

From Germany to New York: The Hesdorfer American Dream Realized

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Throughout the 19th century, when the United States was experiencing vast economic prosperity, many foreigners battling land and job shortages, crop failure, and famine, fled to the States because it was perceived and recognized as the land of economic opportunity. Others came to seek relief from religious or political persecution. Regardless of the reasoning, between 1870 and 1900, nearly 12 million immigrants arrived in the United States.¹ A large majority of these immigrants were from Germany, including John Hesdorfer and his wife, Anna.

Both John and Anna Hesdorfer immigrated to the United States from their birthplace of Bavaria, Germany. Despite the occupation of John Hesdorfer remaining unknown, the couple resided in tenement housing on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.² Living conditions in tenement housing was less than ideal, particularly due to the cramped and poorly lit spaces. However, John Hesdorfer and his wife, Anna, like so many other immigrants and neighbors, were determined to make a better life for themselves, and their families.

As previously mentioned, there is no record of John's occupation post immigration to the United States. Anna, however, maintained "keeping house" as her occupation for a majority of her life. However, in 1850, she acquired a new occupation as mother to their first and only son, Joseph Hesdorfer, born in New York City.

¹ "Immigration to the United States, 1851-1900 | Rise of Industrial America, 1876-1900 | U.S. History Primary Source Timeline | Classroom Materials at the Library of Congress | Library of Congress." Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/rise-of-industrial-america-1876-1900/immigration-to-united-states-1851-1900/#>.

² US Census Bureau, 1880 Census, New York City, New York, New York, 16.

While there is no evidence as to what the education of Joseph Hesdorfer entailed, as a young adult, he worked as a clerk at Beinecke & Company butchers, also known as Beinecke Meat Co., until the late twentieth century (see figure 1).³ It was here that not only Joseph's life would change, but the Hesdorfer family would begin to see their own American dream come into fruition.



Figure 1. Beinecke & Co.'s Stables, at 33 Great Jones Street, New York.
A Archives, The German Historical Institute.

³ US Census Bureau, 1880 Census, New York City, New York, New York, 16.

Bernhard Beinecke, the owner and operator of Beinecke & Co., was a German immigrant much like John and Anna Hesdorfer, Joseph's parents (fig. 2). Beinecke, later deemed, "the wagon man" – due to his reputation selling meat by wagon in Lower Manhattan – was truly a visionary and capitalized greatly on his natural business prowess which he exhibited at a very young age.⁴ After Beinecke acquired employment at a meat company, shortly thereafter, he purchased the company and named it Beinecke & Co. Due to the company's significant growth, Beinecke was quickly introduced to New York society and became privy to the many doors it opened. Over the next fifteen years, Beinecke gradually expanded the company and firmly solidified its position in New York City's vital meat packing industry.⁵



Fig. 2., Bernhard Beinecke, the "wagon man", and later, owner of Beinecke & Co. Immigrant Entrepreneurship.

⁴ Benjamin J. Sacks, "Frederick W. Beinecke, (1887-1971)," Immigrant Entrepreneurship, 1720 to the Present, September 25, 2012,

<https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/frederick-w-beinecke/>.

⁵ Ibid.

During this time, Beinecke hired a young Joseph Hesdorfer as a clerk to work in the back of house at Beinecke & Co. While there is no documentation regarding the development of the relationship between Beinecke and Hesdorfer, one can deduce that while Hesdorfer was a clerk at Beinecke, he became an entrusted employee, perhaps exhibiting the same business aptitude that Beinecke saw in himself. It did not take long for Beinecke and Hesdorfer to partner in several business ventures. In 1890, Beinecke acquired the (then-unfinished) Plaza Hotel on Fifth Avenue at the southeast corner of Central Park (fig. 3).⁶ By 1901, Beinecke and his board, which included Hesdorfer, decided to demolish and rebuild The Plaza Hotel, transforming the fifteen-year-old building into what would later be described as “the most elegant hotel in America.”⁷ Profits from the new Plaza Hotel led to Beinecke and Hesdorfer investing in Hotel Manhattan, located at Forty-Second Street and Madison Avenue (fig. 4).⁸ While perhaps not as universally recognized as the Plaza Hotel, it was profitable for both, nonetheless.

Due to Joseph Hesdorfer’s successful business ventures with Beinecke, and his ever evolving success at Beinecke & Co., he was able to move his now wife Louisa Hesdorfer, as well as his mother, Anna Hesdorfer and father, John Hesdorfer, to the prominent Upper East Side neighborhood in New York City.

⁶ Benjamin J. Sacks, “Frederick W. Beinecke, (1887-1971),” *Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, 1720 to the Present, September 25, 2012,

<https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/frederick-w-beinecke/>.

⁷ “The Plaza,” clipping in “The Bernhard Beinecke Story, 1877-1890,” 13–14, scrapbook, box 3, Beinecke Family Papers (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.), hereafter BFP..

⁸ *Directory of Directors, Directory of Directors in the City of New York*, (New York, New York, 1915), 873.

While Lousia and Joseph resided at 42 East 73rd Street, John and Anna were a stone's throw away at 48 East 73rd Street.⁹ It was quite the poetic revolution for the Hesdorfer's, who immigrated to the United States.



Fig. 3., The Plaza Hotel, circa 1910. Photographs of Old America.



Fig. 4., Hotel Manhattan, 1904. The American Historical Photo Archive.

⁹ US World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, New York City, New York, New York

Joseph Hesdorfer and wife, Louisa, had three children: the eldest, John Hesdorfer, named after Joseph's father; the only daughter, Anna Hesdorfer, after Joseph's mother; and lastly, Joseph Hesdorfer Jr.¹⁰ Both John and Joseph Jr., would later work at Beinecke & Company.

John Hesdorfer Sr. passed away in the spring of 1892 on April 25th. His wife, Anna, later followed in the fall of 1904 on November 11th. At the time of their deaths, their son, Joseph, had become a thriving entrepreneur who could afford costly expenditures, to a certain extent. It is likely that Joseph remained close to his parents until their deaths, largely due to their neighboring homes. Therefore, Joseph commissioned the Hesdorfer family mausoleum to be built at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Highland plot (fig. 5).¹¹



Fig. 5., Front Elevation (West Facing), Hesdorfer Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery.

¹⁰ US Census Bureau, 1880 Census, New York City, New York, New York, 16.

¹¹ Archives, 1901, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York, New York.

Joseph hired C.E. Tayntor & Co. to construct the family mausoleum in 1901 and Hesdafer spared no expense. "All materials of every kind, used in the construction of this mausoleum, is to be of the best of its respective kind and all world is to be thoroughly first class in particular detail."¹²

The mausoleum, quite grand in its size, nearly eighteen feet high and thirty-two feet long, holding twenty crypts, pays homage to Greek architecture. Rectangular in its shape, Doric columns flank the front of the facade, along with the traditional Doric frieze, including triglyphs and metopes. This frieze continues along the symmetrical side elevations, as well as the back facade.

The approach to the door is rather grand with six steps leading you up to the entrance. The entrance door captivates attention due to the detailing of the ornamentation, along with the inscription "HESDORFER" spanning the top of the entrance. Due to the slope of the plot, along with the raised mausoleum, once at the door entrance, the rather monumental feeling seizes the guest.

The exterior of the mausoleum is constructed only of barre Vermont granite, a C.E. Tayntor & Co. speciality, contrasted with a light Italian marble on the interior of the mausoleum.¹³ The floor is composed of pink Tennessee marble in a sand-rubbed finish, which juxtaposes the Italian marble walls and ceiling in a subdued, yet highly refined manner. The ceiling is ornamented with bronze rosettes outlining the recessed niches, which contributes yet another added level of detail to the interior of the mausoleum.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Arguably the most intricate detail of the Hesdorfer mausoleum, is the patented C.E. Tayntor & Co. roof.¹⁴ There are two pediments, one on the front facade and another on the back facade. Resting on top of these pediments are five additional slabs of granite running perpendicularly against the front and back pediment. These slabs are notched into the pediments. Not only are they notched perpendicularly to the pediments, but they are slightly stacked on top of each other, therefore upholding each other by compression. This puzzle piece-like roof construction is unique and specific in its design (fig. 6).

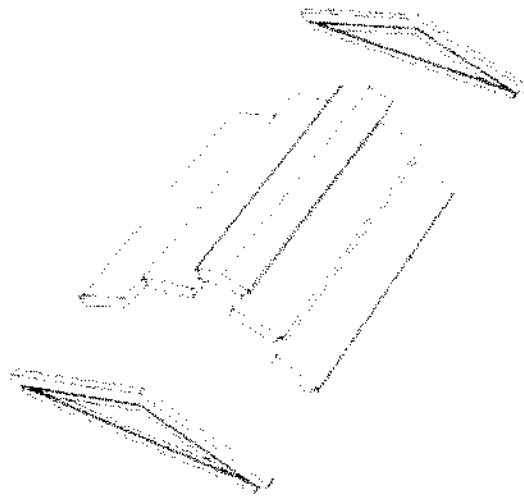


Fig. 6., Ceiling Detail. Drawing by Brooke Marinovich.

Joseph Hesdorfer left behind a legacy not only on his professional endeavors, but his personal, as well. John and Anna Hesdorfer, immigrants from Bavaria, Germany, are buried in the Hesdorfer mausoleum, along with Joseph and his wife Louisa. In addition, all three grandchildren, John, Anna, and Joseph Jr. are buried there, as well. From Germany to New York, the Hesdorfer family American dream did in fact come to pass.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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