

Society For German American Studies

Newsletter

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Liebe SGAS-Mitglieder,

I hope this newsletter finds you well wherever you might read it. The Winter 2024 issue has been dedicated to highlights from our last Symposium in Austin, TX. We hope you enjoy the varied themes and feel inspired to join us at the next Symposium in Milwaukee, WI, April 24-26, 2025.

The Society is in good standing: membership has been growing (forty-one new individual memberships, three new life memberships, one new institutional membership) over the last year, and the *Yearbook of German American Studies*, now openly accessible online, enjoys a remarkable popularity. Our *Yearbook* editor, William Keel, will tell you about an especially interesting case below.

I would like to use this opportunity to remind you of our project identifying notable collections of German American letters suited for digitization by the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C.: <https://forms.gle/XXxazXVGyU8DrAjWA>.

Look around in your regional libraries and local archives. Some librarians and archivists don't know German and might not recognize the significance of their German letter collections.

Mit besten Grüßen,

Marcel P. Rotter, SGAS President

****Amazing news** comes from *Journals at KU*: "'The Missouri Synod and Hitler's Germany,' by Kenneth C. Barnes in the 1989 volume of YGAS, is one of our hottest items! It's been downloaded almost 4,000 times this year (2024)."

In 1989, Barnes taught at Concordia University Chicago and initially presented a paper with that title at the 1989 SGAS Symposium in Chicago. Since then, Barnes had a long career as a Professor of History and Department Chair at the University of Central Arkansas before his recent retirement.

Call for Readers:

Migrant Connections: Mobile Lifeworlds in German American Letters

Are you fascinated by the stories of 19th century German emigrants to the U.S. and their correspondence with those who stayed in Europe? The "Migrant Connections" project, led by the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI), invites you to help uncover these histories by transcribing and studying their letters.

What is the project about?

Millions of German speakers migrated to the U.S. in the 19th century but maintained connections to their communities of origin through letters. While much research focuses on emigrants' perspectives, this digital project highlights the voices of those who stayed behind by collecting and transcribing letters sent from Germany to the United States. These letters reveal how individuals navigated the social, economic, and emotional challenges of migration.

How can you contribute?

We're looking for volunteers who can read 19th century German script and are interested in transcribing and enriching these letters with additional information. Sign up for free at Migrant Connections to access our online transcription platform. Detailed guides and support are available on the website, or you can contact us at contact@migrantconnections.org.

Join Us Today!

Help us preserve and explore these unique historical sources while connecting with a community dedicated to uncovering the past. Together, we can make these stories accessible for generations to come!

Symposium Highlight: The Flusche Colonies and Organized German Catholic Settlement in the United States, 1872-1930

Timothy G. Anderson is a historical



geographer with research interests in three main areas. First, much of his current research focuses on the historical settlement geography of the United States, especially with regard to the historical production of regional cultural landscapes and identities. Second, he is interested in the historical settlement geography of Ohio during the early National period, with an emphasis on sub-regional cultural landscape formation. Finally, he has a long-standing research interest involving the production of cultural landscapes associated with Germanic Diasporas, especially in North America and Europe.

Dr. Anderson presented his work in the SGAS Symposium 2024, "Auf den Spuren der Gebrüder Flusche: The

Flusche Colonies and Organized German Catholic Settlement in the United States, 1872-1930." He writes: "[I discuss] some preliminary findings regarding my investigation of the comparatively unexplored history of seven German Catholic communities in Iowa, Kansas, and Texas, whose foundations in the late nineteenth century can be traced to the actions of three siblings from the small village of Attendorn in southern Westphalia.

Acting as land agents and speculators, both independently and in the employ of railroads, the three brothers organized and influenced the establishment of seven communities and eight parishes expressly for German Catholic immigrants in four states (Iowa, Kansas, Texas, and Oklahoma) between 1872 and 1920. At the broadest scale, the actions of the Flusche brothers and the establishment of these immigrant communities can be contextualized as part of a large-scale trans-Atlantic migration of nearly seven million people from German-speaking regions of Europe to the United States between roughly 1820 and 1921.

Scholars of German immigration have documented the impacts of this mass migration on American society, including its effects on the country's ancestral composition, ethnic cultural ideals and folkways, and ethnic political

identities. At the local and regional scales, German immigrants played key roles in the production of highly distinctive ethnic cultural landscapes in large swaths of the Midwest, Great Plains, and Texas, and in localized rural “ethnic islands” and urban ethnic neighborhoods around the country (but concentrated in the Midwest). This research aims to shed light on the historical and spatial processes involved in the trans-Atlantic migration of a highly distinctive group of immigrants who came to the United States neither as members of a formal society or organization with top-down

control, nor as participants in the standard process of chain migration. Rather, preliminary research appears to indicate that religious confession (in this case, Roman Catholicism), in addition to German ethnicity, was the common denominator that drew these particular immigrants together in the Flusche brothers’ efforts to establish colonies for German immigrants."

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Student Profile: Fritz Kusch, University of Bremen



Fritz Kusch is a PhD candidate at the University of Bremen and a research associate at the University's research center "Global Dynamics of Social Policy." His PhD project traces the history and political influence of protectionist pressure groups in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Before coming to Bremen, Fritz studied modern history, Turkish studies, and political science in Freiburg, Istanbul, and Berlin.

Besides his PhD project, Fritz continues to investigate the longer history of the commemoration of Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben as a political symbol in Germany and the United States, which was already the topic of his MA thesis. At the SGAS Symposium in Austin, he presented a paper on the entangled history of two statues of Steuben unveiled in Washington and Potsdam in 1910 and 1911. Both statue projects grew out of German American political initiatives aiming to establish spaces of public commemoration of Steuben. Many German Americans not only revered the Prussian general as an accomplished general and an American hero of the Revolutionary War but also regarded him as a general symbol of German American achievements and prestige.

Symposium Highlight: Politics in the festive booklets of Bavarian-American Volkfest-Vereine: Bauernbälle in New York and the Bronx, 1928-1941

Alina Zeller is a Doctoral Fellow at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies. Below is a condensed version of her SGAS 2024 Symposium presentation.



My paper at the SGAS Symposium 2024 dealt with two collections of source material I gathered for my PhD project. I presented the political stances of the publishing groups in these sources. The associations responsible for these booklets were two *Volksfest-Vereine* (associations for folk festivals) from the wider New York city area. The *Bayerischer Volks-Fest-Verein von 1874* in New York (*Volksfestverein '74*) was founded in 1874 and the *Bayerischer Volksfest Verein* (Club Bavaria) in the Bronx (Club Bavaria) was formed no later than 1920.

Nineteen festive booklets or souvenir programs from 1928 to 1941 constitute the basis for this analysis. These booklets and programs include the program of event, club history, advertisements (also for further events), and text on anniversaries. Furthermore, they were used to raise money for the associations and their events through selling advertisements in booklets. The booklets or programs could be sold or given out for free mostly at the event they were dedicated to. The sources for this presentation are located at the New York Public Library at the Milstein Division. There are thirteen booklets by the *Volksfestverein '74* published in German between 1928 and 1941. Club Bavaria published 6 booklets between 1935 and 1940, also mainly in German with a few English contributions. For these it is documented that they were given out for free.

With this paper I wanted to shine a spotlight on Bavarian American festive associations as political actors during the rise of Nazi Germany. This is a period which has not yet received a lot of attention regarding festive associations. I wanted to answer the following two questions: How do the publications of the

Volksfestvereine engage with political developments? What are their intentions with their engagement?

Historical Context

The sources cover the period of Hitler's rise to power and the attack on Poland in September 1939, but do not cover the period of US entry into the conflict. It is important to know that German American community mainly survived the German American identity crisis of WWI in the bigger associations. *Vereine* (associations) took over the functions of community and kept German life alive. Leaders of German American organizations found multiple reasons why the anti-German climate after WWI hit them hard. One was the missing unity within the ethnic community. As a solution they proposed strong leadership, and this opened the organizations up for National Socialist (NS) conspiracy theories. Additionally, they became vulnerable to instrumentalization by the NS government. Between 1933 and 1945 the NS regime aimed for the German American associations to influence U.S. politics. The first institution to reach this goal were the Friends of the New Germany and then the *Amerikadeutsche Volksbund*. One of the centers of their activities was New York City. Multiple big events were organized there, like the first German National Congress in 1932 and the Nazi rally at Madison Square in 1939.

Findings

For this paper I focused on the analysis of the text included in the booklets and compared the issues addressed. From this analysis I could conclude the following findings, starting with the publications of the *Volksfestverein '74*. This association, or rather its president, Louis Wirth, chooses to comment on political developments quite freely, and as soon as they influence Germany, the German American community, or its associational life. Wirth deems them mentionable in the Chronicle of the last year. Aside from elaborating on past years' activities of the *Verein*, he even uses the booklet of the *Verein* as a platform for his, and maybe the *Verein's*, general political ideas. Wirth was the long-term president of the organization, and served at least 12 years as president and five years as honorary president. He was also the author of the main components of the publications and was presumably a major influence on the whole club.

In the publications of the years 1936 until 1939, Wirth's words are full of praise for the new strong leader in Germany. He depicts Hitler as a savior who will undo the

wrongs of the Treaty of Versailles, and who helped the New Germany to solve its economic problems and enlarge its territory. Additionally, another leader of the "Bayerntum" got to express his world view in the publication of the *Volksfestverein '74*. Dr. Ludwig Anton Ewald formed the United Bavarians in 1928. It was an umbrella organization for Bavarian American clubs in the wider New York area and had several thousand members. The publication of 1936 was dedicated to Ewald, because of his 65th birthday and 40th career anniversary. In this booklet we get to know about Ewald's gratitude toward Hitler for bringing the lost sheep of the homeland, German Americans, back to the big family of Germans. Concluding, Ewald shares Wirth's sentiments towards Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany. Therefore, the *Volksfestverein '74* comments heavily on international events, as well on the events influencing the German American population.

This stands in contrast with the booklets of the Club Bavaria. Its publication as well as its events claim to be unpolitical. The booklets are full of short humorous stories and caricatures of Bavarian village life. They aim for the demonstration of the Bavarian way of celebrating. But, in contrast to their claims, their publications convey their political world view. For example, there are jokes and commentary demonstrating their anti-Nazi resentments. By selecting the events they report on, the tone of the text Club Bavaria becomes political. They do it in a more subtle way and not as often as *Volksfestverein '74*, but they do nevertheless.

Next, I examine the audiences that the publications address. The booklets of the Club Bavaria are mainly written in German, but also in English. Articles in English slightly increase in number in the later years of publication. The Club Bavaria addresses its American audience directly and even extends its welcome to all visitors, race or belief aside. Club Bavaria stresses that they only want to spread happiness and that their farmers balls are only here to entertain with humor. They want to demonstrate their Bavarian-style celebration to German-speaking and English-speaking visitors. The audience can even become a part of it. In contrast to the Club Bavaria, we find the publication of the *Volksfestverein '74* lacking any English text. Except for advertisement, it is completely written in German.

The choices demonstrated so far reveal the intentions of the two associations. The *Volksfestverein '74* addresses the German-speaking audience and focuses intensely on the developments in Nazi Germany. They see Hitler and his ideology as a solution for the struggles of the German American community. Wirth, as

representative of the *Verein*, argued for the adaptation of NS understanding of *Volkstum*, or Germanness, to overcome the German American identity crisis after WWI. German American organizations, he writes, shall stand united against boycotts and false news against their community.

Club Bavaria wants to be unpolitical and to promote Bavarian-style festivities. With their claim to be unpolitical, they become political. Moreover, they even comment on major political developments and use humor to subtly express their world view. Furthermore, they aim to show the American audience their way to celebrate, which is itself a political act. In a humorous way, *Bauernbälle* reenact Bavarian village life, which contrasts with the militant behavior of the NS movement. They are promoting a different stereotype, which finally might help them convince the American audience that they are not a threat.

To summarize, both publications serve as a political platform. The booklets of the *Volksfestverein '74* speak until 1939 freely about their (or Wirth's) political proximity to NS understanding of *Volkstum*. Club Bavaria chooses to hide their political views behind humor and express it more carefully. In their booklet of 1940, they even explain that they as Bavarians choose to overlook difficult circumstances as long as they don't interfere with their fun. The *Volksfestverein '74* uses their platform to promote unity in the German American community. Club Bavaria uses theirs to locate themselves as mediators between the American and German American audiences and the Bavarian American community. Their festivities are a space for pleasure and overarching community. In conclusion, the instrumentalization of German American associations through the NS affected the *Volksfestverein '74*, whereas, based on these sources, it didn't affect Club Bavaria.

Recent Recipient of the SGAS **Karl J. R. Arndt Publication Fund:**

***Handbuch Deutsch als Fach- und Fremdsprache: Ein aktuelles
Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung***

Edited by: Michael Szurawitzki and Patrick Wolf-Farré

In the series De Gruyter Reference

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110690279>

Open Access

About the Book:

In recent years, interest in GFL has continued to grow around the globe. So far, however, not enough attention has been paid to the fact that people generally learn GFL for work, with specific professional focuses. This handbook is the first to accompany the increasing interest in German as a foreign language with a special focus on communication for specialist purposes.

The Karl J. R. Arndt Publication Fund

In 1983, as a part of the celebration of the tricentennial anniversary of German settlement in what is now the United States, the Executive Committee inaugurated a publication fund to honor Karl J. R. Arndt, a distinguished scholar in the field of German American Studies. Income from the fund is to be used to further one of the primary goals of the Society, the publication of scholarly research on the German element in the context of the culture and society of the Americas. The Arndt Fund provides publication subsidies as well as supplemental funding for the publication of the Society's *Yearbook*.

The 49th Annual Symposium for the Society for German Studies, April 24-26, 2025

The theme of the Symposium will be “German Americans in Print.” This broad theme invites discussion about German Americans as subjects and producers of print media.



The symposium venue is UWM's Downtown Conference Center (161 W Wisconsin Ave #6000, Milwaukee). The conference hotel is the Courtyard by Marriott Milwaukee Downtown.

For further information go to <https://sgas.org/symposium/>