

**Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California**  
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## **Sedition In Bakersfield, 1918**

**"I Am A Loyal Citizen Of The United States"**

(V5)

By Gilbert P. Gia

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**T**he administrator of Kern County hospital had been accused sedition even though he had served as a Bakersfield fire chief, Kern County corner-public administrator, and steward of Kern County Hospital.<sup>1</sup> In May 1918 Buckreus uttered something about German soldiers when he attended a patriotic meeting, but the US was then at war, and Bakersfield had little tolerance for free speech.<sup>2</sup>

**The blue-eyed administrator, Franz Buckreus, came to the United States in July 1871 when he was 26 following service as a medic in the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>3</sup> In New York**

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<sup>1</sup> Morning Echo Jun 17, 1906). He was coroner of Kern County from 1892 to 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Sedition is defined as giving comfort and verbal aid to an enemy country . "World War I ushered in social conformity and governmental centralization into American society. Within commerce, the Railway Administration Act had de facto control of the railroads — the major source of transportation — to the Federal government. The War Labor Board, the War Industries Board, and a slate of other government agencies centralized commerce in the name of supporting the war effort. Fuel rationing, the draft, price controls, [and rationing] — these and many other measures thrust the federal government deeply into the economic lives of the average American. [Wendy McElroy, *World War I and the Suppression of Dissent, Part 1*. April 2002 <http://www.fff.org/freedom/fd0204f.asp> ]

<sup>3</sup> Buckreus was born Nov 30, 1845 in Oberfranken, Bavaria, Germany. He graduated from schools of surgery in Germany. (*Memorial and Biographical History of the Counties of Fresno, Tulare, and Kern, California*. Lewis Pub. Co., 1892, pp. 415-416.) The biography said he served in the sanitary service, a medical arm of the German Army. The Franco-Prussian War was 1870-71.

he worked as a barber but about 1873 returned to Europe.<sup>4</sup> In April 1874 he was back in the US and months later had settled in Bakersfield.<sup>5</sup> Buckreus worked a few months at a barber shop before setting up his own tonsorial business under the Arlington Hotel on Chester Avenue.<sup>6</sup>

Three years later he killed a man. In November 1877 argued with a French dressmaker named Mrs. Eitel who claimed he'd not paid her for her work. By then Buckreus had established his reputation as a solid citizen, but on the day that Mrs. Eitel entered his barber shop to collect her fee, he "applied an opprobrious epithet to her."<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Eitel returned to her shop, and that was where John Wearner found her crying. Wearner, who was also a barber and also German, was as unlikely a person to cause trouble as was Buckreus. A newspaper wrote, "*Both were well-known and esteemed as sober, industrious, quiet, peaceable citizens, regarded as the last persons to engage in a mortal affray.*"<sup>8</sup> Wearner made his way to Buckreus's barbershop, and there "high words and a quarrel speedily ensued."<sup>9</sup>

Hours later, men standing outside the post office saw Buckreus and Wearner on the street shouting at one another. They clinched and struggled, and Wearner knocked Buckreus down. As Buckreus tried to rise, Wearner struck him again and then cinched his arm around Buckreus' neck and punched him repeatedly in the face. Buckreus cried for help. Witness then saw Buckreus point a pistol over his shoulder and fire it. The bullet missed Wearner and went through the wall of Burnaps's drug store across the street. Wearner kept pounding Buckreus' face. Buckreus then turned the muzzle against his aggressor's abdomen and fired. John Wearner fell dead.

The Coroner's jury ruled justifiable homicide, but others did not understand how Buckreus could have been in such imminent danger of his life that he had to shoot

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<sup>4</sup> *History of Kern County California with Biographical Sketches.* Wallace M. Morgan, Historic Record Co., Los Angeles, CA. 1914.

<sup>5</sup> Manifest of ship Holsatia. Arrived in New York Apr 10, 1874 from Hamburg and Havre: Franz Buckreuss [double "s"], 30, citizen of US, barber. (US National Archives. archives.gov). Buckreus was not a US citizen at this time.

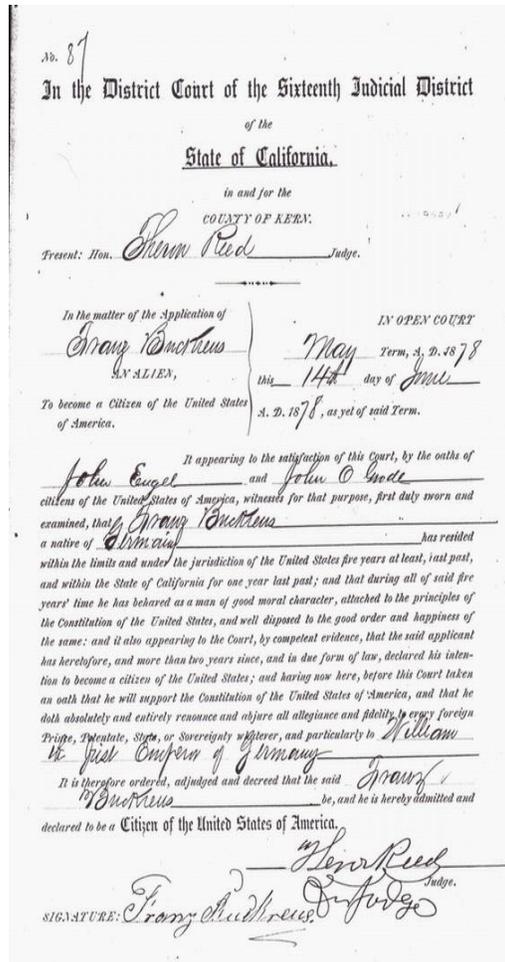
<sup>6</sup> He was in Bakersfield by Mar 1875. *Kern County Californian*, Jun 30, 1883: "*Baths! Baths! Electric and Sulphur Hot and Cold Baths under Arlington Hotel. Franz Buckreus, Prop'r*"

<sup>7</sup> Nov 8, 1877. W.H. Boyd document collection (Jack Maguire Local History Room, Kern Co Library). Source not noted and this researcher could not find it on microfilm. The source is almost assuredly the *Southern Californian*, *Kern County Weekly Courier*, or, less likely, from the *Kern County Democrat*.)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Wearner. A newspaper questioned Buckreus' carrying a gun: "If Frank had not had a pistol he could not have used one. He could have received some bruises about the face and head, no more, probably, than he now carries, and for the infliction of which, his assailant would have been held accountable to the proper authorities, and John Wearner would not have filled a bloody grave."<sup>10</sup> The community seems to have the forgotten killing because on June 14, 1878 Buckreus became a US citizen, and he became an exemplary one.<sup>11</sup>



**Franz Buckreus certificate of citizenship**

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kern County 16<sup>th</sup> District Court. Naturalization document from Buckreus descendent Kathy A. O'Brien. On Jul 4, 1885 Franz Buckreus and E. Palmes ran a footrace from Palmes' saloon to the county hospital. "Buckreus gave Palmes (a very large man) a head start to the Court House corner." Palmes won the race and the \$5 bet. (Lynn Hay Rudy private database of Bakersfield newspaper citations)

**Buckreus sold his barber shop in 1883, the year he was appointed steward of Kern County Hospital.<sup>12</sup>**

**On May 7, 1887 he was elected president of the Alerts volunteer fire team.<sup>13</sup> In 1888 when Native Sons of the Golden West held a costume ball, Buckreus served on the prize committee with Christopher C. Cowgill, Hugh A. Blodget, Bertha Said, and Mrs. Orestes D. (Mary J.) Fish, all of whom were prominent Bakersfield people.<sup>14</sup> The Fourth of July celebrations of 1888 started with a 100 gun salute at sunrise followed by a band procession lead by the parade's grand marshal, Franz Buckreus.<sup>15</sup> In 1891 when Buckreus was a member of the bicycle club, he and others named their bikes. Buckreus called his Bismarck, and Tom A. Baker called his Codfish.<sup>16</sup> In 1894 the Bakersfield oratorio society had 30 members. Franz Buckreus was one of the founders.<sup>17</sup> Franz Buckreus was vice-president of Bakersfield's *Germania Maennerchor*. The group presented a choral program of German Christmas music on December 29, 1908.<sup>18</sup>**

**In October 1885 when John F. Maio resigned as Kern County coroner-public administrator, supervisors made a temporary appointment of Franz Buckreus to that position. Voters elected him to the job in November.<sup>19</sup> He served from 1885 to 1892 and from 1896 to 1903 but at the same remained hospital steward. He attended cases of murder, lynching, and mayhem. In June 1893, 23 year-old William Anthony, a native of Pennsylvania, died from an overdose of morphine given to him by "a woman of the**

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<sup>12</sup> The hospital was on G Street between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, on today's Bakersfield High grounds.

<sup>13</sup> Lynn Hay Rudy, private database of Bakersfield newspaper citations.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* (Jan 7, 1888)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Californian*, May 6, 1891. On Sep 24, 1891 eight members of the the bicycle club took a Sunday ride, and afterward an award called the "royal scroll of court plaster" was given, probably to the rider who fell the most. Chairmen at the presentation were W. E. Houghton, Tom Baker, B. Packard, Alex Mills (Jr), C. J. Burke, G. W. Price, C. C. White., and Franz Buckreus.

<sup>17</sup> *Daily Californian*, Mar 23, 1894. An oratorio society is a community of avocational singers who share a passion for choral music.

<sup>18</sup> Program announcement in scrapbook "Antique Bakersfield." Jack Maguire Local History Room, vault, Kern County Library, Bakersfield

<sup>19</sup> *Buckreus was elected 1887, 1894, 1895-1898, and 1906-1909.* He probably profited from his friendship with Jacob Niederaur, the furniture manufacturer, cemetery sexton, and first mortician in Kern County. Niederaur was born in Bryan, Williams County, Ohio on Jun 15, 1841, served in the Civil War, and came to California in 1868. (*Ohio/ Historical Biographical*. F.A. Battey, Chicago, 1882); upon his death in 1903, Buckreus became the executor of the Niederaur estate and guardian of the Niederaur children. In Mar 1904 Buckreus sold the Niederaur funeral business at 1712 Chester Avenue to Morton and Connelly. (*Bakersfield Californian*, May 12, 1924.) The furniture business, valued at \$70,000, went to George C. Haberfelde. (*History of Kern County California with Biographical Sketches*. Wallace M. Morgan, Historic Record Co., Los Angeles, CA 1914.)

town" wrote a newspaper. <sup>20</sup> In 1894 Buckreus brought back to town a body found lying in the foothills about eight miles northeast of Bakersfield.<sup>21</sup> In 1894 Buckreus placed an ad in the *Los Angeles Times* offering a reward for information about a trunk stolen in Bakersfield.<sup>22</sup>

In 1895 Buckreus moved to the new Kern County Hospital, which was on six-acres immediately northeast of 19th and Oak Streets. He and a Chinese gardener landscaped the grounds. In 1911 Buckreus assisted in expansion of the hospital, and he directed its growth and development for the next 23 years. <sup>23</sup>

In 1901 he investigated the lynching of Ah Sing at a Bear Mountain logging camp.<sup>24</sup> In 1901 he held a coroner's inquest on the death of John F. O'Brien, son of Michael O'Brien who was proprietor of the Nugget saloon. Young O'Brien was found dead in his room with a half-empty bottle of sulfate of morphine. Buckreus discovered that O'Brien had been despondent over a misunderstanding with a woman "whose character is not of the best." <sup>25</sup>

In 1903 Buckreus left the coroner-public administrator position when the State of California required a medical degree of those office holders. But the loss of the job did not dampen his zeal for the truth. In 1905 he was diligent in trying to find information that might save a man from prison.<sup>26</sup>

The *Los Angeles Times* usually referred to Buckreus as a doctor. <sup>27</sup> He was not a licensed medical practitioner, but the hospital steward was a worthy health officer. In 1896 tuberculosis had emerged in Kern County, and Buckreus attributed the contagion to eastern and foreign immigrants. He said, "I would not favor quarantine to prevent such persons entering the state. I would suggest as a remedy a state quarantine law,

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<sup>20</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jun 4, 1893, p 16

<sup>21</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 7, 1894

<sup>22</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 23, 1894

<sup>23</sup> Some of the original trees still stand. *History of Kern County California with Biographical Sketches*. Wallace M. Morgan, Historic Record Co., Los Angeles, CA 1914.

<sup>24</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jul 10 1901

<sup>25</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 19, 1901

<sup>26</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 23, 1905

<sup>27</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 11, 1900

with state quarantine hospitals, whereby those patients could receive treatment and be isolated."<sup>28</sup>

Buckreus knew hospitals. What was his like? As late as 1918 Kern County Hospital was not a place where an ill citizen would prefer to go, rather it existed "*to serve more adequately the needs of the sick poor of Kern county.*"<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, a favorable state report of 1903 noted, "Premises were clean and in good condition. It is lighted by electricity, has a private water supply, and also an irrigating ditch, and four bathrooms and four water-closets. Three nurse are employed. The site consists of six acres of land, all tillable. Two acres are in orchard and one-and-one-half in garden. The hospital keeps two cows and 100 chickens."<sup>30</sup>

The hospital of 1909 was a two-story wood structure flanked by one-story wings.<sup>31</sup> In 1911 a supplementary 60-ft-wide wing was added to the east side for a new surgical ward/operating room, the hospital's capacity increased from 75 patients to 100 patients, and the building was updated with new heating, lighting, and ventilation systems. Wrote a newspaper, "The entire equipment bespeaks the oversight of a wise intelligence."<sup>32</sup>

The war that started in Europe in August 1914 had psychological impact on Kern County, but little immediate impact until the US entered the war. In March 1917, the United States Secret Service came to Kern County to gather names of German residents, and county officials cooperated in creating the lists.<sup>33</sup> The *Californian* noted, "This step is being taken with a view to safeguarding the immense oil interests, the list comprising people who might be considered enemies in case of war."<sup>34</sup> On April 6, 1917

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<sup>28</sup> *Daily Californian*, Aug 7, 1896

<sup>29</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Jun 7, 1918

<sup>30</sup> First Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections. Of the State of California from Jul 1, 1903 to Jun 30, 1904. Sacramento, Sup of State Printing. 1905. In 1905, 62 males and one female resided at the hospital.

<sup>31</sup> It had a frontage of 220 feet. *History of Kern County California with Biographical Sketches*. Wallace M. Morgan, Historic Record Co., Los Angeles, CA 1914.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*. The hospital did not escape controversy. In 1911 a patient who was well-known in Bakersfield got into a hospital bathtub, slit his wrists with a broken light bulb, and electrocuted himself. (*San Francisco Call*, May 24, 1911)

<sup>33</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 3, 1917. Similar citizen groups were formed during WWII. See "Kern Oil Field Protection Against Sabotage Praised," *Bakersfield Californian*, Aug 5, 1942, p 7, c 2-3

<sup>34</sup> *Bakersfield Californian* Mar 3, 1917

the US declared war on Germany, and the next day residents of Maricopa formed the Maricopa Oil Field Protective Association.<sup>35</sup> The *Maricopa Oil News* cautioned, "In these times it will be natural for many to imagine a lurking spy in every person of German birth or extraction. Let us guard against too much suspicion, and too careless speaking of the German people....it is needless to wound by taunting them with disloyalty or lack of loyalty to America because of ties to the old country that makes their hearts bleed. Either way, they decide."<sup>36</sup>



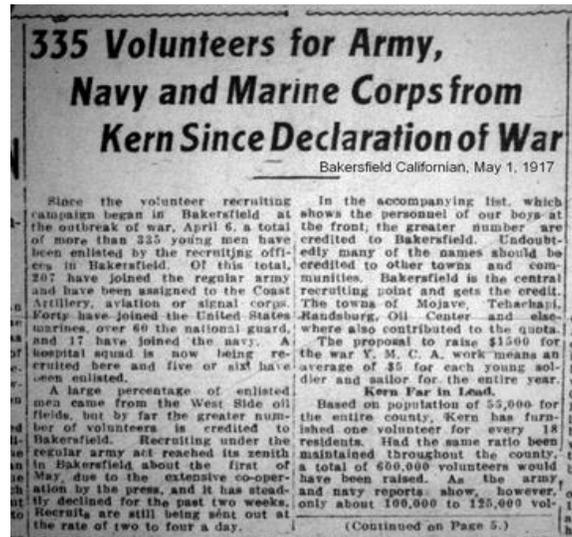
Patriotic fervor grew. On May 1 the US Army recruiting office on 19<sup>th</sup> Street signed up 335 volunteers, and that number placed Kern County high on the list of patriotic communities: Its volunteer rate was five times the rest of the country. "Kern has

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<sup>35</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Apr 14, 1917, pg 1, col 5 ( William Harland Boyd collection, Maguire Room, Beale Library) "All citizens are considered members. If you know of anything which you consider a menace to the peace and safety of our community, submit same in writing at once to Maricopa Oil Field Protective Association. All communications will be held strictly confidential. Anonymous letters cannot be considered."

<sup>36</sup> *Maricopa Oil News*, Apr 7, 1917. months earlier, President Woodrow Wilson criticized foreigners by denouncing hyphenated-Americans. (*Morning Echo*, Jul 14, 1916); Bakersfield Mayor George Hay calmed fears of foreign-born residents when he said, "...no citizens of any foreign power, resident in Bakersfield, need fear any invasion of his personal property rights so long as he goes peaceably about his business..." (*Morning Echo*, Apr 18, 1917, p 1, c1-2)

furnished one volunteer for every 18 residents," wrote the *Californian*. "Had the same ratio been maintained throughout the country, a total of 600,000 volunteers would have been raised. As the army and navy reports show, however, only about 100,000 to 125,000 volunteers have enlisted."<sup>37</sup>



First notice of military draft, Bakersfield Californian, May 18, 1917

"The day will be the eighth following the President's draft proclamation...All men of Kern County who have passed their 21st and not yet reached their 31st birthday must register for the Army draft, whether they are citizens of the United States or are aliens."<sup>38</sup> But the news didn't stop holiday plans. On May 19, Franz Buckreus, his niece Anna Buckreus, and 100 other vacationers departed from Santa Fe Station for Yosemite holidays.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 1, 1917. By June 1, the volunteer program had failed to attract necessary manpower. That caused the war department to establish a "red-hot campaign throughout the county... Thousands of boys and young men will flock to the colors in the next five days, as has never been known in previous history." (*Morning Echo*, Jun 1, 1917). The US Army opened a recruiting office in Bakersfield several months earlier. "Bakersfield has been one of the best recruiting points in California, more men enlisting here than in Fresno. At times the number of recruits obtained here has exceeded that in Los Angeles." (*Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 20, 1916, p1, c1)

<sup>38</sup> *Morning Echo*, May 18, 1917

<sup>39</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1917. Anna Fransiska Buckreus, born in 1864 in Germany, arrived in New York in 1908, destination Bakersfield. She was nurse and X-ray operator at the hospital. (Vitals: 1920 US Census. Information from Kathy A. O'Brien)

**But war came to Bakersfield. In July, 1917, eleven Kern County residents were jailed as "draft slackers."<sup>40</sup> In January 1918 Bakersfield stores were rationing flour,<sup>41</sup> and the same month a former Kern County Land Company engineer was arrested in Tucson, Arizona on charges of being an enemy spy,<sup>42</sup> and German aliens in Kern County were instructed to register at Bakersfield.<sup>43</sup>**

**The Kern County Counsel of Defense, chaired by Judge Milton T. Farmer, was a war-time, ad hoc advisory committee made up of prominent Kern County men in agriculture, government, and business. A resolution passed by the group in November 1917 states the following point, which no doubt reflected the sentiments of the larger community. "*And whereas; Our boys in the trenches in Europe have sacrificed their business, their love of home and family and have offered their very lives that our country might live and prosper and that the principles of humanity might flourish, and these boys are fighting our fight while we remain at home in safety ...*"<sup>44</sup>**

**Across the county patriotism and suspicion grew. Ex-President William Howard Taft spoke in February 1918 before the National Security League and explained that the greatest danger to America was the "whisperers who are overtly sowing sedition and pro-German propaganda."<sup>45</sup> He advocated Federal control over public education.**

**During this time a group was formed at Bakersfield. [start here.](#)**

**The May issue of *Nation* called for the suspension of civil liberties to simplify the process of convicting those charged with sedition,<sup>46</sup> while at Bakersfield 32 girls under**

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<sup>40</sup> *Morning Echo*, Jul 7, 1917, p 8, c3

<sup>41</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 29, 1918. Hochheimer's, a major department store, announced that its grocery department would begin selling equal amount of substitute flour for each purchase of white flour. See also Jan 30, pg 1. Substitute flours included corn grits, cornmeal, corn flour, edible cornstarch, barley flour, oatmeal, rice flour, buckwheat flour, potato flour, sweet potato flour, and soya bean flour. (*The Bride's Cook Book*, Pacific Coast Pub Co, Inc, San Francisco, CA, 1917, pg 18)

<sup>42</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 14, 1918. Charles F. von Petersdorff admitted he had accepted money from a German agent to investigate oil deposits in Mexico. Von Petersdorff was a friend of Henry A. Jastro, Chairman of the Kern County Board of Supervisors, born in Prussia, and naturalized US citizen. Jastro's wealth, political position, and membership on war-time boards seemed to have shielded him from accusations.

<sup>43</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 24, 1918, p 4. The definition of German aliens did not include females. See also Jan 26, 1918, p 8.

<sup>44</sup> Kern County Council of Defense, *Minutes Book*, Nov 12, 1917 (Bakersfield High School Archives, 1241 G St, Bakersfield, California)

<sup>45</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb 22, 1918. To instill patriotism, the National Security League advocated for Federal control of education.

<sup>46</sup> *The Nation* (Washington DC), May 11, 1918

the direction of Sergeant Alex Pullman, USA, drilled three nights a week at Emerson School. "The sergeant is pleased over the interest shown and the progress made by the girls, who, he says are more apt at learning the drill movements than most men."<sup>47</sup>



That May, Bakersfield hosted a seven-day Chautauqua of music, dance, lectures, and religious devotion "to serve war needs,"<sup>48</sup> and local newspapers quoted a length from William Jennings Bryan's two-hour tent-lecture, *A Citizen's Duty*, in which he said, "Our part as I see it is to stand, as one man, backing our government, our President, and Congress in anything they see fit to undertake while this war lasts."<sup>49</sup> A military representative, Dr. J.C. Bushnell, would speak the next day, and the *Californian* advised, "Every relative of our soldiers should hear Dr. Bushnell tomorrow morning."<sup>50</sup> In "With Our Armies in Europe," he described "our boys with Pershing and of conditions with our allies."<sup>51</sup>

Bakersfield movie theaters also promoted the war. The *Californian* wrote, "These are busy days for Uncle Sammy's film industry. Every month brings important additions to the government's important motion picture output. All of which is based on the picturization of the war. The Division of Films of the Committee on Public Information has just issued a prospectus of a new series of two-reel pictures to be issued under the general title 'U.S.A. Service.' The first of the series, 'When Your Soldier Is Hit,' will be issued in December, and the others will follow at half-monthly intervals. This initial

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<sup>47</sup> *Bakersfield Californian* May 14, 1918

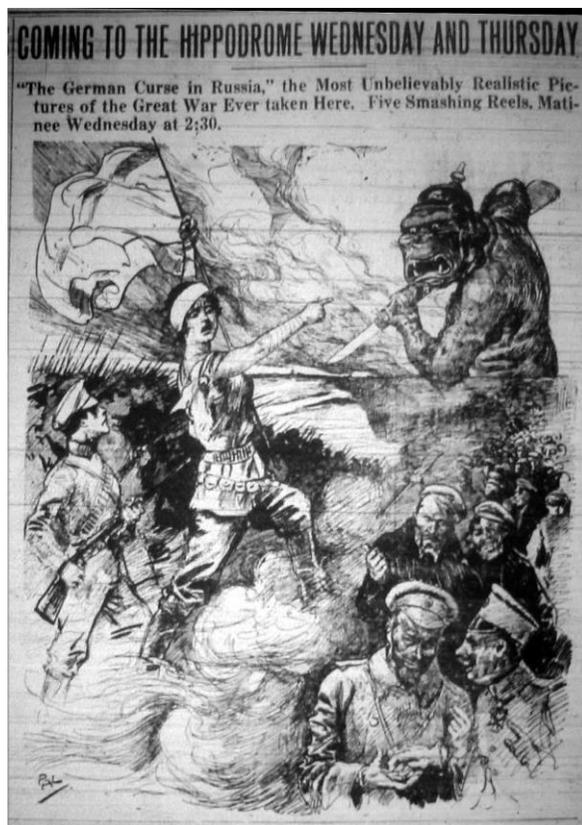
<sup>48</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 11, 1918

<sup>49</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 16, 1918

<sup>50</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 14, 1918

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. The newspapers did not mention Bushnell's accusations that German soldiers had committed atrocities.

picture illustrates the wonderful efficiency of the Medical Detachment and Field Hospital corps...." <sup>52</sup> In May 1918 the Hippodrome screened the *German Curse in Russia*, a five-reel matinee displaying "deeds of heroism, the history-making revolution, and overall and through all, the unbelievably detestable German infamy and its intrigue."<sup>53</sup>



**May 18, 1918, *Bakersfield Californian***

In May, Maricopa trustees ruled that seditious talk was punishable by six months in jail and a \$500 fine.<sup>54</sup> A few days later the state suspended teaching of German and threatened to withhold funds from districts not complying.<sup>55</sup> In June the National Security League (claiming 281 branches and 100,000 members) started a campaign against German-Americans. According to Col. Charles E. Lydecker, NSL chairman, "The presence of a large number of persons in the country who profess loyalty to the government, but who foster the traditions, maxims, speech, and principals of the enemy

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<sup>52</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Nov 26, 1918

<sup>53</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 15, 18, 1918

<sup>54</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 17, 1918

<sup>55</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 21, 1918, see also *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1918

governments by suggestion, innuendo, and connivance amounting to conspiracy, are offensive to loyal workers and detrimental to a genuine spirit of patriotism.”<sup>56</sup>

Such was the atmosphere of patriotism in Kern County in May 1918 when five Kern County hospital nurses walked off their jobs, and hospital steward Buckreus tendered his resignation.<sup>57</sup> The *Californian* noted both events briefly, but drew no conclusions. It added only that Franz Buckreus had proven himself “to be an official of the highest type, faithful, conscientious and intelligent in the discharge of his duties, and there will be genuine regret over his retirement at this time.”<sup>58</sup>



Franz Buckreus image from the *Bakersfield Californian*, March 18, 1908<sup>59</sup>

On May 21, in an impassioned editorial against Germany, Alfred Harrell wrote, “Why not every man and every dollar if need be to defeat this imbruted enemy of mankind? What future would there be for men and women, what value would money have, or property, if the German net could the spread over this land and her defiled hand could clutch it by the throat as it has clutched Belgium, as it is clutching Russia?” Below that, on the same page, Harrell wrote of Franz Buckreus, “A man of the highest type, the soul of honor, conscientious to a degree,” and many accolades followed. Harrell concluded, “A house not built of hands is what this official has created for himself in his years of service in

<sup>56</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Jun 3, 1918

<sup>57</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 22, 1918. Several days before the walkout, Franz Buckreus presented his resignation to the Kern County Board of Supervisors. On the day of the walkout, Buckreus submitted his notice again. On May 23 Anna Buckreus was dropped from the county payroll.

<sup>58</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 20, 1918

<sup>59</sup> A series of sketches of Bakersfield and its people appeared in *See America First*. The series is in the collection of New York State University.

**this community; very largely it is a record that will never be written of men, but that it has been recorded, nevertheless, and in enduring form, we may well believe. When not a sparrow falls but He see it, there is abundant assurance that a life of goodness and kindness have not failed of recognition in that Land of Somewhere that awaits us all.”<sup>60</sup>**

**On May 22 the *Californian* gave details behind the charges. Franz and Anna Buckreus had been having breakfast at the hospital with nurses when Mr. Buckreus opined that one of the Chautauqua speakers had been hired “to tell lies about the Germans.”<sup>61</sup> According to the nurses, Buckreus insisted that German soldiers did not commit atrocities and did not have Belgian women in the trenches.<sup>62</sup>**

**After breakfast five nurses<sup>63</sup> walked off their jobs and filed a disturbing the peace complaint with Judge Flournoy. District Attorney Jess Dorsey examined the complaint, Judge Flournoy issued warrants, and the Buckreuses were arrested. J. M. “Jack” Jameson and Dr. Augustus F. Schaefer posted \$4,000 bail for the administrator and his niece.<sup>64</sup>**

**On May 23 President Woodrow Wilson signed a sedition bill giving the government wide latitude to punish Americans who uttered “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” during wartime, either in word or print, against the US government or its flag or its armed forces.<sup>65</sup>**

**A hearing for Franz and Anna Buckreus was set a few days hence, but at almost the same time the complaint against them was “*placed in possession of the war department*”**

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<sup>60</sup> Bakersfield Californian, May 21, 1918, *Random Notes*

<sup>61</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 22, 1918

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Also noted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jun 7, 1918

<sup>63</sup> Misses Laura Gow, Lillie McIntyre, Josephine Melvin, Helen Avent, Minnie German (*Bakersfield Californian*, May 22, 1918)

<sup>64</sup> The nurses were Misses Laura Gow, Lillie McIntyre, Josephine Melvin, Helen Avent, and Minnie German. (*Bakersfield Californian*, May 22, 1918). May 23, 1918. In the 1910 US Census his surname, Schaefer, is spelled Schafer. He was from Germany.

<sup>65</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1918. *The Nation* (Washington DC) wrote in its issue of Nov 9, 1918, “*The courts will construe talks and speeches as interferences with the prosecution of the war, although they could only be so construed by the most far-fetched reasoning.*” The US Supreme Court upheld the Sedition Act in *Debs v. US*. Congress repealed the Sedition Act on Dec 13, 1920. Subsequent Supreme Court decisions (such as *Brandenburg v. Ohio* in 1969) make it unlikely that a similar law would be considered constitutional today.” (Wikipedia)

***through the C.B. Colby bureau here, working for the department of justice.***<sup>66</sup> On May 23 local attorneys Calvin V. Anderson and Fredric E. Borton asked Judge Flournoy for a continuance to familiarize themselves with the case,<sup>67</sup> and Deputy District Attorney Wesley Grijalva raised no objection. The charges against Franz and Anna Buckreus were "willfully and maliciously disturbing the peace and quiet for this complainant and by tumultuous and offensive conduct."<sup>68</sup>

In an open letter to the people of Kern County, Franz Buckreus wrote,

***"In the humiliating position I am in, I want to tell you that I am a loyal citizen of United States. I love my country, and my flag. I have been true to them in my heart in this war. I asked you not to judge me because I was a soldier in the Army of the country where I was born. When I owed allegiance to Germany in my youth, I gave it. But I have owed allegiance to America for 45 years, and I am loyal to this country. I am an old man of seventy-three years of age, and somewhat infirm. My offense is that I have not been willing to believe all that has been said of the people of my native land, and sometimes I have disputed such statements. I have given offense by doing so, but I did not mean to be disloyal. I have been true to this country ever since I became a citizen of it. The flag is always over the hospital and also flags are in the corridors. I am poor but I have bought a \$1000 [war] bond of each issue, \$3000 at all. I have done it to help America in the war. For forty years some of you have known me. I tried to be a good citizen here and do my duty. I have done my best. Please believe me that in my heart I have no disloyalty when I have disputed the truth of statements about the people where I was born. Now I ask you not***

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<sup>66</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 22, 1918. On Mar 22, 1917, Washington authorized government cooperation with The American Protective League, a nationwide organization of voluntary citizen-spies reporting to military and law enforcement agencies on suspected German sympathizers, radicals, anarchists, anti-war activists, and left-wing labor and political organizations. (Wikipedia). Emerson Hough, *The Web, Authorized History of the American Protective League*. Reilly & Lee, Chicago, 1919 (Library of Congress, Free Internet Archive). Days before the Buckreus were accused, an APL cell was formed in Bakersfield as The Committee of 100. *Bakersfield Californian*, May 16, 1918. Bainbridge Colby was assistant to the Office of US Attorney General.

<sup>67</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 23, 1918

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* In the 1920 US Census, Anna Buckreus was 44 yrs old, single, born in Germany, emigrated in 1908, and naturalized in 1915.

***to judge me harshly. I have meant no offense and I would give my life today for this country to prove my loyalty.”***<sup>69</sup>

**On the day his words appeared, California Governor William D. Stevens spoke at the Bakersfield Opera House before the Parent-Teachers' Association and the State Convention of Congresses of Mothers. The *Californian* reported,**

**“The governor feels very strongly on the subject of the Germans in America and says that while he has the highest regard for the citizen, even if foreign-born, who is loyal to our government, but any person, no matter what his nationality, who is not loyal to our cause and to the United States is a traitor and should be put out. To quote his most expressive words, 'Any man born in Germany or anywhere else, uttering words of sedition and disloyalty, no matter to what lodge or association he belongs, I.W.W.,<sup>70</sup> or what not, is a traitor and should be put where the dogs don't bite.' At this point an interruption came from the audience by a voice saying that these characters should be taken halfway across the ocean and put out to walk the remainder of the distance. The governor answered, 'Make sure that they have to walk on the bottom, and not the top.' ”**<sup>71</sup>

**The next day Franz and Anna Buckreus moved out of their apartments at county hospital and into the Southern Hotel.<sup>72</sup> On May 28 their attorneys entered pleas of not guilty and asked Judge Flournoy to set a trial date. Flournoy calendared it for June 6,<sup>73</sup> but by that date the Federal Government had charged the Buckreuses with violation of the Espionage Act and had bound them over to Federal Grand Jury in Fresno. Bail of \$2500 was posted for each, and they left Bakersfield for Southern California pending trial.<sup>74</sup> The next session of the Federal Grand Jury was scheduled for November 11, 1918,<sup>75</sup> but on that day WWI ended.**

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<sup>69</sup> Bakersfield Californian, May 23, 1918

<sup>70</sup> International Workers of the World was a national union. The IWW's lumber strike of 1917 led to the eight-hour work day and vastly improved labor's conditions in the Pacific Northwest. (Wiki.com)

<sup>71</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 24, 1918

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 28, 1918

<sup>74</sup> \$2500 is about \$50000 today. J.A. Hughes of Bakersfield posted part of the bond.

<sup>75</sup> *Fresno Morning Republican*, Oct 24, 1918, p12

**Back in Bakersfield, county supervisors struggled to staff the hospital. After Matron Isabel Park resigned, County Physician Thaddeus G. McNamara recommended that supervisors consolidate the positions of county physician, assistant county physician, and hospital superintendent. After offering his advice, McNamara said he could not accept such a position, and he tendered his resignation, as did assistant physician Dr. Clarence S. Compton. Dr. James P. Hall accepted the hospital job.** <sup>76</sup>

**On June 18, F.B.I. agent P. Webster filed a report on the charge of purported, pro-German utterances by Franz Buckreus. Webster identified American Protective League Agent No. 224 and an APL member known as "A-6" who had interviewed a Mrs. Griem in San Francisco. A-6 had known the Buckreus well but had not seen them for about a year. Webster wrote,**

**"Referring to A.P.L. #224's report made at Bakersfield on the 21 ult. <sup>77</sup> ... the following is report made by A.P.L. member A-6: 'I interviewed Mrs. Griem whose address is given as 1310 Larkin St., but who I found at the Children's Hospital, where she is a professional nurse. Mrs. Griem is not able to corroborate the statements made in the affidavit quoted in said report of A.P.L. #224, as she was not in Bakersfield at the time these statements were made. She knows Mr. and Miss BUCKREUS, however, and stated that she knows them to be very strongly pro-German. She cannot recall any specific statements made by either of them reflecting on the Government of the United States or the flag, and all she really seems to know is that these people are pro-German.**

**I [A-6] may add that I have known BUCKREUS myself for more than thirty years; that he always enjoyed the highest reputation as a very upright man and good citizen. There is no question, however, that he is a German, a very enthusiastic one, and I should say needed watching. I have not seen him since the commencement of the European war.' Copy furnished to US Attorney at S.F., Bakersfield, Los Angeles."** <sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Jun 7, 1918

<sup>77</sup> The term "A.P.L #224" identified the A.P.L. member in Bakersfield. According to Webster, the Bakersfield report was dated "the 21 ult.", which was May 21, 1918, one day before the nurses walk out, which suggests that discontent had been brewing at the hospital for some time.

<sup>78</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, American Protection League File 130-F, June 18, 1918

File 138-F  
 From: P. Webster  
 San Francisco  
 June 18, 1918  
 June 17, 1918

In Re: FRANZ & ANNA BUCKREUS  
 Pro-German utterances

At San Francisco, Calif.

Referring to A. P. L. #224's report made at Bakersfield on the 21st ult. in above entitled matter, the following is report made by A.P. L. member A-6:-

"I interviewed Mrs. Griem whose address is given as 1310 Larkin St., but who I found at the Childrens Hospital, where she is a professional nurse.

Mrs. Griem is not able to corroborate the statements made in the affidavit quoted in said report of A. P. L. #224, as she was not in Bakersfield at the time these statements were made. She knows Mr. and Miss BUCKREUS, however, and stated that she knows them to be very strongly pro-German. She cannot recall any specific statements made by either of them reflecting on the Government of the United States or flag, and all she really seems to know is that these people are pro-German.

I may add that I have known BUCKREUS myself for more than thirty years; that he always enjoyed the highest reputation as a very upright man and good citizen. There is no question, however, that he is a German and a very enthusiastic one, and I should say needed watching. I have not seen him since the commencement of the European war."

U.S. ATTY S.F.  
 BAKERSFIELD  
 LOS ANGELES

**Webster's FBI Report, above**

**On July 13, 1918 the Federal Grand Jury for the Northern Division, Fresno, indicted Franz and Anna Buckreus on sedition charges, but they remained in Long Beach at freedom under \$5,000 bond. The Californian wrote, "It was stated here [*in Fresno*] today that the trial may be held before Judge Trippet in the United States District Court here in November or may be transferred to Los Angeles and set up for an earlier date."<sup>79</sup> Three others residing in Kern County were indicted by the Grand Jury: Joe B. Walker, charged with having refused to buy Thrift Stamps; Davis H. Rathburn of Taft, alleged to have made statements against President Wilson; and Ernest D. Fisher, who was charged with having attempted to hire Negroes to fight against United States. Walker's bond was fixed at \$1000 while the bonds of Rathburn and Fisher were fixed at \$5,000 each."<sup>80</sup>**

<sup>79</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, Jul 13, 1918. "Three other men residing in Kern County were indicted by the Grand Jury. They were Joe B. Walker, charged with having refused to buy Thrift Stamps; Davis H. Rathburn of Taft, alleged to have made statements against President Wilson; and Ernest D. Fisher, who is charged with having attempted to hire Negroes to fight against United States. Walker's bond was fixed at \$1000 while the bonds of Rathburn and Fisher were fixed at \$5,000 each." *Ibid*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*.

**The Committee of One Hundred had been formed in May 1918 to protect warehouses, crops, and other property in Kern County.<sup>81</sup> On August 31, 1918, nine haystacks equaling 250 tons of hay were set afire near Rosedale on ranches of the Jewett family and those of the Kern County Land Company. "Local officials believe that the fires were started by enemy agents or in protest by sympathizers with, or member of, an organization recently prosecuted by the Federal government."<sup>82</sup> At a meeting of the Kern Council of Defense, Judge J.W. Mahon, chairman, stated that "... ways and means will be devised for combating the alleged pro-German menace."<sup>83</sup> Judge Mahon lauded the Committee of One Hundred . "Its membership now embraces over 300 citizens representing all sections of the county, and it has done a vast deal of important work, cooperating both with Federal and local officials."<sup>84</sup>**

**And the charges against Franz and Anna Buckreus? Newspapers mentioned nothing, but San Francisco city directories from 1918, and on, show the names Franz and Anna Buckreus,<sup>85</sup> he retired and she a nurse.<sup>86</sup> On May 11, 1924, 73 year-old Franz Buckreus died at home in San Francisco.<sup>87</sup> His obituary on page one of the *Bakersfield Californian* read "For the past several years the deceased has resided in San Francisco with his niece, Miss Anna Buckreus, his only relative in this country. Among the old-time people of Kern County, Mr. Buckreus had many lifetime friends who will regret to learn of his passing."<sup>88</sup> There was no mention of sedition.**

**Buckreus descendent Kathy A. O'Brien wrote, "The cause of death listed on the death certificate is 'chronic myocarditis' and a contributory factor was 'senile arterial changes.' It will be interesting to see if the court records bring any insight into Franz's mental acuity in 1918. Perhaps he was suffering from early stage Alzheimer's, or the**

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<sup>81</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Sep 21, 1918. Named members were Fred H. Hall, Calvin V. Anderson, David T. Saine, and Charles H. Stone.

<sup>82</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Sep 1, 1918

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> The 1920 directory listed Franz Buckreus as a widower.

<sup>86</sup> 1918-19 San Francisco City Directory. " In 1922 Anna was employed as a nurse for the Aetna Insurance Company. A year after Franz Buckreus died, she was joined by her sisters Barbara and Augusta from Germany. Neither of her sisters was listed with an occupation in the directories. Augusta died in 1947, Anna in 1959 and Barbara in 1960. None of the four ever married." (Email to Gilbert Gia from Kathy A. O'Brien)

<sup>87</sup> His remains were interred at San Francisco City Cemetery.

<sup>88</sup> *Bakersfield Californian*, May 12, 1924

**trial may have broken the health of the man who dedicated his life to improving the health of the citizens of Kern County.”<sup>89</sup>**

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<sup>89</sup> Email to Gilbert Gia, 2009