



SOCIETY FOR GERMAN-AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

In this issue of the *Newsletter*, we look forward to our spring symposium in Madison, Wisconsin. Before SGAS comes to the Badger State, we want to share some aspects of the area in the next two issues. The bulk of this issue highlights the history and experiences of Wisconsin's German-Americans. Johannes Strohschänk, professor of German at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, is in the process of publishing a book on this topic and has written an overview for our newsletter.

We are also excited to share the publication of a new book by SGAS member Patrick Wolf-Farré. His work *Sprache und Selbstverständnis der Deutschchilenen. Eine sprachbiografische Analyse* shares the language situation among German-Chileans. The publication was supported by our Karl J. R. Arndt Publication Fund. Members of the Society, who are interested in pursuing SGAS funding opportunities, are encouraged to visit the website for more information.

We conclude this issue with a second call for papers for the 43rd Annual Symposium in Madison, Wisconsin.

All the best,

Josh Brown, PhD

Editor

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JOHANNES STROHSCHÄNK

While at the Congress of Vienna (1814-15) the European rulers set out to restore the old absolutist order, the genie was out of the bottle: Thanks to a burgeoning print media and a rapidly growing reading public, more and more people began to challenge their birth-imposed station in life as well as autocratic power, leading to widespread unrest met in turn with draconian police state measures. At the same time, ever steeper population growth destabilized not only the social order but also its economic base. The failed Revolution of 1848-9 was the inevitable result. Already long before, Germans were looking elsewhere—Pomerania, Russia, Brazil, Australia, or North America. Toward the middle of the 19th century, when localized population pressures grew unbearable, emigration became the safety valve that prevented a complete breakdown in the German states, just as—in a momentous coincidence—it provided human capital for exploiting the American west. The lure of freedom and prosperity enjoyed by a young and idealistic nation called the United States of America seemed irresistible—too enthusiastic were the letters from family members and friends who had made the plunge, too exciting the siren call of ship agents, too promising the reports in guide books. This powerful pull across the Atlantic, combined with increasing destitution at home, constitutes what one might call the perfect storm. And Wisconsin was ready.

Between 1848 and 1860 Wisconsin experienced the heaviest influx of German immigration to this country. Most newcomers first landed in New York. From there it was off to the western frontier where, as they had been told, land was cheap and harvests were bountiful. Up until the mid-1850s, the easiest way led through the Great Lakes, with Wisconsin a natural landing point. True, the travelers could already have disembarked on Michigan land, they could have continued their journey even further west to what would become Minnesota, gone south to Illinois, or over land to Iowa, but they knew that farming conditions in Wisconsin, enhanced by an abundant supply of wood and water and rolling, hilly terrain, better met their expectations. Once the railroads had stretched their tentacles to places like Chicago or Des Moines, the migratory stream shifted

south, but by then Wisconsin had become a full-fledged state, with its political and social institutions largely established. All considered, no other region in the United States reminded German settlers more of their old home than Wisconsin. In 1860, 18% of the total population (or roughly 124,000, as compared to 38,000 ten years earlier), consisted of native Germans (i.e. not counting their U.S.-born offspring). In Milwaukee the proportion reached 36%.

Certainly, there were throngs of Irish as well as northern Europeans who fled their famished and poverty-stricken homeland; nonetheless, it was predominantly Germans who crowded the docks in New York, the Hudson River steamers to Albany, the Erie Canal barges or the first primitive trains to Buffalo, and finally the lake paddlers to Sheboygan and Milwaukee. Initially mostly consisting of farmers from the southwest, the immigrant stream would eventually engulf Germans from all regions, from all cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds, from all classes and economic strata. This huge human infusion greatly influenced the development of Wisconsin. Prior to reaching statehood, its territory was considered to be undersettled, underdeveloped and its resources underutilized. By the time of the Germans' arrival, roughly half of Wisconsin's 35 million acres had been surveyed and made available for development. (fig. 1)

Using Jefferson's Congressional Township system, southern and southeastern Wisconsin were already systematically plotted out into rectangular grids of 36 square miles, each square mile subdivided again so that the land buyer could choose between multiples of 40 acres without having to hire a surveyor. Since most of the open land in the southeast had already been snatched up by Yankees, the Germans pushed northwest into the dense forests. Coming from traditions that venerated, indeed mythologized, the woods, they didn't mind too much. In fact, on a practical level they appreciated the fertility of the forest soil as well as the abundance of water and wood. True, it cost them endless hours to clear the land—one tree at a time—erect a shelter, and grow food. Often the promise of a quick first harvest still in the year of arrival proved overly optimistic, causing the



Figure 1

initial food supply to run out, just as winter showed its first grim signs of what was to be in store. But after hardscrabble beginnings, the settlers were soon engaged in age-old farming practices acquired from their ancestors while adding new skills imposed by the environment, such as building log structures, cutting cedar shingles, or splitting fence rails. As to the women's fate, we unfortunately have little documentation, but it is safe to say that they must have felt catapulted back into the Middle Ages when most of their waking hours were spent with primitive food preparation and gardening. Raising children was an afterthought, they would have to fend for themselves. In a few years, the growing farms provided not only sustenance but surplus to be sold at market. It helped that most immigrants, by natural selection, belonged to the younger generations. For the elders that at times decided to accompany their children, the voyage proved arduous at best and fatal at worst. To

build a new existence for one's family, to develop the physical infrastructure and social organization of a new community in the wilderness was not for the faint-hearted. Some later-born like to call them heroes. But heroes make choices. For the immigrants, however, once arrived, there was no point of return. It simply was a question of survival.

Of course, land, the primary resource Wisconsin had to offer, gave rise to other economic activities besides farming. Apart from food, it yielded raw materials such as lumber, stone, and iron, whose extraction required power generated by water mills. In return, merchants supplied the farmers, lumbermen, and miners with tools, implements, building materials, household items, clothing, and groceries such as coffee, tea, spices. On the other end of the economic spectrum we find the craftsmen and industrial manufacturers, many of German origin, concen-

trated in urban centers. Although financially strapped, Wisconsin's government set out to establish the framework for economic and social development. To facilitate the flow of trade, a transportation infrastructure needed to be built. Called 'internal improvements,' roads, bridges, tunnels, and soon rail lines (which would make most canals obsolete) began to crisscross the southern part of the state. City and town halls became the centers of local administration, courts were established to settle legal disputes. The provision that section 16 of each township be set aside to pay for public schools became the foundation of a free public education system.

All this was of great importance to the German immigrants even if they didn't realize it at first. While many were tired of the oppressive, rigid, and unresponsive government in their homeland, they had no experience in democratic traditions. It was thus easy for them to adopt the Anglo-American political and governmental system, a ready-made bed, as it were. Here, they enjoyed freedoms they only could have dreamed of back home—free fishing, free hunting, free wood, and, even more important, free religion and free education. Those who had rebelled against the old order now found themselves able to speak their minds and, also by way of public duty, become politically engaged without fear of retribution. That this involvement in the political affairs of the new homeland was possible after just one year of residence seemed almost too good to be true.

But how could the would-be emigrant back in Europe be made aware of these great attractions? Fortunately for the European immigrants, already in Wisconsin's infancy military scouts, scientists, and adventurers had been busy learning, writing, and publishing about the territory and its diverse resource base, and it wasn't long before many of their pamphlets, articles and books were translated and distributed throughout the German lands. Soon after, a veritable industry of travel and settling guides authored by German emigrants and travelers was flooding the book market (fig. 2). And then there were the personal letters.

In other words, those considering emigration had vast amounts of literature at their disposal before actually leaving their old home. Even the Wisconsin State Government established an Office of Emigration issuing pamphlets in order to inform and attract Europeans, especially Germans (fig. 3).

While European settlers were rushing to the frontier to secure for themselves and their offspring a stable and even profitable existence, we should not forget the Native Americans. Deprived of their home settlements and sprawling hunting areas, relegated to areas of inferior land, decimated by disease as well as armed struggle, corrupted by alcohol and trade goods of questionable value,

Allgemeine Auswanderungs-Zeitung.

Organ
für
Kunde aus deutschen Ansiedlungen,
für Rath und That
zu Gunsten der fortziehenden Brüder,
sowie für
Deffentlichkeit in Auswanderungs-
sachen überhaupt.

Erstes Semester.

N. 2.
Dienstag, 6. October 1846.

Unter Mitwirkung der Herren
Dr. Büttner, G. W. von Koss, G. F. Streckfuß
und anderer Autoritäten herausg. von G. Brodief.

Was thut noth?

Ein neuer Zeitpunkt scheint in Betreff der Beförderung von Auswanderern sich gestalten zu wollen, ein Zeitpunkt, in welchem das Princip der Menschliche Weltung sich verschaffen will. So wenigstens ist der Anschein, wenn man von der Mündung der Elbe und des Rheines von der Bildung von Gesellschaften befußt

wünschen vor allen Dingen eine klare Darstellung der Verpflichtungen gegen die Auswanderer, welche die neuen Unternehmungen sich auferlegen wollen, bevor wir uns veranlaßt sehen können, Worte des Beifalls niederzuschreiben. Und da die Stimme eines einflusslosen Privatmannes nicht weit zu dringen vermag, so fühlen wir uns berufen, einige aus langer Erfahrung geflossene Winke an die Behörden ergehen zu lassen, welche als Grundbedingungen

Figure 2

they have never fully recovered from their plight. At the same time it would be wrong, we believe, to accuse the Germans of directly having caused the Native Americans' decline. When the Germans arrived in Wisconsin, most of the indigenous population had already been pushed out of the territory/state, minimizing contact between them and the newcomers. In the perspective of the German settler, there simply was land waiting to be used 'more productively' by farmers than by hunters. At the same time, Germans tended to be infatuated with the American Indian—from a distance!—whom they naïvely viewed as the noble savage living in harmony with nature. It is impossible to completely absolve Wisconsin Germans from all responsibility; in fact, one might in hindsight indict them as guilty by association. Yet, after scrutinizing their letters, diaries, and other writings, we

may say with some conviction that the majority of German immigrants to Wisconsin—like those to the United States, in general—were not explicitly conscious of contributing to the demise of an indigenous culture.

The fact that the Germans in Wisconsin were able to preserve much of their native culture while blending almost seamlessly into an Anglo-American environment is their greatest achievement. Still, this process would not always unfold harmoniously. There were frictions, there was ill will—over Sabbath rules, over alcohol, over religion, over language—but in the long run these obstacles were overcome, resulting in a state that for much of its history combined the best of two worlds—Anglo-Saxon traditions of democratic government, of entrepreneurial spirit, of innovative risk, with Germanic values of industrious work, disciplined thrift, longterm land stewardship, thorough education, and strict separation of work and play.

As we look at Wisconsin's population today, we may expect the state to have, like many of its neighbors, absorbed its ethnic strands in 'melting-pot' fashion and emerge as an English-speaking society, steeped in an Anglo-American political and public life. The mere fact that, in the Federal Census of 2010, 45% of Wisconsin citizens claimed German heritage does not necessarily prove the opposite. However, not only can we still find some 10,000 families where German is spoken at home, churches where, at least on high holidays, mass is held in German, and a German immersion school in Milwaukee, but there are German elements in public life as well. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the State of Wisconsin, as a social, political, and cultural community, has been significantly shaped by its German element. While at first many of the German traditions, such as beer drinking, were frowned upon, if not downright vilified, they slowly but steadily worked their way into the social fabric of the state. It was German teachers who introduced their love for music and art in Wisconsin schools, planting the seeds for a thriving tradition of singing choirs that still involves thousands of young Wisconsinites every year, while instrumentalists started orchestras that have survived to the present, such as the Mil-

waukee Symphony. Germans in Milwaukee staged the first German language plays on the western frontier. Among the many German clubs and associations that enriched public life, it was the Turners—once a militant as-

sociation of students fighting for German independence and unification—who made physical exercise, accompanied by cultural curiosity and learning, an accepted staple for a well-rounded education, combining a healthy body with a healthy mind. New political ideas about organizing a burgeoning workers class, introduced by German socialists in Milwaukee, would shape much of the national political discourse around the turn of the 20th century. In fact, Milwaukee was arguably the only city in the world with a successful socialist government lasting half a century. In the educational realm, it was German academics and scientists who contributed to the establishment and growth of a state

university system including, in part at least, the Wisconsin Idea with its aim to share knowledge and expertise with the state's population at large. Finally, it was numerous German craftspeople and merchants whose skills contributed to the development of a strong industrial and commercial base in Wisconsin.

Although World War I dramatically reduced the outward visibility of German traditions in Wisconsin as elsewhere in the United States, they appear to have been absorbed without fanfare into daily life. While we acknowledge the popularity of beer, cheese, and brats, we can also emphasize the deep-seated German cultural traits—the ways of interacting with each other, of negotiating our environment in space and time, of raising our children—that characterize the people of Wisconsin today. *Heimat*, once a log cabin somewhere in the woods of Wisconsin, has evolved into entire neighborhoods, towns, and cities. By carrying the German *Heimat* concept into the 21st century and enriching it with the civic achievements of the Anglo-Saxons (and absorbing elements of other ethnic groups in the state as well), Wisconsin-Germans have gained the best of all worlds, a rich cultural tradition woven into a dense, colorful social fabric. It is this blend that characterizes the most German of all U.S. states today and will carry it into the future.



Figure 3

ARNDT PUBLICATION FUND BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT

Wolf-Farré, Patrick. 2017. *Sprache und Selbstverständnis der Deutschchilenen. Eine sprachbiografische Analyse*. Heidelberg: Winter. 194pp.

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ISBN: 978-3-8253-7726-7 (e-book)

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Part of the history of German(s) in the Americas is the German immigration to South America. Particularly the countries of the so called *Cono Sur*, the 'southern cone' (i.e., Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay), received a considerable number of German-speaking immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th century. And while the numbers were only a fraction of those who came to the U.S., their impact is to be noticed until today. Regions like the surroundings of Lake Llanquihue, towns like Osorno and Valdivia, and some parts of the capital Santiago strike the visitors as 'German' because of their architecture, shop signs and the surprisingly high number of cafés and bakeries selling *Kuchen*.

When dealing with (former) German-speaking minorities abroad, the usual perspective of Germanic Linguistics is that of the *Sprachinsel*, the language island. Yet many of these groups, such as the German-Chileans, do neither form isolated communities, nor do they use German as their language of daily communication. How can linguists get a sense of what role these minorities play in their surrounding society, and what role the German language and culture play within these groups nowadays?

Sprache und Selbstverständnis der Deutschchilenen adds an inductive analysis to a mostly deductive field of study. Quantitative analyses have forecasted the "death" of German in Chile for generations. As of yet, this hasn't happened: despite the decreasing numbers in the usage of German, the identification as German-Chilean re-

mains steady and Chile still has a large number of German schools that are popular amongst Chileans of any descent. To get a sense of the multifaceted roles language plays in this, this study analyzes the linguistic biographies of 51 German-Chilean speakers. The results show how qualitative analyses can give a deeper insight into the entanglement of language and identity and complement quantitative findings.



CALL FOR PAPERS

Society for German-American Studies

43rd Annual Symposium

**“German in America: Words, Sounds,
and Images”**

Madison, Wisconsin, 11-13 April 2019



A thematic focus of the Symposium will be on the diverse expressions of German culture in America, past and present. We invite presentations on topics related to this country’s German backgrounds in texts, music, and visual culture, as well in education, religion, politics, journalism, commerce, and other areas. Presentations that focus on more specifically linguistic topics, structural and sociolinguistic aspects of heritage varieties of German in America, for example, are also welcome.

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 for those who present at the Symposium.

Please submit to Cora Lee Kluge a 150-word abstract of your proposed presentation, preferably in electronic form, by 15 December 2018. 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. Please note that sessions are 90 minutes long and typically include three papers. Therefore, speakers should count on 30 minutes for their presentations, including time for discussion.

Email Cora Lee Kluge: clnollen@wisc.edu (please include SGAS in the subject line)

Further information at <https://sgas.org/symposium/>

The Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is the local co-sponsor of the 43rd Annual SGAS Symposium.

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