

# A WOMAN AHEAD

Studieren, reisen,  
Fragen stellen: All  
dies galt im letzten  
Jahrhundert als  
unziemlich für Frauen.  
GINGER HENRY-KÜNZEL  
porträtiert ihre  
Großtante. **difficult US**

 You can  
hear part of  
this article  
on the  
SPOTLIGHT  
cassette

**W**hen my Aunt Betty died at the age of 89, I helped family members clean the house in which she had lived for more than 60 years. Aunt Betty had spent much of her professional life living and teaching in such faraway places as Seoul, Tangier, Rio de Janeiro and Paris.

Her house was filled with mementos of her travels. For me, the most fascinating was a small book I discovered on a shelf in the cellar. It was a journal kept by her Aunt Madge during her stay in Germany in 1887–88. I had often heard Aunt Betty mention Aunt Madge, and I knew that it was Madge who had first inspired Aunt Betty to travel.

Born in Pennsylvania on April 24, 1860 (the year before the American Civil War broke out), Margaret Dickson Mateer was one of those rare 19th-century women who not only completed public schooling, but who went on to gain a college degree. Aunt Madge was not content to stop there, though.

She continued her studies in Philadelphia, where she became a doctor of homeopathic medicine. In 1887, she traveled to Europe to learn more about German medical techniques. A few years later, she went to China as a missionary and doctor, remaining there for most of her adult life.

Though I never met my Great-Aunt Madge, her journal gave me a good picture of the determination, even doggedness, of this pioneering woman. At a time when travel to Europe was by no means common for Americans — and most certainly not for women — she not

only journeyed to that distant continent but, once there, convinced the Berlin medical establishment to allow her a behind-the-scenes look at their practices. It is not difficult to imagine that the medical fraternity did not take kindly to a young American woman pushing her way into their midst.

Aunt Madge wrote about more than just the medical community. The following excerpts from her 1887 journal offer a commentary on German society in the late 19th century, as seen through the eyes of an early feminist who was also heavily influenced by a strict religious upbringing.

Departing by steamer from Hoboken, New Jersey, on October 20, 1887, Madge and three traveling companions arrived in Hamburg on November 1. There, they paid a visit to the *Kunsthalle*, where Madge viewed the paintings with great interest. Almost as interesting as the art was the behavior of two German (art) lovers:

“The most natural scene ... was a party of two, man and woman, who ensconced themselves on the sofas as they made the rounds. We followed, as things looked rather suspicious, and decided that Germans could go far ahead of Americans in some things, as this couple got about fifty kisses in five minutes. Talk about German etiquette! But this amused us wonderfully, as it was done so publicly and with little care who saw. We looked on so horror-stricken that they certainly knew that this was all new to us poor Americans, as it certainly was.”

From Hamburg, Madge took a train to Lübeck, where she was invited to the home of a doctor she had met on the voyage from America. He had been attending the National Medical Congress in Washington, D.C.

“He was in America six weeks, and in that time went to California, Oregon and Washington Territory. After making this flying visit, he says there is nothing good in the U.S., and upon being asked what he liked most in the U.S. he said Milwaukee beer, and I have no doubt he gave us his candid opinion. I do not wonder after seeing Lübeck that he could not appreciate American progression. Everything in Lübeck is praised for its age, while we appreciate all that is new.

...In the square is a small building on the top of which is sort of a cage, in which men and women who cheated



Dr. Margaret Dickson Mateer: early American traveler and a woman in a male profession

# OF HER TIME

were made to stand chained for the public to see them. It seemed to me that that was a custom worth copying at this day, yet I am afraid too much land would be used, for **it** is not one house but hundreds that would be needed.

We next visited a very old church, which has been turned into an old people's home, somewhat different from our Widows' Home in Dayton. The inside is divided off into coops, large enough for a narrow bed, small stand and one chair, and high enough for one to stand in. This is in the main building. The sitting rooms, kitchen and laundry are very bare and uncomfortable. It looked as if each one cooked his or her own food and did his or her own washing, which I think [was] a much better plan than making the women do the work for the men while the men smoked and gossiped."

Madge and her companions traveled by train to Berlin, where they stayed in a *Pension* at Leutsonstrasse 27. At the post office, Madge picked up her mail and discovered that two large packages of women's suffrage materials had been forwarded to her. They had been sent

originally to her Dayton, Ohio, address for distribution in that city:

"I will save return postage and distribute them here [to other American women]. I know they will do good, for the ladies say they talk women's rights to these German men every chance they get. The men do not think much of a woman who is working for a higher education. So far as I can learn, they think it is much more womanly to stay at home and wait on men."

About a week after arriving in Berlin, Madge visited a doctor who taught medicine at the university:

"We found Dr. Gusserow exceedingly polite and agreeable. He informed me that he could not take me into the regular lecture and clinical course as it was contrary to the laws of the government to admit ladies to the government schools. He gave me good advice and said he would allow me to come into some of his operations in the Charité hospital."

journal	Tagebuch
to be content to do sth.	sich damit zufriedener geben,
[kən'tent]	etw. zu tun
doggedness ['dɒ:gɪdnəs]	Härtnäckigkeit
medical fraternity	Ärzteschaft
to take kindly to sb.	sich für jmdn. erwärmen
party	hier: Gruppe
to ensconce oneself	sich niederlassen
[ɪn'skəʊns]	
horror-stricken	entsetzt
candid	ehrlich
cage	Käfig
to cheat	betrügen
widow	Witwe
coop	Pferch
laundry	Waschküche
to gossip	schwätzen
suffrage	Wahlrecht
to forward sth. to sb.	jmdm. etw. nachsenden
to wait on sb.	jmdn. bedienen
exceedingly	überaus
lecture	Vorlesung



Städtischer Verlag (2)

**Berlin in the late 19th century:  
no need to hurry?**

"I think he is one of those queer specimens who think a woman out of her sphere when she attempts to study and practice medicine. He gave me no satisfaction in reference to my work and I did not ask much of him when I saw him shrug his shoulders on telling him I was a physician.

This morning I attended an operation at the Royal University performed by Dr. Gusserow before six or eight [students]. After the operation, Dr. Gusserow took me through his wards and explained the different cases to me, for which he has my everlasting gratitude. I am surprised, and agreeably so, at the manner in which I was treated by the students present. Each one insisted on my taking his place in turn until I had the best place from which to see the

whole operation. My opinion of Germany is rising. May it continue to do so.

We went to see Dr. Libertine, a lady physician. I think there are but two in the city. This lady was exceedingly kind and gave me an invitation to attend her clinics, held Monday and Tuesday afternoons."

Madge's companions urged her to appeal to Kaiser Wilhelm to allow her to enter the Royal University as a student. In the following note to the emperor — which she probably never sent — Madge demonstrates her sense of humor:

"Dear Billy, Would you please allow me to enter your state university? I think it a shame that women cannot enter, and as I am an American, I ought to be allowed that privilege. Enclosed please find return postage. If you cannot call, please write. Yours, M.D."

Madge enjoyed the fine music Berlin offered and paid frequent visits to the philharmonic concerts:

"The concerts are given in a beer hall, a very pretty one, more like our concert halls at home. In the center are small tables, around which six sit, and between parts, eat and drink. Some drink beer, while a great many drink chocolate or coffee. Around this center is a balcony with chairs, and also an elevated place with more tables. On the second floor is a promenade where people congregate between the parts. Everything is perfectly quiet during the music, and not at all noisy even between the music."

Madge also enjoyed the other cultural offerings of Berlin, including the museums, the architecture and the *Schauspielhaus*. Describing the production of Goethe's *Egmont*, she wrote: "The action was good throughout, but what was very noticeable was that the costumes

Growing tired of a daily diet of black bread and sausage, Madge visited the market near her rooming house. In the following entry, she describes the differences between shopping in Germany and in the U.S.

"The stalls are mostly attended by women. I often wonder what all the men are doing. Women seem to do the greatest amount of labor, and where there is any heavy load to be carried, a woman generally does it. Even the statuary adorning the outside of buildings shows this. Where there is a porch or some heavy pillar to be held up, the statue of a woman bears it. ... There are no large stores such as we have in America, and none as large as our common-sized stores. ... The reason the stores are so small is that one store keeps but one article... A shoe store keeps no slippers; a grocery may make a specialty of tea, sugar and chocolate, or canned fruits or eggs and cheese. ... [N]o matter how long you have waited or will have to wait for another streetcar, the conductor will not let you on if there are a certain number on. They take no stock in the American saying "There is always room for one more." In all things, they take it for granted that one has plenty of time to wait. This is seen in the street life of Berlin. For a city of this size, one would expect to see more of a rush, but everyone seems to be taking his time."

German manners were also different from what Madge had come to expect in the U.S. She found the men especially impolite:

"[I]t does provoke me so much to have to get out of the way for every German man. They will never step aside for a woman, although they can bow so extremely politely when they meet one whom they know."

The next day, Madge met another German doctor, Dr. Olshausen.

were very inferior. The building is not a showy one like the American houses."

On New Year's Day 1888, Madge passed by the imperial palace on her way home from church:

"The foreign ambassadors were presenting their respects to the Emperor and we saw the many different styles of coaches of each country. The gayest seemed to be the English, a bright red coach trimmed in gold with a very fancy driver. The French was green and silver. Austria had much the same. The drivers were dressed ... with powdered hair, done in curl and a three-cornered hat, knee breeches, etc. The American, or the one we thought was American, was a plain cab with grey horses and driver in civilized dress."

On January 17, Madge wrote:

"A laughable incident occurred today in connection with my effort to get to a certain state clinic — the large one on Zügelstrasse over which Dr. Bergman has charge. G. von Bergman, the Kaiser's and Crown Prince's doctor, ... told me, to be admitted to his operations, I should go to the *Kultusminister*... As I was a woman, he said, it would be better to have his permission. We made our way to [the minister's] fine residence on Unter den Linden. He questioned what operations I wished to see and if it would not be embarrassing for me to be there at the same time the men were there. He said that a place could be arranged for me and that it was the best place, where I could be a little higher than the men and not mixed in among them, as that might make a disturbance. He said he had never heard of a lady being in any of the operations."

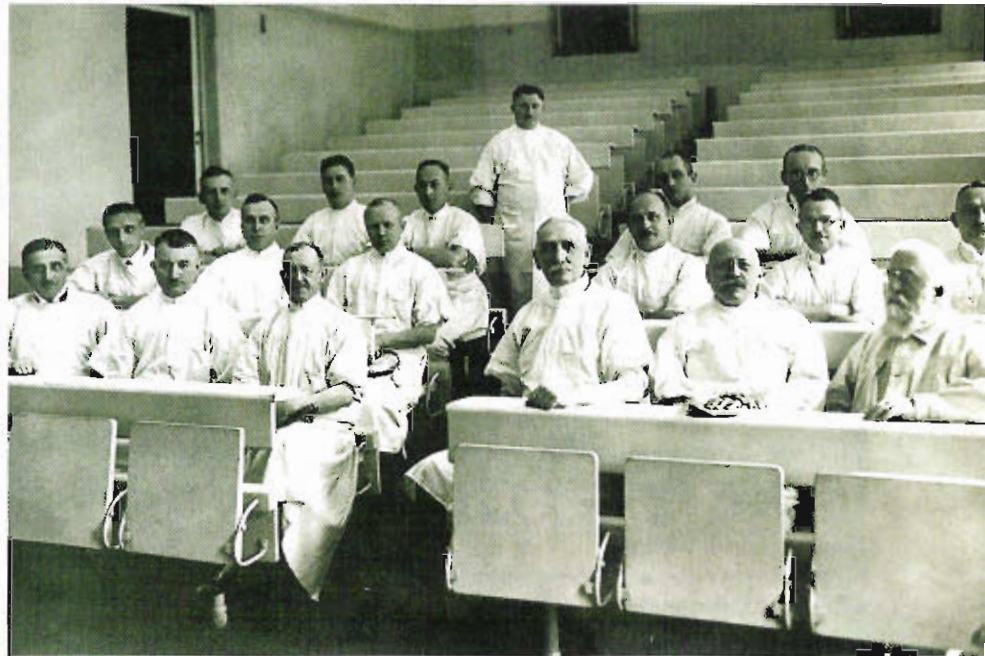
Madge also displayed an interest in German politics. On January 30, she wrote:

"There is now quite an excitement over the Socialist question and we are watching attentively for Bismarck coming so as to get tickets of admission to hear him. One man, a strong one, in a speech last week on this question said if the same state of things existed in Germany today as in Russia at the time the Czar was assassinated, he would favor the assassination of the Kaiser. Bismarck has made much of this remark and it is supposed will make much trouble. Many socialist papers are distributed in Berlin and other large German cities, although the police are vigilant to the extreme."

After leaving Berlin in late February, Madge traveled throughout Germany, Switzerland and France for three

months before returning to the U.S. It was to be her only trip to Europe. She later moved to China, where she was a medical missionary until her death on September 12, 1939, at the age of 79. ■

**Madge Mateer's great-niece Ginger Henry-Künzel also traveled through Europe as a young woman. Unlike her great-aunt, however, Ginger remained in Germany for over 20 years. She now lives in Boston.**



**No place for a lady: doctors at the Berlin Charité hospital**

<b>rooming house</b>	Pension
<b>entry</b>	Eintrag
<b>stall</b>	Stand
<b>statuary</b> ['stætʃuəri]	Skulptur(en)
<b>to adorn sth.</b> [ə'dɔ:rn]	etw. schmücken
<b>porch</b>	Vordach
<b>pillar</b> ['pɪlə]	Säule
<b>slipper</b>	Pantoffel
<b>grocery</b> US	Lebensmittelladen
<b>streetcar</b> US	Straßenbahn
<b>conductor</b>	Schaffner(in)
<b>to take no stock in sth.</b>	nichts von etw. halten
<b>to take sth. for granted</b>	etw. annehmen
<b>to bow</b> [baʊ]	sich verneigen
<b>queer</b>	sonderbar
<b>specimen</b> ['spesɪmən]	Exemplar
<b>to shrug one's shoulders</b>	mit den Achseln zucken
<b>physician</b>	Arzt, Ärztin
<b>ward</b>	[Klinik]Station
<b>clinic</b> US	hier: Seminar
<b>enclosed</b>	als Anlage
<b>to congregate</b>	zusammenkommen
<b>inferior</b> [ɪn'fɪəriə]	minderwertig
<b>showy</b>	protzig
<b>imperial</b>	kaiserlich
<b>ambassador</b>	Botschafter(in)
<b>coach</b>	Kutsche
<b>gay</b>	farbenfroh
<b>trimmed in sth.</b>	besetzt mit etw.
<b>fancy</b>	schick
<b>done in curl</b>	als Lockenfrisur
<b>knee breeches</b>	Kniebundhose
<b>plain</b>	einfach
<b>cab</b>	Droschke
<b>embarrassing</b> [ɪm'berəsɪŋ]	peinlich
<b>attentively</b>	aufmerksam
<b>to assassinate sb.</b>	jmdn. ermorden
<b>vigilant</b> ['vɪdʒələnt]	wachsam