

Carl William Besserer

Carl William Besserer was born in the newly formed *Adelsverein* community of New Braunfels in 1851. His parents immigrated from Germany the year before. At age 14, Besserer went to Germany to be educated, but returned to Central Texas upon completing his schooling. He settled in Austin in 1869. Like many of the German immigrants of that era, music was central to Besserer's culture, and he found a dearth of musical opportunities in the Capitol city. Identifying a need, Besserer opened a music store and began giving lessons.

A talented pianist, Besserer taught a few local boys to play a variety of instruments, and formed a band and an orchestra. As their skill increased, Besserer's band and orchestra became locally celebrated, and it wasn't long before they began touring statewide. Besserer's Orchestra played at governors' inaugurations, during presidential visits, when troops were sent off to war, and when they came back for burial. Besserer also directed a state military band.

In 1873, Besserer married the daughter of August Scholz, who ran a popular *biergarten* in Austin. Scholz's Garden boasted of being the "Most Popular Pleasure Resort in Austin," and offered a free concert every Sunday evening during the summer. In 1879, mirroring a tradition pervasive in Germany and in German communities in Central Texas, Besserer helped found the Austin *Saengerrunde*, or singing society. These groups of singers celebrated their traditions and culture by meeting in a public place and singing songs passed down generation after generation.

Besserer took over management of Scholz's Garden in 1885, and in addition to the regular *Saengerrunde* events, he brought in entertainment such as the Tyroleans, a group who performed English-language and German songs there four times per week. The German Theater continued to present plays in Scholz's Hall, often accompanied with fireworks and balloon ascensions. Besserer and his wife Mary became owners of the hall when August Scholz died in 1891, but sold it two years later.

The Austin *Saengerrunde* still meets regularly in Scholz's Garden at the time of this writing.

