

Maries County Business Leaders Of 1897

By Gary Knehans

JOHN OTTO was born on a Maries County farm on October 8th, 1856. He came to Vienna in 1879 and obtained employment as a clerk in R. L. Schenker's store until 1883, when he started a business on a small amount of capital he had saved. By 1897, he had built up one of the finest stores in the area, featuring ten thousand dollars worth of goods. Otto owned considerable real estate in the community, as well as some farm property. He married Maggie Buschmann on February 22nd, 1881. Their family in 1897 included three boys and one girl.

JOSEPH WEIDINGER was a Maries County farmboy who made good. Born on a farm six miles north of Vienna on May 3rd, 1860, Weidinger struck out on his own when he became of age. With no money of his own, he used carpentry skills obtained on the farm and became a full fledged architect and builder. Many houses and large barns in both Maries and Osage County were built by Weidinger. In December, 1896, he used his savings and formed a partnership with Benjamin Volmert to purchase R. H. Schenker's store. Weidinger bought Volmert's share in the store in September, 1897.

ROBERT L. SCHENKER, father of R. H. Schenker, was born in Saxony, Germany in 1840, and came to St. Louis in 1846. At the age of 13, he began clerking in a dry goods store. Schenker was sent to Vienna in 1869 to take charge of a stock of goods owned by Barr, Duncan, and Company of St. Louis, which later became Barr Dry Goods Company. The following year, he started a modest business, which subsequently prospered. Schenker sold the store to his son, R. H., and retired from the mercantile business. He later sold real estate, investigated titles, and paid taxes on behalf of non-residents. In 1878, he was elected first district associate judge of the county court. Schenker served two terms as Maries County treasurer, beginning in 1884.

ROBERT H. SCHENKER, son of the previous, was born in Vienna May 12th, 1871. After taking a commercial course in Jones' Commercial College, St. Louis, in 1888, the younger Schenker returned to Vienna. Forming a partnership with J. M. Birmingham, Schenker bought and sold cattle and hogs. In 1894, he purchased his father's store, but sold out to Weidinger and Volmert in September, 1896. Young Bob then purchased a

saloon in St. Louis, but after a few months of business there, moved his business to St. James.

THOMAS A. FELKER, the eldest son of John Felker, was born March 10th, 1860, in Vienna. After receiving education in the Vienna public school, he became a Maries County teacher. Felker later spend 18 months in the literary department of Missouri State University in Columbia. In 1881, he was appointed deputy county collector under J. M. Anderson. Felker was elected county collector in 1884 and was re-elected in 1886. He was elected Maries County Circuit Clerk and Recorder in 1890 and served one term in that office. Felker went into the cattle business. He married Millie Tyree of Carthage on January 23rd, 1884. They had three children in 1897.

JOHN P. COATES, an Englishman by birth, came to this country with his parents when he was two years old. His family moved from St. Louis to Maries County when he was 10 years old. Coates purchased the Vienna Hotel from Thomas Ready in 1890. In 1873, he married Mary Rogers. In 1897, the family included one son and three

daughters. He was described as a jolly, genial host, extracting much genuine enjoyment from life.

DR. SOLOMON A. GREMP, another rural Vienna native, was born October 5th, 1859, on a farm four miles north of town. When he was 16, his family moved to Weaubleau, where Solomon took a three years course in the Weaubleau Christian Institute. The family moved to Columbia in 1878. Grempp studied for three years in the medical department of the State University there, graduating second in his class. Dr. Grempp returned to Vienna on January 1st, 1883, and undertook the practice of medicine with Dr. H. J. Barnett. One year later, he established an independent practice and was united in marriage on July 2nd, 1884, to Nettie Felker. Grempp also served four years as Vienna postmaster.



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