

# Founder of the Pearl Button Industry Whose Death Occurred Yesterday; Pictures of His First Plant and Some of the Local Plants of Today

## FOUNDER OF PEARL BUTTON INDUSTRY SUGGUMBS AT LOCAL HOSPITAL

**JOHN F. BOEPPLE PASSED AWAY AT BELLEVUE HOSPITAL TUESDAY AFTERNOON.**

### INTERESTING LIFE

**Came From Germany With Secret of Manufacture of Pearl Buttons From Fresh Water Mussels—Establishes Industry, but Meets Misfortunes.**

John F. Boepple, founder of the fresh water pearl industry, passed away suddenly at the Bellevue hospital on Tuesday afternoon shortly before 4 o'clock, his death being caused by softening of the brain, and followed in illness of many months. It was recalled that the condition of the once prominent Muscatine man was precarious and no hopes had been entertained for his recovery, but it was not known yesterday that his death was imminent.

Mr. Boepple was first removed to the West Hill institution on October 25, suffering from blood poison, and since that time he received the most considerate and careful treatment, but his malady was one for which there could be found no cure, and realizing that his life was slowly slipping away, every effort was made to ameliorate, as far as possible, any suffering on the part of the patient.

The announcement of the death of the hardy old pioneer in the button industry will be received with sorrow by those who have known him through his residence in this locality for about a quarter of a century, and followed him through his trials, his achievements and his failures. He has brought considerable wealth to many of his friends, but his life of care and worry has taken its toll.

Life is interesting. A history of the life of Mr. Boepple, as is the life of the pioneers in all lines of endeavor, is absorbing interest. Coming to this country as an emigrant from the Fatherland, and at first working on a farm in the vicinity of Columbus, he arose to prominence, and while after more than a score of years of business activity, he was found to be in comparatively poor circumstances, still his great interest connected with the pearl button industry which he established. A study of his life shows the lights and shades which fall across the pathway of those who depart from the human world.

Mr. Boepple, according to those who knew him when he first came to Muscatine, followed the occupation of a barn burner in Germany, and was not a worker in the sea shell trade as many have supposed. He came to America in the year 1887 with the emigrant tide and located near Columbus Junction where he secured employment on a farm. One day while walking along the banks of the Iowa river he picked up a fresh water mussel shell, and as he held it, he recalled that he had seen it in his native land. Whether he at that time dreamed that the industry which his discovery would be the basis for establishing would be the basis for the importance which it has, is not known.

At his native Mr. Boepple at once determined to experiment on the fresh water mussel. He succeeded in setting up a machine built upon similar lines to that used himself in the Fatherland, to cut ornaments from the shells, and on a foot lathe he cut the

first buttons from the fresh water clam shell. Encouraged by the result of his experiments he came to Muscatine and without a cent in his pocket walked the streets of the city, interviewing many Muscatine people in the hope of securing sufficient capital to carry on the experiments and to manufacture fresh water pearls. He was referred to Wm. Molls, who was at that time the superintendent of the Muscatine Water Works. When he appeared at the old office of the water works, Mr. Molls was not interested in the project, and was asked to return again in the evening. Mr. Molls decided to purchase his first supply in Muscatine. That evening Mr. Molls decided to provide him the necessary a part, and advanced the founder \$12.00 to meet the expense of going to Columbus Junction to Muscatine.

From Partnership. On January 29, 1891, Mr. Molls entered into a partnership with John Boepple, and Mr. Molls today displaying the original agreement signed by the two men. Early that year Mr. Molls traveled to Newark, N. J., where he purchased twelve machines constructed for the cutting of blinches from seashells. It was not, however, his intention to use the station machine, however, and local mechanics were put to work in perfecting a machine which would be of greater use in the new-born industry. I. A. Kerr (known later as the pioneer "cutter," which it was found was a great improvement upon the eastern model) was in the fall of 1891 he was taken into the partnership, a company being formed.

The first button factory was located in the basement of the Davis corner shop on Cedar street, and here the eastern machine was operated. Later the plant was removed to the building, now occupied by the Nestor blocksmith shop, and with the advent of Mr. Kerr into the affairs of the concern, the factory was located after this a disagreement occurred and the concern was dissolved. Mr. Boepple then erected a small factory at the corner of Sixth and Tenth streets, where from three to twelve years later, H. W. Hittig became interested in the industry and Mr. Boepple was secured to manage the factory which was started at the corner of Third and Oak streets. This was first known as the Boepple button factory and afterwards became known as the Pioneer plant.

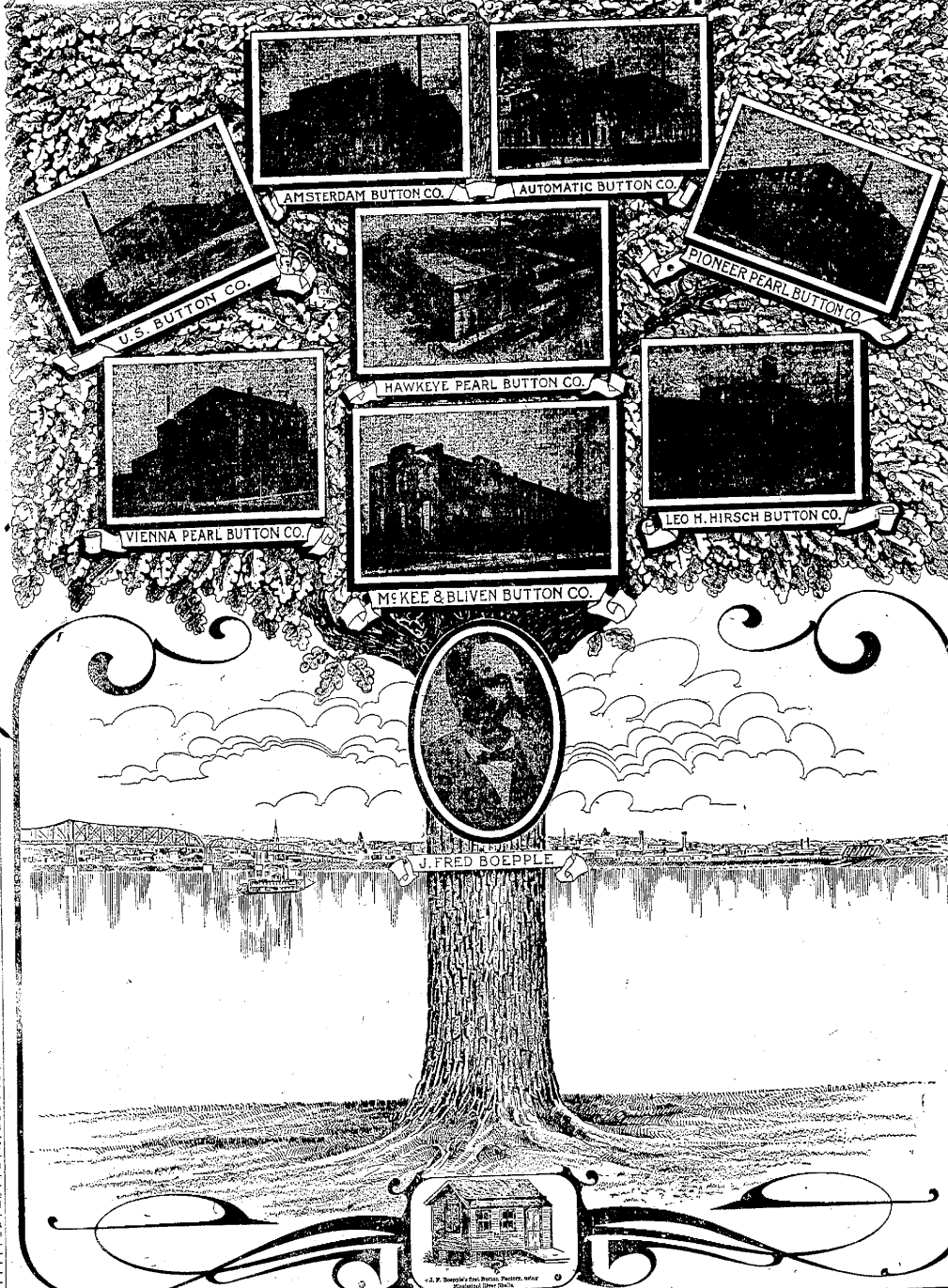
Mr. Boepple remained actively connected with the Boepple plant in the past part of the year for about five years, after which time he became estranged from the button business. After two years of activity in the industry which he established, he found that no place and was resigned for him, and he did not possess the good fortune to again attain any position of prominence in the business.

Others follow. With the feasibility of the undertaking once established by Mr. Boepple, the industry was followed rapidly by others, until the ocean shells have been practically displaced as the raw material for pearl button manufacture. In the nineties, button factories sprang up in Muscatine like mushrooms, a dozen or more were located in barns, and small buildings in various parts of the city. The early existence of the industry was waning, until fostered by the protective policy of the American tariff, and strengthened by the gradual development of the modern machinery, it gained a certain foothold and grew to surprising proportions.

The latter factor, chiefly the "automatic" machine, has accelerated the growth of the industry in a remarkable degree. The past fifteen years has witnessed the small shop displaced by the large industrial institutions, although many small cutters still are still operated. Practically all of the pearl button machinery is manufactured in Muscatine and during the past few years the Barry Manufacturing company has shipped thousands of machines to the east, where a number of large factories are now operating. The industry established by Mr. Boepple has been the chief industrial pursuit of this city, and a little more than a year ago upwards of 2,000 persons were employed in the local factories.

Family Life. John F. Boepple was born in Germany on July 23, 1854. He resided in Ottensau, Austria, and here he learned the trade of barn burner, a profession of which allowed him to solve the problem of the new marriage while quite young, but his wife and daughter, Miss Mary Boepple, also survived by a step daughter, Miss Christine Schuler of Davenport, and Mrs. Theodore F. Kreuzer, sister at Peabody, Ill., also mourns his death as she has three other sisters residing in Germany, and arrangements have been made for the funeral.

Excellent Workman. Mr. Boepple was an excellent type of self-reliant German workman of the old school, methodical, persevering, industrious in the home of his family and in the shop. He was kind, courteous and generous to a fault, and



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was well liked by those whom he included in his chosen circle of friends. As the leading figure for years in the button business in this country, Mr. Boepple had some varying experiences ranging from highly honorable to painful and laughable. When the author of the Dingley tariff was preparing that bill, Mr. Boepple was called to Washington through the agency of the Hon. G. M. Curtis. He was considered to be an authority on that matter and for an entire day he advised and consulted with President McKinley. He found the chief executive greatly interested in the new industry and the permanence of his interest is attested by letters which Mr. Boepple received from the president regarding the business.

Mental Hair Tonic keeps the scalp in a healthy condition, prevents the hair from falling out, restores it to its natural color and sheds regularly keeps the hair soft and fluffy. H. H. Springer, 210 E. 2nd St.

### TROUBLE FEARED OVER CARDS AT R. I. ARSENAL

**STEP PRECURSOR OF INSTALLATION OF TAYLOR SYSTEM (?)**  
Commandant Ordered to Issue Workmen's Shop Cards—Leaders Say Men Will Not Accept Them.

Davenport, Ia., Jan. 31.—Colonel George W. Barr, commandant at the Rock Island arsenal, has orders from the ordnance department, at Washington to issue to the workmen shop cards, the same as used in the Taylor system of shop management, and has posted notices in the shops that they will present the cards at an early date. Union leaders among the 1,200 employees of the government in the

arsenal shops say that the men will not accept the cards. The result is expected to be trouble between the government and its employees.

Colonel Barr, in a public statement, claims that the cards in no way affect the wages of the men, nor required to do, but is merely a step towards a more systematic method of management and keeping records.

The men have no objection to the character of the cards, but claim that they must have assurance that their use is not a precursor of the complete installation of the Taylor system. A mass meeting of the employees was held last night, at which time committees were appointed to wait on the commanding officer, and ask him if the Taylor system were to be installed complete. A report will be made at another mass meeting to be held this evening.

The men are awaiting with intense interest the report of the committee appointed by congress to investigate the Taylor system.

**CONEVILLE.**  
Coneville, Ia., Jan. 31.—Born, on Monday, January 22, a daughter, Mrs. Hill's mother, Mrs. Samuel, came out from Des Moines, Tuesday, to stay with them awhile.

John Dyche has purchased the town property where A. F. Abbott now lives and will move to town as soon as A. F. vacates, who expects to leave on Monday evening. The property was held last night, at which time committees were appointed to wait on the commanding officer, and ask him if the Taylor system were to be installed complete. A report will be made at another mass meeting to be held this evening.

had been a patient sufferer for the past year, and death came as a relief to her sufferings. She was born in December, 1853, and was a little over 53 years of age. She is survived by her mother, at home, Robert of Portland, Ore., Jesse of Conesville, and two sisters, Lillie, wife of James Porter, of Coneville, and Addie, wife of Adam Christ, of near Conesville. The funeral services will be held some time in this vicinity.

A postal shower was given Miss Prich Stemen last Saturday in honor of her tenth birthday anniversary, and she received 152 cards, which was the largest shower of postals in this vicinity.

Mrs. Orin Meredith and Master Wailer of Lone Tree, spent Tuesday in town with her father, G. W. Meredith.