

The Sutler Secret of Erhard Steinbacher

By Robert C. Reszler

Oatmeal is a staple on tables across America, and Quaker Oats is one of the most recognized brand names in the world. These, however, are relatively recent phenomena. One hundred forty-five years ago, most Americans were unfamiliar with oatmeal as a foodstuff, yet in a matter of only fifteen years it had become integral part of the American cuisine. How this dish went from relatively unknown to standard fare in just a few years is a legitimate, yet perplexing question. Historians have traced the oatmeal industry (and its most famous brand) to Akron, Ohio in the 1860s, but the particulars of its origins and phenomenal growth have never been explained satisfactorily. Local Akron, Ohio, legend states that Ferdinand Schumacher, "Oatmeal King" and founder of Quaker Oats, started his business empire with the help of close friend Erhard Steinbacher. Steinbacher had supposedly managed to get Schumacher a one hundred barrel trial order to supply Union Army troops during the Civil War.¹ Until recently, this legend has been accepted as fact, yet research into official government and army records provides no evidence that the Army or the Sanitary Commission ever directly supplied Schumacher's products to the troops. If Schumacher started the American oatmeal industry through supplying great quantities to Union troops, it had to have been via unofficial channels. The issue of Schumacher's success is not in dispute: by the mid-1860s he was running several mills and was the wealthiest man in Akron. The issue of where and how the oatmeal was sold, however, is not as clear. This paper will illustrate that the secret to the success of the oatmeal industry in America may lie in a much deeper role for Erhard Steinbacher as a Civil War "sutler," providing hungry Union soldiers with an introduction and pipeline to Schumacher's new dish, and thus whetting their appetite for more when the war was over.

Ferdinand Schumacher and Erhard Steinbacher were both German immigrants who came to Akron in the middle of the nineteenth century. Schumacher was born in Celle, Hanover, in 1822, and arrived in America with his brother Otto in 1850. After working a farm in Euclid, Ohio, with Otto, he arrived in Akron a year and a half later.²

Steinbacher was born in Bavaria, Germany, in 1825, and arrived in Akron in 1844. Five years later, he displayed his enterprising nature as he caught the Gold Rush Fever of 1849 and left for California. He returned permanently to Akron in 1851 a successful man.³

During the decade of the 1850s, both Schumacher and Steinbacher owned and operated businesses in the center of the city of Akron. On December 3, 1851, Schumacher and fellow German Theodor Weibezahn advertised the opening of their new "German Store" in P.D. Hall's block on Medina Street. Their store specialized in fancy goods and toys, along with jewelry,

cutlery, musical instruments, lace goods, embroideries, hosiery, perfumery, cigars, and pictures.⁴

In the very same edition of *The Summit Beacon*, Erhard Steinbacher, along with partner George C. Weimer, proclaimed the opening of their new Drug Store three doors west of Cobb's Exchange on Market Street. This ad first appeared on May 14, 1851, and declaring their intent to sell drugs, medicines, paints, oils, dye stuffs, brushes of all kinds, glass and glassware, perfumery, fancy soaps and patent medicines.⁵

Schumacher and Steinbacher's paths crossed no later than 1852 when Schumacher moved to a new location on Market Street, this time without former partner Theodor Weibezahn. This new location happened to be the former location of Weimer and Steinbacher,⁶ who moved two doors west into larger quarters.⁷ In the move, Schumacher's business changed to a purveyor of groceries, as Weibezahn remained at the old location as the German Store selling fancy goods.⁸

As late as 1855, Schumacher was still operating as a retail storefront, selling Bremen cigars, Moche coffee, nice cheese, fancy willow baskets, fresh Detroit River whitefish, Georges Bank codfish and dried halibut, without any mention of oatmeal in his newspaper ads.⁹

By 1859, the retailer Schumacher had turned into a full-time miller,¹⁰ as his retail ads disappeared and he occupied a building on North Howard¹¹ with waterpower rights on Cascade Run.¹² Only seventy-one days before the bombardment of Ft. Sumter, Schumacher's German Mills first advertised oatmeal for sale.¹³ Yet he may not have been the only game in town, as oatmeal had started to appear on weekly market price surveys of consumer goods in the local newspaper.¹⁴

For his part, Steinbacher was still running his drug store. He advertised heavily in the local newspaper as a wholesale and retail source of an ever-expanding array of products. In the months preceding the Civil War his newspaper ads included pure drugs, medicines, pure medicinal wines, liquors, Tilden's fluid extract, Sanford's liver invigorator, Bronson's blood food, Tanner's German ointment for bruises and sprains, Stafford's olive tar for bronchitis, coughs and ashma (sic), and dead shot for bed bugs. Specifically for medicinal purposes, he marketed the availability of quinine, opium, morphine, iodine, and iron by hydrogen. As Schumacher (his former neighbor on Market Street) left the grocery business for his mill, Steinbacher's ads started to also include advertising for grocery items such as prime Rio coffee, Virginia tobacco, and molasses.¹⁵

Thus, by the beginning of the Civil War, Schumacher was finally selling oatmeal, although it was not his featured product and only one of many in his ads at this time. Meanwhile, Steinbacher busily displayed his interest in selling anything that the public might want, although there is no indication that Steinbacher was selling Schumacher's German Mills Oatmeal in his store.

Indeed, Schumacher was selling oatmeal in 1861. However, the Union Army, according to Army regulations, was not buying it. Regulations required that food provisions for the troops be purchased through the Commissary General, who was the head of the Subsistence Department. Their procedure was to advertise specifications inviting private contractors to bid. The Commissary General, or an authorized office in the Subsistence Department, would then select the lowest bid from a responsible bidder. The winning contractor then shipped his goods

to warehouses in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, or St. Louis,¹⁶ from which the Quartermaster General's office arranged for transportation to the field.¹⁷ However, oatmeal was not on the standards list for a soldier's daily camp ration, which in 1861 was supposed to include: fresh beef (when practicable, otherwise salt meat); twenty-one ounces of bread or flour, or one pound of hard bread; beans and rice, or hominy; one pound of potatoes, at least three times per week; and coffee or tea upon permission of the appropriate officer.¹⁸ There was no mention of oatmeal in the regulation.

In 1863, the standard army ration was updated to: twelve ounces of pork or bacon (or one pound four ounces of salt or fresh beef); and one pound six ounces of soft bread or flour (or one pound of hard bread, or one pound four ounces of corn meal). For every 100 rations, camp provisions were supposed to include fifteen pounds beans or peas; ten pounds of rice or hominy; ten pounds of green coffee, or eight pounds of roasted (or roasted and ground) coffee, or one pound and eight ounces of tea; fifteen pounds of sugar; four quarts of vinegar; three pounds twelve ounces of salt; four ounces of pepper; thirty pounds of potatoes, when practical; and one quart molasses.¹⁹ There was still no mention of oatmeal.

Another possible avenue of entry for oatmeal into Civil War soldier stomachs was via the supplies procured for use in field hospitals by the Sanitary Commission. A search of the four extensive lists of items procured and issued by the Commission for (1) the Army of the Potomac in June and July of 1863²⁰, (2) the armies in Charleston, South Carolina in July 1863,²¹ (3) the armies in Gettysburg, PA in July 1863,²² and (4) the armies in Richmond, VA during May, 1864,²³ indicated no purchases, or issuances, of oatmeal.

However, there did exist inconsistencies between what was procured for soldiers by the government and what the soldiers actually reported eating. Yet standard primary and secondary source accounts reveal no mention of oatmeal either. For example, in the standard work on the subject, *The Life of Billy Yank*, Bell Irvin Wiley devoted one chapter (22 of 361 pages) to describe foods received as rations, bought from townspeople, and expropriated from the enemy, without one mention of oatmeal.²⁴ Similarly, in another Civil War classic, John Billings's primary source account of a soldier in the Army of the Potomac, titled *Hardtack and Coffee*, spends one chapter (34 pages) on food without any mention of oatmeal.²⁵ The same is the case for Carlton McCarthy's personal recollection entitled *Detailed Minutiae of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia 1861-1865*. McCarthy used one chapter (16 pages of 224) to explain the cooking and eating habits he experienced, still without one word on oatmeal.²⁶

One product that does appear frequently in soldier accounts of field rations is the desiccated vegetable. The product consisted of kiln-dried cabbage, turnips, carrots or parsnips pressed into blocks and shipped to troops. The soldier in the field added water and heat to make the final product.²⁷ Although this process is remarkably similar to the one used by Schumacher to turn animal feed oatmeal into the product that made him a fortune,²⁸ there was no mention of processed oatmeal being used in a similar fashion.

Yet there exist numerous accounts that during the Civil War, Schumacher could not make his product fast enough. He expanded the mill and added modern machinery to increase production. In 1863 he built a separate barley mill²⁹ and ran both mills twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, until the end of the war.³⁰ His resulting financial success was documented

when the local paper declared his 1865 income to be the second highest in the city.³¹ By 1868 he had become a director of the Akron Library Association,³² a director of the First National Bank,³³ and a trustee and finance committee member for the Home Savings Land & Building Loan Society.³⁴

Local legend states that Erhard Steinbacher used his Republican Party influence, some aggressive marketing, and his position as a local buyer for the Quartermaster General to motivate the Army to give Schumacher a trial oatmeal order.³⁵ However, the absence of his name from the twenty-eight party members listed as either committee members or event organizers during local re-election efforts for Abraham Lincoln,³⁶ casts doubt on the extent of his influence on the local party at this time. Furthermore, his relationship with the Quartermaster General's office would have been of little benefit in selling Schumacher's oatmeal, as procuring food for the soldiers was under the auspices of the Commissary General. Any oatmeal ordered by the Quartermaster General would have been animal feed, as these agents were chartered with providing transportation for soldiers, weapons, and supplies.³⁷

Erhard Steinbacher's willingness to market himself aggressively was evident in his testimonial advertisements that were placed in the local newspaper. These advertisements looked like actual news stories and were placed near regular text, but at the end of each story would appear "for sale by Weimer & Steinbacher." Ads of this type promoted such products as Radway's Circassian Balm to eradicate dandruff,³⁸ Blake's Patent Fire-Proof Paint,³⁹ and Dr. Hoofland's Celebrated German Bitters that cured just about every malady known to man.⁴⁰

Finally, regarding the possibility of Steinbacher having been a local buyer for the Union army, there is no evidence that either the Commissary General or Quartermaster General needed assistance from private citizens to locate or execute contracts with contractors.⁴¹ What the government did acknowledge, however, was the need to provide a means by which soldiers could acquire items that the government was not interested in paying for, but were still considered important for giving comfort to the soldier.⁴² This type of service was to be delivered by a civilian businessman known as a "sutler."⁴³ Sutlers were officially appointed civilians charged with selling to the troops things not furnished by the government. As a portable enterprise they set up shop in the camp or bivouac and followed their regiment while maintaining a safe distance from the battlefield.⁴⁴

The selection of a sutler was actually the responsibility of each individual regiment. Regulations stated that a sutler had to be chosen by the Regimental Administrative Council, made up of the Lieutenant Colonel, Major, and First Captain.⁴⁵ The group then forwarded the prospective sutler's name to the Adjutant-General of the Army. Only a veto by the Secretary of War could deny the appointment of the desired sutler to that regiment.⁴⁶

The financial attraction in becoming a sutler was a captive market. Each regiment was to have their own sutler, but never more than one.⁴⁷ Soldiers were encouraged to use the sutler to prevent them from wandering away from camp in search of goods.⁴⁸ As indicated by the regulations that Congress imposed on the practice in 1862, some sutlers actually had more than one regiment under their control,⁴⁹ with sixteen being the highest figure noted.⁵⁰ Since it is unlikely that one sutler stand could serve the needs of sixteen different regiments, it is probable that multiple-regiment sutlers had established a network or chain of employees or agents who

actually operated individual stands.

Sutlers had another hold on their customers through their extension of credit to the soldier. Federal officials actually encouraged sutlers to extend credit in order to smooth out the infrequency of the field payment schedules.⁵¹ To protect a sutler's investment against nonpayment (or death), the government allowed sutlers to place a monthly lien with the paymaster, for up to 1/6th of a soldier's monthly pay.⁵²

The financial success of the system is evident in Congressional records that indicate the troops of the Army of the Potomac alone spent over \$10 million annually on goods provided by sutlers.⁵³ The work was profitable also, as one sutler for a single regiment reportedly made \$10,000 profit in eight months, and another \$20,000 in one year. A sutler with seven regiments netted \$70,000 profit in one year.⁵⁴

Harvey Reid, a soldier in the Twenty-Second Wisconsin, wrote home to his sisters to inform them that he worked part-time for "our sutler, Dan A. Shove,"⁵⁵ since his company duties occupied only a small portion of his day. Reid indicated a regret at asking for the low wage of fifteen dollars per month since he now realized Shove was pulling in sixty dollars per day, forty of which was profit.⁵⁶

The government found no shortage of businessmen anxious to become sutlers. There even appeared classified ads in the New York Herald offering money for existing sutlerships, with reports of transactions as high as \$5000 each.⁵⁷

Having a regiment so involved in the selection of, and negotiation with, a sutler created its own set of problems.⁵⁸ There existed a concern in Congress that these businesses had become so profitable that a large number of Union officers had actually invested in sutlerships themselves.⁵⁹ Further reinforcing the fear of corruption was the fact that a regimental colonel was the only one who could remove the sutler from his sutlership.⁶⁰

The prospect of regimental command being involved in the business affairs of a sutler is evident in the letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg of the Fifteenth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry. Colonel Heg wrote to his wife of a sutler known to her. The first reference declares their friend "Holmen" is "doing a big business, he sells frequently for One Hundred and Fifty Dollars a day."⁶¹ The second reference asks his wife if "Holmen" is ever coming back to regiment, as "They will lose a good deal of their debts down here by being away now while the men are being paid off."⁶² Because Heg was a colonel in his regiment, his question seems to go beyond anticipating his friend's return, as he may also have been involved in selecting, and keeping, Holmen as the regimental sutler. Heg's inquiry into the return for the purpose of collecting debts also raises questions about the Colonel's possible stake in Holman's business.

The hint of corruption was not lost on all lawmakers; some pushed to eliminate the system altogether. During debate over the bill to regulate sutler activity, Minnesota Representative Cyrus Aldrich's statements were indicative of the opposition argument.

The whole thing of sutlers ought to be abolished. It seems to me that there are no officers under this Government anywhere, saving and exempting Indian traders in some portions of the country, who are guilty of so much swindling as these sutlers of different regiments of the United States Army.⁶³

In the end, the effort to move sutler services to the Quartermaster's Office was unsuccessful as lawmakers cited the likelihood that the Quartermaster was just as likely to cheat soldiers as sutlers were.⁶⁴ A second reason was a feeling that without sutlers, the Quartermaster's Office would double in size to provide comparable service.⁶⁵ Thus, the system was allowed to continue, although all parties were aware of just how lucrative, and potentially corrupt, it had become.

The demand for sutlerships caused some to seek political influence to acquire the position. An 1861 survey of 200 regiments showed that a Regimental Administrative Council had appointed only fourteen sutlers in the appropriate manor. Of the rest, 103 were appointed by the colonel of the regiment, 63 by the Secretary of War, and even 5 by a State Governor.⁶⁶

If looking for a sutler appointment, a man from Akron, Ohio would not have to look far. Christopher P. Wolcott was a lawyer who consistently advertised his legal services on the front page of the *Summit Beacon*⁶⁷ from May of 1848 until Ohio Governor Chase appointed him as Ohio Attorney General in 1856.⁶⁸ In 1862, the current Secretary of War, Wolcott's brother-in-law Edwin Stanton, named Wolcott the Assistant Secretary of War.⁶⁹

A local citizen who served as a colonel in the Civil War (and with whom Steinbacher was acquainted) was George Tod Perkins.⁷⁰ After the war, Perkins, Steinbacher and Schumacher served together as Deroo Hospital Fund trustees in 1892.⁷¹ Another person of influence who could have been of assistance is Ohio Governor David Tod, who happened to be the uncle of George Tod Perkins.⁷² As a Democrat (and former Democratic National Convention Vice-President⁷³) interested in becoming Ohio's Governor during the Civil War, he required Republican support for his campaign to be successful. Republican support did come in the form of a Union Party nomination and election to the statehouse in 1862.⁷⁴ Perhaps Tod was one of the governors who had appointed a regimental sutler, as mentioned in the United States Sanitary Commission report,⁷⁵ as a favor to a helpful local Republican.

Steinbacher was marketing the items that the government had in mind for sutlers to provide. In 1862 the Senate Committee on Military Affairs suggested limiting sutlers to a specific list of products they could sell. The non-food items listed were candles, wallets, brooms, comforters, boots, pocket looking-glasses, tin glasses, tin wash-basins, shirt-buttons, horn and brass buttons, newspapers, books, tobacco, segars (sic), pipes, matches, blacking, blacking-brushes, clothes-brushes, tooth-brushes, hair-brushes, coarse and fine combs, emery, crocus, pocket-handkerchiefs, stationary, armor-oil, sweet-oil, rotten stone, razor-straps, razors, shaving soap, soap, suspenders, scissors, shoe-strings, needles, thread, knives, pencils, and bristol-brick.⁷⁶ The list is a veritable catalog of drug store items, much like the store run by Weimer and Steinbacher back in Akron.

The food items suggested by the Committee were apples, dried apples, oranges, figs, lemons, butter, cheese, milk, sirup-molasses (sic), raisins and crackers.⁷⁷ These were also not out of the realm of Erhard Steinbacher, as he had started to also advertise his business as making available "choice family groceries."⁷⁸

Adding oatmeal, or any other product, to the list would not have been a problem, as the Committee's inventory restrictions were stricken in an interest to provide more flexibility for the Army, and its officers, in deciding what items were desired by the troops.⁷⁹ The final

version of the bill, signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in March 19, 1862,⁸⁰ did require a list to be composed by each regiment in order to place a negotiated maximum price for each item. However, this requirement indicates that the products could also differ from regiment to regiment as each regiment had to compose its own list. A list for each regiment thereby provided the means by which a product not procured by the Army and not documented by various primary sources, could have been sold in large quantities to troops in the Union Army.

The list compiled by the Senate Committee on Military Affairs in 1862 did not represent one-tenth of what sutlers were selling at the time.⁸¹

Several millions of dollars have been paid to this army within a fortnight, and how the sutlers do thrive! Communication with the North is so easy, and the army being quite permanently located, sutlers and their goods are allowed to come to the front, that all the luxuries of the season abound. One may see any morning at City Point and Bermuda Hundred, heaps of mellow apples, peaches, and vegetables that would not discredit Washington and Fulton markets. Fresh fish, not twenty-four hours from the sea, fresh figs, not twenty-four hours from the tree ("in the name of the prophet, Figs!") and "Syllabubs and jellies and wines, pies, and other such lady-like things," all brought from the vicinity of Norfolk, may be had of your enterprising sutler, if one can bear the swindle. Mr. Sutler often deals in literature. He will sell you the "Atlantic" or "Harper's" for half a dollar, the latest novel for twice the sale price printed on the cover, or he will sell you a half-dozen rolls of cough candy, or quinine by the dose, or a pair of spurs, or a shirt, or perfumed notepaper, fit for letters to your sweetheart. He keeps postage stamps. He deals in Bibles. He has several cords of canned fruits and half a dozen barrels of eggs, nature's own device in the way of canned fruit. In the way of cutlery, pocket knives and cork-screws he is sure to have, scissors usually, and surgical instruments occasionally. Great is the sutler. Like Shakespeare, he is "a many-sided man." Like Sam Slick's wife, one cannot live without him nor scarcely with him. Like the Miller's Daughter, he has "grown so dear, so dear." Like Robinson Crusoe, "has right there is none to dispute."⁸²

Anything, including liquor, could be had.⁸³ Senator James H. Lane of Kansas proclaimed, "The only way... that you can keep spirituous liquors out of an army is by keeping sutlers out of the army."⁸⁴ Harvey Reid wrote home that the Sutler of the Thirty-First Wisconsin sold beer and whiskey. He indicated his regret that the practice was permitted because someone in the regiment was always intoxicated since payday.⁸⁵ Reid's letter was dated December 1863, and indicates that the practice of sutlers selling alcohol⁸⁶ continued despite legislation to the contrary passed in March 1862.⁸⁷

Steinbacher's advertised product line prior to the war matches up specifically with the Senate Committee on Military Affairs product suggestion list in the area of groceries, molasses and tobacco.⁸⁸ As for illicit products, Steinbacher did advertise both liquor and medicines, such as quinine, opium, morphine and iodine, in his ads prior to the Civil War.⁸⁹

It is thus apparent that oatmeal was not an official ration of the Civil War soldier. It is also

apparent that Ferdinand Schumacher was selling his product to someone in vast quantities. It is not as evident just what the channel was used to sell his product. Perhaps the legend of Steinbacher helping his friend was incorrect only in the characterization of the type of help he contributed. With the documented corruption and exorbitant profits available, it is not hard to understand why someone would not be motivated to admit being a sutler, as the term itself was considered "odious."⁹⁰ Congressional characterizations of sutlers as sharks⁹¹ that sold immense amounts of "trash"⁹² to the soldiers and took the soldier's wages every payday⁹³ neglected to attach prestige and glamour to the profession.

Regardless of the means by which he gained his fortune, the Civil War era was indeed good to Erhard Steinbacher. In 1866 he announced plans to construct an oil refinery⁹⁴ and claimed to have the largest drug and grocery house in Northern Ohio by 1868.⁹⁵ He later became an officer and part owner of the Citizens Savings and Loan and the First National Bank.⁹⁶ According to the U.S. Accessor, his annual income of \$6,110 was the seventh highest in Akron for the year 1865.⁹⁷ Steinbacher and Schumacher, struggling merchants at the start of the war, by war's end were two of the richest men in Akron, Ohio.

The evidence of wealth accumulated by Schumacher and Steinbacher is not refutable. It is clear that Schumacher made his initial fortune via his German Mills during the war. Yet Steinbacher's path to his riches is not as clear. Having made the bulk of his money during the Gold Rush is not likely due to the humble beginnings, and gradual expansion, of his initial store. His rise to the seventh highest paid Akronite in 1865 instead points toward a successful current enterprise, one that most likely stretched beyond the confines of the city of Akron. Additionally, if his success was limited only to his corner drugstore, then his partner George C. Weimer should have been listed somewhere on the list of wealthy citizens also, but he was not.⁹⁸

Refutation of the claim that Steinbacher was a sutler would be confirmed if his name never appeared in governmental sutler records or regimental accounts.⁹⁹ Yet this process is inherently problematic. Government sutler assignments found in the National Archives are not complete, as the regiments of the Army of the Potomac and the Army of the James dominate their lists.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the official lists of sutler assignments could not have accounted for every public sale of sutlership assignments that occurred at this time. In addition, as law forbade the ownership of multiple sutlerships, any enterprising entrepreneur seeking to build a network of sutlerships would have to register each license in the name of an agent or fictitious person. As for regimental accounts, sutlers were always referenced by individual name, void of any indication of a business relationship under which the sutler was operating, such as company or owner name.

Although there exists no direct evidence that Erhard Steinbacher was a Civil War sutler, there is also no direct evidence that he was an authorized Army buyer, as legend states. Nevertheless, Steinbacher certainly had the dealmaker's mentality that must have been required to succeed in hawking comfort items on a battlefield at excessive prices. He also had the drive to traverse long distances in search of extraordinary opportunities, as evidenced by his Gold Rush Fever excursion. As for the extraordinary nature of the sutler opportunity, there was none better; exclusive territories, captive audiences, and a fertile field for buying off the caretaker-

colonel when raising prices or selling liquor created financial opportunity far exceeding the prospects for profit back home, especially during wartime.

For Schumacher the oatmeal manufacturer, the sutler channel would have been preferred over the government channel due to the absence of his product on the Commissary General's list, the lack of competitive bidding, and the nonexistence of any real price controls. Additionally, the excessive sutler prices would not have harmed the marketing of a new and unknown product, as consumer price associations had yet to be made. It also allowed for Schumacher to sell his product to the returning troops at lower, market-driven prices, which must have appeared as bargains compared to the sutler prices they had grown accustomed to during the war.

In the final analysis, the dramatic growth of Ferdinand Schumacher's oatmeal business during the Civil War years certainly points towards a successful effort in reaching the stomachs of Union soldiers. The conceivable channels available to reach this set of customers en masse was limited to (1) the Subsistence Department as via an official government ration, (2) the Sanitary Commission as a hospital ration, or (3) direct field purchase by soldiers via the sutlership system. Since oatmeal never became a sanctioned product for direct procurement by Civil War government purchasing agents, and ordinary citizens were not deputized as authorized buyers, its appearance must have been relegated to unofficial sutler channels. Furthermore, with oatmeal appearing in Schumacher's newspaper ads less than three months before the war started, it is difficult to imagine government buyers not classifying this breakfast newcomer as a "comfort food" to be relegated to sutler wagons.

As far as Erhard Steinbacher's role, his personal success conveniently dovetails Schumacher's. Both German immigrants starting business in the same year, in the same section of the young city, even using the same building for a time, yet they never directly competed with each other. In fact, Steinbacher only began to advertise groceries the very month that Schumacher closed his store. Both entered the decade of the 1860's as local businessmen of modest means, yet exited as economic powerhouses.

As an aggressive entrepreneur, with gold prospecting, oil refining, and retail ventures to his credit, Steinbacher's nose for making money would not have been lost on the sutler opportunity. His dramatic decrease in advertising activity during the war years,¹⁰¹ and his triumphant return with enough capital to build an oil refinery and create the largest retail establishment of its kind in Northern Ohio provide powerful evidence that Steinbacher had once again left town with a kind of Gold Rush Fever and returned a much wealthier man.

As is the case with most legends, the traditional story of how Ferdinand Schumacher started the oatmeal industry in America has elements of truth. Supplying Civil War soldiers with his new staple indeed seems to have played crucial role in his success. Whether it was by accident or design, though, Schumacher's one hundred barrel legend just makes more sense if we adjust it to include the sutler secret of Erhard Steinbacher. The traditional version reads "when the Civil War started [Steinbacher was] authorized by the quartermaster general to purchase supplies for the army in this territory."¹⁰² The revised version should read "when the Civil War started [Steinbacher was *probably*] authorized by the army to *market* supplies to the army in *the form of a sutlership* territory." This eight-word revision may not be quite as tidy as the local legend. However, it does have the virtue of being not only a far more reasonable

explanation, but also (perhaps) a more interesting story behind how that box of oatmeal got into your pantry.

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Notes

¹ Karl M. Grismer, Akron & Summit County (Akron: Summit County Historical Society, 1952), 174-176. In this historiography, Grismer provided a standard, traditional account of Ferdinand Schumacher's start in the oatmeal business which has been widely accepted in Akron, Ohio lore. "[Ferdinand Schumacher] was one of the first persons in Akron to prosper because of the Civil War.... in 1861 the thrifty Schumacher got a break - a tremendous break. He got it through one of his best friends, a fellow German who had also fled from oppression in his fatherland. He was Erhard Steinbacher, grocer and druggist. Becoming an ardent Republican, Steinbacher had many influential friends in the party and when the Civil War started was authorized by the quartermaster general to purchase supplies for the army in this territory. He placed huge orders for flour with local mills and before the war was many months old, all were running at peak capacity. In making his purchases, Steinbacher did not forget his good friend Schumacher. He insisted that the army buy oatmeal to serve the soldiers for breakfast - it was much tastier and more nourishing than any other cereal which could be obtained, infinitely better than cornmeal. That stuff, he declared, might be good enough for Southern rebels but certainly not good enough for fighting Yankees. After weeks of arguing, Steinbacher's German persistence won and the quartermaster's office reluctantly agreed to take a sample order of a hundred barrels. Just a hundred barrels - from an army standpoint, hardly an order worth mentioning. But for Schumacher, the order was stupendous.... After the oatmeal was shipped, Schumacher anxiously waited to learn how it would be received in the army camps. He knew that few soldiers had ever eaten the cereal and was afraid many would refuse to taste it, just because it was something new. But his fears were unjustified. The soldiers liked it. Army orders for oatmeal began pouring in."

² William Henry Perrin, History of Summit County, With An Outline Sketch of Ohio (Chicago: Baskin & Battey, 1881), 771.

³ Perrin, 777.

⁴ The Summit Beacon, 3 December 1851.

⁵ The Summit Beacon, 3 December 1851.

⁶ The Summit Beacon, 28 July 1852.

⁷ The Summit Beacon, 11 August 1852.

⁸ The Summit Beacon, 6 October 1852.

⁹ The Summit Beacon, 14 November 1855.

¹⁰ C.S. Williams, Akron, Wooster and Cuyahoga Falls Directory, City Guide and Business Mirror 1859-1860 (Akron: n.p., 1859), 61.

- ¹¹ William B. Doyle, Centennial History of Summit County and Representative Citizens (Chicago: Biographical Publishing, 1908), 151; Samuel A. Lane, Fifty Years and Over of Akron & Summit County (Akron: Beacon Journal Job Department, 1892), 454; Eugene Oscar Olin, Akron And Environs (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1917), 258.
- ¹² Grismer, 674. Perrin, 771.
- ¹³ The Summit County Beacon, 31 January 1861.
- ¹⁴ The Summit County Beacon, 24 January 1861.
- ¹⁵ The Summit County Beacon, 28 June 1860.
- ¹⁶ J. Britt McCarley, "Feeding Billy Yank: Union Rations between 1861 and 1865" Quartermaster Professional Bulletin, 1988 <http://www.qmfound.com/feeding_billy_yank.htm> (3 February 2003), 1.
- ¹⁷ Russell Weigley, Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M.C. Meigs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 218-219.
- ¹⁸ Act of August 3, 1861, 12th Statute, 287 from Raphael P. Thian, Legislative History of the General Staff of the Army of the United States from 1775 to 1901 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 344.
- ¹⁹ Army Regulations 1863, article 43, paragraph 1190, in The Life of Billy Yank, The Common Soldier of The Union (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 224.
- ²⁰ "Preliminary Report of the Operations of the Sanitary Commission with the Army of the Potomac, During the Campaign of June and July, 1863" Documents of the Sanitary Commission, Volume 2, (New York: U.S. Sanitary Commission, 1866), Document 68, 23 July 1863, 6-8.
- ²¹ "Preliminary Report of the Operations of the Sanitary Commission in Connection with the Engagement in the Harbor of Charleston, South Carolina, July 1st to 20th, 1863" Documents of the Sanitary Commission, Volume 2, (New York: U.S. Sanitary Commission, 1866), Document 70, 4.
- ²² "Report of the Operations of the Sanitary Commission During and After the Battles at Gettysburg, July 1st, 2d, and 3d, 1863" Documents of the Sanitary Commission, Volume 2, (New York: U.S. Sanitary Commission, 1866), Document 71, 21-22.
- ²³ Documents of the Sanitary Commission Volume 2 (New York: U.S. Sanitary Commission, 1866), Document 80.

²⁴ Bell Irvin Wiley, The Life of Billy Yank, The Common Soldier of The Union (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 224-246.

²⁵ John D. Billings, Hardtack and Coffee or The Unwritten Story of Army Life (Boston: George M. Smith, 1887), 108-142.

²⁶ Carlton McCarthy, Detailed Minutiae of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia 1861-1865 (Richmond: Carlton McCarthy & Co., 1882. Reprint New York: Time-Life Books, 1982), 56-72.

²⁷ Sabine, 25.

²⁸ Grismer, 174.

²⁹ Doyle, 151. Olin, 258. Perrin, 771.

³⁰ Grismer, 176.

³¹ The Summit County Beacon, 23 August 1866. The top three yearly incomes for 1865, according to the records of the U.S. Assessor, were T.W. Cornell at \$22,813, F. Schumacher at \$18,590, and L.B. Austin at \$14, 184. As such they were the only three Akronites whose incomes exceeded \$10,000 for the year 1865.

³² Andrew J. Hall, Hall's General Directory and Business Guide of The City of Akron 1868-1869 (Akron: Lane Canfield & Co., 1868), 22.

³³ Hall, 24.

³⁴ Hall, 25.

³⁵ Grismer, 174-176.

³⁶ The Summit County Beacon, 23 August 1860.

³⁷ McCarley, 1. Weigley, 218-219.

³⁸ The Summit County Beacon, 18 June 1851.

³⁹ The Summit County Beacon, 21 May 1851.

⁴⁰ The Summit County Beacon, 25 February 1857.

⁴¹ McCarley, 1.

⁴² The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1145.

⁴³ Donald P. Spear, "The Sutler in the Union Army." Civil War History 16, no. 2 (1970): 121.

⁴⁴ Spear, 121.

⁴⁵ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1143.

⁴⁶ Frank Moore, ed., The Rebellion Record Vol. 10 (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1869), 24.

⁴⁷ Moore, 25.

⁴⁸ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1146.

⁴⁹ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1144.

⁵⁰ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1143.

⁵¹ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1145.

⁵² The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1144.

⁵³ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 January 1862, 272.

⁵⁴ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 January 1862, 272.

⁵⁵ Harvey Reid, Uncommon Soldiers: Harvey Reid and the 22nd Wisconsin March with Sherman, Frank L. Byrne, ed. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 114.

⁵⁶ Reid, 114-115.

⁵⁷ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 January 1862, 272.

⁵⁸ Senator Morton Wilkinson of Minnesota, in The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 January 1862, 272.

⁵⁹ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 January 1862, 272.

⁶⁰ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1144.

⁶¹ Hans Christian Heg to Gunild Heg, 26 July 1862, The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg, Theodore C. Blegen, ed. (Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Assoc, 1936), 114.

⁶² Hans Christian Heg to Gunild Heg, 16 February 1863, The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans

Christian Heg, Theodore C. Blegen, ed. (Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Assoc, 1936), 190.

⁶³ Congressman Cyrus Aldrich, in The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1144.

⁶⁴ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1144.

⁶⁵ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1145.

⁶⁶ "A Report to the Secretary of War of the Operations of the Sanitary Commission" Documents of the Sanitary Commission, Volume 1, (New York: U.S. Sanitary Commission, 1866), Document 40, December 1861, 24.

⁶⁷ The Summit Beacon, 24 April 1850. The Summit Beacon, 18 June 1856.

⁶⁸ Doyle, 264.

⁶⁹ Doyle, 49-50.

⁷⁰ Doyle, 1020.

⁷¹ Grismer, 606.

⁷² Lane, 230.

⁷³ In 1860, Doyle, 742.

⁷⁴ Doyle, 742-743.

⁷⁵ "A Report to the Secretary of War of the Operations of the Sanitary Commission" Documents of the Sanitary Commission, Volume 1 (New York: U.S. Sanitary Commission, 1866), Document 40, December 1861, 24.

⁷⁶ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1143.

⁷⁷ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1143.

⁷⁸ The Summit County Beacon, 28 June 1860.

⁷⁹ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1143.

⁸⁰ Frank Moore, ed., The Rebellion Record Vol. 10 (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1869), 27.

- ⁸¹ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 January 1862, 272.
- ⁸² Charles A. Page, Letters of a War Correspondent, ed. By James R. Gilmore (Boston: n.p., 1899), 243-244.
- ⁸³ Spear, 126.
- ⁸⁴ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 January 1862, 272.
- ⁸⁵ Reid, 111, 18 December 1863.
- ⁸⁶ The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 January 1862, 272.
- ⁸⁷ Moore, 27.
- ⁸⁸ The Summit County Beacon, 28 June 1860.
- ⁸⁹ The Summit County Beacon, 28 June 1860.
- ⁹⁰ Congressman Thomas M. Edwards of New Hampshire, in The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1147.
- ⁹¹ Senator John S. Carlile of Virginia, in Moore, 25
- ⁹² Congressman Frances P. Blair, Jr. of Missouri, in The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1145.
- ⁹³ Congressman Frances P. Blair, Jr. of Missouri, in The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress 2nd Session, 10 March 1862, 1145.
- ⁹⁴ The Summit County Beacon, 3 May 1866.
- ⁹⁵ Hall, 15.
- ⁹⁶ Perrin, 777.
- ⁹⁷ The Summit County Beacon, 23 August 1866.
- ⁹⁸ The Summit County Beacon, 23 August 1866.
- ⁹⁹ Francis Alfred Lord, Civil War Sutlers and Their Wares (Cranbury, N.J.: Thomas Yoseloff, 1969), 95-131.
- ¹⁰⁰ Lord, 95.

¹⁰¹ The Summit County Beacon, survey of issues from 1860 through 1866 in comparison to years prior and after.

¹⁰² Karl M. Grismer, Akron & Summit County (Akron: Summit County Historical Society, 1952), 174-176.