

50<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium of  
**The Society for German American Studies**

“SGAS Symposium at 50, the US at 250:  
Reflections and Horizons”

March 19–21, 2026

**Columbus, Ohio**

**Organizing Committee**

Tim Anderson, Ohio University

Josh Brown, University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

**Venues**

Blackwell Inn and Pfahl Conference Center, 2110 Tuttle Park Pl, Columbus, Ohio

Schmidt’s Sausage Haus Restaurant, 240 E Kossuth St, Columbus, Ohio



## THURSDAY, MARCH 19

**8:30 a.m. Auglaize County bus tour** (meet in lobby of Blackwell Inn)

**5:00–7:00 p.m. Registration & reception** (Pavilion Room, Blackwell Inn)

## FRIDAY, MARCH 20

*Pfabl Conference Center*

**8:00 – 8:30 a.m. Registration** (outside Room 230)

**8:30 – 9:30 a.m. First Round of Concurrent Sessions**

### **Session I (Room 230) Politicians**

Moderator: Kathleen Condray

- David Zersen (Concordia University Texas), “A German American Embraces the Revolution”
- Ayla Gray (Washington University in St. Louis), “‘Reverence for the Mother Never Detracts from Love for the Bride’ — Richard Bartholdts’ Role in Shaping Public Opinions about National Identity and Loyalty During Anti-German Sentiments”

### **Session II (Room 240) German American Jews**

Moderator: Mark L. Loudon

- Barbara Becker–Cantarino (Ohio State University), “Swastika and Jim Crow: Ernst Moritz and Marianna Manasses’ Contribution to American Education in the Shadow of the Elites”
- Armin Langer (Congregation Shir Hadash Milwaukee), “From German Modernity to Reconstructionism: Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan’s Engagement with German American Jewish Ideals”

**10:00 – 11:00 a.m. Second Round of Concurrent Sessions**

### **Session III (Room 230) Civil War**

Moderator: Walter Kamphoefner

- Gregory Zieren (Austin Peay State University), “Friedrich Kapp: Unacknowledged German de Tocqueville for the U.S. Civil War Era”
- Kristen Anderson (Webster University), “With ‘manly heart and unwavering constancy’: German Americans and Civil War Commemoration in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century”

#### **Session IV (Room 240) Letters**

Moderator: Antje Petty

- Marcel Rotter (University of Mary Washington), “Machine Meets Manuscript: A Comparative Evaluation of AI Models for German Kurrent Script”
- Hans C. Boas and Joren Somers (The University of Texas at Austin), “Let the People of the Past Speak! Turning Migrant Letters of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century into Speech”

**11:30 – 1:00 p.m. SGAS Membership Meeting and Luncheon** (Pavilion Room, Blackwell Inn)

#### **1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Third Round of Concurrent Sessions**

#### **Session V (Room 230) The Future of German American Studies: Promoting Growth through Pedagogy, Recruiting, and Community Engagement**

- Bärbel Such (Ohio University), “German American Studies 2.0: New Models for Relevance, Reach, and Public Impact”
- Kathleen Condray (University of Arkansas at Fayetteville), “Connecting German American to the Local: Strategies for Engagement and Growth”
- Michael Rice (Middle Tennessee State University), “Rediscovering German America in Middle Tennessee: Regional Heritage as a Catalyst for Pedagogy, Recruitment, and Public Engagement”

#### **Session VI (Room 240) Linguistics**

Moderator: Bill Keel

- Ellen Jones Schoedler (The University of Texas at Austin), “Plattdeutsch in Texas: Investigating the Origins of Low German Speakers in the Texas German Belt”
- Joren Somers (The University of Texas at Austin), “Word Order Variation in Texas German Subclauses”

#### **3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Fourth Round of Concurrent Sessions**

#### **Session VII (Room 230) Organizations**

Moderator: Michael Rice

- William E. Petig (Stanford University), “Der Nationale Deutschamerikanische Lehrerbund: Its Origin and History”
- Thomas Stefaniuk (Florida Gulf Coast University), “German Americans and the Shaping of American Naturism and Conservation”

### **Session VIII (Room 240) Crossings**

Moderator: Josh Brown

- Antje Petty (University of Wisconsin–Madison), “Immigration in the Time of Cholera: ‘Death Ships’ and the German American Press”
- Randi Ramsden (University of Wisconsin–Madison), “‘Your affectionate friend Th. Heinrich’: A Case Study of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Return Migration through Transatlantic Correspondence”

## **SATURDAY, MARCH 21**

*Pfahl Conference Center*

### **9:00 – 10:30 a.m. Fifth Round of Concurrent Sessions**

#### **Session IX (Room 230) Identities**

Moderator: Bärbel Such

- Mark L. Loudon (University of Wisconsin–Madison), “‘Yankee Doodle’ in German America”
- Carol Strauss Sotiropoulos (Northern Michigan University), “Henriette Froelich: German American ‘Wannabe’”
- Nathan Bates (University of South Dakota), “Heidi Hampel and Oscar Howe: The Art of a German Dakotan Marriage”

#### **Session X (Room 240) Religion**

Moderator: Marcel Rotter

- Albert W. Spengler (University of Virginia), “Immanuel Lutheran: A History of a German Immigrant Church in Charlottesville, Virginia”
- Bradley Weiss (Indiana University Bloomington), “Two 19<sup>th</sup> Century Roadside Crosses in Clinton County, Illinois”
- Alexis Wilson (Claremont Graduate University), “Faith Under Suspicion: St. Paul’s Walther League in Wartime Fort Wayne, 1917–1920”

### **11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Sixth Round of Concurrent Sessions**

#### **Session XI (Room 230) Panel: Pennsylvania Germans and the American Experiment**

- Josh Brown (University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire), Patrick Donmoyer (Kutztown University), William Donner (Kutztown University), Mark L. Loudon (University of Wisconsin–Madison), Steven Nolt ( Elizabethtown College), Jennifer Schlegel (Kutztown University)

## **Session XII (Room 240) Places**

Moderator: William E. Petig

- Heiko Mühr (University of California Berkeley Library), “The Leopoldine Society in the Antebellum Midwest: Austrian Philanthropy, Catholic Colonization, and the Making of a German Ethnic Island in Southwestern Indiana”
- Courtland Ingraham (George Washington University), “German Albany: The Forgotten Story of German Americans in New York’s Capital Region”
- Walter D. Kamphoefner (Texas A&M University), “Missouri Germans: How Do They Fit In?”

**2:30–5:00 p.m. Walking tour** (meet at *The Book Loft of German Village* [an amazing, sprawling bookstore], 631 S. 3rd Street)

**6:00–9:00 p.m. Symposium Banquet and Presentation of Outstanding Achievement Award** (Schmidt’s Sausage Haus Restaurant, 240 E. Kossuth Street)

Outstanding Achievement Award recipient: Antje Petty

*Laudatio:* Mark L. Loudon

*Presentation:* “Tastes of Change: Acculturation in German American Cookbooks”

**With ‘manly heart and unwavering constancy’:  
German Americans and Civil War commemoration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century**

Kristen Anderson  
*Webster University*

After the Civil War, Americans—including German immigrants, many of whom fought in the war on the side of the North—participated in Civil War commemoration for a variety of reasons as the nation struggled to make sense of the large number of lives that had been lost. The goal of this study is to determine what role Civil War commemoration played in the German immigrant community, and what role the memory of their Civil War participation played in their construction of an identity as German Americans. Although it is not unusual for veterans to want to commemorate their war participation, German Americans also participated in Civil War commemoration for a number of reasons that were specific to their ethnic group and set their commemorative experience apart from that of the native-born.

First, participating in such commemorations was a way of demonstrating their Americanness to the native-born. By publicly remembering their participation in the war for the Union, they could remind their American fellow-citizens that they too had been loyal during the war and risked their lives for their adopted homeland. This should not be taken as an attempt to de-emphasize their immigrant status, however, because Civil War commemorations could also serve as venues to highlight Germanness, connecting German character, culture, and history with their Civil War service. Finally, participating in American Civil War commemorations could serve as a way of uniting German Americans across generations of migration. During the 1870s and 1880s as more veterans of the Franco-Prussian War migrated to the U.S., they frequently joined forces with German American Civil War veterans for Memorial Day and other Civil War commemorations. In return, the German Civil War veterans joined Franco-Prussian War veterans for their events. In both cases, these German American veterans maintained that their military commemoration was a sign of their loyalty and patriotism, and that they were united by a shared identity of having fought for the freedom and unity of their homelands, whether it was the mother country or their adopted land.

## **Heidi Hampel and Oscar Howe: the Art of a German–Dakotan Marriage**

Nathan Bates

*University of South Dakota*

Oscar Howe born as Mazuha Hokshina ("Trader Boy") is widely celebrated as one of the most innovative and widely recognized Native American artists in the United States. What is not as widely known is that Oscar married the German-born Adelheid (Heidi) Hampel after his military service during World War II, and the two enjoyed an apparently happy and productive life together, in which Heidi acted not only as his life partner, but also as his financial manager and most avid supporter, promoter, and advocate. Theirs was an inspirational account of a successful intercultural marriage with lessons for an increasingly diverse and globalized present. Oscar insisted until his death that his artistic style was not an outgrowth of European Cubism or American Abstract Expressionism, and Heidi supported him in this view. The works of Oscar Howe almost always depicted the stories and rituals of his people, the Yanktonai Dakota. Yet, it is intriguing that with his marriage to Heidi the German culture was a constant presence for well over half his lifetime. If influence is not the proper word in this context, then perhaps it is permissible to speak of a remarkable alliance of cultures; after all, the word Dakota means friend or ally. Heidi herself was a woman fascinated with the cultural production of her own German heritage. When she met Oscar, she was going to school to become a singer; all her life she was an avid reader of Thomas Mann and other German-speaking authors; and she wrote and even published about her husband's work and life through her own cultural lens. In this presentation, I wish to tell Heidi's side of the story in examining a partnership that rubs against the grain of Indianthusiasm in favor of an intercultural success story. This paper is part of a larger project attempting to determine how much German culture can be found in South Dakotan identity.

**Swastika and Jim Crow: Ernst Moritz and Marianne Manasses' Contribution to American Education in the Shadow of the Elites**

Barbara Becker-Cantarino

*Ohio State University*

My paper addresses the cultural and educational contribution of German-Jewish refugees to HBCUs in twentieth-century America. I am showcasing the efforts and tribulations of Ernst Moritz (1908 Pomerania - 1997 Durham, NC) and Marianne (1911 Breslau – 1984 Durham, NC) Manasse at *North Carolina College for Colored* [now: NC State College] from the 1930's into the 1980s). I was their colleague in the 1960s and besides personal acquaintance I am also drawing on their papers in the *Deutsche Exilarchiv*. This will highlight the work of unsung heroes who worked under existential threat, double discrimination and under the pressures of elite American education.

**Let the People of the Past Speak!**  
**Turning Migrant Letters of the 19th Century into Speech**

Hans C. Boas and Joren Somers  
*The University of Texas at Austin*

This paper reports on the ongoing activities and preliminary findings of a new research collaboration between the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C. and the Texas German Dialect Project at the University of Texas at Austin. The goal of the project “Let the People of the Past Speak! Turning Migrant Letters of the 19th Century into Speech” is to leverage written and oral sources and AI technology to reconstruct the voices and ideas of 19th-century German-speaking immigrants to Texas, thereby opening new opportunities for historical and linguistic research. This paper presents the organization, methodology, and data of a collaborative research project, which is funded through a grant from the Volkswagen Foundation and began on June 1, 2025.

This paper begins by presenting research questions such as: What did the dialects that the German-speaking immigrants brought to Texas in the 19th century sound like, and what topics did they discuss? To explore these questions, the project has started by focusing on immigration from the Northern Hessian area of Germany to Texas.

After this introduction, the paper discusses the organization of the research project. One part of the research team is providing handwritten letters from Hesse to America from the mid- to late 1800s, together with structured metadata (GHI Washington). The purpose of these materials is to provide a blueprint for how Hessian immigrants to the US may have spoken. A second part of the team is processing historical audio recordings from Hesse and training an AI system to produce data for a text-to-speech system capable of reading the 19th-century letters in a dialect reminiscent of the time ([Linguisticbits.de](https://linguisticbits.de), a subcontractor located in Germany). The third part of the team is providing handwritten sources from 19th-century Texas in a machine-readable format (UT Austin). These materials (a diary excerpt and memoir written by first-generation German–Texans, a variety of documents from an immigration company, and school board minutes from a German–Texan academy) serve as a basis for exploring the kinds of topics people discussed at the time. The paper concludes with a discussion of the broader implications of this exploratory research.

This project is groundbreaking in linguistic research in that we will take the language model developed from this procedure and evaluate it in relation to 20th-century Texas German recordings. For historical research, this approach to exploring language change and the communicative practices of ordinary people offers new ways to understand the history of migration and German-speaking diaspora communities worldwide. After reviewing the organization, workflow, and data used for the project, this talk will present our plans for creating a “dialect engine” that can read aloud historical 19th-century letters, using Northern Hessian as its first prototype.

## **Pennsylvania Germans and the American Experiment**

Josh Brown<sup>1</sup>, Patrick Donmoyer<sup>2</sup>, William W. Donner<sup>2</sup>, Mark L. Loudon<sup>3</sup>, Steven Nolt<sup>4</sup>, Jennifer Schlegel<sup>2</sup>

*University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire<sup>1</sup>, Kutztown University<sup>2</sup>, University of Wisconsin–Madison<sup>3</sup>, Elizabethtown College<sup>4</sup>*

Following the conference theme, this session will be a roundtable discussion of the Pennsylvania Germans in their relation to the Declaration of Independence and the 250 years that have followed. This session will include leading scholars of Pennsylvania German Studies. It will build upon sessions about Pennsylvania German Futures in previous annual meetings of SGAS in 2024 and 2025 and in a recent conference in November 2025 at Kutztown University. The dialogue will be exploratory and wide open. We are tentatively planning another conference in 2026 at Kutztown University to continue this theme of the Declaration of Independence and the 250 years since.

There is diversity among Pennsylvania Germans in terms of their religious affiliations, notably the “non-sectarian” “church” groups (mostly Lutheran and German Reformed) who historically are the great majority, and “sectarians” including Anabaptists such as Mennonites, Amish and Brethren, and others. Pennsylvania Germans are unlike many other immigrant groups in developing and maintaining a distinctive cultural identity and language for over two hundred years well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although there has been considerable erosion of the language, folklife practices and a distinctive ethnicity for the nonsectarian “Church” Pennsylvania Germans by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Old Order Mennonites and Amish have maintained a distinctive language and many of their traditional cultural practices into the present. There will be different interpretations of the importance of the Declaration and the following 250 years between these groups and among members within each of groups. This diversity itself might be seen as part of the Pennsylvania German experience.

Participants may focus on the participation of Pennsylvania Germans in the events leading to the Declaration, or the War of Independence, or the trajectories in Pennsylvania German lives over the past 250 years since the Declaration.

Some issues might include:

- Pennsylvania German attitudes toward the Declaration and independence from England. These issues might include the relations with other ethnic groups including English, Scots-Irish, Indigenous peoples, and Hessians, among others.
- Examinations of the manner in which Pennsylvania Germans participated in American life and the ideals of the Declaration during different periods over the past 250 years and how they continue to participate in American life.
- Examinations of the manner in which many people with Pennsylvania German backgrounds distanced themselves from their Pennsylvania German identity in embracing a broader American identity, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

There are important issues concerning whose interests were served by the Declaration of Independence and over the following 250 years. There could be examinations of how other ethnic groups fit into the American experiment and Pennsylvania Germans’ relations with other ethnic groups, including minority and marginal groups. There can be discussions of complex issues concerning what it means to be “Pennsylvania German” and what it means to be “American.” Other issues and topics will emerge from the session and as we hear from other sessions at the conference.

## **The Future of German American Studies: Promoting Growth through Pedagogy, Recruiting, and Community Engagement**

This proposed session consists of a joint panel of three papers that collectively address the future of German American Studies at this significant historical moment. While the field reflects on its past, it must also look ahead to strategies that ensure continued growth and relevance. The panel examines three interconnected areas essential to the discipline's future: integrating German American Studies into undergraduate curricula, recruiting students into the field, and engaging the broader public through outreach.

### **Connecting German American Studies to the Local**

Kathleen Condray

*University of Arkansas at Fayetteville*

This paper presents a series of tested pedagogical, recruitment, and outreach initiatives that have proven effective in cultivating student and community engagement.

**Pedagogy:** In one project, students use the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America* database to locate German American newspapers tied to cities of personal relevance, mapping their findings using Padlet. A second project introduces students to the experiences of German farmers in Arkansas, who discovered that cotton was king upon their arrival in the state. Students analyze excerpts from a contemporary German-language newspaper, learn about the importance of house gardens in this monocultural environment, and plant their own mini garden to take home.

**Recruitment:** Condray will share examples of materials created for recruitment such as postcards sent to students who studied German in high school encouraging them to continue their language learning journey, customized emails to existing students across disciplines to introduce DAAD opportunities at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and a day-long workshop for high school students from across the state.

**Outreach:** Finally, the paper discusses two community-centered events: an annual German history hike based on Friedrich Gerstäcker's antebellum writings on "Wild West" Arkansas and a collaboration with a local bank during the city-wide Falltoberfest, featuring a traditions tent designed to share regional German American history with the public.

### **Rediscovering German America in Middle Tennessee: Regional Heritage as a Catalyst for Pedagogy, Recruitment, and Public Engagement**

Michael Rice

*Middle Tennessee State University*

This paper highlights the often-overlooked German American cultural history of Middle Tennessee and demonstrates how reconnecting students and the public with regional German heritage can reinvigorate interest in the field. By foregrounding local histories, material culture, and community memory, the paper offers concrete strategies for integrating place-based German American Studies into teaching, recruitment, and outreach initiatives.

**Pedagogy:** This section presents interdisciplinary teaching practices that use Middle Tennessee’s oft forgotten German-American past as an entry point for student inquiry. Course modules could pair historical materials—such as nineteenth-century church records, letters, and local German-language cemetery inscriptions—with contemporary media, including GIS mapping tools, documentary clips, and interactive timelines. For projects, students could analyze how German migrants shaped regional religious, agricultural, and musical traditions and compare these histories with broader narratives of American immigration. Beyond the classroom, students might engage in experiential learning activities such as guided visits to German-founded communities in the region, archival workshops with local historical societies, and collaborative micro-projects that document German cultural survivals in foodways, crafts, and seasonal celebrations.

**Recruitment:** Rice argues that the recovery of local German American heritage provides fertile ground for student recruitment across multiple educational levels. For high school students currently studying German, place-based content that connects the language to their own region offers a compelling invitation to continue with German at the university level. For undergraduates majoring in complementary disciplines such as history, art history, and political science, the paper outlines strategies for positioning German American Studies as an avenue for investigating migration, identity formation, the loss of cultural pluralism, and regional history. Finally, for graduate students in public history, the paper highlights opportunities to incorporate German American sites, archives, and cultural landscapes of Middle Tennessee into thesis projects, digital exhibits, and community partnerships.

**Outreach:** This section proposes public-facing initiatives that make the region’s German American history accessible to both academic and non-academic audiences. Central among these is the creation of a digital database documenting German American cultural heritage in Middle Tennessee, including photographs, maps, oral histories, church records, and material artifacts. Such a resource supports local institutions while giving students hands-on experience in digital humanities and archival stewardship. Additional outreach models include partnering with community organizations to host German seasonal traditions (e.g., Advent customs, *Maifest*, harvest festivals, etc.), curating pop-up exhibits at local libraries or museums, and collaborating with German clubs, heritage groups, and regional historical societies to spotlight the enduring influence of German culture in Middle Tennessee.

**German American Studies 2.0:  
New Models for Relevance, Reach, and Public Impact**  
Bärbel Such  
*Ohio University*

The paper offers a practical framework for re-imagining German American Studies by proposing concrete strategies in the three interconnected areas central to the panel’s vision.

**Pedagogy:** This section outlines reimagined teaching models that position German American Studies as inherently interdisciplinary. These include adaptable “German America Across the Curriculum” modules designed for courses in U.S. history, migration studies, ethnic studies, musicology, and food studies, as well as digital-exhibit final projects using platforms such as Omeka or Scalar.

**Recruitment:** This section argues for broadening the narrative of German American Studies to better attract diverse students by reframing the field as part of migration and diversity studies. This includes highlighting understudied histories and developing certificates or micro-credentials that pair German American Studies with disciplines such as anthropology, business, environmental studies, genealogy, or public health.

**Outreach:** This section proposes models for making German American Studies more public-facing through sustained campus–community collaborations. Examples include community oral-history labs that invite the community to contribute stories, documents, and artifacts, as well as global digital outreach through TikTok or Instagram micro-lessons on German loanwords, German American inventors, and other cultural intersections.

**“Reverence for the Mother Never Detracts from Love for the Bride” –  
Richard Bartholdt’s Role in Shaping Public Opinions About National Identity and Loyalty  
During Anti-German Sentiments**

Ayla Gray

*Washington University in St. Louis*

For over two centuries, the United States has undoubtedly provided millions of immigrants with opportunities for a new and better life. However, the current political debates over birthright citizenship and dual citizenship offer us a valuable chance to also reflect on the challenges German-Americans once faced while living in a country they sought out in pursuit of liberty, opportunity, and equal rights. The questions of who qualifies as American and, more importantly, what it truly means to be ‘a good and loyal American’ have been debated throughout United States history. For German-Americans, these discussions were especially important in the first half of the 20th century, as xenophobia and mistrust were increasingly directed specifically at them.

German-born U.S. Congressman Richard Bartholdt, an American public figure with close ties to his birth country, recognized the malleability of national identity and publicly sought to challenge prevailing conceptions of Americanism. While his initiatives to promote inclusivity and support international peace have been commended, his reasoning is flawed by his own prejudices and personal circumstances. Analyzing his autobiography, *From Steerage to Congress* (1930), and his personal papers offers valuable insights into how he, as an immigrant, addressed issues of national identity, thereby emphasizing both the opportunities and the challenges faced by Americans of German descent. Furthermore, it enables us to acknowledge the enduring significance of complex subjects such as national identity and belonging, not only within the contemporary United States but also across different periods and national boundaries.

**German Albany: The Forgotten Story of German Americans in New York's Capital Region**  
Courtland Ingraham  
*George Washington University and Marymount University*

On November 14, 2024, a fire was reported at the Elijah Missionary Church, a 144-year-old church located in Albany, New York's South End neighborhood. As crews sorted through the rubble in search of what was salvageable, a forgotten piece of the Church's origin story was rediscovered: a time capsule from the congregation's opening in 1880. The contents of that time capsule revealed a rare example of preserved history from Albany's German community, what was once a thriving community that dominated several Albany neighborhoods in the nineteenth-century. The building itself was originally opened as Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church, a German congregation that was founded at a time where every ethnic community in Albany had at least one church of its own, delivering services in an immigrant community's native tongue. Contained in the time capsule were German language newspapers—a rare category of artifacts from a once-thriving local industry whose remains were all but eviscerated. The surprise beyond this find and the apparent rarity of its contents shed light on a larger proposition: that Albany's German community, once a thriving feature of Albany's ethnic landscape, had dissipated into a long-forgotten memory that left few traces behind.

As America's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday approaches, featuring America's "forgotten communities" is an effective means of using the milestone to share the stories of understudied communities. Albany's German American population is one of those communities and this presentation aims to identify some of the features of German American life in Albany, New York, while also comparing it to the more thriving and well-remembered German American communities who have thrived in the American Midwest and beyond.

## **Missouri Germans: How Do They Fit In?**

Walter D. Kamphoefner

*Texas A&M University*

This paper will place Missouri Germans in a nationwide context with other Germans, and a statewide context with other Missourians, with respect to their typicality or atypicality. It shows Missouri Germans as being rather typical in their settlement patterns of chain migration, and their quick adjustment to American cropping systems. They achieved a quick start thanks to Gottfried Duden's immigration promotion, and their numbers were in fourth place behind only New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, although by 1860 they had been surpassed also by Illinois and Wisconsin. In Missouri as in other slave states, at any given level of wealth they were much less likely to own slaves than their Anglo neighbors, because they largely rejected the Peculiar Institution. Not all Germans switched to the Republican Party with Lincoln's election, but Missouri Germans were among his strongest supporters along with the Illinois compatriots. This also translated into higher levels of Civil War recruitment, and a continuing strong allegiance to the Republican Party.

## German-American Reform Judaism and Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan's Critique

Armin Langer

*Congregation Shir Hadash in Milwaukee*

German-American Jews profoundly shaped the religious, institutional, and cultural development of American Judaism. Rooted in nineteenth-century German Reform and its American adaptations, this community championed rationalism, universal ethics, civic patriotism, and a modernized synagogue aesthetic. Yet it was precisely this German-American Jewish milieu that provided Lithuanian-born American rabbi Mordecai Kaplan (1881—1983) with both an intellectual foundation and a polemical foil for developing a program of a reconstruction of American Judaism for the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This paper examines the complicated relationship between German-American Reform Judaism and Kaplan's evolving thought through a close reading of Kaplan's major works — including *Judaism as a Civilization*, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, and his essays on Jewish peoplehood — where he engages directly with the values and legacy of German Jewry in the US. Kaplan both appreciated and sharply critiqued the German Reform tradition: he praised its rationalism, community organization, and commitment to ethical monotheism, but rejected what he saw as its over-assimilationist tendencies, its abandonment of Jewish peoplehood, and its discomfort with collective identity and ritual particularism.

By situating Kaplan's analysis of German Jews alongside the lived experience and institutional imprint of German-American Reform Jews in the United States, this project illuminates an underexplored tension at the heart of early twentieth-century American Judaism: how a movement rooted in German modernity became the ideological backdrop against which Kaplan's Reconstructionist program sought to redefine Jewish civilization. This study contributes to broader reflections on German-American religious influence and the evolving landscape of American Jewish identity as the United States approaches its 250th anniversary.

## **“Yankee Doodle” and German America**

Mark L. Loudon

*University of Wisconsin–Madison*

“Yankee Doodle” is among the most enduring folk cultural expressions of the ideals associated with the founding of the United States. As is the case for many folksongs, the origins of both the tune and the lyrics of “Yankee Doodle” are obscure, however it is known to have existed by the 1750s (Lemay 1976). Already by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, multiple poems had been set to the tune of “Yankee Doodle”; many others have been composed since. Most versions of the song evoke the Spirit of ’76 in some way, especially the ideal of liberty. Some are lighthearted, while others are more serious.

Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, several German and Pennsylvania Dutch poems set to “Yankee Doodle” were produced, six of which will be discussed in this presentation. The earliest known version is a German-language broadside titled “Ein Deutscher Yänky Dudel” that is dated from 1809 and discusses the mounting tensions between the young United States and Great Britain in the lead-up to the War of 1812. Another poem, “Bank Yankee-Dudel,” was written by a German immigrant publisher, Jakob Smith (Schmidt) in 1836, the theme of which is the so-called Bank War during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. Other German-language versions (likely) written by European migrants, including “Yankee Doodle eines amerikanisirten deutschen Zierbengels” (Yankee Doodle of an Americanized German dandy), which was published in 1849, satirize cultural and linguistic differences between German and Anglo Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There are three known renderings of “Yankee Doodle” in Pennsylvania Dutch, of which I will discuss two. The first, “Der Deitsh Yankee Doodle,” was produced during the 1876 presidential campaign and expressed support for Samuel J. Tilden, the Democratic candidate hoping to succeed the retiring Ulysses S. Grant, a Republican who was unpopular among the Pennsylvania Dutch. The second poem, the nearly identically titled “Der Deitsch Yankee Doodle,” was written by Harvey “Solly Hulsbuck” Miller (1871–1939) and published in 1904. Its content celebrates traditional Pennsylvania Dutch (food) culture and makes light of American politics in general.

The final poem to be discussed was composed by a Pennsylvania-born Mennonite, Samuel Ernst (1825–1909) and appeared in 1870 in a newspaper Ernst published, *The Acorn and Germ*. Titled “On the German Language” and following the metrical structure of “Yankee Doodle,” this poem was written in Pennsylvania High German and encouraged young Mennonites to appreciate the heritage of the German language and to keep using it despite the pressure to shift to English.

This presentation will analyze “Yankee Doodle”s in German and Pennsylvania Dutch against the backdrop of English-language versions from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and identify similarities between them, clearly demonstrating the shared American identity of their creators and consumers.

### **Reference**

Lemay, J. A. Leo. 1976. “The American Origins of ‘Yankee Doodle’,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 33: 435–464.

## **The Leopoldine Society in the Antebellum Midwest: Austrian philanthropy, Catholic Colonization, and the Making of a German Ethnic Island in Southwestern Indiana**

Heiko Mühr

*University of California Berkeley Library*

Large-scale German Catholic immigration to Dubois County, located in southern Indiana's hill country, began in 1836 with the arrival of twelve families from the small village of Pfaffenweiler, Baden, who settled near the county seat of Jasper. Two years later Joseph Kundek, a Croatian missionary priest, arrived to serve as pastor of Jasper's newly-founded St. Joseph Catholic Church, a small German-speaking congregation of about 50 families. Kundek had been recruited for the American mission field by the Leopoldinen-Stiftung im Kaisertume Österreich, an Austrian mission society. He subsequently became the chief architect of Dubois County's transformation into a large rural German Catholic ethnic island.

In 1829, Friedrich Rese, a Hanoverian priest and vicar general of the Diocese of Cincinnati, had convinced members of the Austrian episcopate to create a mission society that would shore up the work of the American Catholic church. Within a few years the Leopoldine Society evolved into an important support network for needy American Catholic prelates and their impoverished dioceses. Thousands from across the Habsburg Empire contributed to the society, gave alms, took part in local chapter meetings, and prayed regularly for the American missions. The emigration of large numbers of German-speaking Catholics to the United States more narrowly focused the Leopoldine Society's work. Ministering to unchurched German immigrants now assumed priority.

Early efforts of the Leopoldinen-Stiftung to support the struggling American Catholic church centered on the Diocese of Cincinnati, and its financial assistance resulted in a massive program of Catholic institution building in the Queen City. This aroused the suspicions of prominent local Protestant clergymen like Lyman Beecher, pastor of Cincinnati's Second Presbyterian Church and president of Lane Seminary. These Protestant leaders assumed that the Austrian mission society was part of a "Popish plot" to colonize the Ohio River Valley with Catholic immigrants and subvert the Protestant-oriented institutions of the United States. Beecher highlighted the activities of the Leopoldine Society in his *A Plea for the West* (1835), which effectively used fears of Catholic domination and sounded a nationwide alarm of "saving the west from the pope."

Kundek's work in Dubois County, his extensive dealings in land, his establishment of permanent and prosperous Catholic parishes, and his systematic building of German Catholic infrastructure, including parochial schools, culminated in the establishment of a Swiss Benedictine monastic community at St. Meinrad. Kundek's systematic approach can indeed be seen as an effort at Catholic colonization. It was informed by Kundek's early work in small Croatian parishes, in the borderlands of the Habsburg Empire.

## **Der Nationale Deutschamerikanische Lehrerbund: Its Origin and History**

William E. Petig  
*Stanford University*

Over 155 years ago, in August of 1870, a group of 100 German teachers met in Louisville, Kentucky, to organize the first association of American German teachers, the Nationaler Deutschamerikanischer Lehrerbund. While there were local organizations of German teachers in a number of cities, e.g., Chicago and New York, the Lehrerbund was the first national organization. Its purpose was the promotion and improvement of the teaching of German at all levels of instruction without restrictions of religious affiliation. At the time most German instruction in America took place in Lutheran and Catholic parochial schools, and both denominations opposed a German teachers organization that was freethinking and nonsectarian. In 1878 the Lehrerbund established the German Teachers' Institute in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to train German teachers with funding from wealthy German Americans.

This paper looks at the leadership of the Lehrerbund, what it hoped to accomplish, those that supported it as well as those that opposed it, and its final dissolution after World War I. Research is based on the records of the Lehrerbund, which have been stored in the University Archives of the University of Wisconsin-Madison since the organization was dissolved in 1920.

**Immigration in the Time of Cholera: ‘Death Ships’ and the German American Press**  
Antje Petty  
*University of Wisconsin–Madison*

On September 17, 1892, Judge Magazine published a cartoon called “THEY COME ARM IN ARM.” It shows three figures stepping on land at “AMERICAN PORTS,” about to walk past a sign reading “CLOSED TO EMIGRANTS FROM CHOLERA STRICKEN COUNTRIES.” The figures are caricatures of a poor German immigrant and an even poorer looking Russian immigrant holding between them a skeleton covered in a shroud with the words “ASIATIC CHOLERA” written on it.

Human migration has long been associated with the spread of disease. In the 19th century cholera was one of the most feared diseases, and in the United States immigrants were thought to be its primary vector. The cartoon in Judge Magazine depicts the panic generated that month in Eastern port cities, when ships from Hamburg arriving in New York were found to have cholera patients on board. American papers were filled with headlines such as “The Hamburg Death Ships,” “Bodies of Passengers Thrown into the Sea,” and “Again it’s the Hamburg Line’s Ships and Immigrants.” The articles were a mix of (sometimes sensationalized) reporting, calls for public health measures such as quarantines, and immigrant blaming. They often turned a blind eye to the fact that non-immigrants on board had also fallen ill.

My presentation examines how German American papers covered the cholera scare of 1892 as well as earlier cholera pandemics and arrivals of “cholera ships.” I will also look at the coverage of the events by papers in the German ports of embarkation. Some threads have emerged:

- German American papers made a point of being concerned about the health of all Americans, including immigrants.
- They downplayed the existing epidemics in German ports, such as in Hamburg in 1892.
- They blamed other ethnic groups and countries for the scourge, especially “Asians/Asia.”
- They told the stories of individuals, putting a human face on the passengers on the ships.
- They were big supporters of public health measures in America, including quarantines.
- In displays of ethnic pride, almost all papers at some point included lengthy articles on world renown German research universities and German scientists who had helped advance an understanding of cholera, most prominently Robert Koch.

**“Your affectionate friend Th. Heinrich”: A Case Study of 19th Century Return Migration Through Transatlantic Correspondence**

Randi Ramsden

*University of Wisconsin—Madison*

Nearly half a million Germans crossed the Atlantic in the 1840s to seek a better life in the United States. Among them was Theodor Heinrich, a 28-year-old merchant who first arrived in New York in 1843. Unlike some of his better-known fellow countrymen, Heinrich did not make a name for himself in the New World. He did not gain fame, nor fortune. He seemingly lived an unremarkable life in the United States and disappeared from official records entirely after 1858. 20 years later, he continued to write letters to his “dear friend” back in the United States, as he had evidently returned to Germany.

Based on the research findings stemming from a letter transcription project conducted at the Max Kade Institute for German American Studies by Sonja Schander and Randi Ramsden, this paper will be a portrait of Theodor Heinrich’s life in the context of 19th century German American immigration and return migration. While German immigration to the United States has been thoroughly recorded, the research of return migration is complicated by fragmented archival materials and lost historical records. This presentation will contribute to the discourse by drawing on archival materials from the United States and Germany, including, among others, personal letters of Theodor Heinrich, travel logs, and historic mental health institution records, in order to piece together a history of 19th century transatlantic return migration.

**Machine Meets Manuscript:  
A Comparative Evaluation of AI Models for German Kurrent Script**

Marcel Rotter

*University of Mary Washington*

In a recent article in the FoundHistory Newsletter<sup>1</sup> referencing Mark Humphries' blogpost "The Sugar Loaf Test: How an 18th-Century Ledger Reveals Gemini 3.0's Emergent Reasoning,"<sup>2</sup> Tom Scheinfeldt argues that Gemini would be the superior AI application for recognizing 18<sup>th</sup> century (English) handwriting in 18<sup>th</sup> century historical documents.

He claims that the improvements in recent Gemini updates show that Gemini would be the superior AI application for 18<sup>th</sup> century (and beyond?) handwriting OCR. He claims that no other applications would come close and ends with a dismissive note on *Transkribus*, a Dutch AI application that lets users apply different language models (including their own) to handwritten texts in a wide range of European languages. One of them is the family of German *Kurrent* scripts.

*Kurrent* scripts differ from other Latin-based European writing systems in that most of the letters, while using elements of Latin writing (upstrokes, downstrokes, overturnes, loops, ovals), are not the same as Latin letters.

Since I am a regular user of *Transkribus*, this motivated me to conduct a comparative evaluation of the OCR capabilities of German 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century documents written in *Kurrent*. I wanted to see for myself if Scheinfeldt's claim applies to German *Kurrent* script as well.

In regular intervals (to account for growing capabilities in updates), I tested four AI applications and compared them with regards to their accuracy in transcribing the German texts. The evaluation tests will be ongoing until March 1, 2026 to account for changing competencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Scheinfeldt, Tom. *Handwriting Recognition Roundup*. <https://foundhistory.org/handwriting-recognition-roundup/?ref=found-history-newsletter>, accessed 12/11/2025.

<sup>2</sup> Humphries, Mark. *The Sugar Loaf Test*. [https://generativehistory.substack.com/p/the-sugar-loaf-test-how-an-18th-century?utm\\_source=%2Finbox%2Fsaved&utm\\_medium=reader2](https://generativehistory.substack.com/p/the-sugar-loaf-test-how-an-18th-century?utm_source=%2Finbox%2Fsaved&utm_medium=reader2), accessed 12/11/2025.

**Plattdeutsch in Texas:  
Investigating the Origins of Low German Speakers in the Texas German Belt**

Ellen Jones Schoedler  
*The University of Texas at Austin*

The immigration patterns of members of the Low German-speaking community from northern Germany to the United States, and North America more broadly, has been investigated widely (recent studies include, for example, Burns, 2022; Rocker, 2022; Heeren, 2023; Cox, 2025). In the United States, Low German speakers are often concentrated in, for example, regions around Illinois, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Nebraska. There is, however, little research into Low German speakers in the German Belt in central Texas. A number of factors have made such research, including research into the donor dialects of Texas German, difficult.

As attested in studies on Texas German (Gilbert, 1972; Boas, 2009), there is little known about the potential donor dialects of Texas German as a linguistic variety, which traces back to often limited information about where the ancestors of Texas German speakers first immigrated to Texas from. Gilbert (1977: 21), through investigation of census data beginning in 1850, does note that “tabulations of the immigrants' origins within Germany indicated a strong preponderance of North and Middle Germany over South Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.” Friedrich Ernst, who played a role in bringing many Germans to Texas, was from Oldenburg in northwestern Germany. However, many census conducted after 1860 included the assimilation of all Europeans into one “white” category, and while certain counties in the German Belt provided a finer distinction between settler origin than others, exact origin of these immigrants is difficult to pinpoint. Nonetheless, during Gilbert’s data collection for the *Linguistic Atlas of Texas German* (1972), speakers of Low German (and not just Texas German) were part of the community interviewed.

This paper will address the following: (1) immigration of Low German speakers to North America broadly, (2) what is already known about immigration from Low German-speaking northern Germany to Texas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and (3) which information about area of origin can currently be gleaned from Gilbert’s small group of Low German speakers. This includes discussion of the demographic data Gilbert did collect, as well as further investigation into historical census data. The question remains then as to how the Low German language and identity potentially played a role in the formation of the Texas German community generally; linguistically, there appears to be “nothing left” of Low German in Texas.

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## Word order variation in Texas German subclauses

Joren Somers

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Despite the wealth of literature on Texas German phonology and morphology, hardly any work has been done on the syntax of this critically endangered language. The current study bridges that gap by offering an analysis of Texas German word order. The focus is on linearisation in subclauses introduced by *weil* ‘because’, *dass* ‘that’ and *bis* ‘until’. In Standard German, each of these conjunctions triggers verb-final order, but in Texas German, the preferred order of constituents has not been scrutinized in detail yet. One notable exception is a pilot study by Boas (2009: 220–221), who finds that New Braunfels German tends to associate *weil* with verb-second clauses, *bis* with verb-final-clauses, and *dass* with either of these structural patterns.

The aim of the current study is to falsify Boas’s (2009) results, while also offering a comparison with word order patterns in earlier stages of Texas German and other German heritage varieties spoken in North America. The data for this study principally stem from the Texas German Dialect Corpus, which comprises over 1.25 million tokens of informal spoken data representing the speech of 600 informants. For each of the three conjunctions under study, I collected the first 100 eligible tokens after running lexical search queries. The results are in line with Boas’s (2009), in that (1) *bis* strongly correlates with verb-final clauses, (2) *weil* strongly correlates with verb-second clauses, and (3) *dass* instantiates verb-second and verb-final structures in approximately equal measure. Other structural patterns, such as verb-first or verb-third, are attested only marginally. Interestingly, nearly half of all verb-second tokens for *dass*-clauses stem from a mere two individuals.

The present paper invites a three-part conclusion. First, Texas German seems to exhibit a drift towards verb-second, but, crucially, the process affects different types of subclauses to different degrees. Rutten & van der Wal, having observed a similar phenomenon in the history of Dutch, have termed this process ‘constructional diffusion’ (Rutten & van der Wal 2014: 305). Second, Texas German seems to occupy a syntactic position in between more entrenched German heritage varieties, such as Pennsylvania Dutch, and less entrenched heritage varieties, such as Moundridge Schweitzer German: while the former hardly features any verb-second structures (Stolberg 2014), the latter robustly prefers verb-second in both *weil*- and *dass*-clauses (Hopp & Putnam 2015). Finally, the data point towards the role of individuals in propelling language change. Future research might use additional data from the Texas German Dialect Corpus to test this prediction on a larger scale.

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## Henriette Frölich: German-American “Wannabe”

Carol Strauss Sotiropoulos  
*Northern Michigan University*

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries information flowed transnationally via letters, newspapers, travelogues, anthropological studies, philosophical, theological, and literary works, shaping the opinions of “influencers.” Regarding America, many of the most renowned influencers in German lands, including Goethe, never stepped foot on American soil. In his 1827 poem, “America, du hast es besser,” he celebrated the New World and voiced the pessimism encapsulated in the concept of “Europamüde.” Among authors of popular literature, Karl May is likely the most prominent German to have achieved literary success in writing about indigenous Americans without having crossed the Atlantic.

What of German women writers? Did they have a particular stake in looking to the New World for possibilities, solutions, new ways of being, even if never reaching America’s shores? Sophie von La Roche, best known for her popular 1771 *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, enjoyed multiple literary connections as a cousin of the poet and novelist Christoph Wieland, as a personal friend of Goethe’s mother, and as a maternal figure to Goethe himself. While that novel is partially situated in England and Scotland, which she **had** visited, her 1798 *Erscheinungen am See Oneida* drew on accounts of a couple who eloped in defiance of the woman’s family and fled France to America. A second well-received German woman author who sent her protagonists to the New World, Sophie Mereau, was also well connected in literary circles, as the wife of Clemens Brentano, collaborator with brother-in-law Achim von Arnim on the 1808 folk poem collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Her 1794 novel, *Das Blüthenalter der Empfindung* ends with lover protagonists of different religions fleeing Europe for refuge in America.

My presentation will briefly summarize the role of the New World in these two novels before moving to a work which, had the author been male and/or blessed with such connections, could well have been a blockbuster.

Henriette Frölich, unknown and uncelebrated, authored *Virginia oder die Kolonie von Kentucky*, published in 1820. This historical novel remained lost and forgotten until the 1960s, when it was recovered by an East German academic, Gerhard Steiner, who ensured its first republication in 1963 and extolled it as exemplary of socialist literature. The work is, in fact, the only historical novel by a German woman writer of the Napoleonic era—that is, a truly historical novel in which events are front and center, not mere backdrops to love plots or escapist fantasies. In this transatlantic migration work whose heroine meets fellow European émigrés in America during the era of westward expansion, friendships with Quakers, freed Blacks, and Native Americans are featured as well. Further, in an interesting subtext, Frölich grapples with Napoleonic class reforms and the return to feudalistic dynasties following the 1815 Congress of Vienna. One need not be aware of the subtext to appreciate the novel, but such awareness benefits those who study the political landscape under Napoleon and seek a nuanced understanding of class-based responses.

*Virginia oder die Kolonie von Kentucky* has been reprinted in an accessible paperback, as recently as 2015. As one of this suspenseful page-turner’s most avid fans, I have translated it, in the fervent hope that an English version will bring the writer and her work to a much wider readership, attractive to both popular and scholarly audiences. Regarding the latter and the broad Symposium theme that looks to “future directions for . . . the field of German American studies,” such relevant works by German women writers should surely serve as a significant resource.

**Immanuel Lutheran:  
A History of a German Immigrant Church in Charlottesville, Virginia**

Albert Spengler  
*University of Virginia*

In preparation for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Immanuel Lutheran Church in 2019 I began working on a history of my church around 2016 when I was appointed the chair of the sesquicentennial committee. Years earlier I had translated the first twenty-five years of council minutes from the old German script into English.

Using Immanuel church council minutes, newsletters, and sacramental records as well as records at the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society and the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at University of Virginia, I began writing a history of Immanuel and its founding members. (A permanent five panel exhibit on the history of the church will be installed this fall.)

With the goal of getting a descendant of every founding member at the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary service, I traced the ancestry of each founding member. Of the early founding members, I was able to have a descendant of eight of those families at the service.

The most prominent founder was Wilhelm Hoptopp. The Hoptopp had 15 children. One Hoptopp daughter Julia, was connected to one of the most infamous incidents in the history of Charlottesville, the lynching of John Henry James in 1894.

Only recently did I discover that one of my 6C4R, Rev. Charles Christian Morhart, married Augusta Elise Hoptopp. I am currently the only member at my church related to a founding member.

For an area of Virginia not inhabited by many Germans and/or Lutherans (unlike the Shenandoah Valley), the founding members of a small immigrant church played an important role in the history of Charlottesville. The church also had many important connections to the early history of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. For example, the first pastor at Immanuel, John Lorenz Craemer, was the son of the founder of Frankenmuth, Michigan, Rev August Craemer. Even after switching to English services in 1894, the church was still referred to in the community as the “German” church. In 1980 Immanuel began holding an annual German Christmas service for the community—so we are still the “German” church.

## **German-Americans and the Shaping of American Naturism and Conservation”**

Thomas Stefaniuk

*Florida Gulf Coast University*

As part of my research for a new course on “Sustainability in German Culture and Society,” this paper explores the crucial role that German Americans played in shaping the intertwined histories of naturism, outdoor recreation, and early conservation efforts in the United States. While scholars have traced American conservation to figures such as John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, and Gifford Pinchot, this paper argues that German-speaking immigrants such as Kurt Barthel, founder of the American League for Physical Culture in 1929, helped cultivate distinctive cultural practices—especially Wandern (hiking), Turnen (gymnastic outdoor culture), and Naturheilkunde (nature-cure and outdoor health movements)—that contributed significantly to the emerging American ethos of recreational nature appreciation and conservation. The Lebensreform movement, a late 19th- and early 20th-century German reformist ethos emphasizing natural living, physical culture, and environmental consciousness, deeply informed German-American engagement with nature in the United States.

German-American communities and leaders translated these ideals into practical forms of engagement with the natural world, creating hiking clubs, Turnvereine, and naturist organizations that promoted physical health, moral development, and ethical interaction with the environment. Figures like Barthel and other proponents of Freikörperkultur (FKK) introduced structured outdoor recreation and naturist practices to American society, blending European philosophies of holistic well-being with emerging U.S. conservation consciousness. These activities simultaneously contributed to German cultural sustainability in the immigrant setting and helped shape American ideas on environmental sustainability. By situating these contributions within the broader transatlantic currents of Lebensreform, this paper seeks to demonstrate how German-American cultural values materially shaped the development of recreational norms, public appreciation for natural landscapes, and the early foundations of environmental stewardship in the United States. In doing so, it recovers a historically underappreciated dimension of American environmental history, emphasizing the transnational and immigrant roots of both recreational naturism and early conservation movements.

## Two 19th-century Roadside Crosses in Clinton County, Illinois

Bradley Weiss

*Indiana University Bloomington*

A few miles north of Germantown, IL, in the predominantly (Low) German catholic community of Clinton County stand two 19th-century crosses, both erected by immigrants from northern Germany.

The first of these is the so-called “Cholera Cross,” a 25-foot cross on a dairy farm along the Germantown Road. The current concrete cross is just the latest iteration of a series of wooden crosses, with the first having been constructed by Joseph Altpeter in 1850 in fulfillment of a pledge he made to God should his family be spared during the 1832-1833 Illinois cholera outbreak. The cross bears the inscription “IM KREUZ IST HEIL” or “In the Cross is Salvation”.

The second cross, a 14-foot stone cross known variously at “The South Walnut Street Cross” or the “Faith Cross,” is located nearby. It was erected in 1888 by Theodore Huelsmann, reportedly “in the shadow of the struggles of life in general (illness, poverty, the uncertainty of the future)”. After immigrating to Clinton County at the age of 21 in the first half of the the 19th century, Theodore is reported to have missed the small shrines that dotted his native German landscapes, and thus this cross provided him “a significant remembrance of his homeland”. This cross bears the inscription “GEHST DU AM KREUZ VORBEI / ERWEKE WAHRE HERZENZREU” or “As you pass by the cross, awaken true contrition (in your) heart,” a line from a larger poem that can also be found on similar Marterl or “wayside shrines/crosses” in German-speaking lands.

Due to their similar nature and proximity, the two crosses have often been conflated, and many erroneous local myths surrounding them have arisen, such as that there is a condition in the deed to the land which obligates the current owner to keep the Cholera Cross in good repair. This paper will trace the role that these crosses have played, and continue to play, in the consciousness and collective cultural identity of the local (Low) German-American community, traced through newspaper reports dating back to the first half of the 20th century, local archival materials, and interviews which have been conducted with both the current property owners on which these crosses stand as well as the descendants of their original erectors.

## **Faith Under Suspicion: St. Paul's Walther League in Wartime Fort Wayne, 1917-1920**

Alexis Wilson

*Claremont Graduate University*

Religion and German heritage are identifying attributes of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Nicknamed “the city of churches” and “a most German town,” Germans and German Americans in the city faced harsh scrutiny during the onset of World War I in 1917. As a harbor of German language and culture, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church faced intense public examination as the most prominent and oldest Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) church in the city. St. Paul’s responded to xenophobic pressures and anti-German sentiment by relying on lay organizations, such as the Walther League, to navigate the crisis. The Walther League was the LCMS youth organization, with each church hosting a chapter. Mirroring the church’s reputation, several members of St. Paul’s Walther League held leadership positions at the organization’s national level. Through community service, positive public relations, military service, and fundraising, the St. Paul’s Walther League was a driving force behind projecting a positive image of German Lutherans in the LCMS during World War I.

## **A German American Embraces the Revolution**

David Zersen

*Concordia University Texas*

Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg was born in 1750 to parents of German heritage living in Trappe, Pennsylvania. His parents wanted a sound German education for him, so at the age of 13, he was sent back to study in Halle, where his father had studied, until he was 21.

Upon his return, he was ordained in 1770 as a Lutheran pastor in Pennsylvania, married Catherine Schaefer in 1771, and served in four different parishes until 1779. During this period, extant letters exchanged with his father and others demonstrate his commitment to the heritage in which he was raised and to traditional Lutheran parish life.

As a result of experiences in New York and influences from colleagues and parishioners, Frederick's political loyalties began to change. He left the parish ministry and was elected in 1779 to the Continental Congress and in 1786 to the Pennsylvania House. He served three years in the House, being elected as Speaker in his first year. In 1787, he chaired the Pennsylvania Convention that voted to ratify the Federal Constitution.

His leadership abilities quickly became apparent among American patriots. In 1789, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for three terms and served as its first and third Speaker. He was the first signer of the Bill of Rights and the first signer to choose the new nation's capital.

While the full presentation can provide little-known information about Muhlenberg's role, this brief abstract encourages revisiting in the 250<sup>th</sup> year of the American Revolution, a German American leader whose contributions deserve to be appreciated.

## Friedrich Kapp: Unacknowledged German de Tocqueville for the U.S. Civil War Era

Gregory R. Zieren

*Austin Peay State University*

Many scholars of German-American history, of German 48'ers in the U.S. and the history of immigration generally, will have run across the name Friedrich Kapp. After arriving in New York City in 1850, he spent the next 20 years in a wide range of activities. He was a leader of the German community promoting the presidential candidacy of Abraham Lincoln in 1860; the commissioner of immigration for the pre-eminent New York State Board in the late 1860s; active in anti-slavery circles; a lawyer serving the German-Americans; and, not least of his accomplishments, a journalist who wrote in both English and German for such journals as *The Nation* and *Preussische Jahrbücher*. His most trenchant observations have never been translated because writing in both languages divided his audience and lessened his impact. This paper aims to correct some of the neglect and assert his value as an observer for what I like to call *die Amerika Kenner*.

Kapp's disappointment with the U.S. was evident within two years of his arrival when he began writing for the journal *Atlantische Studien von deutschen in Amerika*. Anyone familiar with the *Amerika-Müde* literature of the 1850s will recognize themes in Kapp's work, but he went beyond the usual "they don't do it as well as we do" genre to present a culture of contrasts: Untrammled greed coexists with generous philanthropy; citizens possess unlimited political freedom and freedom of expression while millions are enslaved with no rights; cultural life is inflicted with *Charlatanerie* and Humbug, or as he expresses it, "Humbug ist gross und (P.T.) Barnum ist sein Prophet."

Twenty years later, Kapp devoted an entire book to the Centennial of 1876. Kapp returned to Germany after unification in 1871 and was elected to the Reichstag as a National Liberal. *Aus und über Amerika* revisited some of his better-known works which had been translated into English, for instance, his biographies of George Washington, Generals von Steuben, and de Kalb. But his most insightful essays concern the corruption of American politics including Boss Tweed's New York, the Star Route scandals of the Grant Administration, Reconstruction-era greed and the notion that American democracy was essentially a kleptocracy. This judgment was too extreme for German-Americans, and Kapp was labeled a "*Nestbeschmutzer*" and dismissed as such.