



# SOCIETY FOR GERMAN-AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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## IN THIS ISSUE

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2018 SYMPOSIUM CALL  
FOR PAPERS

OUTSTANDING  
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

NEW OFFICERS

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### A Problem with Anniversaries

At the 2017 Annual Symposium in Philadelphia, we recalled the onset of the Reformation with Martin Luther's posting of theses for debate in Wittenberg on 31 October 1517. For us of German extraction or sympathies, "seventeen" is crowded, since 1917 looms as the year in which the Congress of the United States declared war on the German Empire for its launching of unrestricted submarine warfare on the trade routes to Britain. Our memory of the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915 looks dubious today because we now know it was in fact carrying munitions for the British war effort. Still, it was only in 1918 that American soldiers arrived in France in sufficient force to be used in actual fighting. The casualties were horrendous for such a brief time in action. If they had not "gone over there," there would have been either a German victory or a war almost without end.

So we recall the beginning of "the Great War," with its greater (perhaps inevitable) aftermath, World War II, at our coming Symposium in April, in Indianapolis. It was, of course, a time of serious trial for the German Americans living in North America. In Missouri, where I have lived since 1970, the "other Missouri," which had favored the South and its central institution, slavery, regarded the Germans in their midst for having briefly applied violence to deprive them of their God-given domination. This had been the result of a federally-sponsored coup in 1861 led by Frank Blair, Nathaniel Lyon, Franz Sigel, and Heinrich Börnstein. "Radical Missouri," however, did not last long after the end of hostilities, despite the efforts of Carl Schurz to preserve it.



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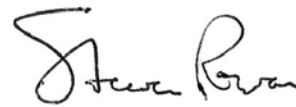
My wife's father, who was born in Spokane, Washington, in 1900, recalled clearly that he went early one day to his Catholic school to retrieve the German Imperial flag from a classroom exhibit when war was declared, and that his father told him they would now speak only English. No more mockingly singing "Deutschland, Deutschland, über Allies" in school.

My own attachment to Germany was largely a matter of enjoying the language and its culture, but there were some traces of personal connection as well. My great-grandmother, Alice Fair (originally Fehr), descended from a mercenary of the Braunschweiger Corps who surrendered at Saratoga and decided to stay in America after release. Alas, this was not enough to make my daughter a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. My great-grandfather, James Harvey Rowan (the same name as my father), was in a largely German regiment, the 115th Pennsylvania, in the Civil War, serving in several memorable battles, including Gettysburg and the Battle of the Wilderness. He would thrive as a farmer in Punxsutawny and have over a dozen children. German was just part of the cultural ambiance in Jefferson County in western Pennsylvania.

As we all know, the brief attempt of President Wilson to enter "the big show" did not really work. Today there are

many who would prefer William Jennings Bryan, the US Secretary of State who resigned in protest against entering the European war. The impact of war fever accelerated the assimilation of German immigrants into the mass of English-speaking America, but it is important to look back on this process with an awareness of what was lost. It is no accident that the early 1920s saw the introduction of national-origin quotas for immigrants, aimed specifically not at Germans but at Italians and Eastern Europeans. This would deprive America of a rich harvest of talent and energy, not least of all including persecuted Jews. The changing definition of America through immigration was only revived in the last few decades, and the fight over what an American might be continues.

Tschüß!



Steven Rowan, PhD  
Professor of History, University of Missouri-St. Louis

## 2018 SYMPOSIUM CALL FOR PAPERS

The Society for German-American Studies will hold its 42nd Annual Symposium in Indianapolis, Indiana, 19-21 April 2018.

Theme: "World War I and Its Repercussions for German America: A Centennial Assessment"

The First World War was an event that changed the course of history. Its effect was global, but arguably no group felt its impact more than the German Americans. Though many publications have appeared, conferences have been held, and lectures have been given, it nevertheless seems appropriate now, at the centennial anniversary of the War's end, to look back once again on its consequences for the group our Society takes as its focal point.

However, as is our tradition, we also accept proposals dealing with other aspects of German-American studies, including the history, language, literature, society, and culture of immigrants from German-speaking areas of Europe as they established themselves in and interacted with the situation and the people of their new homeland, as well as comparative topics with a German-American component. Membership in the Society for German-American Studies is required to participate in the Symposium.

Please submit to Cora Lee Kluge a one-page abstract of your proposed presentation, preferably in electronic form, by December 15, 2017. Include your paper title, your full name as you wish it to appear in the program, your email address, your complete mailing address, and your academic affiliation, if any.

Email address: Cora Lee Kluge ([clnollen@wisc.edu](mailto:clnollen@wisc.edu)). Please include SGAS in the subject line.  
Postal address: Cora Lee Kluge, VP Society for German-American Studies, 121 South Owen Drive, Madison, WI 53705

## WOLFGANG HELBICH RECEIVES OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

### LAUDATIO BY WALTER KAMPHOEFNER

It is with great pleasure and a considerable degree of personal indebtedness that I announce the winner of the 2017 SGAS Distinguished Achievement Award, Wolfgang Helbich. Wolfgang was a professor of North American History at Ruhr University Bochum from 1974 until his mandatory retirement in 2000. The German term *UNruhestand* might better describe Helbich's retirement, for it brought no end to his scholarly contributions. He and I have coedited three books since then, but this award was in no way a presidential mandate.

A native Berliner who witnessed the Russian occupation of Brandenburg as a ten-year old, Helbich embraced the old German tradition of *Wanderstudium*, with stops at the Free University in Berlin, Heidelberg, the Sorbonne, and last but not least, as a Fulbright Exchange Student at Princeton, where he earned a BA magna cum laude in 1958. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of Princeton, where Wolfgang absolved five graduate seminars taught by people of the caliber of Gordon Craig and Arthur Link and returned for postdoctoral research in 1964-66. To this day he is an active member of its German alumni association, and his desk and office always sported those distinctive orange and black Princeton school colors. Another of his America souvenirs was a big wall map of the U.S. marked with all the routes he had traveled from coast to coast.

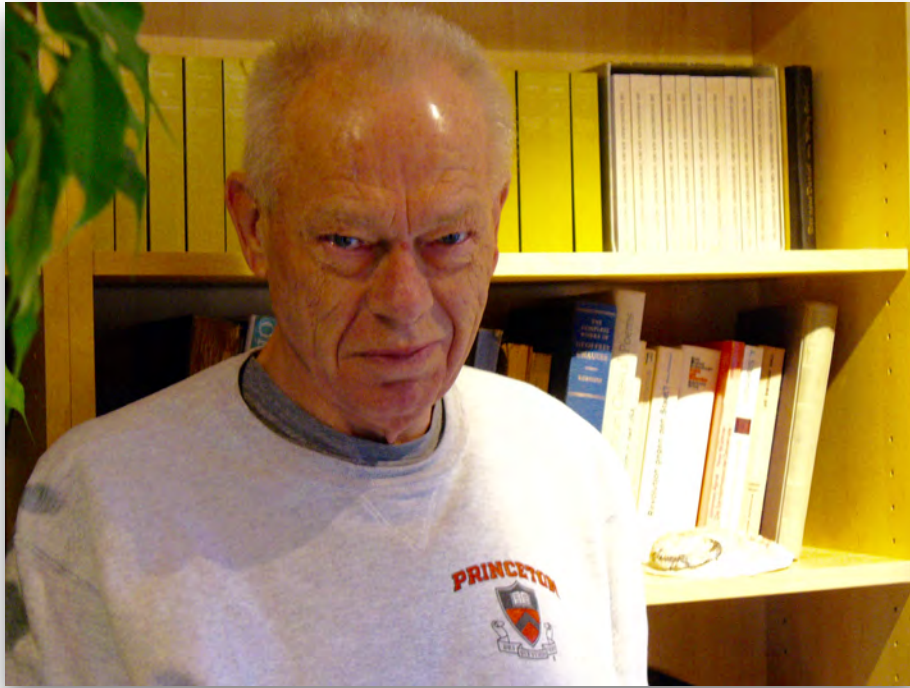
Wolfgang wasted no time upon his return to Germany. By 1962 he had earned his doctorate in Berlin on the subject of German reparations. That same year, he became an assistant professor, and in 1969 an associate professor of American Studies at the University of Heidelberg. But in 1974 he left the idylls of the Neckar Valley for a full professorship in the concrete bunkers of Bochum.

I can safely say that I would not be where I am today had it not been for Wolfgang Helbich. We first met circa 1980 because of the Scheben collection of some 500 immigrant letters, done in the 1930s, which each of us had independently discovered and photocopied but had temporarily put aside. Although I was only a postdoctoral researcher in Muenster with uncertain job

prospects and he was an established professor, he offered me the opportunity for what has proven to be a very productive collaboration that has lasted to this day.

Thanks to Helbich's grantsmanship and public relations skills, the Volkswagen Foundation provided six years of funding to the tune of more than a half million Deutschmarks for the collecting and editing of German immigrant letters; I merely provided the "North American scholarly cooperation," which the VW grant guidelines recommended. The end result was the largest collection of German immigrant letters anywhere, and possibly the largest from any ethnic group. Although he also contacted archives, Helbich's main strategy was to write an appeal to private individuals, which was published by seventy or so regional newspapers in Germany. Then he "picked the raisins" out of the first batch of letters he received, and composed a full page article that ran on the back page of *Die Zeit*, again appealing to holders of letters. Later he achieved a similar coup with *Hör Zu!*, the German TV guide, thus covering both ends of the social spectrum. With Bochum unwilling to continue supporting the letter collection after Helbich's retirement, and with his wife taking a professorship in Erfurt, he found a new home for the collection nearby at the Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, now under the name Nordamerika AuswandererBriefsammlung or NABS. Together with his wife, Ursula Lehmkuhl, Helbich helped launch a follow-up project, supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, to extend the collection efforts to areas of the former GDR that were inaccessible before German reunification. This brought the tally of immigrant letters above the 10,000 mark, with many of them transcribed and all freely accessible to scholars.

Helbich has also made many of these immigrant letters available in publications, the first of which were two paperback collections of thematic excerpts from letters published in 1985 and 1988. More ambitious were two large anthologies of letters we published together, (one of them with a third coeditor, doctoral student Ulrike Sommer). The first of these two presented a typical cross-section of German immigration from the 1830s to the 1930s; the second was restricted to the era and topic of



Wolfgang Helbich

the American Civil War. We followed the same strategy with both letter editions: first publishing in the original German, and only thereafter doing an English version. This required me to write my introductory material in German, and when I got my first drafts back, the pages looked like they were bleeding to death from all the red marks of Wolfgang's corrections. That Helbich would correct my German is unsurprising, but it was a particular delight for him when he could occasionally catch an error in my English spelling or grammar. Ours was a productive collaboration, but not always easy. Those who read our Civil War anthology carefully may note that I give more credit to the idealism of "Yankee Dutchmen," whereas Helbich approached the question of soldier motivation with greater skepticism, perhaps borne of his experiences in twentieth century Europe. Our division of labor on the background research for our letter editions was largely determined by which archives and sources were located on our respective sides of the Atlantic, but not entirely. It was not I but Helbich who discovered, while working in the National Archives, that German was still used as the language of command in some Civil War ethnic regiments as late as 1863. Our English translations were funded by two large NEH grants, with me as principal investigator and Helbich as consultant, but nonetheless it was he who charmed German foundations such as the Thyssen Stiftung to obtain the required matching funds.

Both of these letter editions have been drawn upon repeatedly, helping to enrich textbooks, anthologies, and subsequent academic research on both sides of the Atlantic. Scholars across various disciplines, among them a number of SGAS members, have also profited from the unpublished letters in the collection. Although Helbich's extensive engagement with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien and the Gesellschaft für Kanadastudien precluded a heavy involvement with the SGAS, he was invited to present the keynote address at the 1987 Symposium held at the University of Kansas.

SGAS members are well aware of Helbich's work collecting and editing immigrant letters, but he has worn several other hats that are nearly as important to German-American Studies. His area of teaching and research was officially designated the history of North America, extending also beyond of the 49th parallel. He was a major force in Canadian Studies in Germany. On the side, he was a professional translator of some twenty books, mostly from English into German, among them works by Gordon Craig, David McCullough, a couple by Arthur Schlesinger, and last but not least, the two volume collection edited by Frank Trommler from the German American Tricentennial Conference held in Philadelphia. Helbich has served as an interpreter and translator between continents in a figurative as well as a literal sense. Along with Willi Paul Adams, he edited the *Directory of European Historians of North America*. He authored

an 80-page chapter on the teaching and research of U.S. history in Germany for the 5-volume *Guide to the Study of United States History Outside the U.S.* edited by Lewis Hanke, pointing up the huge disparity between the several hundred professors of German history in the United States versus the handful of professors of U.S. history in Germany. Drawing upon his American experiences, Helbich was an influential force pushing for restructuring of the German university. And he has continued to be an insightful but not uncritical observer and interpreter of American politics, occasionally in venues such as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. I still cite to my students an email he sent me at the outset of the Second Gulf War:

I spent two nights before 9/11 in an apartment on John Street, and Sept. 8-14 in a hotel at 42nd and 6th Ave, around the corner from the UN. Shock and Awe, yes (whoever invented that slogan?), but I flew home with the distinct fear of patriotic overreactions. For someone who spent so many of his best years—best standing for age and a value judgment—in the U.S., this is a very sad time, a little like my favorite uncle falling victim to heroin, joining Scientology and engaging in gang warfare all at the same time.

Real friends do not hesitate to speak the unvarnished truth as they see it. So I am most delighted to award our 2017 Outstanding Achievement Award to a dedicated friend of America and German-American Studies, Wolfgang Helbich.

Dear Mr. President, SGAS,

Dear members of the Society for German- American Studies,

I am not sure which should be coming first: my apologies for not having been with you in Philadelphia, or an expression of my gratitude for the Prize. I decided for the chronology.

Speaking of the same in a different sense, Walter Kamphoefner gave away my advanced age by mentioning I was ten when the Red Army liberated (and don't misread the verb as irony!) the unremarkable village in Brandenburg where my family stayed at the time. I've had a number of health problems collateral to my age, and I won't bother you with any details. Let me just say the other handicaps could have been overcome or ignored, but a serious, volatile and incalculable heart condition made my cardiologist warn me of what might turn out to be too great a risk.

With regard to the Outstanding Achievement Award, my first reaction was sheer surprise, and the second a question: do I deserve it? I dismissed that, figuring not the recipient has to make such a decision but the jury. And yet, in-between asking and dismissing, I had done some thinking, and I won't withhold the tentative results, if only to give the decision-makers the good feeling that they had been right. Walter Kamphoefner mentioned these points in his fine and flattering laudatio, but I would like to add a couple of aspects. When I decided to start the letters collection, there was no bandwagon to jump on, and no model, but historians (and several other disciplines) were only beginning to consider letters legitimate sources.

The other operation, and I also consider this a permanent bridge across the Atlantic: Princeton impressed me in ever so many ways (and I still love ever so many aspects of it), and one of them was the structure of its undergraduate teaching. I felt German university teaching in the humanities deplorable by comparison, and when the debate about the introduction of the Anglo-Saxon system of BA and MA in European universities began, I convinced two other department chairs - in Education and English—that instead of discussing the subject endlessly we should do something about it. First came a yearlong period of long and often repeated, painstaking and often painful conversations



with colleagues to win them over for the project of a trial run. Having defeated tradition, ignorance, and prejudice with a slim majority, we approached the university administration and the President (actually, *Rektor*) and found them more understanding and willing to support our application for the Land government's permission and especially funds, since the 5-year experimental project was quite expensive. We succeeded, and convinced a superb staff to begin implementation of the program. The first program year got off the ground in 1993, and Bochum University could proudly present its first dozen BAs three years later, when in most German universities it was still under debate or at best preparation.

I suppose you can understand that I feel a tiny bit proud of the letters collection and the BA/MA project. This was to be mainly a big THANK YOU mail, but I was vain enough to elaborate on the two achievements that make

me think I received the Award not undeservedly, from my own perspective, while I fully accept and respect the points Walter made in his kind laudatio as the objective and sympathetic outside view.

So let me conclude by expressing my heartfelt gratitude for the Award. I am happy to have received it. And I feel it is a great honor, and a welcome recognition of my work which has mostly consisted of treating topics combining North American and European history, and thereby, hopefully, building bridges of better understanding between the two continents.

Health permitting, I hope to see many of you, here or in the USA in the next few years.

Thanks again, and best wishes,  
Wolfgang

## MEMBERSHIP ELECTS NEW OFFICERS

### CORA LEE KLUGE, VICE PRESIDENT

Cora Lee Kluge (PhD, Stanford University) has been involved in German-American studies since her undergraduate years at the University of Kansas, where J. Anton Burzle, co-founder of KU's Max Kade Center and first editor of the SGAS's *Yearbook for German-American Studies*, was the German Department chair. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she taught German and German-American language, literature, and culture for many years, including an undergraduate course entitled "The German Immigration Experience." Using the enormous resources of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's libraries, she has published and lectured on a wide range of German-American topics, such as Friedrich Kapp's views on John Brown, the work of World War II German POWs on the Mississippi River Basin Model, and the Milwaukee German Theater. Her editions of long-forgotten literary texts include Christian Essellen's *Babylon and Other Witnesses: An Anthology of Literature of the German Americans, 1850-1914*.



### BÄRBEL SUCH, SECRETARY

Bärbel Such (PhD, University of Cincinnati) is Associate Professor of German at Ohio University in Athens, OH, where she teaches all levels of German in their undergraduate program. Besides German-American Studies, Bärbel's research interests lie in Holocaust and Exile Literature with a focus on German-Jewish author Alfred Gong. Bärbel has been a member of SGAS since 2007 and is looking forward to serving her second term as the Society's secretary.



## ACHIM KOPP, TREASURER

Achim Kopp (PhD, Heidelberg) first became interested in Pennsylvania German culture and language as an exchange student at Bucknell University in central Pennsylvania in 1985-86. A revised version of his dissertation entitled *The Phonology of Pennsylvania German English as Evidence of Language Maintenance and Shift* was published by Susquehanna University Press in 1999. In August 1997, Kopp joined the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, where he is currently Professor of Foreign Languages and Literatures. In 2008, he published Francis Lieber's *Brief and Practical German Grammar* with Peter Lang-Verlag in Frankfurt, Germany. Since 2004 he has been collaborating with his colleague in the Mercer History Department, Dr. John Thomas Scott, on a research and publication project on the Moravians in colonial Georgia. Kopp joined SGAS in 1994 and has been serving on the YGAS editorial board since 2005. He also completed two terms as the Society's treasurer between 2011 and 2015.



## JOSH BROWN, NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Josh Brown (PhD, Pennsylvania State University) is Associate Professor of German at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He attended Millersville University of Pennsylvania, Philipps-Universität in Marburg, and Penn State. He is a sociolinguist and linguistic anthropologist focusing on the interaction of language and identity, especially among Amish, Mennonites, Hutterites, and other immigrant groups. Brown is editor of *Transnational German Studies* at H-Net. He coedited *Pennsylvania Germans: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* published by Johns Hopkins. His academic webspace can be found at [www.joshuarbrown.com](http://www.joshuarbrown.com)



Please consider sharing an article that you have written or a story idea that you have for the newsletter. Send all correspondence to the editor:

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