

There is also the metal cross. Wrought iron crosses were found in Catholic German and French cemeteries. Painted silver, white or black, they were adorned with decorative symbols. St. Ann Cemetery, town of Russell, has great examples.

Particularly suited as monuments on the vast stretches of Great Plains or in places like Wisconsin, where winters are brutal and hard on anything left exposed, these wrought-iron crosses were first crafted by local blacksmiths, a trade often learned in the Old Country. Using hammer, anvil and forge, these early artisans crafted crosses of iron, steel and other metals, often from pieces of scrap.

These "Eizenkreuzen" were also crafted for generations by blacksmiths on the steppes of the Volga and the Black Sea region of Russia. These skills came with the smiths as they immigrated to America and to Sheboygan, where a vibrant Volga German population forged thousands of them as they were hired at local factories.

By the end of the 19th century, production of iron cemetery crosses turned commercial, mainly by the firm of Kohler, Hayssen and Stehn, here in the county.

In 1873, John Michael Kohler and Charles Silberzahn took over the Union Iron and Steel Foundry from Jacob J. Vollrath. In 1878, Kohler bought out Silberzahn, but a fire the following year saw Kohler take on two new partners, Herman Hayssen and John Stehn.

Their original plant occupied a building at the corner of Ninth Street and St. Clair Avenue. After 1880, the company moved to a location on Jefferson Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Streets where it remained for 20 years.

Within a few years the art of enameling was developed in the plant and a wide range of products were developed kitchen stove reservoirs, iron manger, cauldrons, water and steam jacket kettles, watering troughs and drinking fountains.

In 1891, cast iron enameled bathtubs, wash bowls, other sanitary ware, drinking and ornamental fountains, vases, garden settees and cemetery crosses were added.

Three cast crosses were produced circa 1891: They were described as 1) 3' 6" painted white, border ornaments and inscription bronzed; price \$10; Painted white, border, ornaments and inscription gilded: price \$12. No two is a gothic 5' 2" high. The white or black painted one with ornaments and inscription bronzed is prized at \$16 or painted white or black, inscriptions priced at \$18. The third is 5' 2" high bronzed and gilded sells for the same price.

In 1899, the company moved from Sheboygan to its present site in the Village of Kohler. A destructive fire in December 1900, totally destroyed the plant and the J.M. Kohler Company (Hayssen left the company and Stehn died in 1886) returned to its old location while the company was rebuilt.

For decades, cast crosses filled cemeteries, especially those where employees of the local manufacturers were laid to rest. Cast iron crosses were cheap, affordable to a new immigrant

factory worker. They were uncomplicated to acquire; they could be ordered and delivered by mail or purchased directly from the factory. They could be inscribed or left plain; and they lasted.

Wildwood Cemetery was once filled with them; St. George, town of Wilson remains the one graveyard in the county with an outstanding supply.

Many more than a century old, iron cemetery crosses live on as symbols not only of one's brief life on earth, but of the era of iron crosses. Like prairie dogs and grain elevators, iron cemetery crosses have been hailed as sentinels of the Great Plains, or survivors of Wisconsin winters. One thing important to remember, that while the cross represented the sacred; the iron represented strength—telling attributes of the pioneers they honored.



St. George Cemetery  
Iron Crosses  
Town of Wilson, Sheboygan  
County



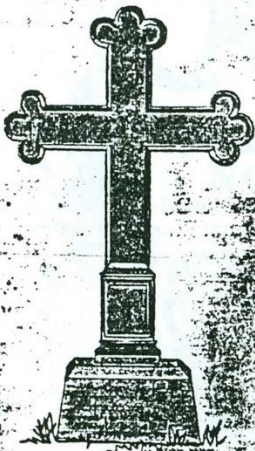
Kohler, Hayssen & Stehn, 1878

# KOHLER, HAYSSSEN & STEH

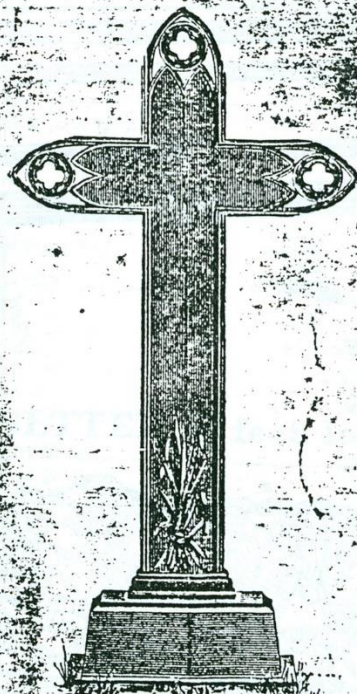
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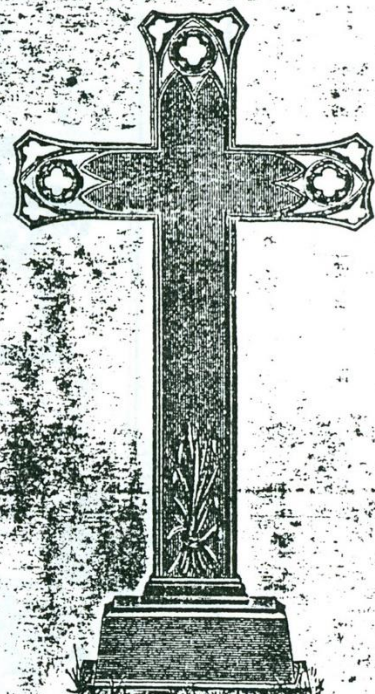
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