

# SOCIETY FOR GERMAN-AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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## IN THIS ISSUE

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

SYMPOSIUM CALL FOR PAPERS

GERMAN IMMIGRATION TO VIRGINIA

KARL PFLAUME: A MALCONTENT IMMIGRANT, PT. 2

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings, SGAS Members!

In this issue of our Society's newsletter we are pleased to feature an article by SGAS Vice President Marcel Rotter on German immigration to Virginia, the site of our 47th Annual Symposium, April 27–29, 2023. The specific location of Alexandria is very convenient for its proximity to Washington, DC, where we will enjoy a walking tour through the historic Penn Quarter on the afternoon of Saturday, April 29. This symposium will be the first time we will gather in the Eastern U.S. since 2017, when we enjoyed a wonderful event at the German Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

The focus theme of the symposium, "German-American Revolutionary Crossings," nicely evokes the importance of political conditions in motivating some German-speaking migrants to leave their European homeland for the Americas, where they and their descendants had, often for the first time, the opportunity to become involved in politics and government at all levels. To be sure, politics was not only a push factor in emigration from Europe; political ideas and events in the New World have had an impact in the other direction. The historical importance of politics in German-American public life features prominently in the second part of Karyl Rommelfanger's keynote address from our last symposium on Karl Pflaume, also featured in this newsletter.



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[SGAS.org](https://www.sgas.org)

Of course, as is our tradition, submissions to the Annual Symposium need not be centered to the focus theme. The diversity of topics represented in the program every year is always refreshing. Indeed, the “big tent” character of our field, whose subject matter spans so many historical eras, regions, cultures, and scholarly disciplines, is reflected every year in what we share with one another at the symposium.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Alexandria in April. In the meantime, I wish you and your families a restful and healthy holiday season *und einen guten Rutsch ins Neue Jahr!*

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Mark

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## CALL FOR PAPERS

47th Annual SGAS Symposium

Embassy Suites Hotel, Alexandria, Virginia

April 27-29, 2023

### German-American Revolutionary Crossings

When revolutions (most prominently in 1848/49) failed in the German-speaking lands, their disillusioned participants often fled to the Americas. While many attempted to realize their ideas in the New World, others settled for pursuing the American Dream. Earlier, the ideals of the American Revolution had a profound influence on revolutions in Germany and beyond.

**We invite proposals for presentations across disciplines on the influence of these ideas on both sides of the Atlantic. As is our tradition, we also accept proposals dealing with other aspects of German-American studies.** This year’s symposium will feature a Saturday afternoon walking tour of German-American traces in Washington, D.C. on April 28. This will be followed by the SGAS banquet on Saturday evening.

Membership in the Society for German-American Studies is required of those whose papers are presented. Jointly authored proposals are welcome, but only the names of authors who are present at the Symposium will be listed in the program.

Using the subject line “SGAS Symposium 2023,” please email to SGAS Vice President Marcel Rotter (mrotter@umw.edu) an abstract of your proposed presentation (not more than 250 words) as a Word document by **January 13, 2023**. The abstract should 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.

### SUPPORT for GRADUATE STUDENTS

**Five symposium grants of \$1,000** each will be available on a competitive basis to graduate students whose paper proposals have been accepted for presentation at the SGAS Annual Symposium.

You will find updates and additional information posted on the SGAS website: <https://sgas.org/symposium/>

# GERMAN IMMIGRATION TO VIRGINIA

## MARCEL ROTTER

Most of us are familiar with the fact that with the first permanent English settlers in Jamestown in 1607, Johannes Fleischer the Younger from Breslau arrived. He did not survive a year. German glassmakers followed suit in the fall of 1608. They are the earliest German immigrants to Virginia and SGAS held our 2008 symposium in Williamsburg in commemoration of these events.

Lesser well-known might be the 42 Siegerländer who came in 1714 as indentured servants for Lieutenant Governor Spotswood to the banks of the Rapidan River, which then constituted Britain's westernmost border. A second group from Kraichgau in Baden-Württemberg would follow three years later. After their service, this second German group moved on to lands in the Robinson River Valley (now Madison County) and founded Hebron Lutheran Church, the oldest continuously operating Lutheran church in America. The influence and enterprising spirit of these early German colonists helped shape the Virginia colony, our young nation, and indeed can be felt throughout our nation's history down to today.

Farther north in Washington, D.C., the influx of German immigrants became noticeable during the 19th century. Due to its proximity to the port of Baltimore, many German-speaking tradespeople settled in Washington's center, between the White House and the Capitol along 3rd to 10th streets. A particular density of German carpenters could be found around the Patent Office, now the National Portrait Gallery. Their services were needed by the thousands of patent applicants, as each application had to be accompanied by a wood model. Given the arduous journey the applicants from all over the country had to endure, it was not always feasible to travel with a fragile wood model. Another profession that figured prominently among German Americans in Washington was architecture. Two were of prominence, Adolf Cluss (b. 1825 in Heilbronn, d. 1905 in D.C.) and Adolph A. Weinman (b. 1870 near Karlsruhe, d. 1952 in Port Chester, N.Y.). Both designed public as well as residential buildings. In addition, Weinman was also a sculptor and medalist. He was a most favored artist



*Franklin School by Adolf Cluss*

among the designers of the Federal Triangle in the 1930's. In addition to "Destiny," the pediment he sculpted for the north side of the National Archives building, Weinman's architectural sculpture graces many significant spaces on the Post Office Department's 1934 neo-classical headquarters, now the Ariel J. Rios Federal Building. All follow the rather grandiose Beaux Arts style. Cluss, on the other hand, built mostly in red brick. His notable buildings include the Sumner and Franklin Schools (the latter now housing the Museum of the Word), the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building (the original National Museum), and the original Department of Agriculture Building.

During our Symposium in Alexandria, we will explore these and other traces of German Americans in the so-called Penn Quarter during a walking tour on Saturday afternoon. For those wishing to explore German-American D.C. beyond that, we will have a handout with a self-guided tour available that will let you explore other parts of town.

Since hotel and conference facilities are prohibitively high in D.C. itself, we will meet in Alexandria, VA, basically a suburb, which has great public transport into D.C.

Embassy Suites, our hotel, is located directly across from the Metro stop (two stops to Reagan National Airport, DCA) and the Amtrak station. In case you have to fly to the symposium, we recommend arriving at DCA. Dulles

International Airport, IAD, is 35 miles away from D.C. Even though a new metro line to IAD just opened, it would take an hour to get to Alexandria. For our international participants, it might be worthwhile to consider Baltimore as a destination. Flights from Germany to Baltimore are often considerably cheaper than to IAD. In addition, you can take the Amtrak train from the Baltimore airport directly to Alexandria. Useful links: [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com); Metro: <https://www.wmata.com>



National Archives Building with pediment by Adolf Weinman

## KARL PFLAUME: A MALCONTENT IMMIGRANT

KARYL ROMMELFANGER

[Continued from the last issue]

Karl Pflaume immigrated to America in 1851, returning to Aschersleben (Saxony) to marry Amalie Hornung in 1854. The couple then returned to Wisconsin together, settling just a bit southwest of Manitowoc, where Pflaume had already established a small farm and built a frame house. They quickly got to know some of the movers and shakers in the combination German and Yankee settlement, including Karl Roeser, publisher of the German newspaper, *Wisconsin Demokrat*.

Pflaume enjoyed some success in farming. But having a degree in agriculture from the University of Jena did not prepare him in any way for the hardscrabble life of a farmer in “der Busch,” the term Germans used for heavily forested Manitowoc County.

Active in the 1848 German Revolution, Pflaume’s interest turned to politics in his new country. He quickly joined the new Republican Party and is one of two men appointed to be delegates to the Republican Congressional Convention in Waupun. Later that fall he was met with “great applause” as he addressed the Manitowoc County Republicans.

In the spring of 1855 Karl Pflaume once again entered the political scene when he ran for township supervisor and won. The unwelcome reward of this new position, he wrote, was that part of the population would be unhappy, perhaps because of decisions town supervisors made about roads and bridges, their primary duty, according to Pflaume.

That same spring, newspaper editor Karl Roeser was nominated to be the Republican candidate for

Wisconsin State Treasurer. In the final tally, Roeser lost to his democratic opponent, German Charles Kühn, also from the Manitowoc area. But Roeser’s candidacy raised the ire of the *Manitowoc Herald* editor who disliked his “uncompromising manner” and his pledge to disobey any temperance law. The *Herald* editor vowed to begin publication of an opposing German newspaper and so the first issue of the *Nordwesten* appeared in the fall of 1855.

Meanwhile, Karl Roeser suggested that Pflaume start an agricultural newspaper. Suspicious of his motives, however, Pflaume initially declined, but soon he changed his mind and with financial help from supporters took on the job as editor of *Der Buschbauer* (The Bush Farmer) in the fall of 1856. One Manitowoc newspaper described *Der Buschbauer* as a campaign paper for presidential candidate John C. Fremont. The paper further praised Pflaume for his enterprise, while Pflaume complained that his “newspaper brings nothing but work.”



Der Buschbauer edited by Pflaume

Keeping his political ambitions alive, Pflaume decided to run for Clerk of the Board of Supervisors of Manitowoc County in 1856. In the first caucus ballot, Roeser beat Pflaume by one vote with three other candidates being eliminated. In the second vote, however, Pflaume beat Roeser by two votes to become the nominee. The *Manitowoc Tribune* writes: “[Pflaume’s] capacity, energy and perseverance are known to most of our readers; and he is a sound thoroughgoing Republican, and an enthusiastic lover of Liberty.”

Throwing a wrench into the situation, Roeser refused to allow his name to be removed from the ballot. He then disparaged Pflaume’s English language skills and derided him as a “bush farmer.” Roeser maintained that he will stand back from the nomination if Pflaume did the same, but Pflaume refused. Ultimately the Democratic nominee won the election, but Pflaume beat Roeser by over 800 votes, a major humiliation for him. The negative experience soured Pflaume on running for office again. He wrote that “corruption and treachery have become so prominent, it is as if impudent whores are carrying out their service in broad daylight on village streets...unless a person uses dishonest methods, he cannot win.”

Nonetheless, Pflaume did campaign for the Republican presidential candidate John C. Fremont in the 1856 election. In the final vote tally, Democratic presidential candidate James Buchanan won Manitowoc County, but the Township of Manitowoc, where a significant number of German immigrants had settled, voted for Fremont. It was a hotly contested election; the *Manitowoc Tribune* reported that a Mr. Evans had been “seriously injured by a gang of unauthorized poll watchers” and that other citizens had been driven away from the polls.

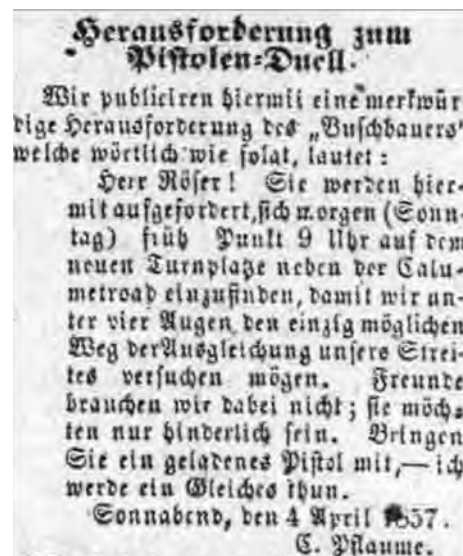
In a November 1856 letter, Pflaume revealed some ambivalent thoughts about America and the reader senses tinges of disillusionment creeping into Pflaume’s world. With heavy immigration locally, he battled squatters on his land and complained, “if it gets to be too much, we could actually think of emigrating.” He went on to write about the toil involved in establishing a farm in the new country: “America is more of a paradise for the speculator who has grown up doing hard work, but it is hell for the so-called educated man...And yet America is a grand country and a blessing to the world.”

In an October 1856 letter, Amalie Pflaume wrote that four families from the Aschersleben area had arrived in

Manitowoc. She noted that Mr. Stock, although initially not enamored with his new homeland, changed his opinion after easily finding a job in a local sawmill. The Biedermanns, however, were having problems adjusting and the Judenhahns were already talking about returning to Germany. Amalie also heard that old Mr. Carus from Halberstadt made a second visit to the village to persuade his son to return to Germany. Yet another German immigrant, a Mr. Gutenhahn, had been desperately begging for money to return. Eventually, Amalie writes, “old Mr. Carus” loaned him the needed funds.

Beginning in November 1856, Karl Pflaume’s life begins to turn to a darker side. A dispute arose between Pflaume and fellow German William Bach, a banker in the village, over a pile of wood that Bach had contracted to purchase. Bach claimed in *Wisconsin Demokrat* that the wood was of poor quality and that the trip to Pflaume’s farm was so difficult that it had endangered both him and his team of horses. This angered Pflaume so much that he journeyed to the village and caned Mr. Bach.

This prompted newspaper editor Karl Roeser to follow up with four weeks of personal insults and vitriol against Pflaume, including several mocking poems by Valentin Wintermeyer, a neighbor with whom Pflaume had never had a good relationship. Simultaneously, Pflaume announced that his newspaper would cease publication after 22 issues, which resulted in further negative commentary in *Wisconsin Demokrat* including a mocking poem *Leichenrede an den “Buschbauer”* (funeral oration to the *Buschbauer*).



Challenge to a duel from Pflaume

Enflamed and insulted, Pflaume challenged Roeser to a duel. It was to take place on April 5, 1857, at 9 a.m. on the Calumet Road by the Turner Grounds. Roeser did not take Pflaume up on the challenge.

The following September three well-respected men of the village, one of them Richard Klingholz, the publisher of *Der Buschbauer*, showed up at Roeser's house and he invited them in. They carried with them an article they had written in response to what they felt had been some blasphemous allegations made by Roeser in a recent edition. They asked that Roeser print the response, and when he refused, Klingholz took his walking stick and caned him. Roeser wrote: "Richard Klingholz...hit me with his cane three or four times, all this in my living room in the presence of my ailing wife." Roeser suggested that he would have repaid the deed, had a gun been handy.

After the dissolution of the *Buschbauer*, Pflaume freely admitted that nothing had been gained monetarily from the newspaper venture and a lot of work on the farm had

been neglected. He conceded that he spent too much time idling around the village and bemoaned the fact that his position among fellow Republicans had deteriorated. It is clear that social relations crumbled as well. Pflaume wrote: "What we miss most of all is sociability. We certainly still have contact with a few families, but it can be weeks or even months before we speak to each other."

Pflaume was still trying to find his real calling in life. He read and wrote voraciously and, in his letters, toyed with ideas of land speculation, studying veterinary science, and just finding work in the village. But the Pflaumes finally made the ultimate decision to return to their homeland. He wrote, "It was folly to come to Amerika, born partly out of my own stubbornness and partly out of my debility" [Oct. 18, 1858]. However, the prospects of returning to Germany were wiped away by the beginning of a global depression.

Thwarted, Pflaume began to write a treatise on American agriculture, which, when it was finally published in 1866, was titled *Einleitung zur Kenntnis der Nordamerikanischen Landwirtschaft - zunächst für Auswanderer* (An Introduction to American Agriculture, Especially for Immigrants). At the same time, he also composed a fictional piece, *Im Urwalde*, which mirrored his own experiences in the Wisconsin woodlands.

Pflaume was reinvigorated in his agricultural pursuits. In 1857, he was part of a group that founded the Manitowoc County Agricultural Society, and Pflaume was elected the 2nd Vice President. The organization resolved to sponsor an "annual cattle show and fair" and they agreed to a county fair and set the dates as October 3rd and 4th, 1859.

The fair was heavily covered in the local newspapers, both before and after the event. When it was all over the *Manitowoc Tribune* called it "a most decided success." *Wisconsins Demokrat* also praised the first county fair, writing that one attendee estimated the crowd attendance for the two days to be between 5,000-6,000. J.W. Hoyt, head of the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, who spoke in English, and Karl Hottelmann, a local brewer who spoke in German, were the invited speakers.

Karl Pflaume attended the fair with his five-year-old daughter and later in the month wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Kriminalzeitung*, a popular journal among the local German population. His letter is an insightful, professionally written critique of the fair in



Manitowoc County Fair announcement

which he opined that Hoyt painted too rosy a picture of American agriculture while Hottelmann was far too critical. Pflaume summed up the two speeches by suggesting that neither speaker had any idea what it was like to be a dirt farmer in the forests of Manitowoc County.

When the news of the Pflaume's editorial hit Manitowoc about a month later, Hottelmann refuted the criticism in the December 2nd edition of *Wisconsin Demokrat*. Pflaume replied in the *Nordwesten* and so began a month long back-and-forth exchange, apparently rife with personal insults. By February, the *Nordwesten* notified its readers that it would no longer publish any letters containing personal attacks and name-calling.

On January 6, 1860, Pflaume and Roeser coincidentally passed each other in the village and Pflaume spit in Roeser's face, then proceeded to cane him, causing personal injury. Roeser immediately had the farmer arrested and Pflaume had to pay a \$30 fine plus court costs. Roeser then filed a personal injury lawsuit and won the suit in the amount of over \$200, a heavy fine for the time period and one that Pflaume likely could not pay.

As troubles mounted for the Pflaume familie, Amalie wrote home in great distress. "Oh, what we have endured in these six years and who knows what more we will have to undergo." She assured her parents that they will return to Germany soon, even if they have to just walk away from their farm – but the economic depression continued for three more years.

During their stay in Wisconsin, Amalie had given birth to six children, but only two, Minne and Karl, survived. In preparation for their return to Germany, Pflaume exhumed his deceased children and moved them to the city cemetery where they remain today.

The Pflaume family is just one of many German

immigrant families who eventually returned to their homeland; no statistics exist to reveal how many made a similar return. For Pflaume there were certainly mixed feelings, as he revealed in an essay, *Rückwanderung aus Amerika* (The Return Trip from America), published in Otto Janke's *Deutsche Wochenschrift*. Pflaume wrote:

"A number of neighbors who had helped us load up our farm wagon said their goodbyes. The wagon, packed with boxes and crates, rolled through the clearing and we followed on foot. As we reached the top of the little hill opposite the farmhouse, we stopped and looked over our former farm – the acreage, the meadow, the creek whose water was so clear and was called Silver Creek, the forest, and over there on the other rise - in the middle of a grassy carpet - the friendly white house in which I had lived for eleven years, at first by myself, and then with my wife whom I had brought from Germany, and then with the children she bore."

In writing, Karl Pflaume appears to have found his true calling. In addition to his agricultural book, Pflaume wrote a number of vignettes about his life in America. Probably his best-known work is a collection of fairy tales, simply titled *Märchenbuch*, which was published in 1870.

Karl Pflaume died in 1879 in Ascherleben at the age of 62. Nothing further is known about Amalie, Minne or, Karl Pflaume. However, a second son, Hermann Eberhardt Pflaume, born in 1869, was sent to live with his uncle, Hermann Otto Pflaume, upon the death of his father – both became noted German architects in Cologne.

Karl Roeser, the somewhat obnoxious German newspaper editor, took a job in the U.S. Treasury Department after Lincoln's election. Later he ran a long-standing German newspaper in Alexandria, Virginia.



Pflaume's drawing of his farm

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