors, and adding new sawdust in preparation of the next day's work.

As time went on, it sounds as though Jim picked up more and more responsibilities around Ruef's, and Jim tells me that Heinz Mattmann taught him everything he knew. It's at this point where Jim laughingly recounts a tale where he was working alongside Heinz tying wieners (which we learned earlier is painstaking work). As the story goes, Jim ended up tying a bundle too tight, causing it to snap and thus dropping wieners all over the floor. Heinz was less than impressed and started kicking Jim in the butt...all the way up the basement stairs! Jim says he ran to see Willy, who then just told the two men to cool it. Never a dull moment with these guys.

Jim wanted to eventually learn more about breaking down the meat, and since they didn't really do that at Ruef's, he started working at Hoesly's – and it was under Dennis Hoesly's leadership that Jim finally learned the trade of butchering cattle.

Jim says he was born and raised in New Glarus, and that Kalyn is originally from Dubuque, Iowa. In one of the more touching parts of our interview, Jim tells me he met Kalyn when she was working at the dog track and Jim was down there making bets. Jim casually asked if she had a boyfriend, and at some point Kalyn gave him her number. When Jim went to call, her dad answered – though Jim thought it was her husband and instantly hung up. Luckily, Kalyn called Jim back and assured him it was her pops and not another love interest. After a brief time, Kalyn moved up to Green County and the two of them were married. It's only after they discuss their marriage that Jim tells me how, prior to Kalyn moving, they would switch up driving an hour and a half to see each other *every* day of the week, *seven* days a week. If that's not true love, I don't know what is.

### **Why do people love landjaeger so much?**

Jim says: “It tastes good and it's convenient. You can carry it and it's a snack.” He would see people excited about landjaeger, which made him even more excited to create the product. He also touches on the popularity of hunters and families working with local processors to create their own venison landjaeger – and like so many hobbies and food-related supply chain woes over the last year, I can only imagine the desire for venison processing and landjaegers has grown and grown.

Kalyn says she once received an email from a guy whose family fled Germany in the 1950s. He told her he had tried landjaeger from Pennsylvania, New York, and Wisconsin, and that Zuber's landjaeger most reminded him of the landjaeger in the Old Country. She says it's not uncommon for folks to call with really thick accents, and it's always a good feeling and nice to know when folks compare their landjaeger to those they remember from Europe.

### **Origin of the name:**

Kalyn hadn't heard all that much about the origin of the name, but she laughs recalling a time someone referred to it as “Landigoogle.” Jim believes the name is derived from Old-World hunters.

### **What makes your landjaeger unique?**

Jim, ever the flavor connoisseur, says it's Zuber's unique flavor profile that sets it apart. He touched on it briefly before I asked this question, but it sounds like his trial and error methods took months and months and months to perfect – and he wanted to be careful not to copy Ruef's or Hoesly's. Jim elaborates further, and without hesitation: “It's the flavorings I used. I like to blend seasonings.” Jim says he prefers his landjaeger with a good smoke on it (which I can agree with), and he also says – with Kalyn's agreement – that at one point he could tell the pH of his landjaeger by taking a bite. He would taste a landjaeger from a particular batch, and then they'd send the rest of the batch to the lab – who then, without knowing, would often confirm Jim's sensory skills.

Jim also feels their forming machine plays a big part in the distinctness of Zuber's landjaeger. He tells me a machine like theirs helps create the most consistent landjaeger you can get, and as the sausage makes its way through the machine, a dent is added and a razor then cuts the end. Jim says they absolutely used to follow the standard hand-work landjaeger processes that the other producers in Green County follow, but that all changed when they added the Knecht in 2000.



Elaborating on the Knecht, Kalyn tells me this is the only company she knows of that makes such a machine, and it takes a great deal of time to receive your machine once it's been ordered. Not only is the Knecht built for a very specific product in the first place (landjaeger), the manufacturer then customizes each machine around the landjaeger producer's exact specifications. As Kalyn tells it, they create different conveyance belts with blocks that are spaced to Zuber's landjaeger specs (and ultimately how big they want their final product to be upon cutting).

This exact specificity seems especially important given the fact that Zuber's makes landjaeger five days a week, mainly for their traditional wholesale partners and accounts. Then, if time allows it, they'll process venison, goose, or bear for private customers on the weekend – mainly due to the fact that they can't package their own wholesale items over the weekend unless they pay extra for the inspector's visit. All in, Kalyn says they make thousands of pounds of landjaeger a week.

**Any criteria you feel landjaeger must follow? Or what should absolutely be kept out? Would you be open to sharing some of the spices, tricks, tips to your landjaeger preparation?**

When talking about the specific shape of landjaeger, Jim considers the round, brat-like shape of Usinger's landjaegers to be an honest landjaeger. For Kalyn, she feels it's the *pair* of sausage snacks that constitutes true landjaeger. Oh, how the opinions vary from producer to producer!

Jim gets on the topic of folks who make their own landjaeger, and how hunters won't typically suggest any of their own seasonings – except for a fella by the name of Ernie Ammon. Apart from making his own sauerkraut, Ernie seems to enjoy a landjaeger or two, and his personal recipe called for red wine and onion (and we see later than red wine is common in some Old-World recipes). Jim says it had a *really* powerful smell, and they always knew whose landjaeger they were working on.



**The Knecht LJM 240 can be a game-changer for producers looking to ramp up their output.**

## **Zuber's Landjaeger Production Schedule:**

**Day 1:** Mix batter and let it sit.

**Day 2:** Stuff the casings to form the sausages. From the stuffer, the landjaeger is moved to a table and then fed into the Knecht LJM 240 forming machine.

From here, the landjaeger is hung up and moved into the smokehouse where they'll remain overnight for 13-14 hours (ensuring they're ready to go the next morning). Note: This extended smoking time must have something to do with Zuber's landjaeger offering such extraordinary smokiness.

**Day 3:** Remove landjaeger from smoker & vacuum seal for storage, on-site sales, and shipping.

Much like Jim being able to guess the pH of his landjaeger by taking a bite, Kalyn says they can tell immediately if something is amiss once they open the smoker door. She says most of the time, everything will be fine since the sausages had hit the correct temperature and were fully cooked – but there are times you can see there is something just a little different in that particular batch.

### **How much landjaeger do you produce each year? Is it your best-selling item?**

Kalyn says that without question, landjaeger has always been Zuber's bread and butter. From very early on, they started distributing to gas stations – even orders as small as four pairs of landjaeger and four packages of snack sticks. I was also surprised to hear Zuber's makes a great number of brat varieties, for sale right out of the shop and in partnership with some local restaurants. All folks need to do is ring the doorbell, look at their current brat board, and one of the Zuber's team will pop in the cooler and get the goods for you.

Jim says that, over the years, they've sent landjaeger to pockets of German and Swiss communities around the country. Heck, Jim even says he'd once heard that country group, Brooks & Dunn, liked their product! They also mention a prison system in California that expressed interest in carrying their landjaeger in the commissary. Knowing landjaeger as well as anyone, Kalyn warned them about the fact that landjaeger can actually dry to such a hardness that they could become a weapon – information, she says, that the prison administration was thankful to learn.

When I first met with Kalyn and Jim, they said they still get at least a few online orders every day. And while Kalyn was hesitant to expand their online presence the first time we met, she let me know during our follow-up that Zuber's landjaeger 4-packs are now available on Amazon.

Overall, the Zubers tell me their business revenue is split between processing and landjaeger/brat sales. Kalyn says they'd looked into interstate inspection, but they ultimately deemed it too extensive and financially infeasible. That said, everything seems to be working well for them as-is, and at the time of our interview they told me the wholesale program still grows year over year (except for the year they suffered the fallout from the fire). I ask if Zuber's has any of their own salespeople at this point, and Kalyn says they do not – though their partnering distributorships have sales reps for their specific markets.

One thing I found very interesting and savvy was the way Zuber's charges the same price for people buying one box or fifty boxes of their landjaeger – a model they put in place to keep a level playing field throughout the state. It also sounds like the Zuber's team still personally delivers their landjaeger



to a few select gas stations they've done business with over the years (and Kalyn says other local stores can always stop in their meat shop and buy some cases when they need).

And while the Zubers tell me they've worked with Monroe's Swiss Colony over the years, they had to back out of negotiations with Kwik Trip due to the sheer logistics of the supply chain – with Zuber's being unable to back semis into their warehouse to load pallets into the trucks. It's larger partnerships like these that may seem great for small businesses up front, but I commend Kalyn and Jim for judging the payout versus the practicality and doing their best to grow the brand while still producing a quality product.

### **Any thoughts on branching out into other styles of landjaeger?**

As I previously mentioned, Zuber's already has the widest variety of landjaeger out there – ranging from Traditional to the only Italian landjaeger I've ever seen. Kalyn tells me they used to make a cranberry landjaeger for Brennan's Markets (of which only one store remains, having recently reopened outside of Madison in 2017). She says the new iteration of Brennan's still sells Zuber's landjaeger, but they have yet to bring back the cranberry collaboration – though Kalyn says she's not opposed to rekindling the collaboration sometime down the road.

As if I wasn't already drooling enough, Kalyn then says they used to make a blueberry landjaeger as well. (I swear – if one thing comes out of this book, it's the hope that one day I'll be able to convince these producers to bring back some of the styles they've retired over the years.)

I ask Jim what inspired him to make the Italian, and he tells me they had a friend who would occasionally bring Italian sauce into the shop to mix with the sausage – and after some time, he eventually sold Jim the recipe. Ever the flavor nerd, Jim says he had to personally tweak it so it was just right. And once he was finished, the state made him tweak it again. While I had no idea this was the case, it sounds as though, for something to be labeled "Italian," you need to have very specific amounts of basil, oregano, garlic... basically all the ingredients that constitute an Italian blend.

### **Besides your landjaeger, which of your own meats are you especially proud of?**

Kalyn says there's a local restaurateur at Jim's Backyard BBQ who comes in to buy brats and burger meat for his shop. Kalyn says the Zuber's brats are different because they never use powdered mixes, and they buy everything fresh the day of production (which is also one of the highlights of keeping their brat output lower than other local producers).

She tells me about their fan-favorites: portabella mushroom and Swiss cheese; pizza; mac & cheese; Hawaiian Luau with pulled pork and pineapple; and The Greek – which features feta, cranberry, and spinach. Stop already!

Making me even hungrier, Kalyn says that one employee made a shrimp alfredo brat with green onions. And while Kalyn admits that she thought it would be terrible, she says it sold out immediately. On the flip side, it sounds like one employee had the grand idea to create a s'more brat. And while she has no problems saying it was awful, she says they nevertheless sold through all of them. (Who knew the pastry phenomenon that has become so popular in the craft beer world was already taking shape in the brat world years before??)

Beyond the brats, Jim says he's especially proud of their summer sausage and farmer's bologna. He begins to smile again as he tells me about "The Love Child," which he created by saving the scraps of their Italian landjaeger, adding it into a large bologna casing, and smoking it not once...not twice...but three times with specially tied knots. While this Love Child was never available for purchase, it was always a fan favorite with Jim, Kalyn and their close friends and family.



**Kalyn and their vacuum packer, which is another lifesaver when packing landjaeger 5 days a week.**

### **Do you have any knowledge related to the history of the chalet-inspired display cases?**

Though the Zubers don't have a full idea of where the display cases originated, Jim says a fella named Mike Rahberger built a number of them for Zuber's over the years. But like I discussed with Ken Gempeler, Jim tells me the inspectors weren't necessarily fond of the wooden construction, and Zuber's switched to their current acrylic cases years ago. Jim says that while the acrylic offers its own advantages, they lack the personality – and it's his opinion that they don't breathe as well as their wooden counterparts, meaning shops need to ensure they pull the acrylic cases away from the wall to improve ventilation and prevent any potential mold from forming.

### **Odds & Ends:**

- Kalyn elaborates on the relationship between Willy, Heinz, and Jim: She says it was really helpful for Jim to learn from the two senior sausage statesmen. She tells me the old Ruef's smokehouse used to produce a wonderfully pleasant and powerful smell – so much so that dogs would literally follow them around town!

- She also mentions how Heinz did “kick him in the ass,” while also playing some good old-fashioned tricks on Jim as well. She says the Ruef family would occasionally host students who were traveling from Switzerland. As the story goes, one girl was in town with her dad and Jim wanted to date her. Ever the trustworthy friends, Willy and Heinz told Jim *just what to say* to her dad in hopes of winning him over...which was actually a pretty crude Swiss phrase. She says the dad didn’t show one bit of anger, and he just turned around to look at Willy and Heinz.

- At one point in the conversation, Kalyn tells me about a guy who had a rope across the back of his car – installed specifically to hang landjaeger. And while the fella seemed to think it was great, his wife said the car always smelled like meat and smoke.

- She tells me of another lady that would store her landjaeger in the oven to keep the cats away, which worked wonderfully until someone started preheating the oven and didn’t know about the precious cargo resting safely inside...



After our meeting, Kalyn sent me this book to look through. Published in 1908 by Chicago’s B. Heller & Co, this 300-page beauty is a perfect mix of how-to guides, recipes, and B. Heller advertisements. Thanks so much, Kalyn!





~ Zuber's Finest ~



## Green County Locker

512 18th Ave  
Monroe, WI 53566

Tel: (608) 325-3456  
Website: [www.ruefsmeatmarket.com](http://www.ruefsmeatmarket.com)  
Email: [ruefsmeatmarket@gmail.com](mailto:ruefsmeatmarket@gmail.com)

*(Phone calls encouraged)*

Proprietors: Chris & Nita Hessling

Interview Date: May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021



The historic Green County Locker sits just over the Monticello city line.

**The Green County Locker is clearly an interesting addition to this producers section** given the fact that there isn't any landjaeger being produced in this facility at the time of writing. That said, this historic building has a long, intertwined history with Green County landjaeger production and I'd be doing all of us a disservice if I didn't explore a little of that marvelous history.

As we've discussed a few times now, the Green County Locker is currently owned and operated by Chris & Nita Hessling, the most recent owners of Ruef's Meat Market in New Glarus (which sadly closed its doors in March of 2021). Without any idea of what lay ahead, Chris and Nita purchased the 5,000 sq ft Green County Locker processing facility in June 2019 from Mike Buol – who still helps out a great deal around the shop, and whose *Mike's Meats* sign still stands proudly out front. And as we just discussed with our last Monroe producer, Kalyn Zuber, the Green County Locker was also home to the original Zuber's Sausage Kitchen dating back to 1991.

So again, while Chris and Nita are not currently making landjaeger in this facility (mainly due to space, regulations, and some exciting in-the-works plans), this space is still an important landjaeger landmark and I was thrilled to finally walk around and visit the space just a couple months before sending this book off to the presses. Join me now as we tour the Green County Locker...

## Changing of the Guard

One of the first things Chris and I discuss is the history surrounding this beautiful building, with a corner segment dated 1939 overlooking all who visit. Chris says they'd just started digging into the history when their plans for Ruef's began to change course, but even in the midst of their upheaval, they were able to find an old advertisement for a grocery store in this building dating back to 1940.

Thanks to that tidbit of info, I started some digging myself and I was lucky enough to come in contact with Donna Kjendlie & Sherry Anderegg at the Green County Historical Society. According to several *Monroe Evening Times* newspaper clippings from 1939-1973, the first occupants of the current GCL were in fact the Green County Frozen Food Market, which was owned and constructed by T.A. Hoesly and L.E. Bothell (with some articles also naming Ray Pavlak as a third co-founder).

Built for \$25K and opened on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939, the GCFFM had 500 lockers of various sizes alongside "latest type" equipment and a retail section selling groceries, ice cream, and, of course, meats and cheese. The GCFFM seems to have been the talk of the town when they first opened their doors (and for numerous decades that followed). Two different 1939 articles mention the modern-for-the-time rounded wall of illuminated glass blocks that would have greeted visitors at the front entrance of the market, and one of those articles proudly discusses the efforts taken by Hoesly and Bothell to use local labor and materials alongside Green County rocks for the landscaping.

Another clipping from May 1944 states that L.E. Bothell applied on behalf of the GCFFM for an additional \$20K to double the size of the locker via an application to the war production board. While I don't know for sure, I'm guessing something came of that application because a March 1945 clipping discusses how the market hosted a camera crew from *Life* magazine (!) and how the final picture sequence featured their 900 lockers. This article and others are very proud to mention how the GCFFM was one of the largest and most modernized frozen food lockers in Wisconsin, and this modernization is cited as a reason the *Life* crew documented them in the first place.

It sounds as though the locker changed hands in July 1947, with George Wenger Jr, William Erb, and Hervey Hoesly (son of founder, T.A. Hoesly) taking over ownership. Some 26 years later, it seems



to have changed hands again, and one of the last articles of the bunch (from September 1973) announces the sale of the Green County Frozen Food Market from Wenger, Erb, and Hoesly to Michael Doyle and Rich Coplien (who, as we just touched on in the last interview, was still the owner when Zuber's Sausage Kitchen started renting space in 1991).

We'll touch on the recent history of the Green County Locker throughout this section, but it's pretty amazing to know this building that still serves as a locker was built in 1939 to be just that – and it's pretty much only changed hands a half dozen times over the last 82 years. Add in the surprising fact that the Green County Frozen Food Market seems to have been one of the most appreciated and well-documented meat lockers of its time, and you have yet another example of the dynamic ties between Green County and its meat markets, lockers, and producers.



Second generation owners of the GCFM announce the sale of their business in 1973. Photo and information courtesy of *The Monroe Evening Times* & the Green County Historical Society.

Jumping forward to 2021, Chris and I dive into the sudden closure of Ruef’s. Chris says their shop, much like the entire village of New Glarus, was dramatically affected by the pandemic – which also played a hand in the closure of the Edelweiss Cheese Shop right across from Ruef’s, and led to many shops and businesses rethinking their brick & mortar plans moving forward.

Chris says they always expected the GCL to be a small plant, without any ambitions to really grow their output. Chris tells me, “The plan was always that Ruef’s was the busy shop, and this was the side gig. That all flipped with Covid, but the idea is still that we have fourteen, fifteen regular clients.” He continues, “Since the pandemic hit, we’re booked out solid through the rest of 2021, and I think Nita finally just started opening up her books for 2022.”

Discussing the day-to-day a little more in detail, Chris tells me, “This is Nita’s deal. She and Mike [Buol] do a great job, and I’ve just kind of tried to make it work. You know, moving everything out of New Glarus in the back of a Prius. Moving everything in here, trying not to step on their toes. Making sure that they can still operate full speed while I’m around.”

If you did a double take at “moving everything out of New Glarus in the back of a Prius,” you’re not alone! Chris says they definitely had to get a standard moving truck for the larger deli cases, doors, and smoker, but for the most part, he was moving all the business’ smaller items down WI-69 in one of the smallest vehicles on the road. And once you see all the hardware, signage, and memorabilia they kept from the Ruef’s operation, you realize that was likely a lot of highway miles.

I ask the question we’ve all been wondering: will Chris and Nita be able to resume landjaeger production at the Green County Locker now or any time soon? Sadly, Chris says no. But on the upside, he fills me in on some exciting in-the-works plans that may change that answer very soon – though I’ll have to keep that cat in the bag a little longer to ensure Chris and I remain friends.

Chris tells me, “We’re licensed for custom processing. Larger processing plants are going to have a custom processing license, but they’re also gonna have an inspected processing license. They’re gonna have a wholesale license. They’re gonna have an inspector there every day while they’re processing, and they can break down a beef and sell it retail.” So while Nita, Mike, and Chris *can* process animals for farmers and families, they cannot sell that meat in their retail shop or use that meat to craft any other sausages or products to sell in their shop – including landjaeger.



While not currently in use, we await the day Chris can once again use this decades-old landjaeger mold.



## How-Tos of Custom Meat Processing

It's here that I ask Chris for a little breakdown of their current Green County Locker operations, and I'm happy I did since it adds a whole new layer of meat processing to our Green County conversations. First and foremost, I inquire "Why is it called a locker?" And the long and short of it is that, in addition to a plant like the GCL processing meat for farmers and families, they'll also store that meat in freezers for folks that don't have large freezers at home, or for those who just prefer to stop in and grab a little at a time. Essentially, their area of stored meat is sectioned off – like a locker – and they come pick out what they want, when they want.

While they still have *locker* in their name, the GCL's current walk-in freezer is too small to house numerous locker spaces for their customers – which Chris says hasn't been an issue over the last couple years. Chris explains that the process can primarily be broken down as "Nita and Mike work with farmers and mobile slaughter guys. So Nita and Mike send Herb or Greg out to the farm. They slaughter the animal, bring it to us to hang ten days or so. We butcher it down, process it, box it up, call them, they come and get it." And while that sums it up pretty quickly, we'll soon see it's a little more detailed and meat geeky than just those four short sentences.

Chris dives into a couple more detailed ways in which they work with local customers, starting with a direct-to-farmer relationship: "What could happen is, say, a farmer brings me a beef. I process and give it back to that farmer. He wants to go and sell it, you know, at that point that's beyond him. We don't purchase any of the meat and we're not selling the meat. We're simply selling the processing."

And while that makes up some of their processing business, they also receive a lot of orders where a family has bought the animal off a farmer. Chris says, "When somebody buys a beef off of a farmer, they're paying a certain price to that farmer per pound on its live weight. Then our slaughter guy will come out, we'll go through their cut order with them, and they are paying us for the processing. They pay us a rate on the hanging weight."

Chris elaborates, "Say somebody bought a quarter of an animal and their quarter comes in at 375 pounds. That's the hanging weight. We're 59 cents a pound for processing, and it doesn't matter if you get steaks, it doesn't matter if you get *all* the steaks, it doesn't matter if you want your burger in one pound or two pounds. You're 59 cents a pound on the 375 hanging weight."

As for what a customer can receive when heading into the Green County Locker, Chris makes it seem as though the sky is the limit: "We have a cut sheet and we'll go through it. You want any chuck roast, arm roast, sirloin tip roast? Do you want any rump roast? On the steak end, do you want sirloins? Do you want T-bones. Do you want ribeyes? Do you want your ribeyes to be bone-in? Three-quarter inches is kind of a standard thickness, does that work? We can go an inch thick, we can go a half inch thick. They'll have an idea of what they want for cuts, and anything that they don't take, that's just going to pad their ground beef numbers."

And if you want your order a little more customized, Chris says, "If you want sausage made out of some of it, or if you want burger patties, there's additional charges for certain things. If you want twenty pounds of burger patties, we can pre-patty your burger for you, and we'll wrap them in packs of six. That's 40 cents a pound additional." Chris adds that, all-in-all, "By the time we cut all the bones out of it, you're getting about 60% of that hanging weight."



A work of art as much as it is utilitarian, these stamps help the team track their customer's cuts.

## The Road Ahead

Chris says when Covid hit, "They closed down the big meat processors for eight weeks. That gives us small meat processors about an eight-month backlog because we can hang 14 to 17 beef at a time in my cooler. If everything's running at 100%, say we're cutting one or two a day, we're gonna do somewhere between five, at the most ten in a week, and I want to have five or ten coming in."

He continues, "When they shut down the big plants, there are guys that have 300 head they take in at a time. If the big plants are all shut down, this guy's got to try to find a way to get his 300 head in. Well, we're a custom processing plant. I work with an individual farmer. I don't take 300 beef and do them wholesale. I cut a beef for you and you pick it up and you go put it in your freezer." Needless to say, while it sounds as though it was beneficial to the GCL for these larger plants to shut down, there was simply only so much the GCL could do when adding new customers.

We talk about the hard work involved with breaking down two beef a day (which can sometimes range from 1,300-1,400 pounds), and Chris says, "Nita is pretty incredible, and it's fun when guys come in and we'll be cleaning or something and he'll be like 'Yeah, I want to talk to you about putting a beef in.' No you don't, you want to talk to her about it." Adding a little humor, Chris says it can be quite the opposite as well: "Last week, or the week before, I'm back there in a suit and tie because I just got done talking to the bank, and a guy comes in, just looks at me, realizes I'm not the one he wants to talk to, and he's like 'No, I want to talk to her. She's the one that's got the shit-kicker boots on and the bloody apron. That's the one I want to talk to.'"

And while Chris has no idea what the future may hold, he says, "The last year, with a lot of people going this route when the grocery stores were out of meat, a lot of people that became first-time buyers as far as buying a beef on the hoof, and we walked them through the process. There were some people that were very new to it who now won't go back to the grocery store."

Chris goes on to say that having Mike around has been incredibly beneficial for both parties. And while it sounds as though Mike first joined the Hessling's GCL team in a part-time capacity, Chris says Mike came on in a larger role when business ramped up and he's working as hard as anybody.

Chris adds that, with Mike going from owner/operator to full-time employee, "He doesn't have to talk to anybody on the business side. He comes in in the morning, he does his cutting, Nita comes in shortly after and does the wrapping and the grinding and stuffing and all that." Chris then adds another benefit of their relationship: "I said, I don't want to be here at four in the morning. What if you come in at four in the morning and start cutting. I'll mosey in sometime behind and make up for it by doing all the cleaning? And it's like, okay perfect."

Between Nita, Mike, and his own self-professed cleaning skills, it sounds as though Chris knows the Green County Locker is in good shape as they navigate the ongoing and ever-changing course for a business that's already seen a ton of changes in its first two years under their watchful eye (in a building that has been a staple of the Green County meat community for over eight decades).

And while I wish I could tell you more about their upcoming plans outside of the Green County Locker, Chris did manage to leave me with one tasty tidbit of hope: "The idea is that everybody's able to stuff stockings with landjaegers this Christmas." Thanks, Chris. That comment in-and-of-itself is a little Christmas gift come early.



Much like Ruef's, Chris and Nita have done an amazing job adding life and color to their retail shop.



# Bavaria Sausage

6317 Nesbitt Rd  
Fitchburg, WI 53719

Tel: (608) 271-1295

Toll-Free: 800-733-6695

Website: [www.bavariasausage.com](http://www.bavariasausage.com)

Email: [bavaria@bavariasausage.com](mailto:bavaria@bavariasausage.com)

Proprietors: Judy Voll-Cottrell &  
Steve Cottrell

Interview Date: February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020



**Judy and Steve in front of their handmade landjäger display haus.**



**I know, I know. 6317 Nesbitt Road falls outside of Green County.** But it only falls about 12 miles north of Green County, and it's impossible to document southern Wisconsin landjaeger in all its glory without adding Bavaria Sausage to the conversation.

For starters, Bavaria and their landjäger (per their German spelling) is one of the more widely-known brands in the Dane and Green County areas, and they have a powerful nationwide presence via their online sales. You can find them at numerous shops; you can't miss their tempting sign off Verona Road (US-151 S / US-18 W); and to be frank, they make some absolutely delicious landjäger – in both Traditional and Pfeffer (pepper) styles.

Add in the fact that Bavaria offers a traditional German take on a product that has thus far been discussed only from a Swiss perspective, and all the sudden the *location* of Bavaria Sausage seems to matter less than the history we're able to find along the way.

My conversation with Judy and Steve was memorable for a number of reasons. For starters, Judy is an absolute powerhouse. Her knowledge, her bold opinions, her familial and company pride, and her willingness to show me every inch of the facility all made for one of the most memorable interviews of this entire process. Secondly, it was during this interview that I first met the legendary Heinz Mattmann, who you've heard a great deal about thus far and who you'll finally meet at length in the next "Meet the Experts" section of this book.

Third, this interview took place the same day we had an inspector coming by to check out the house I currently sit in as I type this page. This was the first home purchase for my girlfriend and me, and the inspection itself felt like a huge step in the right direction after months of home-buying stress. And lucky for us, the place looked okay then and still holds up to this day (fingers crossed). Now, from my house to the entryway at 6317 Nesbitt Rd, let's take a trip into Bavaria Sausage...



**Bavaria prides itself on tradition, which is evident in their architecture as well as their sausages.**

**Can you tell me a little about the history of your establishment, and how you started incorporating landjäger into the mix?**

Judy starts off by telling me how every sausage maker from any region has their own ways of doing things: “Whatever region they’re from, that was their take on it and they’re going to mix their own recipes.” Priding themselves on traditional German recipes and processes, Judy says they receive calls on a daily basis looking for different meats and products folks have enjoyed in Germany – though she says some of the more obscure sausages are harder to make, or even understand, since that one particular sausage maker in that one town may be long gone (which is another reminder of how important it is to document these stories while we still have the folks around to talk to).

Judy’s dad, Fred Voll, was a Master Sausage Maker from Bavaria. According to a *Wisconsin State Journal* article from June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1969 (which Judy has framed in their office), Fred started “as an apprentice meat cutter at age 13, making 25 cents a week, working from 4am to 8pm.” Judy elaborates: “As part of finishing up his apprenticeship, he would have to guess the weight of a cow in the pure dark, by simply feeling it, and having to be within a certain numbers of pounds to pass. They had to lead animals over a bridge to get to the slaughterhouse, and if one fell in...oh, you’d get in trouble.” Heinz and Jeff will talk more about these apprenticeships in the next section, but it makes sense why folks such as Fred and Heinz take the title *Master Sausage Maker* very seriously.



**Founder and Master Sausage Maker, Fred Voll.**

Judy says when the current Bavaria processing location first opened, way back in 1967, they only had the plant and a window to place your orders. People came to the window and wanted her dad's bratwurst, having heard about his legendary reputation dating back to when he started with the Red Owl meat market just up the road in Madison, WI. She says, "He was called the wonder kid," and it sounds as though he also taught classes on how to prepare unique dishes such as crown rib roast – with people showing deep respect for his knowledge of all things meat.

The same 1969 *Wisconsin State Journal* article also says that Fred's reputation may have spread due to a surprise bratwurst giveaway he hosted in Madison – where he gave away "4 pounds of his homemade bratwurst to see how his customers liked them." It sounds like that publicity went a long way, and the same article says that when Fred opened the new Bavaria Sausage plant, he offered a portfolio of 48 *different sausages*, six of which were bratwurst.

Judy speaks very highly of her mom, Kathe, as well, who herself was 85 at the time of our interview – and Judy's quick to tell me her mom was the brains behind the design of their current plant. Considering the fact that Bavaria is one of the larger facilities in the area, that was clearly no small feat. Judy says the plant was actually built for her brother, Freddy, to take over, but it fell into Judy's lap when Freddy found interest elsewhere. Having been born into a sausage-making family, she's been a part of Bavaria her whole life, and she says her husband, Steve, has been along for the ride for over 35 years – which is to say, Judy and Steve have a lot of combined years of sausage production and business ownership under their belt!

Judy doesn't pull any punches: she says their recipes and formulations have never changed, and they've always stayed very consistent even all these years later. She's also proud to say Bavaria has never been bought out or changed hands. She says, "If you had a summer sausage from us 35 years ago and you remember it, you can come in now and have the same one." Though she does add a small caveat, saying there are changes in where you get your meat from – and much like I've heard in other conversations, they have to buy certain allotments of meat to stay within regulations.

Much like Dennis Hoesly, Judy is quick to mention the closing of butcher shops and the loss of experienced sausage makers – and she says you can feel the effects in Green & Dane Counties, over to Milwaukee, and throughout greater Wisconsin. She also echoes Dennis' sentiment that sausage makers are getting old and the kids often don't want to take over for a number of personal reasons.

Judy tells me about one of their daughters who's an RN, and another, Kristi, who works at Bavaria, using her Master's Degree in business. And while she's not sure if their kids will take over, she does give props to their hardworking staff for keeping the operations running – especially at a time when a lot of people no longer see the thrill of working long days in a meat shop. And apart from their own internal considerations, Judy also mentions a changing mentality for folks who live around shops such as Bavaria. She says when Bavaria first opened, there was nothing in the area. But with several new neighborhoods popping up, they're starting to hear concerns over their smokehouse and other parts of their decades-old operation. She says they've always tried to be a good part of the community and she hopes everyone can live and work in the same area together.

As far as Bavaria is concerned, Judy tells me their business has always been built on word-of-mouth, and her dad wasn't big on advertising (though you *can* find a pretty stellar Bavaria Sausage advertisement below). She says people just told other people, and apart from purchasing Bavaria's house-made offerings, these customers also brought in elk, antelope, mule deer, and ram for private processing – and she even recalls one guy who had been processing at Bavaria for some 50 years. If



Judy remembers correctly, they would hunt out west, and they'd drop the animals off on their way back to Virginia. Some people even call from as far away as New York, saying they have family in Wisconsin and would like to get their meat processed there. A truly nationwide business.

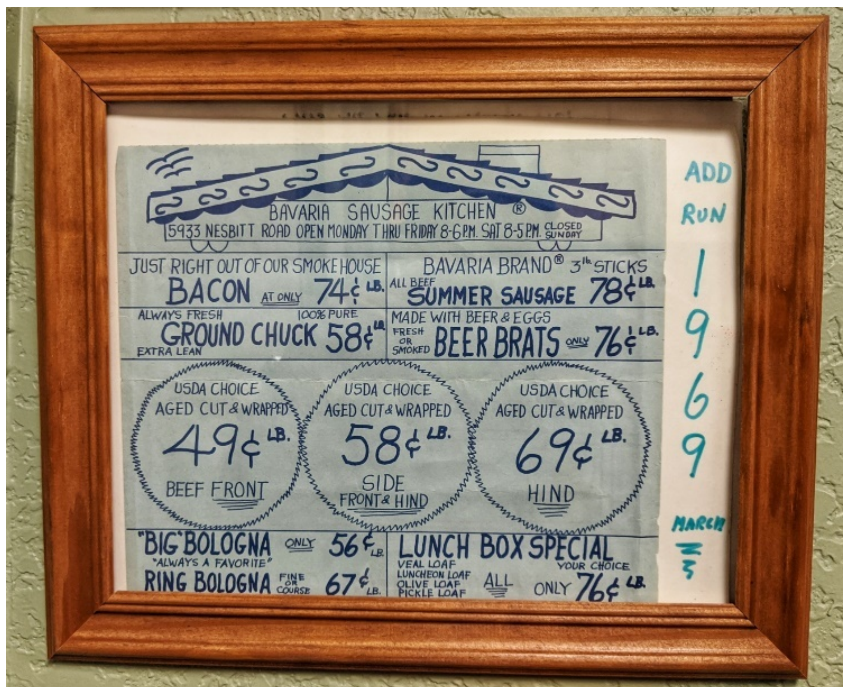
Judy says their private processing is something they've been doing since the very beginning, and they used to be able to create 28 different items out of hunter's meat. They've since cut that list down to shorten the wait time, but they've also seen that hunters generally prefer to order landjäger. And outside of private processing, she says they've seen a shift away from Wisconsin staples such as fresh brats, with more customers generally preferring pre-cooked sausage options.

Much like my conversation with Kalyn Zuber, Judy says they had a fire at the Bavaria plant as well and they worked really hard to get back open in just five months. And while that may sound like a short amount of time to recover from a fire, Judy assures me it was no small task – with members of the team packing and sending gift boxes and landjäger out from their new operation in a random hallway. She says they definitely could have closed the doors for those five months, but they wanted to create a sense of normalcy. And as it turns out, their customers still wanted their Bavaria!

### Origin of the name:

While other producers are unsure of landjäger's naming (or simply base it off the translation), Judy is firm in stating the name is directly tied to land hunters – with potential roots directly in Bavaria. There definitely isn't a consensus among producers that confirms my game warden theory, but again, words and expressions take on many different meanings throughout time and place.

Like Kalyn Zuber, Judy also recalls customers throwing out names like "Lane-Jaygers" and "Ingle-lingers." She also makes a note that their spelling of our beloved sausage snack is different than their Swiss friends (and that's why you'll be sure to find it spelled *landjäger* in this section).



A classic Bavaria Sausage Kitchen ad from 1969. Sign me up for a Lunch Box Special!



## **What makes your landjäger unique?**

Judy says the difference between some of the Swiss landjaeger and Bavarian landjäger is Bavaria's tends to be a little more lean. Judy tells me that, while producers can add up to 33% fat into a product such as landjäger (according to the USDA), they prefer to keep it around 18%.

She elaborates, saying for their landjäger (and much like the summer sausage example she mentioned earlier), "We stick with the same recipe, the same tradition, the same formulation, the same technique that my dad did. Nothing changes. The only thing that's changing over the years is the meat you buy." She adds that when her dad started up the operation, he demanded "No fillers. No additives. No MSG. Natural hickory smoke. Just good stuff people like."

In line with some of the other meat sourcing conversations I've had, Judy says you need to be careful what pork you buy because of the water content, and for that reason (and that of tradition), Bavaria only uses very lean beef to create the backbone of their landjäger.

Judy tells me about her cousin in Germany who actually prefers Bavaria's landjäger to the options she can find in her local German towns, and Judy feels part of that preference may be due to the fact that there are less and less small butcher shops in Germany as well. As the conversation evolves, she says younger generations are eating less blood sausage and head cheese, and she feels these items may never become a part of their culture unless young families keep putting them on the table. She says some families may still feature items like head cheese around Christmas or Easter, but it's more-so a novelty and less of a tradition. At the end of the day, Judy is somewhat saddened to see these Old-World dishes falling out of favor, but she's proud to see her family and the Bavaria team helping to keep the traditions and recipes alive no matter what the going consensus may be.

Judy then tells me how some fans of Bavaria entered their landjäger into international competitions without Judy knowing, and they ended up taking home two gold medals! All in all, Judy says Bavaria stands out because "all our products are robust. No mild spicing. Not meaning hot or spicy, just robust." Having read and heard that Swiss sausages tended to be more nuanced, that definitely makes sense – and that bold German flavor is very present in your first bite of a Bavaria landjäger.

## **Any criteria you feel a landjäger must follow? Or what should absolutely be kept out? Would you be open to sharing some of the spices, tricks, tips to your landjäger preparation?**

At some point in our conversation, Steve was able to step out of his other production duties and chat for a bit. His perspective was a helpful resource alongside Judy's extensive knowledge, and much of the info in this section came from their combined expertise.

### **Bavaria's Landjäger Production Schedule:**

**Day 1:** Stuff batter into casings, usually around 650 pounds at a time.

**Day 2-4:** Three days in the press.

**Day 5:** Sausages are moved onto cages and then into the smokehouse, where they'll spend roughly 19 hours at 100F and another 2-4 hours at cook-off temps of 160F.

**Days 6-9:** Hung to dry, then bundled and prepared for vacuum packaging.



**There was simply no way this photo wasn't making the cut. Enjoy.**

Steve tells me that while the meat they process from hunters follows much of the standard Bavaria landjäger protocol, they actually aren't pressed and flattened due to the extra work (and therefore taking the shape one would commonly associate with a traditional brat).

Knowing every producer has different points throughout the process where they prefer to eat their landjäger, Judy tells me she prefers them with two days of age on them (which, as you'll see later, is pretty darn close to my favorite snacking timeline). She says the spice is more present at that point, and she even feels you can simply place landjäger on the counter for a couple hours and already start to see an improvement in the overall flavor and balance (and again, I wholeheartedly agree).

When I read off my list of spices that may be present in landjäger, Judy agreed that two of them are definitely common for landjäger (caraway and garlic). Judy talks about a large number of producers buying their spices pre-mixed (which we've seen throughout our travels as well), and she tells me that even with Bavaria's massive output, they still blend their spices in-house. "What we have done different," she says, "comes from my father, who I would call a *Master Spice Mixer*." These days, she tells me, "Steve goes down and he'll make a whole bunch of landjäger spice and he puts it in a bin, so it's pre-mixed for the sausage maker to get what he needs for each batch."

When discussing the actual beef they use, Steve tells me he likes meat that's been hanging for two to three days before they get it. He checks the pH, and if it's high, the meat is too wet and it needs to ferment longer in the smokehouse until they can cook it off. And like other producers who've done this long enough, Steve says he can tell the overall condition of the beef as soon as it arrives.

Ans much like every other producer I spoke with (and what seems like the one constant between all the shops), Bavaria also utilizes hickory for their smoking. As for using a starter culture, Steve says that while they didn't use a starter back in the day, they found that it really does move the fermentation along more quickly – and they feel they incorporated the culture in such a way that the flavor was not compromised or changed enough to warrant sticking with the old methods. Steve elaborates, saying that Old-World landjäger production would have used the "slot method," where the landjäger would sit in the back corner of the smoker and naturally ferment for days.

As we'll discuss later with Dr. Jeff Sindelar, Steve tells me how they add dextrose into the batter, and the lactic acid starter feeds off the sugar to create the fermentation you're looking for – and once you hit the right spot, they raise the smoker's temperature to kill the culture and effectively stop the fermentation process. I mention how this process sounds strikingly similar to how Berliner Weisse is made, and they both say they are not fans of that particular beer style! Though they do follow up and say breweries sometimes call them in search of woodruff (an ingredient used to make a syrup for Berliner Weisse), and they're one of the few places in the area that carries it.

Whether it's landjäger or woodruff or any other German specialty item you're looking for, it sounds as though Bavaria is your go-to destination...even if you live in Green County ;)

### **How much landjäger do you produce each year? Is it your best-selling item?**

At the time of our interview, Judy and Steve said they were making ~600 pounds of landjäger every week – or what amounts to ~3,000 pairs. Judy says that during the busy season (basically every week from July to October), she has absolutely no idea how much they sell, but they'll sometimes get calls from people requesting 200 six-packs (or 1,200 *pairs* of landjäger) at a time! Additionally, Judy says



they used to offer vacuum sealed bundles of 25 pairs and 12 pairs, but over the years they've whittled that down to six-packs only.

With all that said, it's no surprise when Judy and Steve confirm that landjäger is their number one selling item – which, to our benefit, means they're constantly producing our cherished smoked sausage snacks. Judy says their six-packs are the most popular way for folks to feed their landjäger cravings, and people always tell them how the snacks will be accompanying them while they're out-and-about hunting, rafting, camping, hiking, biking – you name it. She says by the end of December, their landjäger is finally all sold out...and they need to start all over again.



**The Bavaria Sausage smokehouses are a sight to behold.**

Steve says they've tried to remove the iconic tags that hang from each pair (another WI landjäger tradition that really only resides in Green County and at Bavaria), but people have always shown a demand for single pairs – especially retailers who want to sell them individually (and without the tags on each pair, folks wouldn't know whose landjäger they were purchasing). Why would they ever want to get rid of the tags, I ask? To which Steve says, "It's just so much hand work. from stuffing to hanging to smoking to labeling and bundling. Everything is hand work with those."

As for how many pairs make their way into Bavaria's beautiful chalet case, Judy says that people will still buy six at a time, but they prefer them aged a little while. And for those of you who prefer your landjäger aged 2-3 days, it sounds like you might just want to air-dry them at home since the landjäger they add to their rack is almost always gone by the end of the first day they're hung.

Wholesale-wise, Judy said they work with distributors who can pick up numerous bulk orders at a time. And going back to beer (of course), Judy says they send a lot of brats and landjäger to breweries around the country, and then she mentions a distribution channel I'd not previously thought about:



the one-and-only eBay. While it's a powerful distro tool, she says they often need to classify it under "jerky" because people aren't sure what landjäger is exactly. She says, "They just know of these sticks, but they're not sure of the history." And that's exactly why we're here, folks.

### **Any thoughts on branching out into other styles of landjäger?**

While Judy and Steve both agree they have no desire to make seasonal or one-off landjäger at this point, Steve says they used to offer a Cajun style in addition to their current Traditional and Pfefferjäger. He tells me their Pfefferjäger is made with red and green Brazilian peppers, and I have to say the pepper definitely comes through from the first bite and follows you for a few minutes after. They also used to offer a pepperoni stick, but due to moisture content, the leanness of their meat, and regulations, they decided to cut the product from the portfolio. Even now, with the Cajun option discontinued, Steve tells me their Traditional landjäger still outsells the Pfefferjäger 4 to 1.

### **Besides your landjäger, which of your own meats are you especially proud of?**

Judy says in the summertime, Bavaria is cranking out bratwurst, summer sausages, and landjäger. And in the winter, folks are more interested in brats (obviously), liver sausage, ring bologna, wieners, and cold cuts. Personally, Judy really likes their summer sausage, kielbasa, and "cheddi" sticks. Judy says she used to love it when her dad made blood sausage. She says he'd have "blood up to his elbows. He'd throw spice across the whole vat, then add more spice. That was the coolest thing." Can you tell Judy's been in the meat processing business a long time?!



**One of traditional German murals greeting any customer lucky enough to visit Bavaria, USA.**

## Do you have any knowledge related to the history of the chalet-inspired display cases?

Judy says they used to have a cardboard landjäger case back when they made landjäger for Hickory Farms (or as it was billed, *Hickory Schnitz*). She tells me the original chalet case in their retail shop was – you guessed it – built by her dad. It sounds as though that case was damaged in the fire, however, so their good friend and colleague, Heinz Mattmann, stepped in to build the beautiful display *haus* you see today. Judy says the meat shops in Germany often hang their products on the wall, so she surmises these landjäger cases we've come to love may have been inspired by those shops – and she's almost certain the design and concept made its way over from the old country.

### Odds & Ends:

- Judy tells me about a hunter who forgot about landjäger in his hunting clothes from the previous season. She says he just grabbed it out, gave it a look over, and just started eating it. Wonder if this is the same fella Dennis Hoesly knows??
- In a rather unexpected but totally understandable part of our conversation, Judy tells me Bavaria regularly sends their landjäger to bodybuilders due to the high-protein and lean-beef content (including a number of unnamed Mr. Universe champions). One truly has to wonder how many pairs of Bavaria landjäger these muscle-bound competitors have devoured over the years? And you know we're looking at you, Arnold!





~ Bavaria's Finest ~

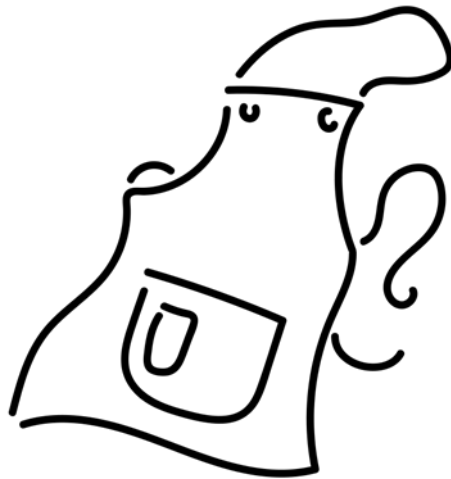
## Meet the Experts

**It's true that both of the men we talk to in this next section, Heinz Mattmann and Dr. Jeff Sindelar, could be considered producers as well.** Jeff has crafted untold amounts of meat products over the years and helped lead workshops on meat processing, and Heinz is just your average world-class sausage maker with 55+ years of experience under his belt.

That said, both of these men are now unaffiliated with any of the meat shops & producers we've met thus far (with Heinz retiring from his most recent role at Bavaria Sausage in 2020), and they each offer very personal reflections and opinions on landjaeger production and how it relates to Green County & Wisconsin as a whole. One man hails from Switzerland, the other from Iowa, and like your Upstate NY pal, Jesse, we've all found ourselves living in Wisconsin and enjoying the prized hometown sausage snack known as landjaeger.

Heinz and Jeff both tell wildly different stories about their backgrounds and experience in the meat industry, and each of them were instrumental in building a fuller picture of what makes landjaeger special, and why it's such a unique product both commercially and scientifically.

My continued thanks to these two men and all the folks who took the time to help me bring this book to life, and please join me know as we chat with Heinz at Puempel's Olde Tavern in New Glarus, and Dr. Jeff Sindelar in his office on the UW-Madison campus...





# Heinz Mattmann

Master Sausage Maker

Swiss Butcher Apprentice, 1962-1963

Ruef's Meat Market, 1965-1991

Bavaria Sausage, 1991-2020

Email: [heinzm@tds.net](mailto:heinzm@tds.net)

Interview Date: February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020



**When you talk to Heinz Mattmann**, you hear the voice of a living legend and Proud Swiss-American. And to be honest, you don't just hear Heinz – you often hear *about* Heinz. His name first popped on my radar when I emailed Beth Zurbuchen at the Swiss Center of North America. I then heard his name when talking to Kalyn at Zuber's, and from there I heard his name from almost every single person I spoke with. I'd heard he played the alphorn (confirmed). I'd heard he maybe yodeled (Heinz says no...but I don't know if I believe him). I'd heard he worked at Ruef's; played a big hand in training Jim Zuber; was a Master Sausage Maker; and currently worked at Bavaria Sausage. And I'd heard he was an all-around amazing human being, and perhaps one of the most genuine representatives of New Glarus, Green County, and landjaeger production in our area.

This was all true. And then some. As I'd mentioned earlier, I first actually met Heinz while sitting down with Judy and Steve at Bavaria Sausage. He popped out of the back, big smile and all, and we quickly set a plan in motion for the two of us to sit down together. Considering the fact that my Bavaria Sausage interview took place on February 5<sup>th</sup> and my sit down with Heinz took place on February 8<sup>th</sup> tells you just how quickly we put those plans on the calendar. It also just so happened that I was meeting Dennis Hoesly the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>, and Heinz agreed to meet me afterwards for a beer and some great conversation.

When we start talking, I asked Heinz if he could potentially translate the Swiss landjaeger recipe I'd just taken a photo of over at Hoesly's, and he happily obliged. Oddly enough, just a few minutes later another fella introduced himself to Heinz and asked if Heinz could possibly translate a document the gentleman had come across when going through family mementos. Heinz had never met the man, but surely offered his help. And not long after that, Heinz's pal, George, popped in to see if Heinz was free to play some alphorn a little later in the day. Can you guess Heinz's answer? This man who I'd heard would be a great resource on landjaeger, Green County, and Swiss heritage and history was just asked by two people to translate Swiss documents and play the traditionally-Swiss alphorn – all while drinking New Glarus beer in an 1893 New Glarus tavern that sits smack dab in the heart of the most Swiss town in America. Yeah, his was going to be fun...

## The Many Lives of Heinz Mattmann

When we first start chatting, Heinz tells me he trained under Judy's dad, Fred Voll, at Bavaria, and that he's worked at Bavaria for 28 years. And prior to that he worked at Ruef's (just up the block from where we met) for another 27 years. At the time of our interview, he was still at Bavaria working part-time on the packaging side of things. He tells me a lot has changed in the meat industry over the past few decades, and these days it's more-so folks following previously-established recipes. He refers to what he currently does as routine work, but this is also someone who's been working in meat for most of his life. And I'm sure many people would be very proud to say then learned under someone of his skill level and background. Heinz tells me he wanted to retire in 2019, but Steve at Bavaria asked if he would stay – allowing Heinz to keep up his health insurance for the time-being. All in all, Heinz says it works out pretty well for both parties thanks to his benefits & schedule flexibility, while still providing Bavaria the help they need.

From here, we quickly begin discussing Heinz's upbringing in Switzerland, and he tells me he started working in the meat biz as far back as 1962, when he took part in a year-long apprenticeship in a French part of Switzerland (similar to what Judy discussed, and what we'll hear more about from Dr. Jeff Sindelar in the next interview). In that time, Heinz says he had the opportunity to create landjaeger, and it was his job to stuff, twist, and flatten the sausages in 2" x 4" pieces of notched-out wood – which he says took a lot of time (a common theme when discussing landjaeger production). He says when he first came over, Ruef's also had wooden molds, but they eventually transitioned to stainless molds as standards and regulations changed over the years.

In addition to landjaeger production, Heinz says he also had a hand in making other sausages, though much of his first year was spent in a community slaughterhouse that helped to supply a lot of meat markets in the local area. While he clearly liked sausage making and meat processing enough to stay with it for over five decades, he didn't much care for this job at the time. As an aside, he tells me about his first day on the job, when a guy approached him and said, "Before you do any work, you need to drink the warm blood from the calf. If you can't drink it, you might as well stop because you're going to see a lot of blood." Heinz says he definitely drank some of it, but he couldn't finish everything they gave him and he – quite understandably – thought he might puke. He says he was able to keep it down, and that this initiation was common for all the new apprentices – and he says all-in-all it was just another part of growing up.

It was after the single year of apprenticeship that, in 1963, Heinz's dad called him up to say they were thinking of moving the family to New Glarus in the United States of America and asked Heinz if he wanted to join them. Heinz says he replied, "I definitely want to go!" At the time, it sounds as though Swiss families had sponsors upon coming over, and he lists Karl and Helen Hoffman as the sponsors of his family. He says they owned the Alpine Café in New Glarus, and Heinz and his family stayed with them for two weeks until they found their own place to rent and farm.

In one of the most surprising parts of our conversations (and really one of the more surprising things I've learned in a while), Heinz tells me he'd only been in New Glarus, Wisconsin, USA for four years when he was drafted for the Vietnam War in May 1967 – even though he wasn't a US citizen at the time. He says that's part of being in the US on a green card as a permanent resident; the US can draft you into military service. Through some quick research, it seems like male green card holders aged 18-25 still need to sign up for Selective Service, but this was definitely news to me. And here I was, a citizen of the US for 40 years and never once having to serve in our armed forces.

Once enlisted, Heinz says he served for two years during the Vietnam War, but he was fortunate enough to stay on American soil due to the fact that his brother, Leo, had already joined the Marines and had been sent to Vietnam. Leo had heard that, following World War II, families only needed to send one brother at a time, and Leo told Heinz to pass this info along to his commander. Heinz says the commander needed an order number, which Heinz didn't know – and his commander basically told him he'd be heading overseas. What Heinz did have was his brother's office number in California, which he called and was finally able to get the information he needed to stay put. Though “staying put” in this case meant being assigned to riot control at Walter Reed Medical Center in DC during Nixon's 1969 presidential inauguration.

Heinz tells me he was out of the military for about ten years when someone suggested he join the reserve located in Madison, WI. Deciding to do just that, Heinz was then sent to San Antonio, TX and they informed him he'd be a medic by the time he left – to which Heinz casually agreed. Now a medic, Heinz was activated during Operation Desert Storm and ended up in Frankfurt, Germany, working in emergency rooms for five months.

Knowing I'm from Upstate New York, Heinz also tells me he spent some time at Fort Drum in Watertown, NY (very close to the Canadian border, and known for its bitter cold winters). He says he was there for two months during one of these notorious winters and the tanks were “colder than hell.” Due to budget cuts to his local unit, Heinz finally wrapped up his military career after Desert Storm having served 2 years of active duty and another 12 years in the reserves.

After all of his stints in the service, Heinz decided he wanted to stay in New Glarus. His dad had built a place at that point, though his mom had passed away in 1981. After her passing, Heinz's dad told them he was heading back to Switzerland to visit his 18 brothers and sisters – and when he returned again, he asked Heinz if he wanted to buy the house. Heinz says his dad wasn't necessarily an “I love you” kind of guy, but they did stay in touch when his dad moved back to Switzerland.

As it just so happens, Heinz had just visited his dad back in the old country around 2002 when his dad suffered a heart attack, sending him right back over to Switzerland once again. And while the doctors initially said it wasn't all that bad, his dad ultimately passed away the day after he returned to Switzerland for the second time. You hear this type of story when families move overseas (I'd heard similar tales of my Welsh great-grandparents being separated from their family in search of a new life in America). And after all these years, Heinz has a family of his own here in the US – with three kids in total, and two of them living near New Glarus.

This was all so interesting and eye-opening, and I thanked Heinz for his honesty and service to a country he'd only been living in for 4 years when first called upon. Like all the topics we discuss, Heinz brushes it off with a smile and a laugh (and a sip), and we continue down Landjaeger Lane.

## **Heinz's Thoughts on Landjaeger Production & History**

Heinz says he'd been working at Ruef's part-time in 1965, and had just joined the team full-time in 1966 before being drafted in 1967. He credits Willy Ruef with his helpful on-the-job training, and all the information he learned about making sausages (including landjaeger). Heinz says he often spoke with Willy about taking over the meat market at some point. For various reasons, that never quite materialized and by the time Heinz returned from Desert Storm, Willy's son, Bill, had taken over the day-to-day operations. It was around this time that Heinz saw a sign at Bavaria announcing their need

of a sausage maker, and up until our interview, Heinz had been there ever since (though him and Dennis Hoesly joke about Heinz helping out around Hoesly's Meats once he's "retired").

I tell Heinz that I've heard he also helped Jim Zuber over the years, and he confirms that fact as well. He tells me the two of them go back many years, and he was present right up until Jim was opening Zuber's Sausage Kitchen. He says they discussed the various flavors and spice notes that Jim was playing around with (sound familiar?), and Jim finally landed on the flavor balance we still taste to this very day. He says Jim grinds his meat a little finer so you can't see the fat as much, which is similar to how they run things at Bavaria (echoing Judy and Steve's comments that, while there is some beef fat, Bavaria tries to keep their landjäger mostly lean). He even feels that Bavaria might be leaner than Ruef's or Zuber's, to which I can definitely agree.

Speaking of Jim Zuber, I had to ask about the incident with him maybe kicking Jim's butt all the way up the stairs when they worked together at Ruef's. Heinz laughs and seems to recall the incident a little more than he lets on. He mentions Jim ripping through a casing when tying a knot, and maybe "giving him hell." He does say that Jim always took safety seriously, as did everyone at Ruef's. He says, "You don't leave a knife sitting around. You always put it in the butcher block. Safety is #1. Same with grinders and mixers. You make sure it's all turned off before you reach in."

We talk about the spices that are traditionally added to landjaeger, and he remembers the spices in Switzerland being coriander, caraway, pepper, salt, and sugar. He tells me Steve does the bulk of spice mixing at Bavaria, though the kalberwurst at Bavaria is Heinz's recipe. At the time of our interview, Heinz wasn't sure if Steve would continue to use his recipe when he retires – but for now, it's a secret known only to Heinz. And while he says Steve likes a little more zip in his recipes (which definitely lines up with the conversation I had at Bavaria), Heinz confirms that his recipe is based around how they made kalberwurst back in Switzerland – and he even got the recipe from his cousin. He says it's always a great feeling when people come in and tell him they love the products he helped create, but it's especially heartwarming when they're referring to the kalberwurst. And he says he originally started making kalberwurst due to his employment at Ruef's.

I ask Heinz if he has any thoughts on starter cultures, and how some folks use them (Zuber's and Bavaria), while others do not (Ruef's, Hoesly's, Gempeler's). Heinz says it wasn't until working at Bavaria when he first found out about using a culture (which makes sense working on landjaeger in Switzerland and at Ruef's). He says he actually encouraged Jim Zuber to use a culture when he was first building out his landjaeger recipe and formulation. Another ripple off Heinz's well-established presence in Green County.

As we continue talking, I ask Heinz why exactly he thinks it is that landjaeger is so popular, and he pretty much lists the portability. "It's a small item," he says, "You can put it in your shirt pocket, back pocket. When you're hungry you don't have to stop and cook something. You just grab it and take a bite." Heinz also tells me he likes his landjaeger really firm. In the past, he would just grab them fresh and allow them to harden – but now he enjoys them a day or two after they're freshly hung or opened due to some tooth pain (I get it, Heinz – both the timeline *and* the tooth woes).

Going back to people asking Heinz to translate Swiss documents for them (guilty!), I mention a part of my conversation with Dennis Hoesly where he discussed the many varying dialects throughout the Swiss cantons. Heinz agrees it can be very difficult to keep track of sometimes, and that some parts are strongly-French, while a more northern region may have Germanic notes, and so on. He tells me



that his hometown, Trimbach bei Olten, is very close to France, and while he was in school, he'd have to talk and write in German, but he'd go home and speak in his family's mother tongue.

## **A Man About Town & Other Musings**

Heinz tells me he's almost 73 at the time of our interview, and though he won't say so himself, word on the New Glarus streets is he has been deeply involved with all things New Glarus over the many decades he's been a resident – from planning large city-wide anniversary celebrations to entertaining locals and tourists alike with his alphorn performances. About those...

Heinz says he's largely a self-taught alphorn player, and he never played until living in New Glarus (though it sounds like he did have some accordion experience back in Switzerland). As he tells it, one of the guys who had been playing alphorn had an accident and knocked out some teeth. The same fella then suggested Heinz pick it up, and the rest is history. He does credit the Monticello band director, Christen Bafner, with helping to clean up his playing a bit.



**Heinz and George pose for the camera while playing their alphorns – which is a regular sight in New Glarus most weekends throughout the summer. Photo by Kevin E. Schmidt, Quad-City Times.**

At the time of the interview, Heinz tells me he'd been performing on the grounds of New Glarus Brewing Company for the last four years– typically for a few hours on Friday and Sunday afternoons. The performances are weather-dependent, he says, and they usually take place from May through whenever it gets too cold in the fall. He says this was something he spoke with New Glarus Brewing's owner, Deb Carey, about, and Heinz and his alphorn partner, George, have become such NGBC staples that their poster now resides in one the many brewery entryways. Pre-Covid, it sounds as though Heinz would bring an extra mouthpiece with him for people to play as well – and I guess we'll just wait to see what becomes of that. Heinz says they always play free of charge, but he does get free

beer for performing at NGBC. He also says there are a combined five alphorn players in New Glarus – with some still traveling to perform outside New Glarus.

Speaking of alphorns and traditional Swiss music, I ask Heinz if he's heard of The Jolly Alpine Boys and Albert Mueller, and the two songs I've found named after landjaegers. He says that while he's unfamiliar with the band or songs, he remembers policemen being referred to as landjaegers when he was a kid. When I ask if this may have been related to game wardens or rangers, he says he's unsure and for him it always meant everyday cops (whose real title, he says, was polizei). He says that as a kid, he always thought it was weird that the meat sticks were called landjaegers – but as far as Heinz knows, the name did stick because these police were eating them. Too perfect.

He recalls getting home from school and his mom saying, “Here are your landjaegers.” They'd go outside and play, and once they got hungry – bam, landjaeger at your service, and then back in your pocket. He attests to hunters being able to take them anywhere without fear of spoilage. I also asked if he's ever heard any other names for the landjaeger sausage snacks, and he said he had not. The naming conversation continues, though I'm still going with my gut and saying it originated with traditional game wardens.

As we roll into the end of our lively conversation, I ask Heinz some of my less-specific questions on the list – such as if he ever wanted to make a special one-off landjaeger, or if he knew anything more about the history of the chalet display cases. As far as one-offs are concerned, he did suggest a “cheddi” (cheddar) option, but that was ultimately shot down at the time. That said, we've heard cheese mentioned a couple times as a landjaeger flavoring, so why the heck not? I also express my interest in an apple landjaeger smoked with applewood, and he mentions having heard of some folks using applewood over the years (and we do know Nueske's goes that route).

As for the chalet cases, he remembers there being one in a butcher shop in the French part of Switzerland, but he isn't familiar with any specific history or stories he's heard between Europe and New Glarus. We do discuss the beautiful Bavarian Sausage chalet *haus* that sits so regally atop their deli case, and much like Judy said, it sounds as though he helped bring it to life after their other display case suffered fire damage. He said, “I told them I'll make you a new one. And that's the only one I ever made.” I'd say one is enough for a lifetime, Heinz.

Between 55 years of sausage making, 14 years of military service, moving and traveling between Switzerland and America, being a Master Sausage Maker, working at Ruef's and Bavaria, helping to plan annual events, playing the alphorn at one of the most sought-out breweries in America, building mini-chalet cases, and basically acting in an unofficial capacity as New Glarus' mayor-about-town, I'd say Heinz has lived enough lifetimes for a few of us combined. And here we thought New Glarus was a quiet little village.

If you ever find yourself in New Glarus in the summertime (particularly on the weekend), be sure to keep an eye out for at least one of two men walking around with massive alphorns – you really can't miss them, and you've got a really good chance of meeting Heinz as well. And who knows, he might even be able to translate some old Swiss documents for you over a glass of Totally Naked lager. Speaking of translations, let's pop down and see what Heinz has to say about a standard landjaeger making process, and what he came up with after looking over the recipe we found in the *Schweizer Wurstwaren Saucisses de chez nous* (from Dennis Hoesly's collection).





**One of my favorite photos. After meeting with Heinz at Puempel's Olde Tavern, we trekked up to Ruef's and were lucky enough to stumble upon Chris behind the counter. Laughter ensued.**

## Traditional Green County Landjaeger Production

According to Heinz, the following process was used in Switzerland as well as Ruef's Meat Market when Heinz was employed under Willy Ruef over 55 years ago.

- On day one, the combination of meats is selected (mainly beef, but pork is often added as well). Meat is then course-ground and mixed with a proprietary mix of spices alongside the cure and salt. After mixing, the meat is ground once again through a smaller grinder blade.
- At that point, the meat blend (now known as batter) is stuffed in a hog casing. From there, the links are hand-pressed in specialized molds. Some producers automate this stage of the process.
- The landjaeger is then laid on a board with several layers on top of each other, with freezer paper between each layer. Once stacked, the landjaeger is stored away for roughly 3-6 days.
- From there, the landjaeger is placed in the smokehouse, where they're smoked between 6-8 hours on cold smoke or between 68-77F. The temperature is then raised until the landjaeger hits an internal temp of roughly 150F.
- After hitting that peak temperature, the landjaeger is allowed to cool down before a second trip into the walk-in storage for another 1-2 days. From there, many producers will vacuum seal the landjaeger or hang them in their chalet-inspired display cases.

## Traditional Swiss Landjaeger Recipe

According to the book, *Schweizer Wurstwaren Saucisses de chez nous* (roughly translated as “Swiss Sausage Products, Sausages from Our Region”), and available courtesy of Dennis Hoesly's own collection, the following is a traditional recipe for Swiss landjaeger. It's quite standard across the board, though this did help shine some light on red wine actually being used in traditional Old-World landjaeger (something I'd only previously heard about in passing). Many thanks to Heinz for translating this and adding his own traditional Green County production notes as well.

### Mixture (**Zusammensetzung**)

80% lean beef (**Kuhfleisch**)

20% beef back fat (**Rückenspeck**)

Salt and spices per Kg. meat (**Salz/ Gewürze je kg. Brät**)

20 g. Nitrite curing salt (**Nitritpökelsalz**)

7 g. Cooking Salt (**Kochsalz**)

1 g. Pepper (**Pfeffer**)

1 g. Coriander (**Koriander**)

3 g. Gr. Caraway (**Kümmel gebrochen**)

1 g. Garlic (**Knoblauch**)

5 g. Red Wine (**Rotwein**)

### Preparation (**Verarbeitung**)

Meat put in chopper 4-5 times around until pea size – Then add back fat (the back portion of the beef) – Also add all spices and salt – Continue chopping until with a 3-4 mm. size – Casing used is Hog or skin fiber intestine – Cold smoke between 20-25 degrees C.



Rohwurst geräuchert

Saucisses crues fumées



Rohwurstwaren

## Landjäger

**Zusammensetzung:** 80 % Kuhfleisch R IV  
20 % Rückenspeck S VII  
100 %

**Salz/Gewürze  
je kg Brät**

20 g	Nitritpökelsalz
7 g	Kochsalz
1 g	Pfeffer
1 g	Koriander
3 g	Kümmel gebrochen
1 g	Knoblauch
5 g	Rotwein

### Verarbeitung:

Kuhfleisch im Blitz 4–5 Runden vorzerkleinern – Speck beigegeben – mit den Gewürzen bis zu einer Körnung von 3–4 mm blitzen – Salz gegen den Schluss beigegeben.

**Darm:** Schweins-, Rindskranz- oder Hautfaserdarm

**Trocknen:** Kaltrauch 20–25 °C

Traditional photo and Swiss recipe from *Schweizer Wurstwaren Saucisses de chez nous*.

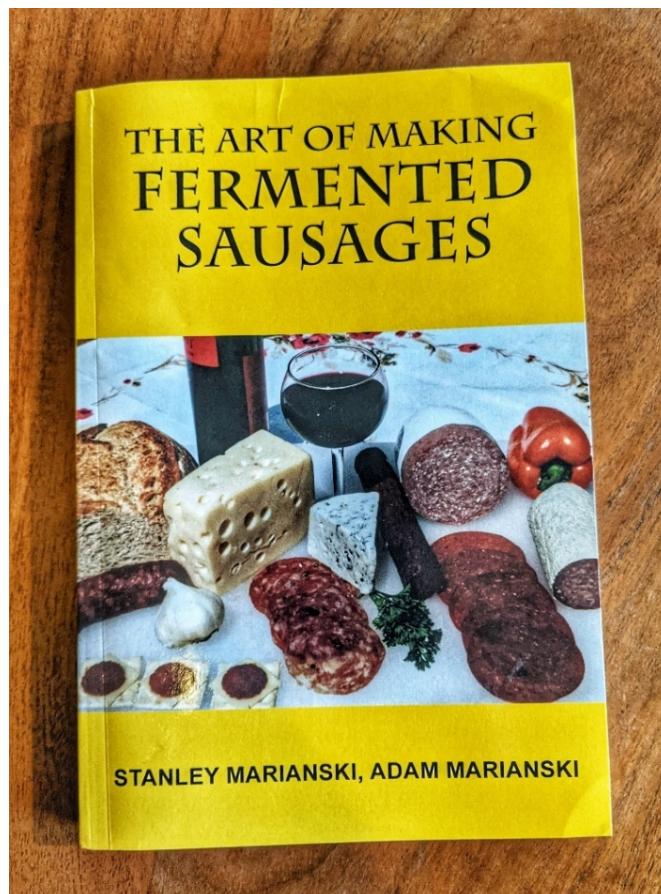
## Traditional German Landjäger Recipe

For reference, one of the other well-known recipes I found was in *The Art of Making Fermented Sausages*, by Stanley Marianski and Adam Marianski. This book is chock-full of information, and they list “Landjager” as a “German sausage similar to Austrian Kantwurst since both sausages are flattened during fermentation, which gives them a rectangular shape.”

And while the Marianskis list lean beef as the main meat ingredient, their fat addition comes from pork – at 70% / 30% proportions, respectively. From there, they list salt, cure, dextrose, pepper, cumin, and nutmeg alongside a T-SPX starter culture.

We see there is definitely some overlap and differences between the Swiss and German recipes, with both recipes calling for pepper and cooking & curing salts, but the Swiss version calling for coriander, caraway, garlic, and red wine, and the German calling for cumin and nutmeg.

And where the Swiss recipe doesn’t explicitly call for a starter culture, the German one certainly does. That said, the Marianskis’ book is completely dedicated to fermented sausages, so cultures are found in most – if not all – of the recipes. And while Dennis’ recipe is older and Swiss in origin, we also know we’re pretty evenly split within Green County on who does and doesn’t use a starter. Needless to say, these two recipes and Heinz’s notes definitely helped me wrap my head around the true nature of landjaeger, and I hope it gives you some additional insight as well.



**If you’re interested in making fermented sausages at home, you’ll want to get this book.**

## Jeff Sindelar, PhD

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**The Science of landjaeger is a fascinating thing**, and just when I thought I had a decent understanding of the process, I sat down with Dr. Jeff Sindelar to find out I'd only just scratched the surface. Even with there being so much overlap in the day-to-day protocols and basic science of crafting landjaeger and brewing beer (the latter of which I have a great deal of experience with), the field of meat science is something entirely new to me – and I have to once again thank Jeff Sindelar for bearing with me as I've asked countless questions over the last year and a half.

It wouldn't be hyperbolic to call Jeff Wisconsin's foremost expert on all things meat. I first heard his name when talking to Dennis Hoesly, and after that I couldn't get away from him. "Jeff Sindelar" kept coming up in conversations, and much like Heinz, I realized this book wouldn't be complete without sitting down with Jeff to hear his take on the landjaeger conversation.

As it just so happens, it wasn't long after I'd reached out to Jeff that he got back to me, and back in the day when we could casually visit with one-another, I popped over to his office on the west side of campus after wrapping up my day at the Wisconsin Union. Where Jeff and I met – just days before the world went on full pandemic lockdown – is no longer where Jeff's office resides. When we chat, he discusses the new UW Meat Science & Animal Biologics Discovery building that was slated for completion in July of 2020. And as of writing, the building now acts as the home for numerous areas of research alongside the Wisconsin Meat Industry Hall of Fame and the recently rebranded Bucky's Butchery, which is now Bucky's Varsity Meats – a store that, according to their website, links "the production and research of the Meat Science & Animal Biologics Discovery program to the Madison community and beyond."

Much like some of the other sections within this book, this chapter alone could have been its own project, so I'll do my best to condense what Jeff already did his best condensing for me. Now, without further ado, let's go have a chat with Jeff Sindelar...



## Background & Expertise:

When I first meet Jeff, I try to get an understanding of his post. While he's listed as a professor on the UW-Madison website (and is clearly based at UW-Madison full-time) his role also seems to be that of someone in the field who looks out for Wisconsin producers. Having worked with the Colorado Brewers Guild during my time in Denver, his responsibilities almost seems to overlap with those of a trade organization. To that point, Jeff tells me most of his job – “on paper, 80%” – is supporting the meat industry and all the stakeholders included in the meat processing establishments in Wisconsin (which, at the end of the day, means his role has a nationwide focus as well). As a professor and specialist, he provides support to youths and adults alike – really anyone who has a need for science-based information about meat, meat processing, meat safety, meat labeling, etc.

He admits that his is a very unique job. His research appointment, which comprises the other 20% of his job on paper, helps drive the extension program at UW-Madison. And he tells me his position is largely driven “by the history of meat discipline on campus and the breadth of the industry in Wisconsin.” Jeff says this was the only job he applied for coming out of higher ed – and he knew if he wanted to do this work, Wisconsin was the place to do it due to our history, the number of meat producers, the population driving the demand, and the desire to keep these traditions alive. He says, “You can't do that in Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas. Not enough people to buy it, not enough money for people to spend on local products. Wisconsin is the perfect storm for sausage, cheese, and fermented beverages. Wisconsin is a really special state in that regard.” We couldn't agree more.



**The brand new, \$57.1M Meat Science and Animal Biologics Discovery Building (MSABD) at UW-Madison in Madison, Wisconsin. Photo by Michael P. King/UW-Madison CALS**



Jeff then elaborates on the multiple ways of supporting the Wisconsin meat industry: “By serving as a resource if they have problems or questions. Or if they need support, either through moral aspect or validating what they know or think they know. Or providing them with new information.” He says it’s a lot of science-based education, and just a couple weeks after our meeting, he was planning to take part in a two-day meat processing short course “intended to support the viability and growth of the meat industry in the state of Wisconsin by providing meat processing knowledge at a fairly introductory level.” While the course never took place due to Covid-19, he says it’s targeted at those individuals that are interested in entering the meat industry, or are very new to it – but he’ll also see folks who have been in the industry for a while who just need a refresher, or want to pick up something new along the way.

And while that’s an example of the programming Jeff works on, he says he also supports needs. “A lot of it is probably most beneficial for the small or very-small meat processing plants,” he says – which, at the time of our conversation, was sitting around 375 in total. “So there’s a bunch,” he says, “and because they’re very small, with low numbers of employees, they don’t have technical groups when issues arise. Or if they have a problem with a food safety situation and then need support to work through that, and the outcome could either be you discard or destroy potentially thousands of dollars of product versus salvaging that product.” He goes on to say, “If I can provide some scientific basis or justification and help them work through that, where they can salvage that, then that can become a real financial swing and be really, really impactful.” It became quite clear, quite quickly why Jeff was spoken so highly of amongst the landjaeger producers of Green County.

As for Jeff’s background, he tells me he grew up on a farm in Nebraska. He was always surrounded by production agriculture, and knew he wanted to stay in the field and eventually gravitated towards his current end of the agriculture spectrum. He received his Master’s degree at Michigan State University, and went to Iowa State University to complete his PhD. While at Iowa State, he says he found himself involved with their extension program (he was heavily involved with a lot of workshops and short courses as a graduate student) and there was a week-long course that brought in a Technician from Germany that would spend a couple weeks making sausages.

And while *Technician* may sound like a pretty standard job title, it’s actually an incredibly established and respected role in Germany and throughout the worldwide meat processing community. Jeff then explains the different levels of education and training in Germany (which overlaps a great deal with my conversations with Judy Voll-Cottrell and Heinz Mattmann):

Jeff says, “You start your meat processing education by first going through meat butchery school to learn and develop skills to become a ‘Master Butcher.’ So breaking down carcasses, fabricating cuts, and so forth. And this training occurs at a university, which is more like a technical college similar to Madison College.” He continues, “After this stage of training, you are then considered a Master Butcher or *fleischmeister*. If you’re interested in continuing your meat processing education beyond fabrication, one can pursue the classification of Master Sausage Maker or *wurstmacher*. This is achieved by more academic training and, alongside your courses, the student takes part in hands-on training and apprentice work under another established *wurstmacher*.”

It’s this mix of schooling and apprenticeship – that takes a minimum of two to three years – where Jeff says “You work for somebody for basically nothing, but you’re able to receive this priceless education which, for Germany, ensures only the best butchers and sausage makers exist to continue carrying on the rich legacy of world-famous sausage making traditions.” He concludes: “A

Technician classification is achieved with even more academic training involving a deeper scientific and theoretical understanding of meat processing. It's along the lines of a PhD in academia."

And it was this very Technician – who worked for the casing company, Devro – who first exposed him to landjaeger, and that when folks like this Technician work for those types of companies, "you have to know a lot about the products you're supplying. He would come over before the short course, he's done this for like 35 years, and make 75-80 European style sausages, and landjaeger was one of them. So I learned 20 years ago or more how to make the traditional form of landjaeger." He says he's since taken that knowledge he gained and used it to teach other meat processors within the borders of Wisconsin and throughout the US. He says, "I'll do a manufacturing demonstration and say, 'We have a bowl chopper or a silent cutter, we'll get the recipe formulation and then we'll make some landjaegers and go through the process.'"

Jeff continues, "One of the things I enjoy doing is teaching people technologies. So for the first workshop coming up, we won't teach them how to make landjaeger, but we'll teach them how to make snack sticks. But then they take part in advanced courses where we *do* teach them to make landjaeger, both traditional as well as more non-traditional ways, which we see more and more often because it's easier and quicker. And most consumers don't have a full understanding of what traditional really means as they may in other parts of the world where landjaeger originated."

## **What Really Constitutes "Traditional?"**

It's at this point that I ask Jeff to discuss the difference between traditional and non-traditional landjaeger – a question which has clearly opened Pandora's box, and to which Jeff says there's "quite a bit of difference, actually." He continues, "If you talk to a purist, they would say it's a solar system or two away in terms of separation, but there are some nuances because it's just like hot dogs: a hot dog is not a hot dog, or a Frankfurter is not a Frankfurter." (And if you feel like you're experiencing some Matrix-level meat science, you're definitely not alone.)

Jeff says, "The biggest differences would be traditional landjaeger are never heat treated (i.e. cooked), so they're fermented and they never get above 90F. They're fermented, smoked for color and flavor, and dried to achieve an expected texture and so they're shelf stable."

He continues, "The second, and biggest, difference is the manufacturing process itself – the forming. Landjaeger is traditionally made in presses, which gives that beautiful crisp, rectangle shape. There's specialized equipment that does that. They are molds that you lay them in, they're mechanical to smash and then press. You see some that are squared off, some that are sort of flat, and then some that are clearly not even trying that hard."

"The third," he says, "is the amount of smoke. Traditional landjaeger is very heavily smoked, like barbecue that's really, really, really heavily smoked. That would be like the level of smoke traditionally found for landjaeger. And that heavy smoke is directly tied to the origin of landjaeger where smoke served as a preservative to control bacteria from growing and to ward off insects due to the 'bitterness' of the smoke." (Once again, we see a unique overlap between beer and landjaeger production, with brewers initially adding bitter hops to beer to both balance the flavor *and* act as a preservative when stored in wooden casks and shipped across the world for weeks at a time.)

Want more? Here's more! Jeff continues, "The fourth, and this varies a lot and why it's lower on the list, but you tend to see in the US, more landjaeger tasting like black pepper, or more like a summer sausage with milder pepper. More traditional landjaeger, when you eat it, the main things that come out are moderate level of saltiness. Just like any dried product like that, a lower level of pepper, a medium level of garlic, a medium level of wine. Red wine is a very traditional ingredient. And then you have this fermented flavor, but it's medium-low. Then as you chew, that saltiness will build from a low to a medium-low. The wine will drop off a little bit. The garlic will kind of stay or maybe drop off. The pepper will increase a little bit, and there's usually a little bit of red pepper as well to hit at the back of your throat when you swallow. So landjaegers are traditionally very simple spices – and there is dextrose or sweetener added for the fermentation process."

Did you get all that? Not only is it fun to hear Jeff's breakdown of the many flavors and facets of traditional landjaeger, but it also overlaps a great deal with the traditional *Schweizer Wurstwaren Saucisses de chez nous* landjaeger recipe we'd talked about with Dennis and Heinz.

We then touch on non-traditional landjaeger, which can be a funny proposition since what we know as modern-traditional is still varying from these old-school, European methods – with much of that having to do with regulations, and to which we'll touch on a little later. Jeff says, "Here in the US we see almost all landjaegers that are cooked – because it's very hard to make anything that's not cooked anymore." He also adds, "They're rarely heavily smoked as much as they once were," and "you see a lot of variation" in their shapes and spicing.



**The sprawling American Foods Group Harvest Floor within the Meat Science & Animal Biologics Discovery (MSABD) building. Photo by Michael P. King/UW–Madison CALS**

## Meat Fermentation

With our introductions and initial conversations out of the way, it's time to finally dive into the whys and hows of landjaeger fermentation – the topic you always read about but, I feel, rarely gets into the profound understanding of what's happening deep down in the soul of landjaeger. Jeff begins by saying, “Meat fermentation is pretty standard across the board, but there's tons and tons of nuances and different ways to do different applications.”

He continues, “Meat fermentation is essentially using a bacterial strain of cultures. Back in the olden days, as my son would say, and really before the mid-1960s, there weren't commercial strains of starter cultures. Companies would develop their own internal strains and then they would infuse ‘back slopping’ to inoculate it, and you'd always have your house recipe stock. I usually don't advocate for that because there's so many things that can go wrong that the risk usually just isn't worth it anymore.”

He then tells me two of the largest commercial starter companies in the world are in Wisconsin: Chr. Hansen and Kerry Ingredients. As Jeff says (and I agree), Wisconsin is a “fermentation state.” These two companies, and really any commercial producer, will grow strains based on what the producer's goals are. And once they're dialed in, they'll standardize it. He says the most common strain for meat processing in the US is called *pediococcus acidilactici*, and it's become popular due to its high metabolism and ability to produce acid faster than any other starter culture.

Jeff says these starters are “homo-fermentative, so they're designed to consume simple sugars and produce lactic acid, although most of them today will consume just about any sugar. But dextrose is usually the sweetener of choice because it's the most readily available by the culture.” Again, we begin to see the pieces of previous interviews and conversations falling into place.

And here Jeff starts getting extra meat geeky: Once you have an idea of what you want your culture to accomplish, you then add “a certain amount of sweetener; usually half percent of your formulation of meat weight is a minimum. Then you add the prescribed amount of the starter culture. After those two are added in the mixture, the product is stuffed and it goes into fermentation rooms. Italians call them ‘drip-dry rooms.’ The temperature of the rooms is brought to the optimum growth temperature for the strains. All those strains have minimum/maximum temperatures, and you would normally bring the temperature of the fermentation chamber to about 100-110F if using a starter like *pediococcus acidilactici*. And then the bacteria will consume the dextrose. They'll produce lactic acid, small amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, small amounts of oxygen – but very, very small because they've been genetically altered to minimize that gas production.”

What the strains *do* want to do is create lactic acid, and Jeff says “They'll continue functioning until they either run out of sweetener, or you drop the temperature out of the optimum range, or you take the temperature high enough that you kill them off. In the US, that's typically the approach – you raise the temp of the product to a high enough temperature where you kill the bacteria off and stop fermentation, which is normally at least 130F but commonly higher (up to 160F).”

Because this overlaps so much with a lot of wild and sour beer fermentation, I inquire more about lactobacillus and pediococcus – to which Jeff tells me “lactobacillus is used, but not very often. It's more of a flavor developer for fermented products.” As for pediococcus, he says it's common in pepperoni and some summer sausages, and “when you get lactobacillus into the products, they tend to have more of the funkier aromas and flavors, like Italian dry salamis.”



It's here that Jeff asks if I ever tried the classic Oscar Mayer hard salami, to which I shake my head no while wondering when I'll be able to do so. He says it's one of the best products they ever made "because the recipe and the process were created years and years ago by people who knew what they were doing, and then no one had any reason to change the original formulation." He continues, "That product started by only using lactobacillus. In about the 1980s or early 1990s they had to add another strain because the metabolism is so slow that it would literally take days to produce enough acid to lower the pH to levels required by the government for good safety requirements."

These last two notes are especially interesting for me since there have been a few landjaegers I've tried where the flavors really presented themselves as pepperoni-like. One has to wonder if they've used similar spices to pepperoni, or if they've somehow purposefully or unknowingly introduced lactobacillus or varying strains of pediococcus. And do these bacteria exist in a producer's house culture and they have just accepted it as part of their particular flavor profile? So many questions!

Jeff continues dropping the knowledge: "In the US, there are standards for pH reduction. So while we're fermenting, we're at these temperatures where we want the good bacteria to grow, and the bad ones to not grow. Most of those are controlled by having enough salt in the meat, or through smoke, although today we don't add a lot of salt and we don't do a lot of smoking, so fermentation becomes this race of the finish line. And if the starter culture is growing and producing acid, they're outcompeting the other bacteria that could cause illness if allowed to grow to high levels."

Jeff says the strain of bacteria that's most concerning for fermented processed meats is *staphylococcus aureus*, because it's "nitrite-tolerant, salt-tolerant, and heat-tolerant, making it a good competitor to any starter culture. It can also produce a heat-stable toxin if allowed to grow to high enough levels. In the US there are requirements to reduce the pH to specific levels in a specific amount of time during the fermentation, mainly to make sure that *staphylococcus aureus* doesn't grow to high enough levels to produce a toxin."

Jeff brings up pediococcus again, and says producers have "18 hours, once you start fermentation, to reach a pH of 5.3 if fermenting at or above 100F, and meat generally starts out around a pH of 5.8 – give or take a little bit. Once the fermentation achieves a pH of 5.3, *Staphylococcus aureus* can't grow anymore." But the lactobacillus bacteria tend to ferment at a lower temp (75-80F), and because of that lower fermentation temperature, "producers have to wait longer than 18 hours to get to that desired 5.3, and it may take as long as 60 hours to get to 5.3."

Due to these factors, Jeff says producers and companies work together to develop fermentation blends and processes – and by mixing different bacteria stains such as lactobacillus and pediococcus (which ferment at different temperatures, creating different flavors and aromas in the process), each producer can develop their own unique fermented flavor profile.

Jeff wraps it up by saying, "The basis of the fermentation is simple: add a culture; add food for the bugs, often dextrose; bring the product to the right temperature for the bacteria to eat the dextrose; produce acid. That's the standard process, and beyond this, it can get very involved. There's a lot of science but there's also art by creating very unique aromas and flavors if that's a goal."

While that's a pretty funny way to wrap things up as "simple," it's part of why fermentation is a highly-valued skill and a true mix of art and science. Just as with beer, the producers work within the scientific guidelines they're given (the facts they know), and they're then able to change or tweak

processes to get their desired affect – all while understanding there are certain standards you need to stay within to create a safe and delicious final product.

## Scientific Step-By-Step

And while fermentation is a whole beast in-and-of-itself, it's but one part of the entire landjaeger production process. At this point, we turn our attention to thermal processing (smoking + cooking), and Jeff says that no matter how much work the producers have done to prevent unwanted bacteria from getting in the landjaeger, the meat is not ready to eat prior to thermal processing.

He continues, “Once you go through fermentation, you basically have an acidic product. The fermentation itself *will* kill some bacteria, but usually one or two logs\* of bacteria, so ten to a hundred. In the US, we have regulations that you have to show a five and sometimes six log reduction in your process, so a hundred thousand or a million. This is why uncooked products are very, very rare these days, and even if someone did want to make them, the expensive validation testing makes them a cost-inhibitive product. So when you cook a product, you can easily get to that five or six log. Again, with thermal processing, the smoking is defined as the burning of wood, sawdust, chips, whatever, and transferring the smoke compounds to the surface of the product. And then cooking would be increasing the internal temperature to levels that kills bacteria.”

\*To break it down even more, endurocide.com explains: “‘Log’ is short for logarithm, a mathematical term for a power to which a number can be raised. For example, if using 10 as a given number, a Log 3 increase can be shown as  $10^3$  or  $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$ .” Thanks, internet.



Visitors are always impressed by the MSABD lecture halls. Photo by Michael P. King/UW–Madison CALS

Jeff continues: “Consider you’re making the product with the bowl chopper and you usually have a fair amount of beef, some pork, and a fair amount of beef fat. Maybe some pork fat. And you use a chopper because it provides a dicing effect, creating small pieces of meat with very clean cuts and

edges and providing an attractive particle definition in the final product. Beef is used, and this is true for hot dogs, smoked sausage, etc., because it's a firmer protein. When you add beef to a recipe, it gives us a firm bite. Beef fat is used just because of the texture that it gives a finished product – a firm, less-mushy texture. Pork fat is primarily used for more flavor, and it's a very different flavor than beef fat. Pork lean is also a cheaper raw material and often more available.”

Meat geekery continues as we discuss stuffing and flattening: “After the product is made and stuffed into a casing, traditionally natural casing is hog intestines, then it's usually loosely stuffed, and then linked strand is separated into shorter strands, for multiple links per strand, and from there it's laid into what looks like a big trough that has a lid on top that has a spring-loaded press. So you put a layer in, and then put a separation in, like a piece of plexiglass. You add another layer, then another plastic glass. Another layer, and so on. As you're doing this, you sprinkle a little water in there because for fermentation, you need it to be a warm, aerobic, and wet environment. If it's not wet enough, you can actually get some greening or some other discoloration which is just a cured chemistry thing.” You know, just a cured chemistry thing!

Jeff goes on to say, “After it's loaded in these big troughs or molds, the landjaeger is fermented inside the molds. You elevate the temperature to 80F or whatever your culture needs to do its thing. You continue fermentation until the pH is at least 5.3 or lower, and then you stop the process. You take them out, and because of the fermentation process, the shape is set at that point – because you basically have slowly and partially denatured proteins far enough due to the acid generated via the fermentation process and they've reassembled into the shape we all know. It's still raw, uncooked sausage, but it's firm enough that it holds the distinctive, rectangular shape.”

Jeff explains further: “You take those fermented sausages and hang them on a smoke truck. Then you go through the traditional smoking process, which could be anywhere from 8-20 hours (depending on your preference for smokiness, texture, etc.), and then, traditionally, you would go to a drying process, where you'll dry until you lose about 25% - 30% of the raw, stuffed weight. So if you start out with 100 pounds at stuffing, you'd want to have about 70-75 pounds at the end of the drying process. Meat itself is about 70% - 80% water, so when these folks tell you about the things the inspectors are testing for, it's the pH and the water content.” Two topics we're familiar with!

Jeff continues: “When you ferment, whatever your endpoint pH is, so let's say after fermentation the pH is 5.2, it will usually buffer back up like 0.1 or 0.15 pH units because meat has a lot of buffering capacity in it. So it'll actually buffer back up, but then it'll stop and hold. And water activity will just continue dropping as you continue drying the product.”

As we keep digging deeper, Jeff says the landjaeger process in the US would be: stuff the batter into the casings, add the stuffed sausages into a mold, begin fermentation, remove the links from the molds, hang and smoke the sausage, commence cooking, and wrap everything up with drying. And of course, as Jeff has been known to do in this conversation, he says, “Then you see a lot of variance of that.” (We also know some producers we spoke with use slightly different processes.)

And it's here that Jeff mentions Louie Muench of Louie's Finer Meats in Cumberland, WI, and how, while Louie is a very traditional German sausage maker, he does *not* make a traditional German landjaeger. Jeff says, “He'll stuff in the natural casings, but he stuffs it very thin. It's very irregular and he doesn't press it. He just hangs that and then he goes to the fermentation, smoking heavy, and

cooking.” So again, we see the lines blurred between my initial list of five traits of traditional landjaeger, and what *traditional* really means at this point in the evolution of landjaeger.

Jeff says that, in general, landjaeger isn’t known as a tangy meat snack. They’re actually supposed to be pretty mellow, and more than anything, the fermentation plays a significant part in firming the meat and ensuring it’s shelf stable. He continues, “When you ferment, you create this internal lattice structure that helps hold everything together. If you don’t ferment, that doesn’t exist. You apply more pressure through cooking or drying, and it starts to render the fat a little bit, making it greasier.” He says you can learn a lot by cutting into your landjaeger, even going so far as to say you can uncover up to 80% of landjaeger’s life cycle by cutting into the finished product. Talk about landjaeger archeology.

With all this in mind, I ask Jeff why meat would have been fermented in the first place. Much like beer historians attest, Jeff theorizes that meat fermentation was discovered by accident, and even going further to say it’s believed curing was discovered by accident as well. “Way before refrigeration,” he says, “[fermentation] was found to be an effective preservation method. Way back when, the bacteria we deal with today didn’t exist. They have evolved. People will say, I don’t want to cook my beef jerky, I’ve been making it for 50 years. Yes, but the harmful bacteria weren’t a known source of pathogenicity until recent decades (mid-to-late 1990s). Salmonella didn’t used to be dangerous enough to make you dreadfully ill, but it can now due to its evolutions, and in the same way people and everything else in life evolves.”

He mentions Europe again, and says “In Europe, there are still many uncooked products available and sold due to them not having the same issues with harmful bacteria as we do in the US. Europe still takes a lot of precautions, though many bacteria in the US that are classified as pathogenic haven’t yet evolved to be pathogenic or human food safety concerns in other countries. Germany being a good example. Our volume is higher, so the risk could be greater. The federal government and Food Safety Inspection Branch, FSIS, knows that over 80% of their customers are small and very-small plants. These plants are the reason their jobs exist.” This is a really interesting point, and as Jeff would have you understand, the same federal government that creates the strict regulations also realizes they can’t do things in a way that will jeopardize the small businesses. Jeff says, “Even though we know the larger companies, it’s the small companies that drive it.”

## **WAMP & Other Conversations**

It’s at this point that Jeff and I discuss WAMP, the Wisconsin Association of Meat Processors. Jeff serves as a Technical Advisor to WAMP and their meat products competition – as well as sitting on their board. He tells me WAMP holds a convention every year (typically around the Madison area), and the centerpiece is always the products competition.

At the time of our interviews, producers could enter products in 36 different classes, and you’ll often see 900-1,000 products entered in the competition. Jeff says some 27 states in the US host similar conventions, but none of them are larger than the Wisconsin event. He goes on to say the *national competition* has never been larger than Wisconsin’s, and that our neighbors to the west in Minnesota may have the next largest competition, at maybe 500-600 entries. After hearing all this, I had to ask if there was a competition class for landjaeger, and I could tell Jeff really didn’t know why or how that wasn’t a thing. Let’s hope we can change this in the upcoming years!



After our long conversation, I think I know the answer to this question – but I still ask Jeff why he thinks landjaeger is so popular in Wisconsin. He says it definitely has to do with the German and Swiss heritage we find in-state, but also landjaeger’s uniqueness in the marketplace and being different than most other meat snacks in texture, appearance, and flavor.

Jeff tells me he’s made landjaeger himself a couple dozen times, and to make it traditionally is a very labor-intensive process – something we’ve definitely taken away from our previous discussions. He feels this is often why you see so many meat sticks in relation to the landjaeger you’ll find in the market, with snack sticks generally being a little more cost-effective due to raw materials, manpower, and overall turn-time per batch.

When discussing the chalet display cases, Jeff actually echoes some earlier conversations in that he doesn’t know much about their history, but he says he feels they’re supposed to simulate European open markets. “Our version of a farmer’s market,” he says, “and if you attend these markets, the carts and buildings have that façade.” Like many other folks I’ve talked to, he too feels they were likely brought over from Europe and kept alive by the same producers and traditions that continue to breathe life into landjaeger itself.

I ask Jeff if there are any well-known or unique meat products he gravitates towards, and he says he’s a big dry sausage connoisseur, and he also really enjoys well-made liver sausage, knockwurst, and a good head cheese.

## **Building a Future at UW-Madison**

As we begin to wrap things up (and I keep my fingers crossed that my recorder was able to capture all this incredible info), I ask Jeff a little more about – what was then – Bucky’s Butchery, and has now become Bucky’s Varsity Meats. Jeff says he’s played a big part in the project, and at the time of our interview the retail store had been operational for about 12 years. He says he was heavily involved at the beginning (teaching students how to make bacon to sell on-site, for example), but the shop has grown so much that he’s more of a consultant (and customer) at this point.

The Meat Science and Muscle Biology Laboratory, which was home to Bucky’s Butchery, was a state-inspected meat processing facility with all the tools one would need – chopper, mixer, grinder, etc. – to provide world-class meat products to the Wisconsin community. And while he’d become more of a consultant for Bucky’s, that “extra” time simply transitioned over to his behind-the-scenes work bringing the Meat Science & Animal Biologics Discovery building (and Bucky’s Varsity Meats) to life – with a great deal of his focus being on that project for the last 6+ years.

And while it’s new to a lot of people, Jeff says the project was 20 years in the making, having stalled once before he started in his current role – with the stall actually playing a part in why he joined the department in the first place. And while the original building we met in was built in 1931, the history didn’t outweigh the need to open a modern, state-of-the-art facility for today’s changing world. Jeff says the first design meeting took place in the fall of 2014, and it took two years to design the building from there. With construction having started in January 2017, Jeff is now able to call the new building home – and you really need to see the space to believe it.

Speaking with Jeff was about as eye-opening as any conversation I had over the last couple years, and it helped to answer a number of questions I’d been stockpiling over the course of my interviews. Hearing the producers discuss their operations is always exciting, and hearing Jeff break down the

science of it helped me walk away with a *much* better understanding of exactly why these processes and protocols were implemented in the first place.

My visit with Jeff also furthered my dedication to bringing this book to life. When Jeff talked about the perfect storm of what makes Wisconsin the premier meat-processing state, and why these traditions have carried on for decades, it really makes you step back and once again appreciate all that our great state has to offer both socially and culturally. Be it traditions passed down from great-great-grandparents right off the boat, or new traditions started by Wisconsin's younger generations, meat processing and our all-mighty landjaeger seem like they're here to stay.

### **Some quick notes related to the Meat Science & Animal Biologics Diversity Building.**

Although Bucky's Butchery has closed its doors, we now have the massive, \$57.1M Meat Science & Animal Biologics Diversity building – which itself houses Bucky's Varsity Meats and the Wisconsin Meat Industry Hall of Fame. Because this is such an important part of Wisconsin meat processing history, I've received the permission of Jeff Sindelar and the Meat Science & Animal Biologics Discovery Building to highlight the following information from their website:

### **Bucky's Butchery**

#### **Permanently Closed**

University of Wisconsin-Madison  
1805 Linden Dr, Madison, WI 53706



**Bucky's Butchery circa 2020, as if already a distant memory.**

## **Bucky's Varsity Meats**

Meat Science & Animal Biologics Diversity Building  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
1933 Observatory Drive, Madison, WI 53706

*Established in 2020, Bucky's Varsity Meats is truly a one-of-a-kind, full-service retail meat store located on the University of Wisconsin-Madison's campus. We are a student-driven store, committed to education and showcasing the incredible variety of products and cuts produced at our premier state-of-the-art facility, the Meat Science & Animal Biologics Diversity Building.*

*The University of Wisconsin has nearly 2000 acres of farmland set aside for agricultural research in Arlington, WI – about 20 miles north of campus. This research station is composed of 12 individual livestock and crop units managed by distinguished experts committed to humanely raising healthy animals with the best welfare practices to produce high-quality meat.*

*We source quality animals and meats from our farms in Arlington and local suppliers to offer wholesome, premium products to the campus and surrounding communities.*

**(And while Bucky's Varsity Meats doesn't offer any landjaeger at this time, they do offer a delicious assortment of beef jerky, snack sticks, and snack bites. Be sure to stop in!)**



**An interior shot of the brand-new Bucky's Varsity Meats, which features everything from beef sticks to Polish sausage to condiments and custom merch. Photo by Michael P. King/UW-Madison CALS**



## The Wisconsin Meat Industry Hall of Fame

Meat Science & Animal Biologics Diversity Building  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
1933 Observatory Drive, Madison, WI 53706

*The Wisconsin Meat Industry Hall of Fame was established to recognize the contributions of individuals who have had a significant impact on the meat industry of Wisconsin. This contribution may be regarded as a business venture, an idea, a process or invention, an educational effort, a leadership role or any other effort which has influenced positively the people and environment of the state of Wisconsin. The accomplishment is broadly interpreted as related to the production, distribution and consumption of meat products.*

*The rationale for this effort is to compile a historical documentation of significant achievements and impacts of meat industry leaders and innovators that contributed to a strong and vibrant Wisconsin Meat Industry. The concept is to recognize, record and thereby ensure not only a lasting tribute but equally important to serve as a challenge for greater accomplishments in future generations.*

*Each year, a committee of academic and industrial leaders in the field solicits nominations for honorees. Those who are selected receive a plaque and their photograph and biography are placed in the Hall alongside the other distinguished Hall of Fame inductees.*

*This activity was the inspiration of Dr. Robert W. Bray, Professor of Meat and Animal Science, University of Wisconsin, from 1941 to 1984, and was initiated in January, 1993.*



**You gotta love what you do. Here we find Mitch Monson, retail operations manager for Bucky's Varsity Meats, holding (hugging?) a prime rib. Photo by Michael P. King/UW–Madison CALS**



## Transcribed Versions of “Landjaeger”

**When it comes to digging to the bottom of landjaeger’s rich history**, there may be no other topic as interesting or hotly-debated as the name itself. Is it “land hunter?” “County hunter?” Is it slang for “police” or “game warden?” Is it even a rough term for a policeman’s...well...sausage?

Even if I personally feel the term is rooted in the history of game wardens, it may ultimately take a trip to Europe to fully clear up this debate (or potentially fuel it even more). But one thing *is* for sure: the word is HARD for people to pronounce, and every producer had at least one story related to the funniest and oddest things they’d hear when taking landjaeger orders.

Even funnier than a human’s mispronunciation, however, may be the way landjaeger was transcribed from my recordings – so much so that I felt the need to share some of my all-time favorites. Enjoy the read (hopefully with a lawn yoga...err, *landjaeger* in hand)!

*Lanyards*

*Lanyaggers*

*Laying it lanyard*

*Lanya here*

*Gladiators*

*Lanyakers*

*Lawn yoga*

*Onion here’s* (one of my favorites)

*Line acres*

*Non-agger*

*Land acres*

*Lawn maker*

*Land jakers*

*Blind yoga*

*Line yaeger*

*Lanya*

*Line digger*

*Laundry*

*On daggers*

*Lawn major*



## Room to Breathe: The Evolution of Landjaeger in Open Air



**One thing that's so very fascinating about landjaeger** is how much it can change over time – and quite often, for the best. While some folks love their landjaeger most when it's straight out of the smoker, others prefer it a few hours or days after it's been hung to dry (often in the traditional chalet-inspired display cases, but sometimes in the back of one's car as well).

When I first began my research, I was excited to stumble upon Zuber's website, where Jim – unlike any other site or producer on the web – had done a thorough breakdown of the landjaeger lifecycle. With Kalyn Zuber's permission, I've copied that info here for all to see:

### ***Care & Handling of your Zuber's Landjaegers:***

*The landjaeger is a shelf stable product which means that it needs no refrigeration to stay edible for long periods of time. They are great for outdoor activities such as hunting, hiking, and camping. Your landjaeger will arrive in vacuum sealed packaging to maintain their freshness. Zuber's Snack Sticks will arrive at your home also in a vacuum sealed package and must be refrigerated.*

*After opening your landjaeger, you can eat them immediately, **but many choose to let them dry further which intensifies their unique and smoky flavor.** If you choose this method, you should hang your landjaeger pairs in a dry, well ventilated area until they are dried to your liking\*.*

*Each person will have their own personal preference as to how many days it takes to dry their landjaeger to achieve the taste and consistency they like. **The longer you allow your landjaeger to dry, the harder the texture will become and the more intense the smoky flavors will be as the water evaporates.***

*\*Drying landjaeger in an area that is not ventilated well enough will allow mold to form on the outside of the casing due to high moisture content.*

### **In addition to our previous conversation, Kalyn also provided these two nuggets of info:**

- “Once you open the bag, you should take out what you want to eat, roll the bag tightly, and stick it in the freezer. I don't like the crunchiness if you leave them to hang more than a couple days, but that's just me.”

- “If you forget and you do begin to see mold specks, just wipe them off with vinegar water and it will kill the mold. The meat is fine, it's just the casing. Jim told me they let them get moldy in Europe and then they wipe them off. Personally, the idea of eating mold doesn't appeal to me.”

Vinegar, mold, and ice boxes – who knew? And thanks again to Kalyn for those tricks of the trade!

## Jesse's Landjaeger Timeline



I've had enough landjaeger laying around the house over the last few years that it became time to run my own weekly check-in with hanging and air-drying our favorite sausage snacks. And below you can witness *Jesse's Landjaeger Timeline* for yourself (using a Zuber's landjaeger as reference).

**Day 1, Hour 1:** As fresh as you'll find your landjaeger, right out of the vacuum seal. Somewhat slick, incredibly soft and flexible – to a point where you can bend it in a complete O-shape and the landjaeger retains its form. Smell of smoke begins to fill the entire kitchen in the hours after the seal was opened, and the freshness of the product really shines through.

I have to admit though, this is not my favorite time to enjoy landjaeger. While I don't get this with Zuber's as much (and some people may love landjaeger right out of the package), I have experienced some landjaeger that was almost hot dog-like right out of the package. And sometimes the mouthfeel can be a little soft and unappealing. That's just me though.

**Day 2, Week 1:** Starting to firm up throughout. I can still bend the entire link in an O-shape, but the meat and casing offer a little resistance. Flavor starts to shine through with a little less of the fresh meat flavor and a little more of what you expect from landjaeger when bought off an open rack. Smokiness shines a little more in flavor, but the smell of smoke is less powerful around the kitchen. A few bites offer a nice punch of spice, and there's a nice gentle snap when biting down.

**Day 3, Week 1:** It may sound a little bold, but I can honestly say the third day on the rack may be *the* ideal time to enjoy your favorite landjaeger – no matter the producer. The outside is firming up, though it still has some give. You definitely can't get an O-bend, and even a tighter U-shape will snap the casing. But this firmer texture creates a snappiness and overall mouthfeel that marries perfectly with the spices, fattiness, and overall smokiness.

If I'm at home, I typically keep a knife near my drying rack and slice pieces off as I go about my day – and today is when you really notice the fat softly squeezing out, the slight pitch of spices and meat that hits you in the middle, and a robust-but-balanced level of smoke in the finish. The landjaeger will continue to mature for weeks to come, but I personally feel Day 3 is where the flavor and texture balance one another most perfectly.

**End of Week 1:** Landjaeger has begun firming up throughout. At this point you can still bend the link, but the casing will begin to crack ever so slightly. Smokiness presents itself in a more rounded way, rather than the bright burst you receive in a freshly-opened package of landjaeger.

**End of Week 2:** Pretty solid and rigid at this point. The landjaeger will basically snap at any real bending of the link. Zuber's offering usually has a unique end piece on their landjaeger that I'm guessing is a result of their Knecht forming machine – and these end pieces snap right off at this point. There is still a nice balance of smoke and spices, though as time will tell, I don't know if I prefer my landjaeger to age anywhere past this point.

**End of Week 3:** As expected, the landjaeger is firmer yet, with almost none of the fattiness left. I'm still able to bend the landjaeger to some degree, and while the mouthfeel is fine, chewing becomes a

little more of a chore. As expected, I don't believe I particularly love my landjaeger past the two-week point – and it's harder than hell to have these links staring at me from across the kitchen.

**End of Week 4 (28 days):** It's hard to say how much more solid the landjaeger has become over the previous week. It's firm; plain and simple. What's left of the fat begins to push out of the meat when I chew, and there is increasingly little bend before the casing begins to crack. The casing has also begun to separate itself from the landjaeger without any external force. Again, if I found a landjaeger like this in my pocket or tackle box, I would undoubtedly eat it – but I wouldn't age any landjaeger this long on purpose.

At the end of the month, it's safe to say my personal preference for aging landjaeger falls between Day 3 and the tail end of two weeks. The meat, smokiness, spices, and mouthfeel all seem to find their perfect union at this point – and what's better than enjoying your landjaeger at peak perfection?

**Below you'll find a couple different ways to air-dry your landjaeger, allowing for good air flow and offering a visual appeal that would make any mother proud.**



**My buddy and Wisconsin native, Dave Swanson, ordered some Zuber's for delivery to Boulder, Colorado, and he whipped up this landjaeger line in his kitchen. Well played, Dave.**





**I personally use a shelf my girlfriend originally bought for some plants. Thanks, hun! The rails allow me to hang fresh pairs, and I'll then store partial landjaegers on the top shelf. And props to County Fresh Meats and Custom Meats of Marathon for their delicious offerings.**

## A Visual Tour of Landjaeger Display Cases

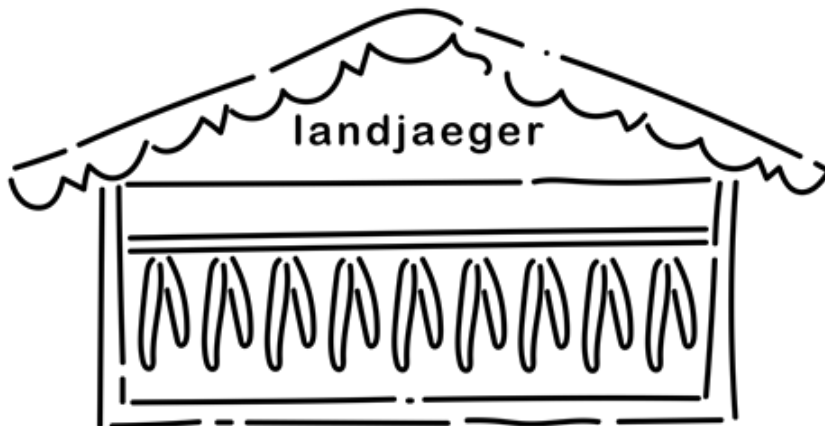


**A large part of the reason landjaeger may be so popular** is their eye-catching and completely unique chalet-inspired display cases. While we never fully got to the bottom of where they originated (one assumes the Old World), we did learn that many of these cases were built by the producers themselves – as if it’s some innate ability of landjaeger makers to also be skilled in the ways of building replica chalets!

The display cases can almost always be found at the meat shops themselves, and if you’ve visited Green County (or their northerly neighbors in Dane), you’ve likely seen these cases in the wild as well. For me, the first few off-site locations that come to mind are Hoesly’s cases at New Glarus Brewing Co & Puempel’s Olde Tavern (in New Glarus as well), and an iconic Ruef’s case that always jumped out from behind the bar of The Old Fashioned in the heart of Madison.

With the closing of more and more Wisconsin meat shops, the passing of legendary landjaeger producers/woodworkers, less children interested in taking over operations, and the increased regulation of landjaeger, it’s hard to say how long these old traditions will live on. One hopes till the end of time...landjaeger is shelf-stable after all!

Join me now as we take a visual tour of some of the more iconic landjaeger display cases...







Ruef's on display at The Old Fashioned in Madison, Wisconsin. That last pair may or may not have ended up in my possession...?



Old-school Ruet's display case. This image once graced the cover of their Sausage Guide. Photo credit unknown, but likely courtesy of a Willy or Bill Ruet.



While not a landjaeger case per se, this gorgeous work of art was displayed at Ruet's Meat Market and built in 1972 by Karl Minning of Verona, WI.





Perhaps the most elaborate wooden chalet-inspired landjaeger display case in Green County, this beauty sits proudly atop the deli case at Hoesly's Meats.



That lettering woodwork. Those small details. That delicious landjaeger...





**Maybe it's a garage? A solarium? A doghouse? Or a room-like interpretation of the land outside a Swiss chalet? Either way, this case's woodworking details truly set the bar.**





**Rocks adorn the roof and pay homage to the mountainous hometowns of Swiss settlers.**





**Gempeler's/Alpine Boy Sausages converted to acrylic display cases, which offer a more practical approach to creating numerous display cases as producers add more retail accounts.**



**You'll also find Zuber's landjaeger in acrylic cases, this time at Roy's Market in New Glarus.**





Ooh, dream weaver... You too can find this dreamy landjäger case at Bavaria Sausage.





A wide-angle shot of the Bavaria display *haus*, which is aptly surrounded by a deli case full of cheese, some imported glühwein, a collection of hats, and all the assorted German snacks you'll ever need.



A Hoesly chalet at Puempel's Olde Tavern in downtown New Glarus. The artwork behind the case is actually one of many murals painted in 1913 by traveling artist, Albert Struebin.





While Zuber's often uses acrylic, they're no stranger to the wooden chalet-inspired cases as well – with this house sitting proudly atop the cheese case at Baumgartner's, Wisconsin's oldest cheese shop.



A wide-angle shot of the Zuber's case at Baumgartner's, where you can also see their assorted cheese menu alongside a mural representing the famous "Battle Between Beer and Wine."





Another Old-World inspired Hoesly case at New Glarus' Maple Leaf Cheese and Chocolate Haus, which also sits directly next to the former home of Ruef's Meat Market.



A top-down shot of the same case, and you can't help but love the details that went into these pieces.





A Ruef's classic, now awaiting its next unveiling at the Green County Locker.



This original photo is courtesy of a Bavaria Sausage flyer, but I had to include it due to the cardboard display case (similar to what Judy discussed in our interview), and the first and only iteration of *Jägerpretzels* I've seen – located front-left, and representative of Bavaria's ability to customize products.

## Landjaeger, the Musical



**When I first began this quest**, one of my first stops was the Wisconsin Historical Society – located smack dab in the heart of the University of Wisconsin - Madison campus. I had come to know the WHS building fairly well since I worked right across Langdon Street at the Memorial Union, and I would occasionally walk through the space to take in all the history they have to offer.

Of all places in the Madison area, I thought for sure the WHS would have at least a couple books or references to landjaeger (the meat product). What I found were two fascinating references to traditional polka songs entitled “Landjäger (Gamekeeper)” and “Landjaeger March” – both featuring a man named Albert Mueller, who was also a part of The Jolly Alpine Boys.

And while these songs aren’t tied to landjaeger the snack, the one song directly lists gamekeepers – or what could also be viewed as *game wardens*. Merriam-Webster’s definition of a gamekeeper is “A person in charge of the breeding and protection of game animals or birds on a private preserve,” while Wikipedia lists UK gamekeepers as “A gamekeeper or, in case of those dealing with deer, (deer-)stalker, is a person who manages an area of countryside...to make sure there is enough game for shooting and stalking, or fish for angling, and acts as guide to those pursuing them.”

That sounds pretty similar to our earlier descriptions of game wardens, and if we do walk away with one almost-certainty, it’s that landjaeger sausage snacks *were* originally named after game wardens rather than family (casual) hunters or traditional police forces as we know them (though I have no doubt all of these folks enjoyed landjaeger throughout their travels).

This also allowed me to research and showcase an entirely different side of Wisconsin culture, and with the help of a couple fellow documentarians, I’m proud to shine a light on Albert Mueller, The Jolly Alpine Boys, and a couple of landjaeger billboard hits. Enjoy!

My two greatest resources for this section were James P. Leary’s Emmy-award winning *Folksongs of Another America: Field Recordings from the Upper Midwest, 1937-1946*, and “Urban spelunking: O'Brien's Pub & the former Golden Zither,” a March 2021 *OnMilwaukee* article by Senior Editor/Writer, Bobby Tanzilo. Apart from this info, Albert Mueller is something of an enigma – though he seemed to leave a lasting impact between his travels from Green County to Milwaukee.

As the story goes, Albert Mueller was born in New Glarus to his father, Markus, and mother, Bertha Banziger. Tanzilo says that, according to a *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* article from 1996 by Eldon Knoche, “Bertha Banziger missed the first ship she was to have taken when she sailed to New York in 1912, so she arrived aboard another boat. The ship she missed was the Titanic.”

Bertha seems to have played a big part in Albert’s musical upbringing as well, with Leary saying she brought with her a “Glarner zither made by a craftsman named Oertli.” And being unable to play it herself, she encouraged Albert to do so – which it seems he did with great success.



While this story varies somewhat from Tanzilo saying Bertha bought a zither for Albert when he was 12, both pieces have him starting to play around the ages of 11 or 12 – and Leary notes: “For six months in 1924 eleven-year-old Albert traveled nine miles north each Saturday, taking two-hour lessons from a Mrs. Elmer in Belleville ‘all by ear.’”

According to Leary, Mueller played zither in between acts of New Glarus’ famed Wilhelm Tell play, and it sounds as though this Tell play and its accompanying acts were well known to certain members of the faculty at the UW-Madison, including Helene Stratman-Thomas. Leary quotes her notes:

“We arrived at New Glarus in the midst of preparations for the Wilhelm Tell play. Rehearsals for this annual Labor Day event precluded us from assembling groups of yodelers for recording, as we had planned. We were directed to a very talented Tyrolean zither player, Albert Mueller, who recorded many folk melodies, Tyrolean marches, and ländler. We marveled at his dexterity. His mother too expressed her admiration and pride: ‘Oh ja, his teacher says he hat a gut Schwung.’”



**Albert Mueller on the zither. Photo courtesy of Zither US Facebook; courtesy of Bobby Tanzilo’s *OnMilwaukee* piece about the Golden Zither.**

Leary and Tanzilo have Mueller moving to Milwaukee around 1940 or 1941, and Tanzilo goes on to note that Mueller “became a founding member of the Milwaukee Zither Club and he performed regularly at the Swiss Club on 24th Place and Vliet Street,” while Leary documents that “after joining the Milwaukee Zither Club in 1942, Mueller’s musical life was mostly in that city and, although he played for more than twenty years for Milwaukee Swiss Club functions, his repertoire shifted to German and Austrian tunes in keeping with his new home’s dominant population.”

Both men mention Mueller's stint at the now-closed Golden Zither restaurant starting in the mid-1960s, and they each mention him playing on a golden zither (which Mueller is said to have crafted himself). It also sounds as though Mueller's stint at the Golden Zither overlapped with his participation in The Jolly Alpine Boys.



Photo credit once again to Tanzilo's *OnMilwaukee* piece, where he references singing waitress, June Steinke, alongside Fannie Kuchler and Albert Mueller at the Golden Zither.

And while Mueller's music is quite hard to find these days, it sounds as though his popularity was such that, according to Tanzilo, Mueller's performances were broadcast live on the radio every Saturday night for eight years while he was the Golden Zither's full-time musician. Tanzilo says, "One such broadcast, from 1974, is in the collection of the Mills Music Library at UW-Madison and includes performances by Mueller and Fannie Binter, along with the Jolly Alpine Boys polka group, singers June Steinke, Bob Frisch and Otto Biersack, and instrumentalist Hans Gleiber."

Leary and Tanzilo have Mueller continuing his run at the Golden Zither until sometime between 1976-1979, and both mention his post-Golden Zither career with the Vienna Strings, which, according to Leary, was your average "Austrian *schrammel* ensemble featuring zither, piano accordion, and twin violins." Of course it was!

It sounds as though Albert Mueller was a zither force to be reckoned with, and I have to say this was one of the happier surprises over the course of my research. I never in a million years expected my results at the Wisconsin Historical Society would introduce two songs referencing landjaeger, but I'm thrilled it happened and I'd love for you to listen to the songs as well.

If you live in Wisconsin, please feel free to check out The Jolly Alpine Boys vinyl yourself (and ask if you can view the autographed copy they keep in-house), or just follow the info below + the QR codes to hear the tunes in all their glory. It turns out landjaeger *sounds* as great as it tastes.

## Landjäger (Gamekeeper)

Played on zither by Albert Mueller.

New Glarus, Wisconsin. August 20, 1940.

Recorded by Helene Stratman-Thomas and Robert F. Draves.

(Details courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society)

**James Leary had this note to add regarding Landjäger (Gamekeeper):**

“‘Landjäger,’ the tune he recorded for Stratman-Thomas, invokes an Old World gamekeeper, but a landjäger is also a dried sausage made in New Glarus and savored for more than a century by tavern patrons in Wisconsin.”

**Hear *Landjäger (Gamekeeper)*:**



Or visit <https://aperfectpair.tumblr.com/>



## Landjaeger March

Another take on landjaeger in music comes via The Jolly Alpine Boys and their self-titled album – approximated to have been recorded around 1962 at Draeger Recording in Racine, Wisconsin. On this album we find “Landjaeger March” as the 6<sup>th</sup> and final track on Side 2.

The work on this album is attributed to: Albert Mueller on zither, Roland Braun on clarinet & soprano saxophone, Victor Weinfurter on accordion, and Howie on tuba [Yes. Just *Howie!*]. Frieda Haese is also credited for her vocals on the 5th work (An Der Juxer Landsgemeinde-Jodel).

According to the Mills Music Library, this album appears to be a part of the Ford Porter Collection / Wisconsin Music Archives, where they list the related Subjects as *Folk dance music*, *German Americans*, and *German Songs*, plus a Content Type of *Yodels*.

A library Note says: *Title from disc label. Principally instrumental Alpine folk dance music. And they list the physical details as 1 audio disc : analog, 33 1/3 rpm, monophonic ; 12 in*

### Side 1:

- Jolly Alpine Boys Polka
- Haushammer Landler
- Howard's Polka
- Dachauer Moos Landler
- An Der Juxer Landsgemeinde-Jodel
- Heidauer Landler
- Mary's Polka

### Side 2:

- Lindenau Polka
- Linzer Tanz
- Altbayrischer Landler Es & As
- Kusse Mich-Swiss Schottische
- Al's Jodel Waltzer
- **Landjaeger March**

**Hear *Landjaeger March*:**

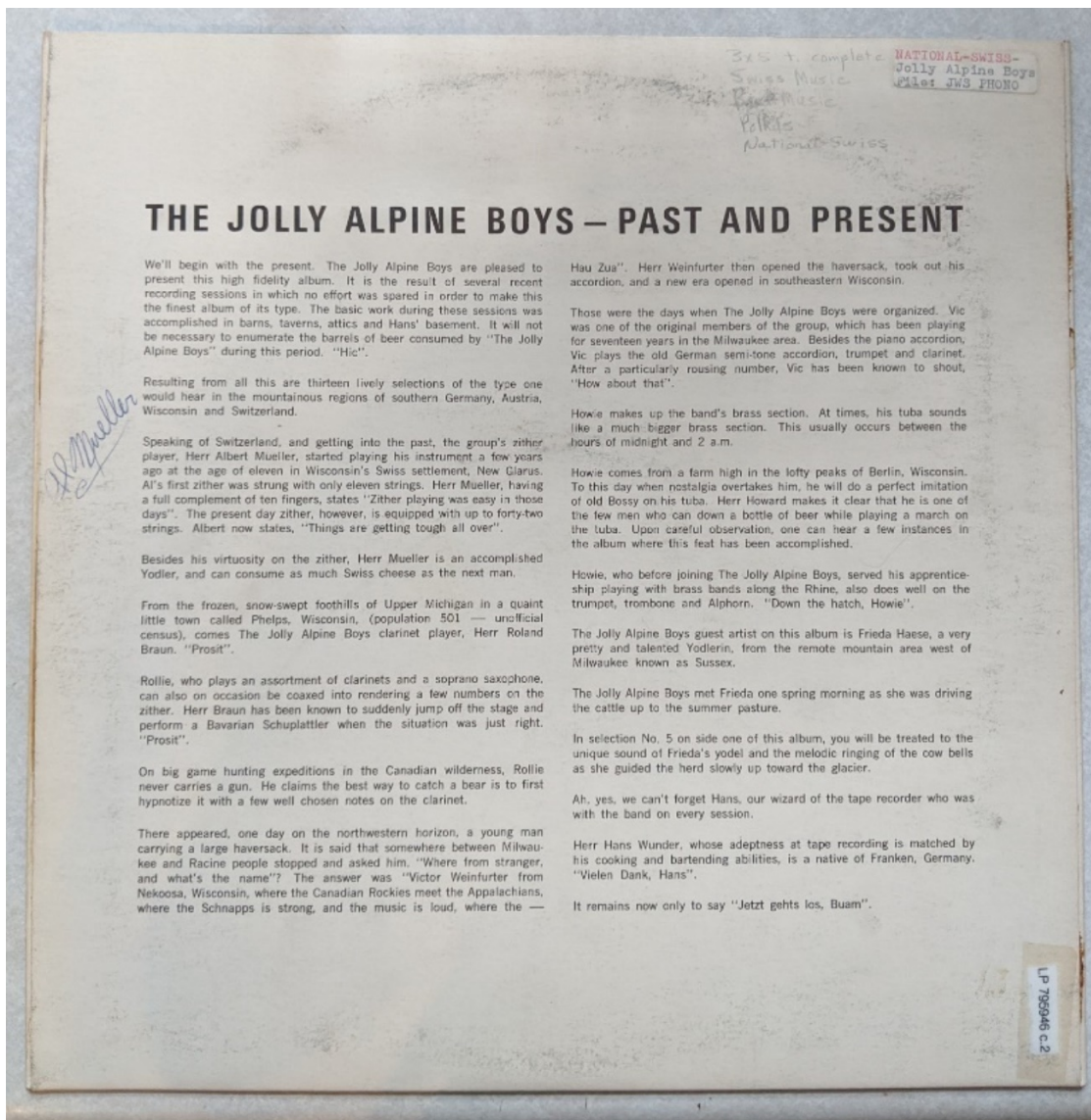


Or visit <https://aperfectpair.tumblr.com/>



Fantastic front cover of The Jolly Alpine Boys self-titled 1962 album.





**Back cover. And you can see Albert Mueller's autograph on the top left-hand side of the jacket.**

And no need to squint your eyes, I've copied the information from this back cover...it's worth a read.

### *THE JOLLY ALPINE BOYS - PAST AND PRESENT*

*We'll begin with the present. The Jolly Alpine Boys are pleased to present this high fidelity album. It is the result of several recent recording sessions in which no effort was spared in order to make this the finest album of its type. The basic work during these sessions was accomplished in barns, taverns, attics and Hans' basement. It will not be necessary to enumerate the barrels of beer consumed by "The Jolly Alpine Boys" during this period. "Hic".*

*Resulting from all this are thirteen lively selections of the type one would hear in the mountainous regions of southern Germany, Austria, Wisconsin and Switzerland.*



*Speaking of Switzerland, and getting into the past, the group's zither player, Herr Albert Mueller, started playing his instrument a few years ago at the age of eleven in Wisconsin's Swiss settlement, New Glarus. Al's first zither was strung with only eleven strings. Herr Mueller, having a full complement of ten fingers states "Zither playing was easy in those days". The present day zither, however, is equipped with up to forty-two strings. Albert now states, "Things are getting tough all over".*

*Besides his virtuosity on the zither, Herr Mueller is an accomplished Yodler, and can consume as much Swiss cheese as the next man.*

*From the frozen, snow swept foothills of Upper Michigan in a quaint little town called Phelps, Wisconsin, (population 501 - unofficial census), comes The Jolly Alpine Bays clarinet player, Herr Roland Braun. "Prosit"*

*Rollie, who plays an assortment of clarinets and a soprano saxophone, can also on occasion be coaxed into rendering a few numbers on the zither. Herr Braun has been known to suddenly jump off the stage and perform a Bavarian Schuplattler when the situation was just right. "Prosit".*

*On big game hunting expeditions in the Canadian wilderness, Rollie never carries a gun. He claims the best way to catch a bear is to first hypnotize it with a few well chosen notes on the clarinet.*

*There appeared, one day on the northwestern horizon, a young man carrying a large haversack. It is said that somewhere between Milwaukee and Racine people stopped and asked him, "Where from stranger, and what's the name"? The answer was "Victor Weinfurter from Nekoosa, Wisconsin, where the Canadian Rockies meet the Appalachians, where the Schnapps is strong, and the music is loud, where the - Hau Zua". Herr Weinfurter then opened the haversack, took out his accordion, and a new era opened in southeastern Wisconsin.*

*Those were the days when The Jolly Alpine Boys were organized. Vic was one of the original members of the group, which has been playing for seventeen years in the Milwaukee area. Besides the piano accordion, Vic plays the old German semi-tone accordion, trumpet und clarinet. After a particularly rousing number, Vic has been known to shout, "How about that".*

*Howie makes up the band's brass section. At times, his tuba sounds like a much bigger brass section. This usually occurs between the hours of midnight and 2 a.m.*

*Howie comes from a farm high in the lofty peaks of Berlin, Wisconsin. To this day when nostalgia overtakes him, he will do a perfect imitation of old Bossy on his tuba. Herr Howard makes it clear that he is one of the few men who can down a bottle of beer while playing a march on the tuba. Upon careful observation, one can hear a few instances in the album where this feat has been accomplished.*

*Howie, who before joining The Jolly Alpine Boys, served his apprenticeship playing with brass bands along the Rhine, also does well on the trumpet, trombone and Alphorn. "Down the hatch, Howie".*

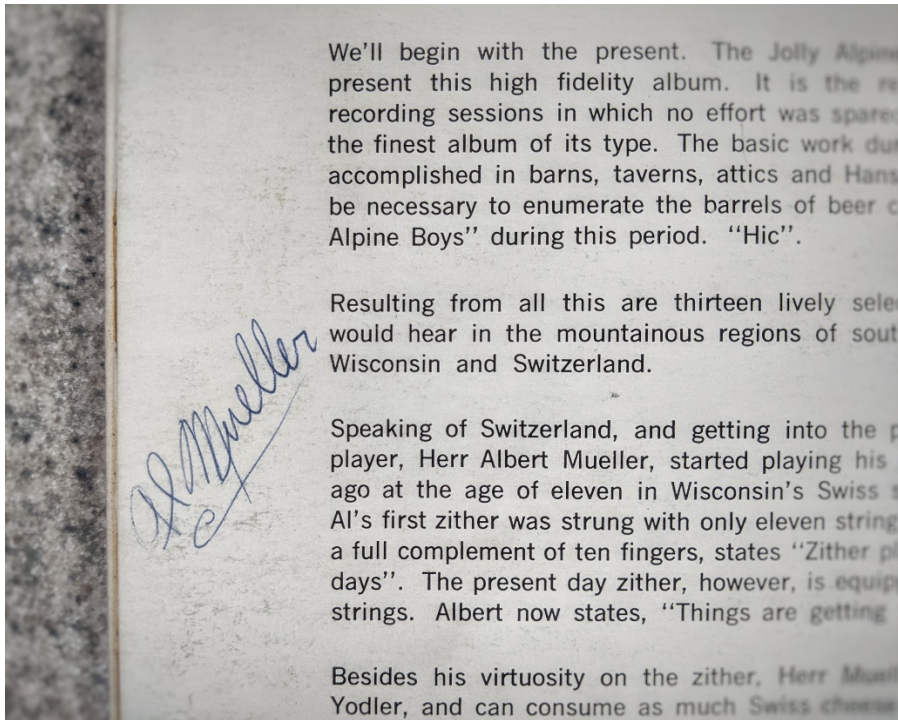
*The Jolly Alpine Boys guest artist on this album is Frieda Haese, a very pretty and talented Yodlerin, from the remote mountain area west of Milwaukee known as Sussex.*

*The Jolly Alpine Boys met Frieda one spring morning as she was driving the cattle up to the summer pasture.*

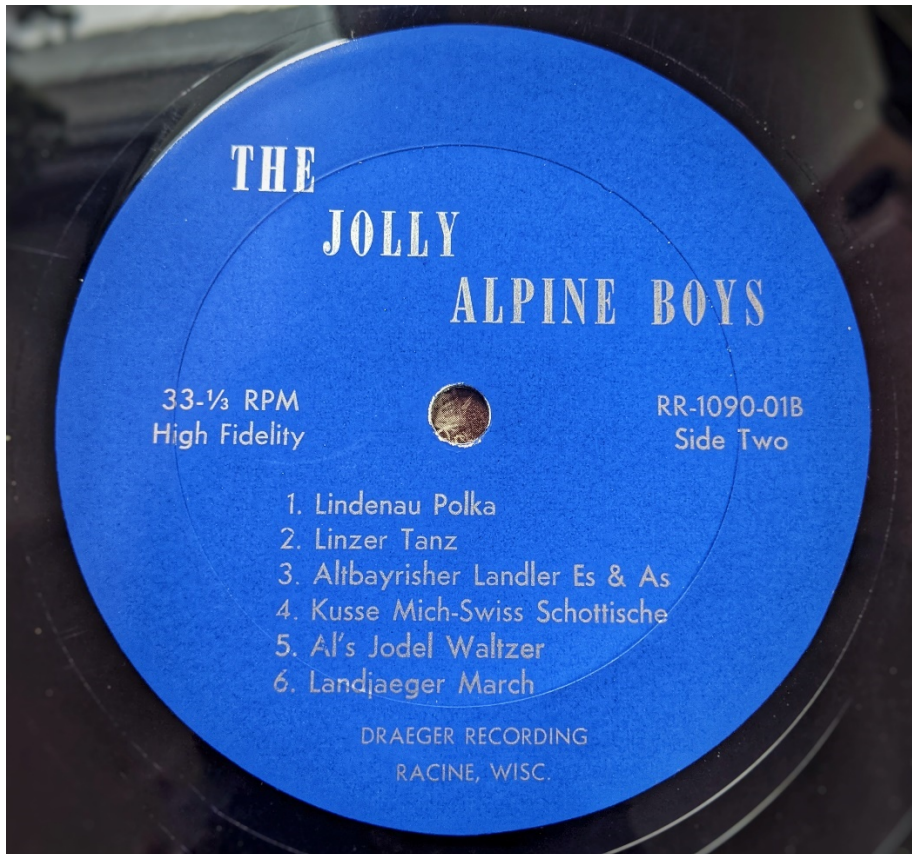
*In selection No. 5 on side one of this album, you will be treated to the unique sound of Frieda's yodel and the melodic ringing of the cow bells as she guided the herd slowly up toward the glacier.*

*Ah, yes, we can't forget Hans, our wizard of the tape recorder who was with the band on every session. Herr Hans Wunder, whose adeptness at tape recording is matched by his cooking and bartending abilities, is a native of Franken, Germany. "Vielen Dank, Hans".*

*It remains now only to say "Jetzt gehts los, Buam".*



Close-up shot of Albert's autograph, available on-site at the Mills Music Library.



Side B of the album, with all eyes on Track 6.

## Another Perfect Pair

**I asked everyone I spoke with if they had a particular drink** they liked to enjoy when snacking on their favorite landjaeger. Needless to say, this is Wisconsin...so you shouldn't be surprised that beer and Bloody Marys topped the list! Take a look at what keeps your landjaeger experts sharp and hydrated when they have some time to step away from the shop.

### **Chris Hessling at Ruef's Meat Market:**

"I don't drink a lot. Hardly at all. But when I did, especially on a Sunday like today, a Bloody Mary with half a landjaeger soaking in it, and I'm munching on the other half. I had a tendency to bite the end off before I put it in there, so they kind of get nice and soggy. I don't know if that was standard. I don't know if that's traditional, but I'm not claiming to be a purist. I came into it with no knowledge. I can get away with that."

"You know the one thing I don't add to it? Vodka. Still I'll sit down with a bloody, you know? They last me twice as long 'cause it's not a ton of fun drinking straight Bloody Mary mix, but I get all of the parts that I enjoyed."

### **Dennis Hoesly at Hoesly's Meats:**

"Anything New Glarus [Brewing Co] makes. I like most of their beers. Two Women. Spotted Cow. Two Women is probably one of my favorites, or Totally Naked. Depends on how many I'm going to drink. If I drink more than one, I'll go with Two Women. If I'm just wanna have a nice beer, I'll go with one of their seasonals."

### **Ken Gempeler at Gempeler's Supermarket**

"Beer. I like Spotted Cow and Totally Naked."

### **Kalyn Zuber at Zuber's Sausage Kitchen:**

"Bloody Marys. There's a bar, they had a Bloody Mary bar on Sunday morning and they would buy the Cajun landjaeger and actually use it as a stirring stick. They would stick it in there with pickles and other stuff."



### **Judy Voll-Cottrell and Steve Cottrell at Bavaria Sausage:**

"We sell a lot of our pepper landjäger for Bloody Marys. People buy them all the time, both of them, for Bloody Marys. My dad liked Paulaner beer. He liked Spaten. He was a Spaten drinker. I quit drinking beer in second grade 'cause I overdosed on it. True story."

Steve: "We use Wisconsin Brewing's Chocolate Lab in our beer brats."

Judy: "And talk about giving it a robust flavor!"

### **Heinz Mattmann, Master Sausage Maker:**

"Spotted Cow! My favorite is a Spotted Cow. Or they just had the seasonal, Staghorn."

### **Dr. Jeff Sindelar, Professor & Extension Meat Specialist:**

"Probably just a good amber or brown beer."





## Afterword



**Well, folks. Here we are.** The end of our time together on this meat geeky trip down Landjaeger Lane. I truly hope you've enjoyed this book as much as I enjoyed creating it. I can't say thanks enough to all the folks who helped bring this project to life, and all of you who took the time to give it a read. As with any history, I'm sure things will change down the road – and hopefully that means adding more producers rather than removing any more from the list. I also have a bounty of photos in the archives, so we may be seeing each other in a 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition sometime soon. Only time will tell.

To that point, I leave you with this: If you live in Green County and want to support your local neighbors and their businesses, please stop in and visit these meat shops. The same for any of you in Dane County – Bavaria Sausage is right off Verona Road, and you can't miss the massive sign or their beautiful facility & retail shop just a slight right out of the roundabout.

The same goes for anyone in any county, city, town, or village in Wisconsin – or really anywhere in the US of A. If you're a fan of landjaeger or other products from local meat shops, please take a trip down to their business and show them as much support as you possibly can. Owning a small business is no easy task. Meat production involves a ton of labor and long days. These shops were already working their tails off before the Covid-19 pandemic, and they could sure use even more support after one of the worst economic years in our nation's recent history.

Enjoying delicious landjaeger while keeping a small, family-run business afloat? It's a win-win!

Thanks again –

Yer pal, Jesse Brookstein





**I always loved this sign that hung in Ruef's Meat Market,  
and what better way to say goodbye?**

**Till we meet again, friends....**

