



The America Line: A Route for Immigrants from Germany's Eastern Areas to Bremerhaven or Hamburg

Cora Lee Kluge



Germany



The routes of the America Line railroad.

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When I was in Germany recently, I heard for the first time about the so-called America Line, a railroad line whose construction and development were inextricably connected to the story of emigration from German lands to the New World.

The development of transportation methods and routes has always been one of the major factors influencing human migration. We know that when transatlantic sailing ships were replaced with steamships, the ocean voyage became less perilous and began to appeal to greater numbers of po-

tential migrants. Likewise, the difficult journeys undertaken by early immigrants who ventured into the interior of the United States—long and arduous overland trips, river expeditions, or cruises through the Great Lakes—became much easier, cheaper, and more attractive when the Erie Canal was opened in 1825. Similarly, Chicago's dramatic growth, from a population of just under 30,000 in 1850 to just under 110,000 in 1860 and nearly 300,000 in 1870, was undoubtedly in large part a result of the coming of the railroad to that city, beginning in

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Greetings, Friends and Readers!

It has been a beautiful end-of-the-summer season and beginning of the fall at the University of Wisconsin. We enjoyed many weeks of perfect weather—a cool July, followed by much warmer temperatures in August, and then an unbelievably sunny month of September. Even the local wine growers announced that this was an excellent year. So now we know: undoubtedly this is the climate that persuaded our immigrant forefathers to plant crops, build houses, and settle in the area.

Nevertheless, the staff members of the MKI are far from feeling settled. In August both the Sound Lab and the Center for the Study of Upper Midwest Cultures, our sister institute, moved out of the Keystone House and into temporary quarters on the third floor of the University Club (on Library Mall, in the central part of campus). Now, we look forward to reuniting in the summer of 2011 on the fourth floor of the University Club. For the time being, of course, MKI enjoys the advantage of more space in our little house, but there is the more compelling disadvantage of having our staff split between two locations two miles apart. Things are especially difficult for Kevin Kurdylo, our librarian/archivist, who must spend time in both places.

The summer months should be a relatively quiet period, and yet things seemed busy. Jennifer Schultz, a graduate student in the UW-Milwaukee translation program, did an internship with the MKI. In addition, our new project entitled “Language



The MKI exhibit at German Fest, Milwaukee.

Matters for Wisconsin” began with trips to Rhinelander, Wausau, and Mineral Point—and a trip to Kenosha/Racine to follow. We also took part in German Fest in Milwaukee with Mark Loudon’s exhibit “What’s In a German Name?” Our thanks to the Museum of Wisconsin Art, which shared our German Fest space and let us use its exhibit walls, and to our Friends who helped with organizing and hosting our table: Peter Arvedsen, Rudi Boeckeler, Sandy Castlerline, Ed Langer, Tom Lidtke, and Frank and Neill Luebke.

The academic year is well underway, and MKI staff members are offering courses in German-American studies. This fall my capstone seminar for undergraduate German majors has an enrollment of 20 students who are studying German-

American literature. In the spring my annual general-studies course entitled “The German Immigration Experience” (German 271) will be offered; and Mark Loudon will teach “The German Language in America” (German 352/960), which is open to both undergraduates and graduate students. We are also exploring the possibility of a second online course, building on last spring’s “The German-American Experience”—more about that to follow.

We are always delighted to see you. Drop by the Keystone House, or come to one of our public events, which are always announced on our Web site. Meanwhile: all the best for the rest of the fall season—work hard, have fun, and stay in touch!

—Cora Lee

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News Note: Interest in J. D. Salinger from the German Perspective

Cora Lee Kluge

On January 1, 2009, the very reclusive J. D. Salinger—well known throughout America since the 1951 publication of his best-selling novel *The Catcher in the Rye*—celebrated his ninetieth birthday; and when he was in the news again this summer, it was because of his efforts to protect his privacy. In June he brought a copyright infringement suit against Swedish author Fredrik Colting, asking that the publication of Colting's work *60 Years Later: Coming Through the Rye* (written under the pseudonym J. D. California), an unabashed sequel to *The Catcher in the Rye*, be banned. The decision of a federal district judge in New York City in favor of Salinger has been appealed by Colting, and we have not heard the final word. But meanwhile, the work has appeared in the United Kingdom, so transatlantic readers will have some access.

In the last few weeks, the German press has also brought stories about J. D. Salinger, but they have had nothing to do with his lawsuit against Fredrik Colting. Instead, the focus has been on investigating Salinger's experiences at the end of World War II. Margaret A. Salinger's biography of her famous father under the title *Dream Catcher*, published in the year 2000, confirms that he took part in some of the toughest battles of the war, including the D-Day landing on Utah Beach and the Battle of the Bulge; and he was also a member of the group that liberated the concen-

tration camp Dachau. In the summer of 1945 he was hospitalized in a military hospital in Nuremberg for "battle fatigue," and thereafter he was assigned to a Counter Intelligence Corps group to work with denazification efforts.

Both Margaret A. Salinger's biography and another biography published by Paul Alexander in 1999 report that in October of 1945, Salinger married a young woman named Sylvia Welter and lived with her a few months in Weissenburg before they moved to America. According to the former, Welter was a Nazi whom Salinger met at a hearing. Now German reporters have been checking into the facts. On September 5 the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported that the bride was French, and that the couple was married in Pappenheim with two "special agents" as witnesses. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, digging deeper, revealed on September 22 that their home in Germany was not in Weissenburg, but in Gunzen-

hausen, in the "Villa Schmidt" in the Wiesenstraße, and that—according to classmates in Nuremberg, where Welter finished her Abitur—she was far from being a Nazi, unwilling even to join the Bund Deutscher Mädel (the girls' division of the Hitler Youth). It seems certain that she was an eye doctor, and Salinger may have met her during his hospitalization in the summer of 1945. The marriage lasted only about eight months; and Welter returned from New York to Switzerland, later remarried, and moved for a second time to the United States. According to reports, she died in this country in 2008.

Those of us who grew up in the culture and with the prose of J. D. Salinger will follow with interest the information coming from both the German-language and the English-language press. There is a lot still to be revealed. 

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Uelzen railroad station, designed by Friedensreich Hundertwasser.

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1850.

We know something about how America's nineteenth-century immigrants crossed the Atlantic and reached their final destinations in the United States. But we may be less familiar with the routes they used when they set out from their homes in the Old World for the European seaports from which they departed. The America Line (Amerikalinie), a railway that connected Berlin with the North Sea ports of Hamburg (ca. 150 miles to the northwest) or Bremerhaven (ca. 200 miles to the west), was a crucial link for individuals from East and West Prussia, Silesia, Pomerania, Galicia, and Russia. It is common knowledge that the first big wave of migration from German lands to America came from southwestern Germany in the years 1845 to 1863; the second wave came from northwestern Germany

in the years 1863 to 1877; and the third wave came from northeastern Germany in the years 1877 to 1890. Were the existence of this railway route and its final completion in the year 1873, which connected eastern areas with the large and efficient transatlantic steamship companies, a direct result—or even a cause—of the increase in numbers of immigrants from this part of Europe?

The history of the America Line begins in the year 1867, when the Magdeburg-Halberstadt Railroad Company was given the concession for building a stretch of railroad going west from Berlin, with a bifurcation point to be somewhere in the Altmark, a region in the northern part of today's federal state of Saxony-Anhalt. The original plan had been to locate the junction in Tangermünde, which lies at the confluence of the Tanger and Elbe Rivers; but instead Stendal, some 10 kilometers

to the northwest, was chosen. From Stendal one section of this railroad line became the heavily traveled route west to Hanover. The other—the one popularly known still today as America Line—was to proceed to the northwest, to Salzwedel and then Uelzen, with connections continuing from Uelzen to Hamburg or to Bremerhaven. The construction of the section from Stendal to Salzwedel proceeded quickly, with a first trial run in September of 1869, while the continuation from Salzwedel to Uelzen progressed more slowly and was not opened until the spring of 1873.

We have at least one report of an emigrant group traveling on the route of the America Line. From the diaries of the German-American painter Friedrich Wilhelm Heine we learn that he and another painter named Bernhard Schneider left their homes in Dresden in April of 1885, with Milwaukee as their destination.



Decorative pillars at the Uelzen station.

They proceeded by train through Leipzig and Magdeburg to Uelzen, where they were joined by two other painters, Hermann von Michalowski and Franz Rohrbeck, who arrived by train from Berlin. From Uelzen they all continued to Bremen, buying tickets at the North German Lloyd office there, and then on to Bremerhaven. (For more about F. W. Heine, please see the Winter 2008 issue of this Newsletter.)

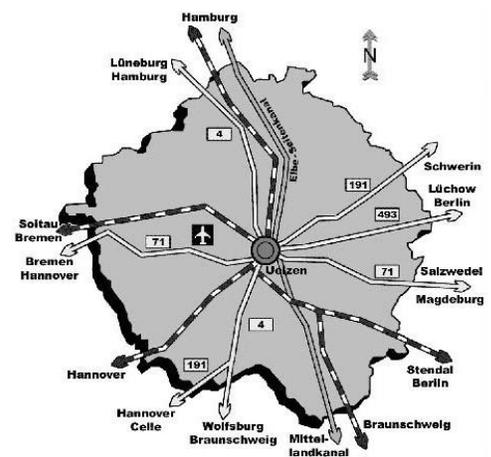
For many decades, traffic was extremely heavy on the America Line. In 1891 a new emigrant railroad station (Auswandererbahnhof) was opened in Berlin-Ruhleben to deal with the large numbers of passengers who were either beginning their trips or transferring there, by some estimates as many as 100,000 per year. As late as 1938, 64 trains traveled along this stretch every day.

The fate of the America Line in more recent times is bound up with the military and political history

of the twentieth century. In the last days of April 1945, General Walther Wenck, retreating from Berlin, was attempting to help both soldiers and civilian refugees (by some estimates as many as 250,000 individuals) to flee from the Russians and reach territory occupied by the Americans by crossing the Elbe near Tangermünde. The area was under heavy attack, and the railroad bridge across the Elbe in Hämerten (just north of Tangermünde, not far from Stendal) was destroyed, thus disrupting the America Line. Adequate repairs on the Hämerten bridge were not completed until October of 1947, and by that time, due to growing tensions between the West and the Soviet Union, all commerce between the Soviet zone and the other zones of occupied Germany was deteriorating. Although limited one-track train connections between Berlin and Hannover were maintained throughout the years of the closely guarded inner-German boundary, traffic on the America Line on the stretch between Salzwedel (in the GDR) and Nienbergen (in the FRG) was completely interrupted. Only after reunification in 1990 and because of government-funded programs aimed at reconstructing the transportation infrastructure between the long-divided parts of Germany, was this stretch of railroad rebuilt and modernized. The cost was nearly 1.5 million marks for the 113-kilometer section between Stendal and Uelzen. Following the completion of the final section—that between Salzwedel and Uelzen—the

gap in the America Line was finally closed, and celebrations were held along the border between the federal states of Saxony-Anhalt and Lower Saxony on December 18, 1999.

Just this month (September 2009), the town of Uelzen, which lies at an important intersection in the traffic patterns of northern Germany, has been in the news: the German Alliance for Railroads (Allianz pro Schiene) awarded Uelzen's railroad station the distinction of Railroad Station of the Year 2009 as the most customer-friendly in the small-town category. The station itself is an attractive and unforgettable example of the work of Friedensreich Hundertwasser, who designed it as part of the Hanover World Exposition 2000. But the greatest significance of Uelzen for America's German immigrants and for others from eastern European areas, was undoubtedly its strategic position on the America Line. 🚂



Uelzen as a transportation hub.

Research Notes: Dialect Shift in Freistadt, Wisconsin

Mark L. Loudon

Back in the fall of 2003, the MKI received a National Leadership Grant of \$234,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (part of the U.S. Department of the Interior) for the American Languages project. One of the main purposes of this grant was to digitize and make accessible sound recordings from three repositories at the UW–Madison: the MKI’s North American German Dialect Archive, the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, and the Mills Music Library. The grant period ran three and one-half years, during which time we were able to digitize over 2,000 hours’ worth of recordings, most of which were interviews with speakers of German-American and regional English dialects. While these recordings will offer research opportunities to scholars for many years to come, their content is also of interest to individuals and organizations whom we regularly aim to reach through our work in the community. The American Languages project thus accomplishes the goal of linking research and public outreach that is at the core of the missions of both the MKI and our sibling organization, the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures. In what follows I would like to share an example of the kind of work we have undertaken since the grant ended in 2007.

Among the many German-American recordings we digitized with IMLS funds is a collection of nearly 60 interviews with speakers



Harold and his sister Dolores at school in Freistadt.

of German in Wisconsin that were made in the summer of 1968 by Jürgen Eichhoff, professor emeritus of German and the founding director of the MKI. Already at the time when Professor Eichhoff was conducting his fieldwork, German had receded as a heritage language among the descendants of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants, so most of his interviewees were in their 60s, 70s, and 80s. As a dialectologist, Eichhoff was especially interested in the range of Low German dialects spoken in Wisconsin, but several of his interviews were conducted in High (standard) German. Being a dialectologist myself, I shared Eichhoff’s curiosity about the various dialects he documented, but I also became interested in the “Wisconsin

High German” in some of the recordings. Even though these interviews are easily comprehensible to speakers of standard European German, the High German of Wisconsin and standard European German are not the same. So earlier this year I decided to find out more about the history of Wisconsin High German.

One of the communities in which Eichhoff interviewed speakers of both Low German and Wisconsin High German is Freistadt, which is located in Ozaukee County just west of Mequon and Thiensville and east of Germantown. Freistadt was founded in 1839 by 30 Old Lutheran families from Pomerania and has the distinction of being Wisconsin’s

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Language Matters for Wisconsin: A Community-Based Initiative

Antje Petty

Earlier this year, the Max Kade Institute and the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures received a Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Grant from the UW-Madison for “Language Matters for Wisconsin,” a three-year project to engage Wisconsin communities in a discussion of language issues, and to share research-based information on a number of critical language questions. The project, led by Tom Purnell (Linguistics), Eric Raimy (English), and Joseph Salmons (Director, CSUMC), focuses on four communities that together capture the richness and complexity of language use in our state: Rhinelander, Wausau, Mineral Point, and Kenosha/Racine.

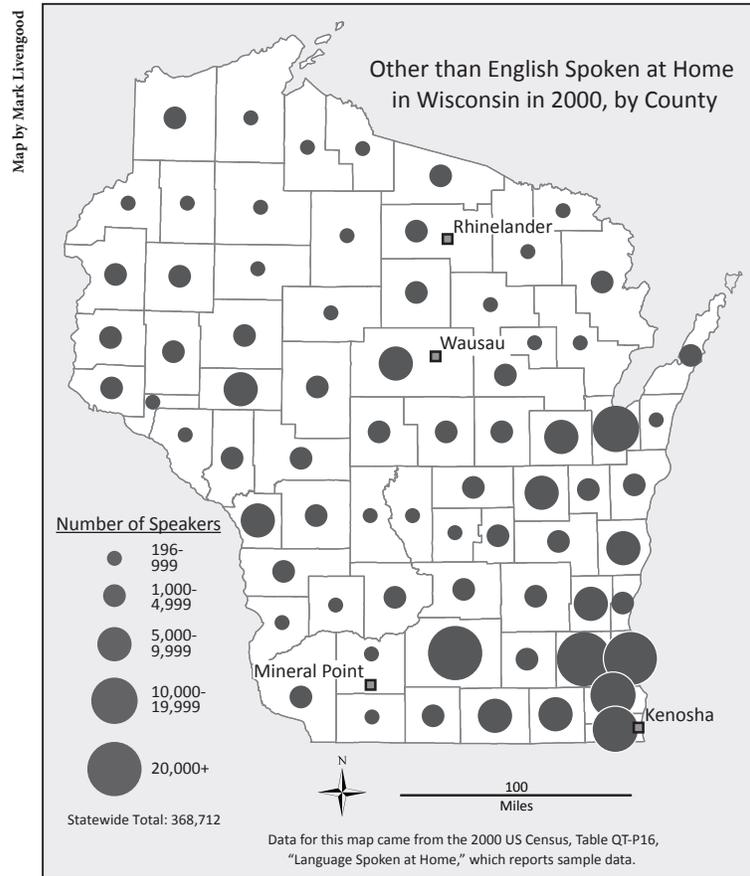
Our goal is to address underlying historic, ethnic, social, and cultural bases for and aspects of dialect and language acquisition, use, and loss. We will compare language and historic immigration (from Germanic, Slavic, and Scandinavian lands, as well as the migration of Yankees and African Americans) with language issues connected to contemporary immigration (those of the Spanish and the Hmong). In addition, we will look at language and ethnicity (African Americans, whites, Hispanics), language and education (the influence of changing dialects on learning how to read), and language preservation and revitalization efforts (Native American languages).

We have already begun to meet with collaborating organizations in the four communities and are devel-

oping exciting programs and materials. Mark Livengood (Geography) has produced some spectacular maps that depict the intersection of immigration and linguistic trends in the state and at the local level. Over the next two years we will create a Web site with which our partner communities can explore their languages and dialects historically and today, using census data, speech samples, and a host of other resources. We will also publish a small book for general audiences on Wisconsin language issues and will work with local representatives to develop exhibits and host discussion forums in the communities.

If you live near Rhinelander, Wausau, Mineral Point, or Kenosha/Racine, stay tuned for a public event on language in your area later this fall.

We are excited about this project and the interest and enthusiasm it has generated throughout the state. In particular, we are thrilled about the level of involvement within the four communities. The best ideas and suggestions have come from our local partners, and they are the ones who will shape the project’s outcome and success in discussing language matters in Wisconsin. 



Online Bibliographical Resources for German-American Studies: Part I

Sonja Mekel

The Internet offers growing numbers of research aids for academic and amateur historians. Students of history have never had so many digitized catalogs, books, and documents available to them, and more appear on a daily basis. In fact, the number of Web sites is so staggering and the libraries, archives, and other institutions sharing holdings online are so generous that many Internet users find themselves at a loss about where to begin. The following is a digest of some of the useful resources available for German and German-American history and culture.

“The Awful German Language” and Script

One of the main hurdles for people interested in German-American history is that many sources, especially those from the nineteenth century, are in the German language. To be sure, census reports and newspaper items concerning German Americans are readily available in English, but many published documents and personal papers were written in German. Thus researchers must possess at least a basic knowledge of that language. A greater difficulty is that many documents were written in the old German script, a form of handwriting that was taught in schools until the early twentieth century. Still, with some determination and a good printout of the German alphabet, the dedicated reader can learn to decipher this script. Alphabets can be

found at <http://homepages.rootweb.ancestry.com/~kobie/script.htm>. In addition to examples and “translations” of German script, this Web site has a useful list of abbreviations that were used in church records. Other examples and learning aids can be found under <http://www.suetterlinschrift.de/Englisch/Titel.htm>; <http://members.cox.net/hessen/learninggerman.htm>; and <http://transkription.de/en/matter.php>.

German History

The well-organized and searchable “Reichstagsprotokolle” (Session Reports of the German Reichstag and its Precursors) grant insight into the problematic ins and outs of daily German politics between 1867 and 1942: http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/en_index.html. The English version of the Web site provides assistance in locating any one of the 292,690 session report pages; from there on, the documents themselves are in German. If the reader wants still more politics, the German “Bundesarchiv” <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/> provides online resources such as the Akten der Reichskanzlei: Weimarer Republik (Files of the Reich’s Cabinet: Weimar Republic) <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/reichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/index.html>. Unlike the Reichstagsprotokolle, the Bundesarchiv provides no English version or search option, but it does have a Digital Picture Archive <http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/>. Viewing the

images and photographs is free, but reproducing them requires permission and the payment of a fee. “DocumentArchiv” <http://www.documentarchiv.de/> offers the texts of over a thousand German historical documents, beginning with the 1803 Reichsdeputationshauptschluss and ending with 2003 speeches by German politicians concerning Germany’s participation in the Iraq war, along with the documents’ references. The documents from the Nazi era are especially interesting; they include the infamous “Nuremberg Laws,” but also lesser-known items like the 1937 law prohibiting participation in the Spanish Civil War.

A similar, but aesthetically more appealing Web site is “German History in Documents and Images” <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/index.cfm>, an initiative of the German Historical Institute (GHI) in Washington, D.C. It goes back in time to the Reformation, and has wonderful images and maps. The GHI’s general Web site <http://www.ghi-dc.org/> is full of information about the Institute’s activities and provides access to several full-view books, lectures, and more.

German Studies and Fiction

The “Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Germanistik” <http://www.germanistik-im-netz.de/> is a good portal for readers of German looking for library catalogs, German literature, and encyclopedias. Under “Datenbanken” (databases), one finds links to collec-

tions such as the letters of Ferdinand Freiligrath, or to the thesaurus of the Brothers Grimm, conveniently marked “F” for “free access.”

The German Studies programs of many American universities also have interesting Web sites. Because they are numerous, a few examples must suffice: the University of Cincinnati Department of German Studies <<http://www.artsci.uc.edu/german/about/germanamerican/links.html#university>>; the Brown University German Studies virtual reading room <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/German_Studies/links/index.html>; and the Boston College German Studies Department <<http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/german/english/links.html>>. Links on the Boston College Web site lead to current German TV guides, as well as to Mark Twain’s “The Awful German Language.”

A search for “Germans” in Harvard University’s Open Collection Program, “Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930” <<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/>> yields, as of this writing, 82 results, including a number of nineteenth-century immigration guide books and travelogues, but also parts of Robert Reitzel’s journal *Der arme Teufel*, and the three-volume *Reminiscences* of Carl Schurz in English.

The Max Kade Institute’s own Web site <<http://mki.wisc.edu/>> is an excellent tool for finding resources. In addition, the MKI Newsletter and several conference papers are accessible under <<http://csumc.wisc.edu/mki/Publications/1.PublicationsFrames.htm>>. The Wisconsin Historical Society’s Digital Collection

<<http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/index.php>> deserves high praise; moreover, its “Wisconsin Magazine of History Archives” is online, making it easy to browse for articles on German immigrants and Wisconsin-German life: <<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wmh/archives/search.aspx>>.

Books and Periodicals

Unfortunately, most American German-language newspapers and periodicals are not available online. However, “Translations from Nineteenth Century German-American Newspapers” <http://john-martens.com/newspaper_contents.html> furnishes about two dozen articles from La Crosse, Wisconsin, newspapers. Moreover, articles from a number of Chicago-area German papers that were collected and translated in 1941 by the “Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey,” an undertaking of the Works Projects Administration of Illinois, are accessible through the “Internet Archive” <http://www.archive.org/details/5418474_6>. The Web site <<http://www.archive.org/index.php>> also has a wealth of music, images, and texts that have been scanned by cooperating libraries in the United States, Canada, and Europe, all available without charge. An enormous number of out-of-copyright books on a variety of subjects, many of them in German and with a download option, virtually fall into the Web-surfer’s lap. A search for “German-American” texts yields, among many other publications, most of the *German American Annals*, a German-American gymnastics textbook, and a Nazi propaganda pamphlet of the German-American Bund.

Google books <<http://books.google.com/>> is another good place to find books on Germany and by German Americans. A full-view book search of “deutsche Einwanderer” yields hundreds of results, among them such treasures as several volumes of the Cincinnati *Der Deutsche Pionier*. Until recently, Google had even more full-view nineteenth-century German literature online, but for whatever reason has removed many of them, or made them only partially accessible. Fortunately, some of them can still be found in the Internet Archive listed above.

Many publications by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German authors are filiopietistic, stressing the contributions and achievements of German immigrants. A more objective introduction to German-American history is “The German Americans: An Ethnic Experience” <<http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/kade/adams/toc.html>>, written by Willi Paul Adams and published by the IUPUI Max Kade German-American Center. In addition, the Center’s Web site, <<http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/kade/home.html>>, has a link to several interesting full-text publications and other resources.

[To be continued.]

Sonja Meikel is working on her Ph.D. in American History at UW–Madison. She has a special interest in German-American Jews, and her dissertation analyzes the relationship between Germans and German Jews in nineteenth-century Milwaukee and Chicago.

German and Polish Students Study Immigration and Ethnicity in the Upper Midwest

Antje Petty



Photos courtesy: Leipzig/Krakow Immigration & Ethnicity Study Tour

American Studies group on its Midwestern tour.

From September 23 to 26, a group of sixteen students from the American Studies Institutes of the University of Leipzig, Germany, and of the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland visited Wisconsin. Led by Professor Hartmut Keil, the group was on a two-week study tour of the Upper Midwest to learn about immigration and internal migration past and present, and about issues of ethnicity in rural and urban America. They focused on Chicago, south central Wisconsin, and the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. At UW–Madison, the group attended a workshop on Language and Immigration and the following day visited one of Wisconsin's many small rural communities that were settled in the 1850s primarily by German

immigrants: Hustisford in Dodge County. Members of the Hustisford Historical Society graciously showed us their town, the historical museum (Founder John Hustis's old house), and the Lutheran church. Evidence of Hustisford's German-American history was everywhere: in names, stories, signs, buildings, and the personal inscription in an old family Bible that Keil translated. Read more about the Immigration & Ethnicity Study Tour on the group's blog < <http://immigrationethnicity2009.wordpress.com/>>. 🗺️

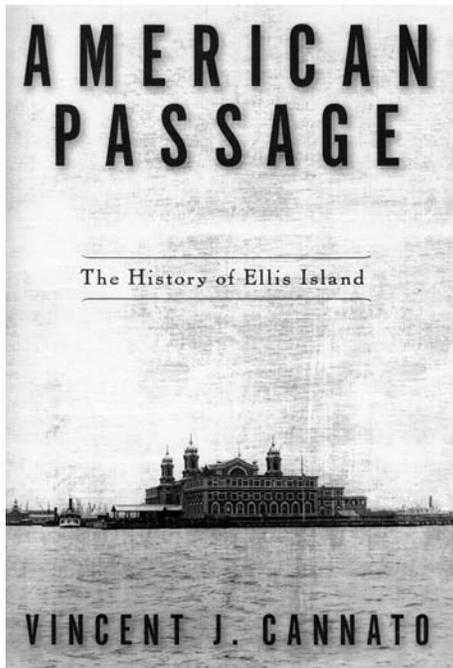


Professor Keil and Mark Livengood check an old Hustisford map.

American Passage: The History of Ellis Island

by Vincent J. Cannato, Harper Collins, 2009

Antje Petty



There is no other place as closely identified with America's history of immigration as Ellis Island. At the turn of the twentieth century, Ellis Island was the "golden door," the "isle of tears," or simply "the gate" for 12 million—mostly European—immigrants. For many Americans, including German Americans, stories of ancestors "who came through Ellis Island" are part of the family lore and are often closely intertwined with their sense of being members of a nation of immigrants. This is true even for those whose ancestors actually arrived before Ellis Island was opened.

In *American Passage*, Vincent J. Cannato—who teaches history at the University of Massachusetts in Boston—tells the story of Ellis Island

“as a biography, not of a person, but of a place, of one small island in New York Harbor that crystallized the nation's complex and contradictory ideas about how to welcome people to the New World.” The book covers the island's history from the nineteenth century, when it was still called “Giblet Island” and was used for pirate hangings, to its modern-day function as the nation's most iconic immigration museum. The main focus, however, is on the years of mass immigration: from 1892, when Ellis Island was the nation's premier inspection station, used to regulate the stream of new arrivals, until 1924, when immigration was restricted by a new immigration quota system that rendered the inspection of individuals superfluous.

Ellis Island was the result of the first attempt in American history to systematically separate “desirable” immigrants from “undesirable” ones. It was also opened when the federal government took over the regulation of immigration, as immigration previously had been handled on the state level. Thus “Castle Garden,” the point of entry for 8 million immigrants between 1855 and 1890, was administered by the state of New York, and only beginning in 1892 did the federal government try to implement federal immigration laws in Ellis Island.

But who was considered “desirable,” and who was not? What old-stock Americans (often those

with Anglo-Saxon New England background) feared most was a nation overrun by poor, uneducated, and sick immigrants who didn't speak English, brought different religions and cultures, and undercut the American Labor market. Many Americans were especially prejudiced against the increasing numbers of Russian Jews (considered filthy and diseased) and Italians (thought to be criminal and violent). While during the 1880s only 956,000 of the nation's 4.8 million immigrants came from Eastern and Southern Europe, in the 1890s immigrants from Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and other countries in Southern and Eastern Europe outnumbered immigrants from the North and West by 1.9 million to 1.6 million. Cannato describes the ensuing national debate in great detail. With many examples and personal stories he describes why the nation in the end decided to restrict immigration by excluding individuals with certain undesirable traits, rather than excluding an entire ethnic group or geographic region. An exception was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred Chinese and other Asians from entering the United States simply because of their race.

The job of looking at every individual newcomer and separating the good from the bad fell to the inspectors at Ellis Island. In 1892 they were

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oldest German settlement. Thanks mainly to a zoning restriction that prohibits home lots of under five acres, Freistadt has so far been able to withstand encroachment by developers and to maintain an active connection to its Pomeranian and Old Lutheran heritage. This heritage is promoted today by three strong local organizations: the Historical Society of Trinity Lutheran Church in Freistadt, the Pommerscher Verein Freistadt, and the Pommersche Tanzdeel.

Five residents of the Freistadt area were interviewed by Eichhoff in 1968, two in Pomeranian, two in High German, and one in both dialects. The youngest speaker, Harold S., was 39 at the time of his interview. Today, Harold is 80 years old and still living and farming in Freistadt. Last winter, I did presentations on the Eichhoff recordings for both the Verein and the Historical Society, which featured audio clips and English translations on PowerPoint slides. Most people at the presentations knew all the speakers well, and it was a special privilege to meet Harold, who is still a fluent speaker of both Wisconsin High German and Pomeranian, as well as a wellspring of knowledge about the history of Freistadt.

For about two generations after the original immigrants settled in Freistadt, Pomeranian was the main language of daily life, though everyone was also familiar with the High German used in church and the parochial school attached to it. English played only a secondary role: Harold recalled, for example,

that his U.S.-born grandfather spoke no English that Harold was aware of. Then something interesting happened within the community. Those born around 1900 who attended Trinity Lutheran School, which was bilingual at the time (German in the mornings, English in the afternoons), grew up speaking Pomeranian; but as adults they began to prefer speaking High German, including with their children. Through the story of Harold S. (born in 1929) this shift can be seen. With his parents he spoke High German, but with his grandparents and other, older members of the community, he used Pomeranian. Thus Freistadt experienced what is known as “dialect shift.”

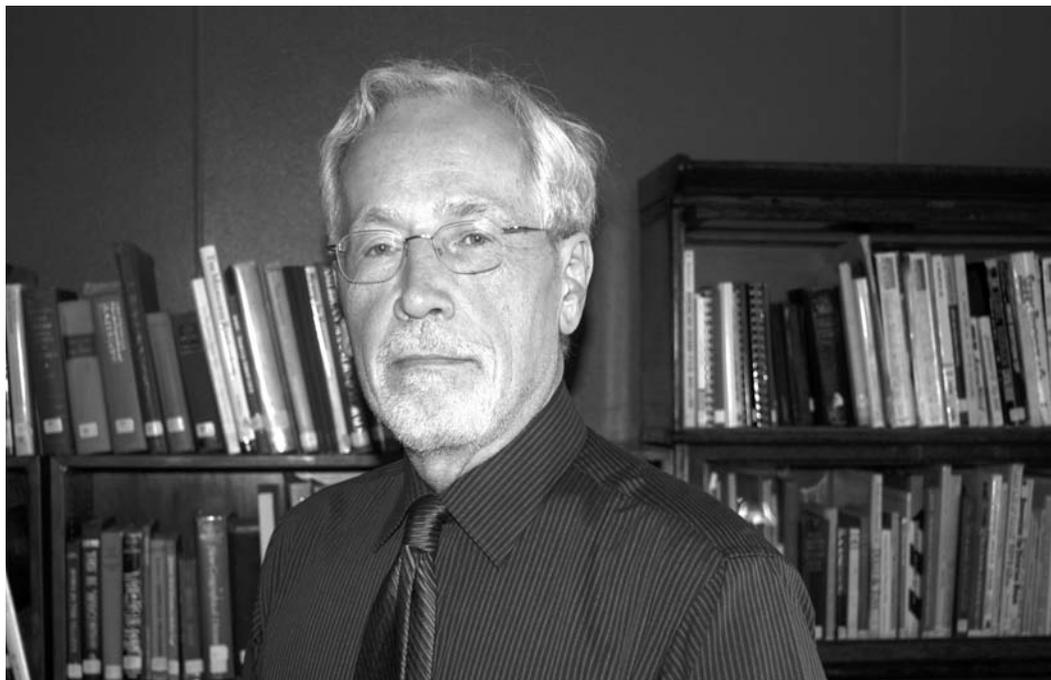
The period of Low German–High German–English trilingualism in Freistadt, and likely in many other similar communities in rural Wisconsin, was short-lived, and there were very few children born there after 1940 who grew up speaking any form of German, preferring English instead. The transition to English in Freistadt had really nothing to do with the anti-German sentiment so often invoked in discussions of the loss of German in the United States. Rather, community members point mainly to the switch to English in church in the mid-1940s, which they attribute in large part to the intermarriage of local men with non-German-speaking women from other communities.

The recordings from Freistadt and elsewhere across the state, aside from their linguistic value, are rich sources of local history. In order to improve the accessibility of these

audio materials, the MKI relocated the Sound Laboratory that houses them to the recently renovated University Club building, which is located on the central campus. This move, along with the relocation of CSUMC to the same building, is the first step toward eventually moving the entire MKI to the University Club, a process which is projected to be completed by the summer of 2011. Until then, we will continue to bring to life the stories contained in recordings from communities such as Freistadt and will preserve them for future generations. 

Gary Gisselman

Antje Petty



When Gary Gisselman joined the Board of Directors this year, he was already familiar to many Friends. As the librarian of the Marathon County Historical Society, Gary had been one of the organizers of the popular “German-American History in Marathon County” tour that accompanied the Friends’ annual meeting in Wausau in 2008. As it turns out, the history of Gary’s own family parallels that of Marathon County.

One set of Gary’s grandparents came from Pomerania in the late nineteenth century; his other grandparents emigrated from Sweden. Thus Gary grew up in Marathon County surrounded by both German and Swedish heritage. Neither Ger-

man nor Swedish was spoken in his family, but Gary credits his upbringing with instilling in him a sense of place in history and eventually an interest in researching local as well as migration history. He is especially interested in the history of Pomerania and its emigrants and has traveled to Europe to do research and trace the roots of his family. His current research focuses on what became of Pomerania as a cultural region after World War II, and the people who had to leave Pomerania after the War to resettle in other parts of the world—especially those who wound up in former East Germany.

In addition to his work for the Marathon County Historical Society, Gary has been engaged in

the Wausau community, serving a number of organizations in various capacities: the Marathon County Board of Supervisors, the Wausau City Council, the North Central Health Care Board of Directors, and Zion Lutheran Church. He is also an active member of the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Pommerscher Verein of Central Wisconsin, where he serves on the History Committee.

We are excited that with Gary Gisselman, the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Max Kade Institute once again has a member from North-Central Wisconsin who will represent that region’s unique German-American history and experience. 

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asked to enforce laws that prohibited the entry of criminals, prostitutes, convicts (except those who had been incarcerated for political reasons), lunatics, persons in danger of becoming a public charge, alien contract workers (except domestic servants, skilled workers, and artists), and persons who had engaged in acts of moral turpitude or polygamy. Inspectors were also supposed to sift out people with communicable diseases and the “feeble minded.” Over the years, anarchists, epileptics, and professional beggars were added to the list, and after 1916 new immigrants had to prove they were literate by reading a Bible passage in their native language. Trying to sift the wheat from the chaff turned out to be more difficult in practice than on paper. Inspectors only had a few moments to look at each immigrant, and unless there were very obvious signs or other readily available information, many individuals who might have

been excluded were not identified.

American Passages is most powerful when it tells the stories of the people of Ellis Island: the immigrants, inspectors, interpreters, doctors, commissioners, etc. Especially dramatic are the accounts of people who were slated for deportation for any of a number of reasons. Nevertheless, in the end barely two percent were not allowed to enter the United States. The relatively low rejection rate was a major source of contention that surrounded Ellis Island throughout its existence, especially for those Americans who had hoped to reduce the number of immigrants in general by means of the selection process. Only with the beginning of World War I did the number of immigrants decline. But a new dilemma faced administrators on Ellis Island after 1914: those immigrants who were denied entry could not be sent back to war-torn Europe, and had to remain on the island indefinitely.

After the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917,

American immigration policy took another unprecedented turn. In his “Proclamation of a State of War and Regulation of Governing Alien Enemies,” President Woodrow Wilson created a whole new type of individual: the *alien enemy*. An “alien enemy” was any male over the age of fourteen who was born in Germany, resided in the United States, and was not a naturalized U.S. citizen. This person was banned from possessing weapons, operating a plane, or living within half a mile of a military base. He also could not “write, print or publish any attack or threat against the Government or Congress of the United States,” and was not allowed to give aid to the German war effort. As soon as the proclamation was made, the first suspects were rounded up and taken to Ellis Island. Many came from the largely German community of Hoboken, New Jersey, or were crew members on German ships stranded in New York. Altogether some 1,500 German “alien enemies” were detained on Ellis Island. Most were moved after a few months to a camp in North Carolina, but Ellis Island had overnight changed its role from an immigrant inspection station to a military detention facility. Later in the war, it was used as an American military camp and convalescence center for wounded war veterans.

After the end of the war, immigration from war-ravaged Europe picked up again dramatically. Afraid that as many as 25 million Europeans might flood the United States, and more xenophobic than ever, Americans decided that the old system of regulating immigration by processing individuals had outlived its usefulness. In

Photo and caption from Cannato's *American Passage*.



The Mittlestadt family arrived at Ellis Island in 1905. They were headed for North Dakota. “Seven soldiers lost to the Kaiser,” read the photo caption in the *New York Times*.

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the early 1920s, a set of immigration quota laws were passed, culminating in the Immigration Act of 1924, which not only drastically limited the number of immigrants allowed in every year (to 165,000), but also set quotas based on the percentage of each nationality recorded in the 1890 census—a blatant effort to reduce immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, which had mostly occurred after that date. Germans were the greatest beneficiaries of this law (with a quota of over 51,000 people). The numbers allowed for Northwest Europe and Scandinavia made up 86 percent of the total.

After again being used both as a detention center for enemy aliens and as a military base in World War II, Ellis Island was closed and abandoned in 1954. Thirty-six years later and after major renovations, it was

reopened as an immigration museum run by the National Parks Service, as Cannato explains in the last chapter, entitled “The New Plymouth Rock.” The National Parks Service asserts that the Museum is about “the peopling of America” and “is a symbol of four hundred years of immigration.” However, it also conjures the image of a “good old time” when all new Americans had to pass a rigorous screening (or so says our historical memory) and thus earn their place in America.

American Passage is informative and thought-provoking but also a pleasant read. It becomes clear that the immigration debate of the Ellis Island era mirrors the immigration debate that still occupies America today: one cannot avoid concluding that worries about “newcomers” and arguments about who should be

allowed to join the American family are the same ones in 2009 that were heard over a hundred years ago. And thanks to the many personal stories (even though some digress a bit too far), Ellis Island comes to life as an important place for the American people, rather than merely a gate. 

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In the German-American News 150 Years Ago

The following is a translation by Cora Lee Kluge from an “Events of the Day” section of the *Illustrierte Abend-Schule: Eine Zeitschrift für Belehrung und Unterhaltung* (St. Louis, Mo., February 15, 1859). It reveals that Missouri and Kansas have become pressure points in the growing tensions that will soon erupt into the Civil War, and helps illustrate the attitude of some St. Louis Germans toward slavery.

... Another decision [made by the Missouri Legislature in Jefferson City], according to which the pro-

hibition of renting slaves from other states is to be removed and the price of free labor depressed, can only be regarded as an expression of exasperation and an impotent attempt to block the natural course of events that is rushing Missouri toward a condition of being slave-free. In addition to its geographical position, the properties of its soil, and its culture, comes the fact that conditions in Kansas place the property of slaveholders in northwestern parts of the state in great danger. And the fact that this last circumstance is of great influence is proven by

the countless shipments of sold slaves which Missouri envoys have taken further south since last summer. Such a gradual freeing of the state from slavery is moving surely toward its goal; the thefts of abolitionists as well as the activities of hoodlums along the borders [the violence of Bleeding Kansas was already in full swing] can indeed interrupt or delay its course and bring about animosity, but not destroy it or cut it off. 