

# THE TOWPATH

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**NEW BREMEN HISTORIC ASSOCIATION**  
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## DEAR READERS OF "THE TOWPATH"

Every quarter when the 430+ *Towpaths* are mailed, we get some very interesting letters concerning the news of OLD TIME NEW BREMEN. We would like to share some of the letters with you:

## FROM IRENE I.L. STAGGS OF HIGHLAND, CA

(Mrs. Staggs is the former Irene Wehrman of New Bremen.  
 She was a graduate of the Class of 1936.)

"I enjoy reading about so many families. Also, memories come to mind. I remember walking home from school, passing by the empty building with all the poison ivy, the FRENCH HOTEL. My brother, Eddie Wehrman, made the Christmas star that went above the KUENZEL FLOUR MILL. Each year he would have to hunt for someone to help him get up on the flour mill to place the star. It could be seen for quite a way."



## FROM DeLOSS JORDAN OF ARCADIA, CALIF.

(Mr. Jordan is also a native of New Bremen.)  
 (He is the son of Omer & Anna Jordan.)

"Hi Everybody,

Thank you for sending my copy of *The Towpath*. It is so interesting. Of course, I remember many of the names.

I think we bought a MAGESTIC RANGE from THE ARCADE." (See article in last issue.)

## The Hometown Paper

There's something about the most of us,  
 No matter where we go,  
 We have within a longing,  
 At least I've found it so,

*To keep in touch with loved ones  
 While wandering up and down,  
 And we love to see the paper  
 From the old hometown.*

It receives a hearty welcome  
 As it makes its regular round,  
 Telling us of our old friends  
 And where they may be found.

*It just sort of keeps together  
 Heartstrings once entwined;  
 It's the voice from our old hometown,  
 Where town and paper seem combined.*

Folks away receive it  
 And hold it in renown  
 They're glad to get the paper  
 (Ottis Shirk)

The New Bremen Sun was New Bremen's weekly hometown newspaper. There are copies dating from January 20, 1888 to July 13, 1961 in storage at the New Bremen Museum. Microfilmed copies are at the New Bremen Public Library. These are very helpful to those who are doing any kind of research. Many an interesting story was told in our little paper. Much of the material in this issue of *The Towpath* was found in The New Bremen Sun.

## NEW BREMEN FIRE DEPT. - WASHINGTON ST. - ca1900

"The Fire Department was putting on its best display, with the buttsmen standing by the hosecart. This cart was pulled through the streets by whoever arrived there first after the fire bell rang." (from "Ralph May Remembers")

The accompanying picture is from the Ralph May collection and is featured in the book, *Ralph May Remembers*. This gives you a view of the old Fire Department at the turn of the century. Now in the year of 1996, this same building is owned by and has recently been renovated by Crown Equipment Corp. The fire bell which had long been in storage, has also been replaced as shown. [ML]

The hose cart shown in this picture is thought to be the one now in the possession of the Kettlersville Fire Dept. Kettlersville also has the old hand pumper formerly used by the New Bremen Fire Dept. According to Stanley Shuster, former Fire Chief of the Kettlersville Dept., nobody seems to remember whether the hand pumper was borrowed by Kettlersville and never brought back to New Bremen, or whether it was actually purchased. The pumper was used by the Northern Fire Company, which was formed on June 20, 1857, and which was housed in the Fire House and Town Hall located in the old City Park on North Main St. This building was demolished in 1959 to make way for the new Post Office and First National Bank.

The Kettlersville Fire Dept. restored the pumper in the 1950s and I'm sure you've seen it in many parades in the area. Before it was restored, the printing on the side of the pumper indicated that it was manufactured by the Cowing Co. of Seneca Falls, New York. Mr. Paul Poppe of Kettlersville wrote to the Cowing Co. at that time for some historical information about the pumper. This showed that, in 1874, the pumper had sold for \$400.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the New Bremen Fire Dept. used to borrow the pumper to take it in the parades at the Central Western Volunteer Firemen's Conventions, variously held in New Bremen and the neighboring communities of St. Marys, Versailles, Covington, West Milton, etc.

According to John Wissman, a former New Bremen fireman, the first motorized firetruck owned by the New Bremen Fire Dept. was a Peterpurch firetruck. In 1946, it was the only piece of fire equipment owned by New Bremen. It was subsequently sold to the Cridersville Fire Dept. [LMF]



## THE OLD NEW BREMEN JAIL

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Do you remember the old New Bremen jail located at the east end of the old Fire Department shown on the left? If so, then you also remember it was a "bed and breakfast" for many of the transients who came through our little town during the depression of the '30s. The men traveling by boxcar were just common folks looking for work. It was a common sight to see strangers walking the streets of New Bremen, knocking on a door here and there, asking for food, coffee, matches or newspapers. The men lined their coats with the newspapers to keep warm. If by chance they were stranded in New Bremen overnight, our Marshal, William Nieter, would offer them a bed in the jail. The next morning, they moved on, looking for work.

In the southwest corner of New Bremen, the site now occupied by the Auglaize Farmers Grain Elevator on South Herman St., was the "Hobo Camp." In warm weather, these transients sat around a campfire, exchanging stories and cooking an evening meal. This "camp area" at that time was the home of a small lumber yard, the Cement Tile & Block Co., and a set of broken down buildings which were the remains of the old Brockie Handle Factory. (ML)

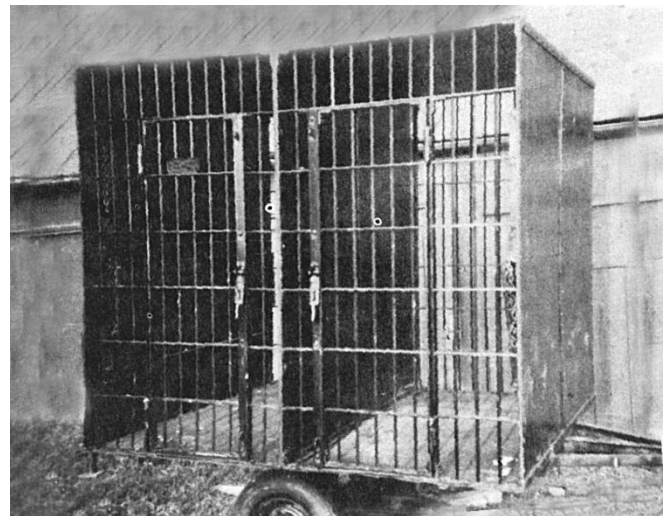
*(EDITOR'S NOTE: According to Stanley Shuster of Kettlersville, Harry ("Jersey") Fischbach offered to take the jail when the New Bremen Fire Dept. needed the extra space for their fire trucks. Stan is now the owner of the building where "Jersey" Fischbach had his museum from 1961 until March of 1974. Stan also had a "hobo" story to tell. Years ago, his father, Harvey Shuster, who was Kettlersville's Village Marshal, would light a stove in the Town Hall to give the hoboes a warm place to sleep. The next morning, Stan's mother would make them breakfast.)*

[LMF]

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### ANOTHER LETTER & A PICTURE FROM ONE OF OUR READERS:

"When Harry Fischbach's little museum in Kettlersville was sold about 15 years ago, he sold the old wrought-iron jail that came out of New Bremen. Originally I was told that it came out of the building that sat where the Marathon Gas Station now sits. I've more recently learned from co-workers at Stamco that it was in the old Fire Station that Crown has just restored and that it was painted aluminum. The original paint on it was aluminum - today it's painted black.



It consists of two cells, each 4' wide x 7' high x 7' long. Each cell has two swing-down wrought-iron bunks supported on each end by chains when down. Each cell has a wrought-iron door. No welding was used. The entire jail is held together by large iron rivets. It weighs about 3000 pounds. The original cast-iron nameplate lists the maker as The Champion Iron Co. - Kenton, Ohio. The old jail is in good shape yet, except for some rust damage on the floor. I'm sure some of your readers know some interesting history about it."

**Dave Hemmert**

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**CHOLERA PLAGUE**  
**IN NEW BREMEN**  
**AS REMEMBERED THROUGH**  
**HEARSAY BY MRS. FINKE**  
She Was Rescued As A Babe  
In Her Dead Mother's Arms

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Referring to a picture, in a recent issue of the SUN, of the monument on the St. Augustine Cemetery at Minster, erected in memory of the victims of this Section who died during the cholera epidemic, over three-quarters of a century ago, Mrs. Charles Garmhausen of Warren, Ohio, writes the SUN to call attention to the fact that her mother, Mrs. Louise Finke, who several weeks ago celebrated her 90th birthday, is perhaps the only resident of New Bremen today who has recollection of incidents harking back to the dreadful times following the ravages of the much feared malady of those early pioneer days. Of the actual suffering and sorrow Mrs. Finke cannot remember anything because she was a mere babe when both her parents, Frederick and Marie Schoenfeld Wehrman, were taken in rapid succession as victims of the cholera, back in 1849.

The way Mrs. Finke remembers the story as told her by her foster parents, and the way she has frequently rehearsed it to her children, she was about five months of age when the epidemic broke out and her father was one of the victims. Burial had to be made without delay as the citizens were dying one after the other and the supply of caskets had run out so that the lifeless forms were laid in rudely constructed boxes and buried as hastily as possible. The men returning from the burial of her father and coming to the house to look after the ailing mother found her cold in death with the child still resting in her arms snuggled to the lifeless breast of the mother who had loved her. Before making disposition of the mortal remains of the mother, diligent search was made for a place to leave the child.

As a last resort, her uncle finally appealed to a Mrs. Wilhelmi, then residing at Lock Two, where Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Heinfeld now reside, and though she had already taken in four orphans up till then, her faith and inbred mother-love opened her heart and home for just one more tiny baby which was cared for with as much affection and concern as if it had been her very own child. Soon the child was known as Louise Wilhelmi, and retained that name

until it came time for her confirmation, to be received into membership of the St. Paul Church. The pastor, Rev. Carl Heise, felt conscience-bound to inform the child of her real name, and after consulting with the foster parents, it was agreed that he impart the information. Mrs. Finke to this day remembers how shocked she was and what days of anguish she went through when she found that she was an orphan and had grown up under an assumed name.

However, the kindness and love showered on her by Mr. and Mrs. Wilhelmi during her childhood days are always a source of fond remembrance for Mrs. Finke, and to this day she honors the remembrance of them who took the place of her real parents, and enjoys to tell the story of how affectionate they were, and always showed deep concern in her welfare. By this time, however, the community had recovered from the ill effects of the cholera epidemic and things in general were moving in the even tenor of their way. Louise Wehrman, as she was then known, was now obliged to shift for herself, and she earned her own living until she entered into wedlock with the late Captain Henry Finke, and reared a family of seven children without a single death in the family outside of her husband who passed away 28 years ago.

Mrs. Finke's is but one of the sad stories which had their origin in the year when cholera raged in this part of Ohio and almost wiped out the young settlement in the primeval forest where it had been founded 15 years prior to the epidemic. Most of the tales known now are such as have come through tradition from parents and grandparents.

*The cholera epidemic of 1849 resulted in a high number of deaths. In an account by Charles Boesel, he stated that from a population of about 700 people, there were 150 who died of the disease. Church records of St. Paul's and St. Peter's Churches indicate that 122 people died from St. Paul's Church and, between July 27th and August 18th, 50 from St. Peter's. These were the only two churches in town at that time. A few of these deaths were attributed to scarlet fever, typhoid, or malaria, however the majority of the deaths were caused by cholera. These victims were buried in a mass grave in the church cemetery on Herman Street. Besides Louise Wehrman's parents, there were 3 more Wehrmans who died within this 2-week period. Two of them were the parents of August Wehrman, who was Clarence ("Molly") Wehrman's father. (Many of you will remember "Molly" as New Bremen's former Village Marshal.)[LMF]*

## **TAPS SOUNDED**

### **AND VETERAN HENRY FINKE ANSWERED FINAL CALL**

#### **Soldier of the Civil War Prominent Business Man**

#### **Respected Citizen**

Henry Conrad Finke was born in New Bremen on January 14, 1843, the son of William Jobst Finke and Elizabeth Barbara Kuenzel. After completing his education, he assisted his father in managing the farm and carrying out contracts on road building and the like.

On August 27, 1861, at the age of eighteen, he was one of the first to enlist with Company C, 37th Regiment of the Ohio Volunteer Infantry, and served the entire four years of the Civil War, suffering many hardships and taking part in many deadly conflicts. He was discharged on August 20, 1865, as a First Lieutenant, having been elected to that position in the week following his enlistment. He became an active member of the local post of the Grand Army of the Republic at New Bremen.

After the war, Mr. Finke returned home to New Bremen and again became associated with his father in the flour mill business. On November 28, 1867, he married Louise Wehrman. They had seven children, all of whom are still living.

Together with his father, they founded the woolen industry in New Bremen. In 1866, he assisted personally in the erection of the woolen mills, taking personal charge of the business as soon as the building was completed, and retaining that position until death. When the Bakhaus & Kuenzel Company was organized in 1899 and assumed ownership of the mills, Mr. Finke was elected Superintendent. He later became Treasurer and retained that position until death. Keen insight into business affairs and sound judgment gave Mr. Finke a prominent position with the wool

manufacturers and dealers all over the country. A Chicago firm declared him the shrewdest wool-buyer with whom they had ever come into contact.

In 1886, Mr. Finke was one of the organizers of the Citizens Building & Loan Association. He was elected Secretary and later served as President. He devoted much time in this capacity to the public good without remuneration.

*Mr. Finke was an active member of New Bremen's volunteer firemen, being a member of the Cataract Fire Company which was formed around 1869 and was located in the fire house on South Washington Street.*

Henry Finke was a man of positive convictions and firm character, but was always kind to his loved ones and ever ready to help the poor and needy.

On Saturday, January 14, 1911, he celebrated his 68th birthday surrounded by a number of his children and grandchildren, also being visited by members and employees of the Woolen Mills. On Sunday morning, he rose at the usual time and ate breakfast with his family. He had scarcely left the table when he complained of feeling ill and within a few minutes, he had passed away at the age of 68 years and 1 day. He is survived by his wife, 7 children, 15 grandchildren, a brother, and 2 sisters.

Funeral services were conducted in Christ Church by Rev. Ph. Wittich. His associates at Bakhaus & Kuenzel acted as pall bearers. Others attending his funeral were the old veterans from New Bremen, Minster, St. Marys, Wapakoneta, and Lima along with the members of the Volunteer Fire Dept. and the directors of the Citizens Building & Loan Association. He was laid to rest in German Protestant Cemetery.

*(New Bremen Sun - 1/20/1911)*

## **OBITUARY**

### **LOUISE WEHRMAN FINKE**

A native of New Bremen, Mrs. Finke was born February 16, 1849, to Fred and Marie Schoenfeld Wehrman and named Marie Louise. Her parents died of cholera, her father on July 22, 1849, and her mother on July 27, 1849. She was raised by a Mr. & Mrs. Wilhelmi of Lock Two.

On November 28, 1867, she married Henry Finke, a veteran of the Civil War and later one of New Bremen's foremost citizens and leading industrialists, prominently connected with The Kuenzel Mills Co. Mr. Finke died in 1911 after 44 years of marriage.

Mr. & Mrs. Finke had seven children: Mrs. Chris (Clara) Roettger, Otoe, Nebraska; Mrs. Charles (Alice) Garmhausen, Warren, Ohio; Mrs. George (Laura) Kuenning, Columbus, Ohio; Julius Finke, Omaha, Nebraska; Mrs. Fred (Minerva) Schroeder, Grenola, Kansas; Arthur Finke; and Mrs. Fred (Pearl) Longworth, both of New Bremen.

Mrs. Finke was New Bremen's oldest resident at 98 years, 4 months, and 3 days when she died June 19, 1947 at the home of Mrs. Longworth on South Washington Street. She had 19 grandchildren, 32 great-grandchildren and 11 great-great-grandchildren - a total of 69 direct descendants.

Funeral services were held at Vornholt Funeral Home with the Rev. Lewis G. Fritz conducting services. She was buried in German Protestant Cemetery beside her husband.

*(New Bremen Sun - 6/27/1947)*

How did the Finkes become associated with Bakhaus and Kuenzel? Henry's mother and his step-mother were both Kuenzels. His sister, Sophia Caroline married a Dietrich William Backhaus on January 31, 1879. William Finke was a witness.



## A LETTER FROM MARIE MUELLER OF MIDDLETOWN, OHIO

Dear Friends,

Even though I have never met you, I feel we have many feelings in common because of our connections through "the old hometown." I am enclosing a check for my 1996 dues, but I also wanted to introduce myself since I was born and raised in New Bremen.

One of the pictures in your last issue was taken from the house at 15 N. Main St. which was my home from 1905 to 1970, when I took my mother with me to West Milton, where I was teaching then. The picture which I refer to is the one of the Paul sisters' home (8 N. Main St.), just across the street, which also shows the back of the brick building then owned by the MUELLER BROTHERS, John and August, who were my uncle and my father. They were in the men's clothing business there for many years while I was growing up.

I graduated from New Bremen High School (in the old OPERA HOUSE) in 1923. Since a fall on the ice in 1993 and a broken hip, I am now living with my niece in Middletown.

*Yours truly, Marie Mueller*



Picture courtesy of Leola Wissman

**CLASS OF 1923:** The above picture was taken when the class was in its Junior year of High School. Two members, Joseph Wint and Walter Rawers, completed their Senior year at Minster after spending three years with the class.

**FRONT ROW:** Joseph Wint, Marie Mueller, Esther (Tostrick) Schroer, Leola (Speckman) Wissman, Mabel (Scheer) Abbott, Lillian (Heil) Dixon, Alvera (Stroefer) Schelper, (Rev.) Herbert Schowe.

**ROW 2:** Miss H. Carlyle, (teacher), Gertrude (Gilberg) Thielker, Frances (Kettler) Blanke, Norma (Stienecker) Katterheinrich, Marie (Heinfeld) Meinken, Hedwig (Wissman) Hott, Nettie Loy, Wilhelmine (Grothaus) Cunningham, Stella (Neuman) Gruebmeier, Marvel (Wehmeyer) Draper, Superintendent Elmer Jordan.

**ROW 3:** Reuben Eschmeyer, Alton Schelper, Georgianna Rawers, Lorma (Bertke) Linker, Helen (Brandt) Dillion, Lola (Huenke) Dietrich, Arnold Heinfeld, Walter Rawers, Paul Harlamert. *(Those whose names are underlined are still living.)*

The **ANNUAL DINNER MEETING** of the New Bremen Historic Association was held Monday, March 25, 1996 in the Assembly Rooms of St. Paul Church. Members and guests were treated to a delicious roast beef dinner prepared by the Krieg family, followed by a dessert bar furnished by members of the Association. Table decorations were furnished by Paul and Viola Headapohl. After the dinner, everyone was entertained by the Samaniego family with their presentation of American Indian culture and dances.

**WILLIAM D. WENZLAU  
1357 WESTHAVEN ROAD  
SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA 91108**

October 15, 1978

## Our trip to New Bremen, Ohio to find Christian and Wilhelmena Wenzlau

Having flown all night from Los Angeles and driven two hours from Toledo, Sally and I were tired and punchy when we arrived in New Bremen. We needed to find out the birth date of Christian Wenzlau so that we could place him correctly on our family tree. We found a policeman outside the small station and asked him where the graveyard was located. His name was John Belton. John said that there were three graveyards in town. He took us into the station, made some telephone calls, and we settled on German Protestant Cemetery north of town. John offered to drive us to the cemetery, but stopped first at the home of the former caretaker to check the records. The records indicated only a Charles Wenzlau which gave us hope. Arriving at the cemetery, John found the new caretaker and we drove to the northwest end of the cemetery where we felt the grave might be located. John found the two gravestones of Christian and Wilhelmena and the caretaker made carbon paper rubbings. We then drove back to St. Marys to rest before going to the library. We stayed at Motel St. Marys on State Route 29, run by Jim and Evelyn Hirschfeld.

In the afternoon, we went to the New Bremen Library and studied copies of pamphlets and books on the local history. One was an 1880 History of Auglaize County. This book contained an 1880 map of New Bremen with names of the owners of the various lots. Sally was quite excited when she found "Christ Wanzlau" written on two lots, and "Christ Wanzlou" on two other lots - a total of four lots. Two of the vacant lots were located on the east side, middle of the block, on Herman between Monroe and Poplar. The other two lots, one with a frame house, were located on Monroe between Herman and Franklin. We found an old frame house at 315 Monroe on the 1880 vacant lot. The lot which showed the 1880 frame house is now vacant. We talked to the people who were renting 315 Monroe. They said that their lot and the adjacent Wenzlau lot were owned by a William Bushman, Sr. Not finding Mr. Bushman home, I talked to his son, Bill, who said he didn't remember a house being on the vacant lot in his forty-seven years in New Bremen. He said he would try to locate his father, age 72, and have him call us at the motel, which he said was run by his relatives, the Hirschfelds.

We returned to the library where Sue Maxson, the librarian, offered to go through their microfilm records of the 1840, 1860, and 1880 census records of the county. We chose 1860 and spent half an hour scanning the records. Sharp-eyed Sally let out a loud "Stop!" at "Christian Wenzlau". The 1860 census revealed the following: Christian Wenslan, 39, male - Wilmena, 40, female - Charles, 3, male - Wilmena, 8 months, female. We were excited to find the existence of daughter, Wilmena, who we felt must have lived into adulthood as we did not find her headstone in the family gravesite. [EDITOR'S NOTE: *Marriage records (maiden-name index) show that Wilhelmine Wenzlow married Heinrich Barienbrock on December 23, 1880.*] A clipping from the 1896 Biographical History of Mercer County indicates that Charles left New Bremen at the age of eleven to become a store-clerk in Celina, Ohio.

The following morning, when leaving Motel St. Marys, we talked to Evelyn Hirschfeld, the owner, who was surprised to hear that our relatives had owned the lots on Monroe Street. Her grandmother, Mrs. August (Lillie) Egbert, still living at age 93, acquired the lots in her early married life, around 1905. Evelyn remembered an old frame house near the street on the vacant lot as indicated on the 1880 map. She said she would talk to her relatives to try to determine from whom they acquired the land and more about the house.

We found the town of New Bremen lovely and the people were helpful and kind. Christian and Wilhelmena must have had a very happy home!

*(printed with the permission of Bill Wenzlau)*

[illegible]

*(Mr. & Mrs. Wenzlau have donated a copy of their book "The Ancestry of Russell Smith Wenzlau and Gladys Madeline Davis" to the New Bremen Public Library. Even though I didn't know any of their relatives, I found the book very interesting as they used the anecdotal method of recording their family's history, with each family member relating what they remembered most about their predecessors. You might want to take a look at this book the next time you are in the library.)(LMF)*

## ***GENEALOGY NEWS***

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*(Lucille M. Francis - April, 1996)*

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, a group of people headed by Mrs. Irene Bay and Mrs. Mary Wint, working for the Historic Association, took it upon themselves to try to create a genealogy department by translating old church records and recording the information from the tombstones in area cemeteries. Mrs. Bay and her crew spent many hours translating the births/baptisms, marriages, and death records at St. Paul's, St. Peter's, and Zion's Churches. These statistics had been recorded in German script through 1922. After they were translated, a group of people typed the information on index cards and Mrs. Bay donated a file to hold these cards. This file is located in the New Bremen Public Library. Mary Wint and her crew, along with Mrs. Bay, also spent many hours recording tombstone information from the cemeteries of New Bremen, St. Marys, and New Knoxville. These records were also put into the card file.

Over the years, these ladies, along with several others, have attempted to answer your genealogy questions. Mary Wint had been the genealogist for the Historic Association for the past 15+ years. When she recently announced her desire to resign from this job, Martha Plattner and I both accepted the offer to take her place.

Recently, after many years of frustration at not being able to follow up on the female members of a family because I couldn't find who they married, I decided to create a maiden name index of the marriages recorded in the card files (1835-1922). After completing it, I found it so helpful that I presented to the Historic Association the possibility of having this book printed and offering it for sale to other genealogists. They have agreed to do this and the books should be available soon. The price is \$8.00 per book (+\$2.00 shipping & handling, if mailed). If you would like to have a copy, please send orders to:

New Bremen Historic Association - P.O. Box 73 - New Bremen, Ohio 45869 - Att: Genealogy.