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MISSOURI'S GERMAN HERITAGE





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

7	<i>Foreword. The United States — a land of immigrants</i>
9	<i>Introduction. German settlements in Missouri — a brief historical outline</i>
13	Chapter I Missouri Germans 1.1. German settlers in St. Louis, 13 – 1.2. German settlers in Concordia/ Missouri — a historical background, 15 – 1.3. Missouri Germans and slavery, 18 – 1.4. Gottfried Duden, 20 – 1.5. The German American Experience in Missouri during World War I, 26 – 1.6. The German church in Missouri, 29.
35	Chapter II Missouri's German Flair 2.1. German architecture in Missouri, 33 – 2.2. Missouri's German cuisine, 37 – 2.3. German Turnvereine in Missouri, 39 – 2.4. German festivities held in Missouri, 40 – 2.5. Urban Chestnut, 40 – 2.6. Die Deutsche Kueche, 41 – 2.7. Stone Hill Winery and Hermannhof Winery, 44 – 2.8. German tradi- tions in the Ozarks, 45.

6 *Table of contents*

51 Chapter III

The German Language In Missouri

3.1. A Rare German Dialect Is Dying, But A Missouri Town Is Fighting For Its Survival, 52 – 3.2. The old general store and new drug store opening in Cole Camp, Missouri, in 1885, 53 – 3.3. Neil Heimsoth proudly shares the story of his progenitors in Germany, 54 – 3.4. A Low German dialect spoken in Concordia, Missouri, 55 – 3.5. Missouri's Saxon–German Lutherans, 71 – 3.6. The American English influence on Missouri German, 77.

83 *Conclusion. The American dream*

85 *References*

FOREWORD

THE UNITED STATES — A LAND OF IMMIGRANTS

The United States has always been a nation which offered many economic opportunities to people coming from around the world since it was still a collection of British colonies in the seventeenth century. Various ethnicities immigrated to North America; they came from many European countries, from Africa and from Asia, thus shaping a multi-ethnic society in the United States.

The most important ethnicity residing in the U.S. is undoubtedly the German one, settling prevalently in Pennsylvania and in the upper Midwest. Given that, this essay will emphasize specifically the German ethnicity residing in the United States. The focus will not be on their significant immigrant population, but on their achievements that helped the United States to become a great country. Moreover, and more importantly, the German immigrants brought numerous traditions and festivals with them as well as architectural styles and cultivation techniques. Thus, U.S. states, such as Pennsylvania and particularly Midwestern states, such as Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, and specifically Missouri, are all characterized by a German flair today. Additionally, it's worth mentioning that the Germans' military achievements in the United States were noteworthy. Hence, during the Revolutionary War, German soldiers fought for the British as auxiliaries. They were called "Hessians" because many came from Hesse. Those German settlers were some of the first immigrants to settle in

America by accepting the offer to switch sides in exchange for land and religious liberty.

After the Revolutionary War, the Congress of the United States established a more viable government with its second charter, the 1789 Constitution, and maintained open borders to immigrants seeking economic prosperity. As the legislative branch of the government, Congress was responsible for issuing the laws relating to immigration. Legislators knew the necessity of the immigration for the growth, settlement, and prosperity of the country, but specific rules for immigration were not initially formalized into legislation.

Throughout the nineteenth century, German immigrants continued to experience this same degree of preferential treatment as an ethnic group, resulting in large numbers of Germans immigrating to the United States in general, and to the American Midwest, specifically Missouri, in particular. Thus, in the first half of the nineteenth century, German immigrants flowed into the U.S. because it actively promoted the settlement of new territories in the West. The concept of “manifest destiny” encouraged the westward expansion to the Pacific coast. Networks of roads, canals, and subsequently, railroads facilitated the arrival in the furthest frontier of settlement. As the German immigration to the U.S. augmented remarkably high numbers of German settlers moved to the US, especially throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. A large percentage of German immigrants who came to the U.S. during the 1830s and 1840s settled in the newly established state of Missouri, seeking all the economic prosperity that the land offered.

A salient feature pertinent to Missouri Germans is their significant commitment in political areas. Most Missouri Germans were politically active and, more importantly, they wanted the U.S. to abrogate all the laws favoring slavery. That the German settlers in Missouri were among the strongest advocates for abolition during the Civil War will be discussed in detail in subsequent section of this essay.

INTRODUCTION

GERMAN SETTLEMENTS IN MISSOURI — A BRIEF HISTORICAL OUTLINE

During the second half of the nineteenth century and until the beginning of the twentieth century, about seven million people came to the United States from German-speaking lands (for further details, see Tondi: 2017). The German immigrants frequently settled in the upper American Midwest, as previously mentioned, specifically in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ohio, Iowa, Illinois, and in Missouri. They established towns as they moved up the Missouri River into the frontier and their distinctive traditions dramatically changed the culture of the area. The Germans also started vineyards and wineries and published several German language newspapers. A limited number of German immigrants had also come to the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus, there were a few scattered German settlements in Missouri even before 1821, the year in which it became a part of the Union. However, the German immigration thrust into the state became considerable only in the 1830s, when Missouri was commonly regarded as the “Gate to the West” (Auburger/Kloss/Rupp 1979: 125).

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, the German settlers swarmed to Missouri for two fundamental reasons: first, Gottfried Duden’s 1829 “Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America” and other similar travel stories defined Missouri as the “Far West” of the US, as a new idyllic fatherland (homeland), with cheap land and rich

resources. It attracted large numbers of Germans and, as a result, they decided to immigrate immediately to North America. Moreover, the failed German revolution in 1848 incited many participants to flee their home country. They had been compelled to face particular exigencies and painful challenges in their native land and they now hoped to ameliorate their social and economic status in the New World.

Georg Sauer subdivides the immigrants of the period from 1830 to 1850 into four social groups. The first group comprises acculturated people who intended to eschew political oppression. The second group embraced romantics who rejected the rigorous conventions of German society. In the third group, Sauer includes religious separatists aiming at achieving personal liberty. Finally, the preponderant category included German peasants whose principal objective was to improve their life conditions (Sauer 1920: 165–170).

Numerous German people decided to settle in Cole County, Missouri, which was fifty percent German by 1875, although Cole County's first immigrants were of British provenance (Ford 1938: 24). The German immigrants had the chance to arrive without difficulties in Missouri through the Mississippi from New Orleans and, moreover, the climatic and geographic conditions in that region were relatively similar to the ones in Germany (Sauer 1920: 168).

In 1850, approximately 45,000 German people resided in Missouri, and by 1890 the numbers rose exponentially. There were 250,000 German settlers, and half of them were German-born (Dippold 2007: 8). Also, Missouri's capital, Jefferson City, which had only approximately 3,000 inhabitants in 1859, was expanding rapidly. Data from a subsequent census demonstrated a steady decline of German people who were not born in the U.S. Thus, in 1910, 12.6 percent of the population residing in Jefferson City, and 16.9 percent of Cole County's inhabitants were born in the "German Reich". Despite such a considerable decrease, the German language was the native tongue of most people of German extraction who were not born in the United States (Kloss 1974).

It is also remarkable that the German migration to Missouri was correlated with American industrialization, undermining the strong economic position of guild artisans and skilled workers in trades and

handicrafts. The Far West thus seemed to beckon with opportunity. The rolling hills and rivers reminded the early immigrants of their homelands, and their letters home spurred even more chain migration. After the Civil War, the golden age of German culture began to thrive in Missouri. The populations of a large number of small towns were almost entirely German. Schools, churches and publications were nearly all published in the German language. As German businesses in St. Louis and other towns flourished, the immigrants and their families prospered.

Also the German writer Karl May (1842–1912) was aware of the importance of German settlers residing in Missouri. Thus, in his novel *Weihnacht*, which is set in Missouri, he mentions that St. Joseph had 7,000 inhabitants around 1865, of whom 2,000 people were German-born. They also founded several German associations such as a *Jagdverein* dedicated to hunters. Moreover, there were five churches in the above-mentioned town, two of which had a German-speaking membership. In May's opinion, the economic upturn of St. Joseph was achieved, mainly because of the presence of German immigrants (May 1953:107–108). The towns the German settlers built in Missouri came to resemble what they had left behind. These small Missouri towns preserved much of what was best of their traditions and culture, while embracing at the same time the political freedom offered by their new homeland. However, in the subsequent century, specifically in the early twentieth century, the situation experienced by many German immigrants was progressively exacerbated. An anti-immigrant sentiment arose, which became a serious problem for Germans residing in Missouri and in other Midwestern states, especially during and after World War I. Also, the period of prohibition in the 1920s and early 1930s created considerable blows for their culture. Such anti-immigrant issues and anti-immigrant sentiments arose and recrudesced again during World War II. But the unique spirit of the German immigrants remained as they blended into the overall culture of Missouri and the entire American Midwest, allowing them to become a significant part of the American Midwest. In 1990, a census was conducted, in which Missouri's residents were asked about their heritage. Astonishingly, 1,844,192 people claimed to be of German provenance, while 1,038,117 people were

of Irish background (Dippold 2007: 7). By the late twentieth century, however, the German immigration to the United States tapered off. The current immigration waves to the US, instead, are Hispanic and especially Asian (Tondi 2019 / Tondi 2021).

In summary, it can be maintained that the role the German immigrants and their descendants played in relation to the settlement and development of Missouri's political, religious, economic and social landscape, was indeed crucial (<https://www.nps.gov/jeff/blogs/german-settlement-in-missouri-new-land-old-ways.htm>).

CHAPTER I

MISSOURI GERMANS

The first chapter of this study is historical in nature. It will address various areas focusing on different aspects of the Missouri Germans. The first section will summarize the historical background and the intrinsic features of German settlers residing in St. Louis, Missouri in the nineteenth century.

1.1. German settlers in St. Louis

Most German immigrants came to St. Louis from Pennsylvania and other States. There were only a few Germans in St. Louis before 1820. In the subsequent years, however, St. Louis's German population irrupted. They started pouring into the city in particularly significant numbers and, thus, they owned one third of St. Louis properties in the 1840s. The German immigrants were often proprietors of saloons, restaurants, boarding houses, and grocery stores. A large number of German settlers also worked as barbers, blacksmiths, doctors, and druggists, bringing indispensable skills to a rapidly growing city. (Burnett/Luebbering 1996: 22). It can be noted, moreover, that the circumstances were exigent, and life conditions in St. Louis in that time period were problematic. Consequently, the city necessitated the support of educated and dedicated outsiders. Many of the Germans were carpenters, bricklayers, and stone masons and the less-skilled workers met urban needs as gardeners, maids, cooks, or nurses.

Temporary lodging for these new German immigrants became problem; and unfortunately, it could not be resolved all at once. Some of them found lodging in one of the hotels or boarding houses on the riverfront. Due to the overcrowded conditions, St. Louis became one of the unhealthiest cities in the world. As a result, people had to face uncontrolled suffering and disease, such as a cholera epidemic. Moreover, there was a devastating flood in spring 1844 and, subsequently there was also a major fire (Burnett/Luebbering 1996: 22). In spite of these calamities, St. Louis continued to grow and prosper. By 1850, the city had nearly 78,000 inhabitants, of which 24,000 were German settlers. German newspapers, theatres, social clubs, and musical clubs thrived in this urban metropolis. In the nineteenth century, there was a considerable similarity between some neighborhoods in St. Louis and similar sections in German cities. For example, the streets were lined with two-story brick houses with green shutters on the windows and roofs with decorative triangular gables (Burnett/Luebbering 1996: 83).

The German settlers also brought their ideas of entertainment to St. Louis; and furthermore, they supported many public parks and gardens. In those gardens there were many statues of illustrious German writers and statesmen. The gardens were places where diverse social events were held. Orchestras and singing societies gave concerts, and plays were held in the gardens. The proprietors of private gardens frequently served wine, beer, and sausages. (Burnett/Luebbering 1996: 83). On Sundays, large numbers of people came to the gardens. Typically, Sunday afternoon was a time for music, plays, and sharing food and drink. These Sunday activities were often not appreciated by other inhabitants of St. Louis who considered Sunday a quiet and peaceful day to be spent in worship and in reflexion. Thus, American people often inveighed against the German settlers, not approving beer drinking and the German way of relaxation.

Music was regarded as a fundamental value by German people residing in St. Louis. They had a predilection for playing the piano, and they also introduced the habit of playing the piano to their American host community. The first choral group in the city was formed by a group of men from a brewery; and successively, the German American community also supported the establishment of the St. Louis Symphony

Orchestra (Burnett/Luebbering 1996: 84). The first German theatre performance in St. Louis was a production of “The Robbers” (*Die Rauber*) by the German playwright, poet, and historian, Friedrich Schiller. He was esteemed and even eulogized, being considered a great man by most German Americans.

The German culture was also fostered by social organizations. Thus, there were more than 300 German associations in St. Louis prior to World War I (Burnett/Luebbering 1996: 84). Those German societies appealed to every social and economic class; the “Liederkrantz Club”, however, was solely open to the social elite, while clubs that were open to more people were more common and particularly appreciated. There were numerous singing societies, groups supporting poor people, entertainment clubs, shooting societies, labor unions, political clubs, and Turner societies. The Turners were organized in Germany in 1811 in order to promote physical education and intellectual pursuits, and they also introduced the practice of teaching physical education in schools.

Festival days were utilized to maintain and celebrate St. Louis’s German heritage. Thus, there was a ten-day festival, held to commemorate Schiller’s life. During this festivity, a parade was organized, in which eight thousand people marched through streets decorated with American and German flags along with pictures of Schiller. After the parade, thirty thousand people gathered in a park to listen to music and to speeches in German and English (Burnett/Luebbering 1996: 85).

In the late nineteenth century, St. Louis was one of the leading cultural and educational cities in the U.S. and was regarded as a kind of German metropolis in the middle of the United States. It had an excellent Symphony Orchestra, a significant botanical garden, and six daily newspapers, two of which were German—language papers with national influence.

1.2. German settlers in Concordia/Missouri — a historical background

This section is also historical in nature, being dedicated specifically to German immigrants, coming from Northwestern Germany. They typically did not settle in Missouri’s big cities, such as St. Louis, but rather

in Missouri's rural areas. Hence, a large number of Germans established themselves in Lafayette County, situated in Western Missouri where they founded a little town named Concordia. (Concordia will be treated in the third chapter from a linguistic perspective.)

Between 1838 and the early 1890s, large numbers of German peasants from the Kingdom of Hanover immigrated to Lafayette County, Missouri, in order to establish a new community centered in the town of Concordia, initially named "Freedom Township". Hence, a substantial Hanoverian settlement was built by the Dierking emigration party in Southeastern Lafayette County. Goebel defined it as a "*starke deutsche Niederlassung*" — a strong German settlement (Goebel 1877: 203).

Unlike a large number of Midwestern Germans, the Hanoverians moved to Freedom Township without discernible leadership from nobles, members of the urban middle classes, Latin farmers, or emigration societies formed in Germany (Frizzell 2007: 157). They were all influenced by Gottfried Duden's book, an author who will be treated more exhaustively in one of the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Moreover, they often decided to leave Germany because of recommendations from relatives, friends, and acquaintances. This process of chain-migration was correlated with numerous out-of-the-way locations in Europe with similarly obscure places in America in the nineteenth century. The Hanoverians made an excellent decision based on several opportunities to continue working the soil provided by available land in Missouri, coupled with economic pressure prevalently caused by overpopulation and the decline of household industry in the Hanover area (Frizzell 2007: 158).

A significant number of German immigrants, arriving in Missouri in 1839, came from Esperke, situated in County Neustadt, a little town north of Hanover. The German farmers operated on a rather modest scale and were unable to reproduce in Missouri the social, legal, and economic postures of that divided farmers in Esperke. After their arrival in Missouri they had to adapt to the settings of a free and open society different from County Neustadt. (Frizzell 2007: 33).

As far as agriculture is concerned, the German settlers in Concordia soon enjoyed enormous prosperity: Lafayette County presented a

considerable advantage, apart from being well-suited to cash crops because its upland soils were more productive than most Missouri soils. It was the combination of relatively productive soil and a cash crop that provided prosperity for the new Freedom Township Germans (Frizzell 2007: 51).

Hanoverians in Lafayette County also benefitted from a new opportunity for them, namely cultivating and selling hemp in Missouri, although their Anglo-American neighbors benefitted even more. The principal reason for this difference resulted from the fact that the Anglo-Americans had been first in Lafayette County; thus, they had more capital. Furthermore, they brought large numbers of African-American slaves to produce hemp on a large scale. In any case, the German settlers in Lafayette County can be considered unique among nineteenth century German immigrants because they worked on their own next to an area of particularly lucrative, predominantly slave-based agriculture (Frizzell 2007: 55).

Lafayette County was one of the seven counties in west-central Missouri to which the historian R. Douglas Hurt attributed the expression "Little Dixie". According to Hurt, in 1860, approximately a quarter of the population of Little Dixie consisted of slaves who were employed in growing hemp and tobacco, and in general farming. Three townships in the entire state, all within Little Dixie, contained a slave majority in the farmlands outside the market villages. One of these was in Lafayette County. In two additional Lafayette County townships, slaves composed more than two fifths of the population. The county as a whole contained 6,374 slaves in 1860, more than any other county in the state (Hurt 1992: 239).

The situation for draft animals appeared to be a case of Germans adopting a Missouri trend faster than their Anglo neighbors. Western Missouri was a central location for breeding the famous Missouri mule. Mules were nearly unknown in Northwestern Germany. In 1850, more than one in eight German families in Lafayette County owned one or more mules—and horses as well (Frizzell 2007: 57). Mules were cheaper and required less rest than horses during a long day of fieldwork.

Farming was a rather profitable and rewarding business in Lafayette County, but it did not alleviate the lure of California when gold was

discovered there in 1848. A large number of German settlers from Missouri went to California, and the most successful among them was presumably John Holtcamp who claimed his parents were the first Prussians in the county. He mined in California until 1856 when he returned to Freedom Township with \$1,700 with which he bought his own farm (Frizzell 2007: 63).

When the German settlers decided to move to California in 1850 to seek greater fortune, they left a relatively prosperous frontier community of four hundred people begun by Hanoverians who were progressively supplemented by settlers from Prussian Westphalia. Subsequently, the community grew to nearly one thousand people, more than a third of whom were young people born in the U.S. At the beginning of the American Civil War, the community was predominantly rural marked by a social and institutional infrastructure which had been developing tardily in the preceding two decades (Frizzell 2007: 63).

1.3. Missouri Germans and slavery

This present section has a totally different focus than the two preceding historical sections in the chapter. It addresses a significant and somewhat delicate issue that deserves elaboration. It illustrates the German settlers' attitudes in relation to the preservation of slavery in Missouri in the nineteenth century. Slavery is generally considered an extremely deplorable event in American history; and it will never be expunged from American people's memories. Moreover, it must be understood within the context of new German settlements.

Important in this review is the story of Friedrich Muench. In 1862, when the outcome of the Civil War and the question of emancipation were uncertain, Friedrich Muench, a German-American politician, considered his support of freedom indisputable. Upon Muench's death in 1881, Franz Rodmann, a political associate of Muench, recalled a conversation after a fervid session of the Missouri State Assembly in which he questioned Muench's outspoken support of emancipation. Rodmann averred that Muench's passion would compromise the cause, but Muench responded fiercely that the subjugated people of Europe

had lost their independence and political liberty (Bergerson/Logge: 2019).

Prior historians had often examined the anti-slavery sentiments of the German community in the U.S. Hence, Alison Clark Efford examined in what way the liberalism of the 1848 rebellion influenced the German-American community. Louis S. Gerteis argued that many Germans did not believe in slavery, especially for pragmatic reasons. In this regard, a collection at the Missouri Historical Society, relating to German immigration to Missouri from 1834–1947, ought to be analyzed. That collection includes several documents pertaining to Friedrich Muench: Muench himself tried to write a speech about a new anti-immigration organization in Missouri. Subsequently, he extemporized it in front of a crowd on July 4, 1840, and Friedrich's grandson, Julius Muench, made an address to the Missouri Historical Society about his grandfather's legacy. A colleague of Friedrich Muench, Franz Rodmann wrote his address *A Farewell to Friedrich Muench*, describing Muench's political life. The *Westliche Post* printed an obituary notice after Friedrich Muench's death on December 16, 1881. Friedrich Muench's theories on equity, equal rights, immigration rights, and slavery appear frequently in that collection. He also wanted to understand the attitudes of Germans more thoroughly when they first came to Missouri and how those views changed once they settled there.

It begins by studying the published works of Gottfried Duden, Gustav Koerner, and William G. Bek. Duden published his *A Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America and a Stay of Several Years along the Missouri* in 1829, intending it to be a guidebook encouraging Germans to settle in Missouri.

In 1834, Gustav Koerner wrote a critical response to Duden's Report, and he titled his response *An Illumination of Duden's Report on the Western States of North America: From the American Side*. From the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, a historian named William G. Bek collected sources pertinent to German-American history in Missouri (Bergerson/Logge 2019). In that timeframe, Bek published his book *Der Geist des Deutschtums in the State of Missouri*, in which he also criticized Duden's Report, but with the added vantage point of writing in the post-Civil War era.

Theories of cultural globalization can help explain what happens when immigration brings different cultures together. Cultural Globalization is the term used to explain the mixing of diverse cultures and producing a more consolidated, global culture. These theories analyze the impact various cultures have on each other when they are forced to interact. In this case, educated German immigrants interacted with the culture of native Missourians, a diverse culture in and of itself. As these cultures mixed, immigrants' concerns for their equal rights evolved into a collective desire on the part of German-Americans to renounce slavery. As tensions mounted over slavery in the 1840s and 1850s, the immigrations swell from Germany to Missouri also augmented notably, especially after 1848.

Friedrich Muench was a perspicacious man, a visible and frequently referenced German-American, involved in Missouri's state politics, and eventually national political movements and elections (Bergerson/Logge 2019). Muench's legacy was analyzed by reviewing what his family and friends wrote about his most politically active decade, which extended from the late 1850s to the late 1860s. From the 1840s through the Civil War, the German-American community in Missouri was able to proudly insert its voice into the debate over slavery thanks to progressive leaders, such as Muench.

1.4. Gottfried Duden

This section focuses exclusively on Gottfried Duden, previously mentioned, Duden was an illustrious and educated German emigration writer who was born in Remscheid/Germany in 1789. He worked as a judge, and also studied medicine for some semesters before moving to North America (Emmerich 2013: 58). Duden was enamored with Missouri's impressive landscape and its pleasant climate. He immigrated to Missouri in 1824 and wrote a famous, but somewhat idealistic book about the state in order to incite German people to leave Germany and to settle in Missouri. Gottfried Duden's book for immigrants became one of the most influential examples of nineteenth century emigration literature (Mehrhoff 2019: 29). Duden presented his Report to