

# Max Kade Institute

## FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF THE MAX KADE INSTITUTE. VOL. 9 NO. 4 WINTER 2000-2001

### Table of Contents:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <a href="#">Fall Conference</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">A Conference Perspective</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">Travel down the Rhine</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">Letters of a German-Amer. Farmer: Review</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">Foreign Languages in K-12 Classrooms</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">Ger. Immigrant History Teaching Resource</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">Friends Profile: Robert Luening</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <a href="#">Spring Lecture Series</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">Collection Feature</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">The Puzzle in the Portrait: Review</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">Friends of MKI Board of Directors</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">MKI and CSUMC</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">Thanks from MKI's Assistant Director</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">New Library Acquisitions</a></li> </ul> |
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## [Fall Conference: "German-Jewish Identities in America: From the Civil War to the Present"](#)

The Max Kade Institute holds conferences that are interdisciplinary in scope and which strive to link the academic community and an interested public. With funding from the German Historical Institute and the Friends of MKI, and co-sponsorship of the UW-Madison George Mosse/Laurence Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies, the Center for the Humanities and the Department of German, conference participants explored issues of identity, from several Jewish and German perspectives. A scholarly volume that illuminates the conference topic of German-Jewish Identity in America will be co-edited by conference organizers Christof Mauch, Acting Director of the German Historical Institute, and Joseph Salmons, Director of the MKI. [Below](#), Friends Board member, Susan Stoddard, shares her insights on the conference with readers of the Newsletter.

[Back to top](#)

## A Conference Perspective

By Susan Stoddard

On October 26-28, conference participants were privileged to hear a wonderful international group of scholars present thoughtful topics dealing with the issue of the identity of German Jews in America, from the Civil War until the present. I had just read the two volume journals of Viktor Klemperer, written from 1933 until 1945. I had wrestled with his assertion that he was first and foremost German and of Jewish heritage - rather than Jewish, and therefore not German. The keynote speaker, Dr. Henry Feingold, from Baruch College at the City University of New York, suggested both Klemperer's books, and the new autobiography by George Mosse, which addresses the same issues. He also introduced the issues of the German Jew compared with the Eastern European Jew, and the Ashkenazi with the Sepharadi. Thus, he set the stage for the rest of the conference.

Although as an historian (I was an undergraduate UW major in the 60's), I have considered the Holocaust and its aftermath in Europe and in the United States, and although I lived in New York and New Jersey in the 70's, I was

simply not aware of the broader questions of Jewish identity in the U.S. I did not really consider the cultural and ideological differences between the Reform and Orthodox communities, nor the role of the German-Jewish community in the Reform movement. Thus, I am glad to have had the opportunity to attend the conference organized by the Max Kade Institute and the German Historical Institute.

My family has great ties to Milwaukee, and I knew about the Settlement House and the Settlement Cookbook. I did not know that the Settlement House was set up as a way to teach immigrant women about sewing and nutrition, that it was part of the progressive political idea, not a religious endeavor. Cissy Kantor's statement that "...charity has nothing to do with being a volunteer, it is a duty!" emphasizes the role of Jewish women in the creation of other Milwaukee institutions, which I only knew as part of the German freethinking/socialist heritage. It would be interesting to study the intellectual influences on the Reform movement and the Freethinkers, since there are parallels.

A discussion of the religious communities in various areas, including Chicago, Cincinnati and New Orleans further showed the strength of the German-Jewish community in establishing hospitals, homes for the aged, and orphanages. One society, the Jewish international fraternal society B'nai Brith, was founded in 1857 based on the ideas of unity and community. Great philosophical differences between the branches of the faith were overcome with the idea of brotherly love in the need to provide for the less fortunate. The names of Isaac M. Wise, David Einhorn, Max Heller, and Paul Lensch will provide a springboard in reading more in this field. The community in Arizona was used as a model for the successful Jewish entrepreneurs who did not live in enclaves, as was done in the East and Midwest, perhaps in part because of the frontier and the smaller numbers. (It's too bad that the role of the Spanish conversos, who date back to the 15th century, especially in New Mexico, was not mentioned as part of the western community.)

Finally, the issues of the secular Jews who wished to provide for communities in the Ukraine and, of course, Palestine/Israel, were presented. Felix Warburg, Julius Rosenwald, and James Rosenberg were among the bankers and industrialists mentioned who funded these efforts.

[Back to top](#)

## **Classic Rhine and Mosel Rivers**

**Explore German-American Heritage  
September 9-19, 2001**

Strasbourg-Black Forest-Baden-Baden -Speyer-Heidelberg-Mainz-  
Boppard-Cochem-Cologne-Düsseldorf-Arnem-Amsterdam-Interlaken

Follow the route of German migrants from the decks of a privately chartered riverboat. Visit villages and countrysides to see the origins of religion, economics, and culture, and to understand their impact on modern-day North America and Europe! Embarking in Strasbourg, sail the Rhine through the German countryside to the fabled Romantic Rhine region, sailing through some of Europe's most spectacular scenery en route to Amsterdam. Travel with faculty expert and long-time member of the Executive Committee of the Max Kade Institute, Dr. Melvin Croan, Professor (Emeritus) of Political Science.

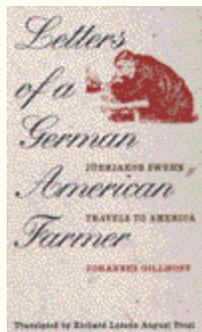
For more information concerning this Wisconsin Alumni Association trip, please call Sheri Hicks at the Alumni office (608) 262-9521, toll-free 1-888-WAA-TRAVEL(922-8728) or INTRAV at 1-800-825-2900.

[Back to top](#)

# Letters of a German-American Farmer: Jürnjakob Swehn Travels to America

By Johannes Gillhoff. Trans. by Richard Lorenz August Trost. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000. 178 pages.

Reviewed by Clark Mitchell



Johannes Gillhoff's book, a compilation of letters written to his father, is an entertaining read for anyone interested in the experience of the German-American immigrant. At the turn of the last century, Gillhoff gathered letters written by former students of his father, a schoolteacher in Mecklenburg. After eighteen years of reworking the letters, Gillhoff created the character Jürnjakob Swehn. Swehn is a fictional German immigrant whose experiences are based on the many individual stories found in these letters.

The text is written in the form of letters (as the title implies) and is thus full of personal anecdotes.

Within this format, Gillhoff addresses significant topics facing the nineteenth-century German-American. Among the initial letters are stories about the settlement process, claiming and clearing of land, and hardships on the farm. Gillhoff also introduces the German-American perspective on certain social issues. For example, Jürnjakob's wife is his equal, and he consults her before making decisions, indicative of the crucial role of women on the family farm. Religion is another social issue addressed in the letters, clearly playing a large role in the German-American immigrant experience. Jürnjakob describes in great detail the building of the first and subsequent churches, the search for pastors, and the general importance of the church in the community. The church also played the role of educator in the earliest immigrant communities. Jürnjakob, in his letters to his former teacher, describes the dichotomy of the parochial (German-speaking) school and the public school.

Of interest to the linguist is the extent to which German is spoken in the family and in the community. Jürnjakob says of his children: "When the children are together, they usually talk English. Which is why we have to be sure that they learn German" (165). According to these letters, language maintenance efforts were underway before 1900. The dialect spoken in this community is *Mecklenburgisch*, an eastern variety of Low German. Jürnjakob identifies closely to speakers of his dialect, referring to someone as a *Mecklenburger* (or non-*Mecklenburger*) more often than speaking of someone as being German. The original letters are written in what is referred to as *Missingsch*, a mixture of High and Low German features. The English translation attempts to preserve the concept of *Missingsch* by making use of both High and Low German phrases. In the words of the translator: "I make it sound like that old-timey farm talk that I grew up with and experienced . . ." (xv). While some italicized phrases may add charm to the book, I found the high frequency of such phrases (sometimes several on one page) along with their subsequent English translation a bit distracting. Here is an example of this: "The first thing we did was build a log house, *wir bauten uns ein Blockhaus*. There was plenty wood" (52). Additionally, the direct translations of German idiomatic phrases, as well as the imposition of German syntactic forms on English phrases, detract somewhat from the message of the letters. A very high-frequency idiomatic loan translation is the phrase "man oh man". This phrase is often used to begin sentences: "Nu, man oh man, I giddyaped them horses" (61). "I scratched me behind the ears. . ." (107) illustrates my syntactic quibbles. I understand the translator's effort to enrich the text with these features, however, less can be more.

Of course there is humor in the letters as well. In one letter, Jürnjakob explains to a friend that "every and any German has to have something to complain about, otherwise their skin doesn't fit." The book also includes several entertaining narratives such as the story of the church organ. The new church organist has a lesson in German frugality and simplicity. The organ "windmaker" (the guy who pumps the air into the organ) tells the new organist: "Don't pull all the stops at once, as if that wind doesn't cost money. And, if you'd leave those worldly tra-la-las off those holy hymns, you'd get through real good with my wind" (97).

Aside from minor problems with the translation, the book offers informative insight into the daily lives of nineteenth-century German-Americans. By fusing the various original letters into one family of immigrants, Gillhoff manages to paint an entertaining picture of early immigrant life. Besides poking fun at himself and fellow Germans, Jürnjakob does emphasize the important role German-Americans played in the settlement of the Midwest. I recommend this book to all

looking for insight into the experience (both community and family) of nineteenth-century German-American immigrants.

[Back to top](#)

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## **Immigration and Heritage: Connecting Foreign Languages with Other Subjects in K-12 Classrooms**

**By Antje Petty**

Their heritage may be different, but one thing virtually all Americans have in common: a personal and/or family history that includes immigration/emigration or migration. On a larger scale, immigration issues are interwoven with many historical and current events. Already these issues are taught in elementary and secondary schools, but usually as isolated topics within the curriculum demands of an individual subject. At the Max Kade Institute, we feel that immigration is an ideal topic to connect different school subjects with foreign languages, to connect teachers, students, and parents with the community at large (for example, local museums, historical and ethnic societies) and to connect the present with the past.

In this context, MKI is developing teacher workshops, in which foreign language teachers will cooperate with teachers from other disciplines in creating a cross-subject instructional unit. Example topics could be: *The Settlement of Wisconsin*, *The Role of Immigrants in the Wars*, *The Concept of a National Language*, *Immigration Issues in the Year 2000*, etc.

Using the first topic, the integrated curriculum could work as follows: students in history class learn about the settlement of Wisconsin, while in language arts class, they read historic or current immigrant literature related to that topic. At the same time, in the foreign language classes, students study in depth the impact of immigrants from their target language countries, using authentic materials in the foreign language. In this case, German students could learn about the regions in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria from which people emigrated to Wisconsin. They could learn about the dialects those immigrants spoke, learn about particular groups such as the 48ers, etc. Materials being used would range from sound recordings of dialects, travelogues and historic newspapers to photos and personal letters. The MKI collection will be a valuable resource for those materials.

By being taught through integrated curricula, students will benefit in many ways. They will not only be confronted with different viewpoints but literarily will have heard different voices. This will help them to appreciate their own voice and at the same time appreciate the diversity in our society. Overall, it is one step toward preparing students for life as responsible citizens in an increasingly global world.

[Back to top](#)

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## **German Immigrant History Teaching Resource**

**By Emily Engel**

We are excited to announce the great strides made through educational outreach. As soon as the first activity for the new teacher's resource was done, Pam Tesch and I were able to visit eight classrooms and test it...with much success.

Visiting classrooms proved to be very helpful for us. We learned a lot about our first set of activities (Family and Immigration) and about middle and high school students. We visited classrooms ranging from seventh grade through twelfth, all with varying success. By working with so many different ages, we learned that the activities worked best with older students, because we were able to initiate quality conversations about the broader themes and issues of immigration in the U.S. Students were engaged in conversations about the Melting-Pot and Salad Bowl theories, as well

as the issues surrounding English-only legislation. These topics lead to the discussion of what is the American identity, if we have one, and should we expect immigrants to adopt it as their own.

We will continue to plan new activities and to meet with teachers throughout the next semester. We would like to personally thank Naomi Smith, at Stoughton High School, and Mary Counter, at Shattuck Middle School in Neenah, for allowing us into their classrooms, and offering us their helpful advice on the teaching activities. We are very appreciative!

In addition, we presented the second set of activities at WAFLT (Wisconsin Association of Foreign Language Teachers) with much success. If you are interested in learning more about the activities in the German Immigrant Teaching Resource, please contact Antje Petty at the Max Kade Institute (262-7546).

[Back to top](#)

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## Friends Profile: Robert Luening

By Pamela Tesch

When he's not designing new courses in farm management, writing books, working on genealogy, or traveling to Europe to meet new (and old) relatives, you might get Bob to stop and talk about the Meat and Animal Science Professional Improvement Seminar where he's been engaged in a long-time study of the anterior portion of the species *ovis* and probability statistics (otherwise known as sheephead). Robert Luening is a charming and energetic member of the Institute, who knows how to concentrate on business, but also has fun.

Director Joe Salmons notes: "Bob has transformed the Friends of MKI, both recently as President, and previously as Treasurer. He suggested lifetime memberships and has helped to build the endowment." Associate Director Mary Devitt also recognizes his service: "Bob has played a very important role in developing the Friends and has served the Institute in many other ways, in addition to being President and Treasurer. He has also given family history lectures throughout the state. In almost every community, he knows or has some connection with someone; probably because of his career as an Ag-Extension agent." Bob became a member of the Max Kade Institute during his career on campus teaching Farm Management. Since that time, he has been a dedicated member of the Institute, not only participating in lectures, conferences, and other events, but also serving on the board for six years.

His professional career at the UW began in 1963, and he continues to teach short courses, the most recent being in the summer of 2000. Before he received his degrees in agricultural education, he experienced life as a farmer for sixteen years in Waukesha County. The combination of his field and professional experience led him to publish a *Farm Management Handbook*, and later a book, *Dairy Farm Management*, that has been translated into Spanish, French, and Russian.

Bob attributes part of his interest in the MKI to his German and Dutch heritage. His wife, Dorothy, introduced him to genealogy. Together, they have researched both his German and Dutch ancestors. One of his ancestors, his grandfather Dietrich Christian Ludwich Luening, was one of the very early members of Milwaukee's Masonic Aurora Lodge No. 30 and wrote part of a lecture in German 150 years ago. Bob attended an event last spring at the Aurora Lodge and was recognized in honor of his grandfather (see *MKI Newsletter* Summer 2000). Bob says that D.C. led an adventurous life. "He was born in Amsterdam, and moved to the Bremen area, where he was reputed to be a juvenile gang leader. He was sent away to sea and came to the US as a teenager. He became a school principal eventually and was active in public education for over fifty years." Since 1990, Bob and his wife Dorothy have traveled to Europe every three years to meet their family and tour the Netherlands and Germany.

Perhaps D.C.'s life as a Mason and educator influenced Bob. Like his grandfather, he is a Mason and has been master of the Middleton Ionic Lodge, as well as the Hartland Lodge. The community is important to him, and in addition to his

service to the MKI, and to the Masonic Lodges, he also belongs to the Madison West Kiwanis Club. He has been in *Who's Who in America* since 1984.

Bob thinks that we often take ourselves too seriously these days. He says, "We can accomplish just as much if we once-and-so-often sit down together for popcorn and beer and have fun!"

[Back to top](#)

## Spring Lecture Series

January 31, 1418 Van Hise Hall, 4:30

Peter Wagener, Institut für Deutsche Sprache - Mannheim:  
"Languages in a Virtual World: German & German-American Dialects on the Internet"

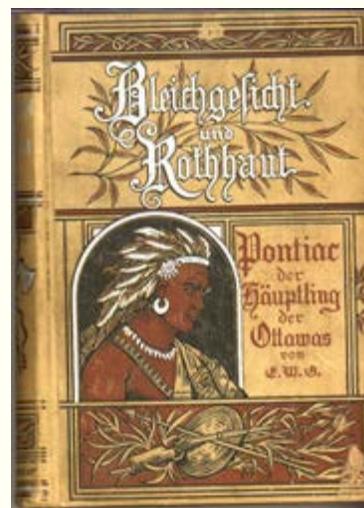
Please watch for more information about upcoming lectures.

[Back to top](#)

## Collection Feature: Native Americans in Late Nineteenth-century and Early Twentieth-century European and German-American Literature

By Heidi Marzen, MKI Librarian

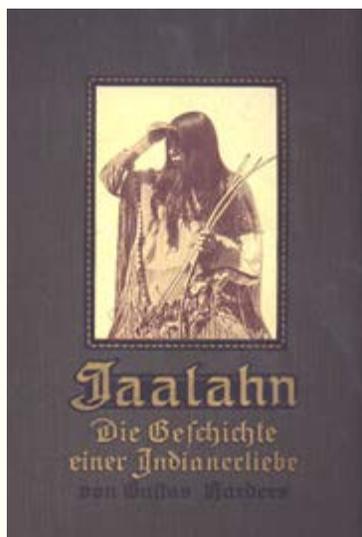
To complement our recent lecture, "Germans and Indians in a European Perspective" by Christian Feest, we are featuring in this issue part of our collection of German-American literature. The titles in the following bibliography include not only those published in the United States in the German language, but also some published in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. There are both fiction and non-fiction titles, with varying depictions and perceptions of Native Americans.



The images shown here were chosen for their illustrations of Native Americans. The historical novel by L.W. Graep, *Bleichgesicht und Rothhaut*, features the Ottawa chief, Pontiac. It was published by the prominent German-American publishing house of George Brumder, in Milwaukee. Also pictured is the cover of *Jaalahn: Die Geschichte einer Indianerliebe*. It was published both in Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century. The first page of this book tells the reader that "*Jaalahn bedeutet 'Auf Wiedersehen'!*", or "*Jaalahn means 'goodbye'!*"

Shown below are images from the book, *Eliot, Brainerd und Zeisberger: Drei Glaubenszeugen unter den Indianern*. This is the tale of three seventeenth-century missionaries, shown here preaching to the Indians. This book was published in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 1883, and written by a Lutheran pastor from Brooklyn.

Look for other collection features in future newsletters. Please contact Heidi Marzen (262-7546) to view any of the items below.



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*Der Wildtöter.* Stuttgart: W. Nitzschke, n.d.

Berghold, Alexander. *Indianer-Rache, oder die Schreckenstage von Neu-Ulm.* Graz, Switzerland: Verlags-Buchhandlung Styria, 1892.

Eastman, Ch. A. *Winona: Indianergeschichten aus alter Zeit.* Hamburg: Rauhes Haus, 1922.

Frey, August Emil. *Eliot, Brainerd und Zeisberger: Drei Glaubenszeugen unter den Indianern. Missions-Bibliothek für Jung und Alt, V.* Allentown, Pa.: Brobst, Diehl & Co., 1883. [pictured]

Gärtner, Georg. *Nur ein Wilder! Eine Erzählung aus dem Indianerleben.* [Stuttgart]: Gustav Weise, n.d.

Graepp, L. W. *Aus der Heimath des Rothen Mannes.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Brumder, 1897.

Graepp, L. W. *Bleichgesicht und Rothhaut, oder, Pontiac, der Häuptling der Ottawas.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Brumder, n.d. [pictured]

Harders, Gustav. *Jaalahn. Die Geschichte Einer Indianerliebe.* Dritte Auflage. Hamburg: Rauhes Haus, 1911 / Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern, 1921. [pictured]

Harders, Gustav. *Wille wider Wille: Eine Herzengeschichte aus den Indianerhütten Arizonas.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern, (c)1916.

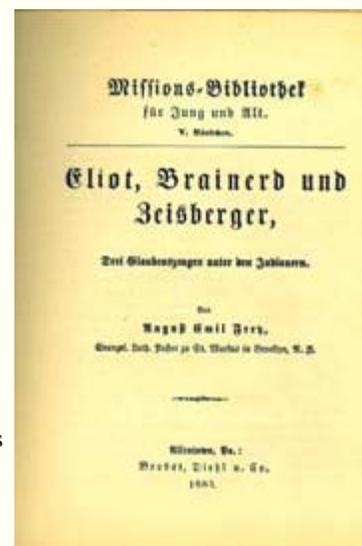
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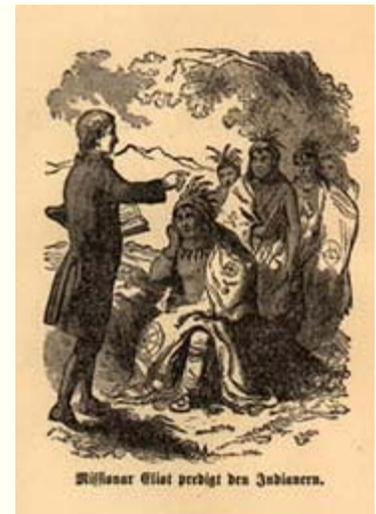
Herzberger, F. W. *Manitous Opfer: Eine alte Indianersage.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern, n.d.

May, Karl. *Der Ölprinz: Eine Erzählung für die reifere Jugend.* Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, n.d.

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Young, Egerton. *Unter den Indianern*. Guetersloh: Bertelsmann, 1899.

[Back to top](#)

## The Puzzle in the Portrait

By Eleanor Florence Rosellini. Guild Press of Indiana, 1999. \$17.95 (Hardcover). 112 pages.

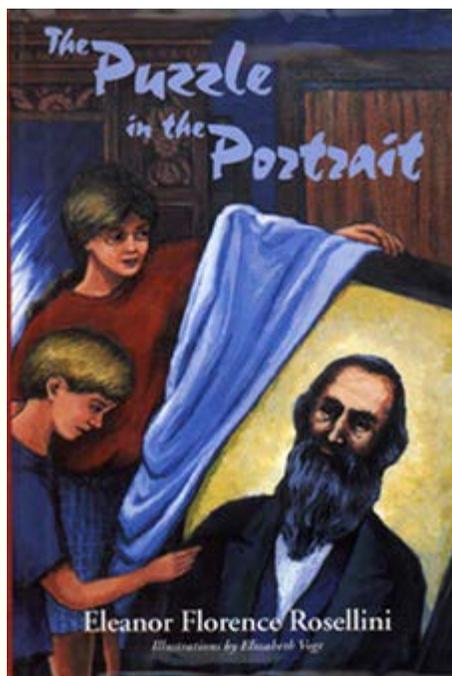
Reviewed by Antje Petty

July 12th, Williams Bay, Wisconsin. Just arrived at grandfather's house. Brother is running around birdbath, waving a stick and grunting like a cave man...

With this entry in the diary of eleven year old Elizabeth Pollack begins the story of a mystery: a mystery born not in some far-off or exotic place but right in her own grandfather's house. Elizabeth and her eight year old brother Jonathan love detective stories and would like nothing better than to become sleuths themselves. They get their wish when, from behind an old family portrait, a mysterious faded note is found that seems to be over a hundred years old. In an effort to decipher the note and to uncover the story behind it, the children delve deeply into their family's history. They learn about genealogy and old handwriting, they find long lost family treasures, and they visit the places where their ancestors lived, traveling from Wisconsin to Indiana to Ohio. But most important of all, they meet relatives they barely knew and get to hear family tales that could have easily died with the older generation. After an exciting, suspenseful journey, Elizabeth and Jonathan find the surprising solution to their mystery, and — in the words of their uncle Richard — they have "found more than one treasure." They have learned that family memories are jewels that can be lost forever if no one makes an effort to collect and preserve them.

With *The Puzzle in the Portrait*, Eleanor Rosellini has written a mystery for 7-12 year olds that will be enjoyed by the whole family. Says Rosellini: "I meant the book to be read out loud, to be shared by family members, and to be a catalyst for intergenerational communication." In this, she definitely succeeds. The story is absorbing, fast-paced, and will engage parents, grandparents, and children alike. In a school setting, the book can be a lead-in to further discussions of family, society, and heritage. Boys and girls alike will readily relate to the main characters: the somewhat bookish older sister Elizabeth and the rambunctious little brother Jonathan, whose favorite book is *The Encyclopedia of the Totally Disgusting*. Throughout the text, vivid illustrations by Elizabeth Vogt draw the reader even deeper into the story.

While the mystery itself is fiction, the settings and characters are modeled after places and people in the author's life. Eleanor Rosellini points out that even while writing this book, she learned more about her own family's history. And she just might have helped to preserve a piece of this history, too: The "real" Diamond



Prairie Farm in Ohio is about to be torn down but will live on in *The Puzzle in the Portrait*.

For those who want to become memory keepers themselves, there are some suggestions at the end of the book. Examples include: "put together a memory box," "find an object with a story to tell," and "film older relatives talking about their past." Young readers also get clues on how to do genealogical research using libraries and the Internet. At this time of year one suggestion in particular might be of interest: "At your next holiday celebration, get a few people to tell about their most memorable holiday. Warn them ahead of time so that they have time to think about it. Write down or tape your favorite story. Make sure to get the facts right, just like a newspaper reporter!" Who knows, maybe you will uncover a mystery. After all — to again quote uncle Richard, "If you like puzzles there is nothing like family history!"

[Back to top](#)

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[Back to top](#)

## The MKI and the CSUMC

By Ruth Olson, Assistant Director, CSUMC

The Max Kade Institute will soon be part of the new Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures. The creation of CSUMC is the result of a planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Part of the NEH's plan to create ten regional humanities centers across the country, CSUMC will serve a 5-state region, including Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and Missouri. This summer, we will be writing an implementation grant to NEH, and during the next seven years, we will be raising money to fund an endowment that will sustain regional humanistic activities for years to come.

The goals of the new center are to create partnerships with academic institutions and other humanities organizations and agencies across the Upper Midwest; to study the languages and expressive culture of the Upper Midwest's diverse peoples; to stimulate the development of related research and library, archival, museum and virtual collections; to foster educational and public programs, with an emphasis on pluralism, language and expressive culture; to act as a clearinghouse for information about projects across the Upper Midwest; and to connect with other regional centers across the country. The Center will be guided by an advisory board of academic humanists, programming professionals and exemplary practitioners of expressive culture, drawn from across the region.

The CSUMC will sponsor and support conferences and events that will serve diverse professions, institutions and communities. We envision, for example, a conference that conjoins bilingual storytellers, teachers, linguists, literary scholars, regional writers and librarians. Other conferences would foster discussion and collaboration among: traditional musicians, folklorists, ethnomusicologists and producers of recordings and programs; dance and theater scholars and immigrant and ethnic performers; and fine and folk artists, museum curators, art historians and educators.

The Center will also offer research opportunities for both individuals and organizations. Fellowships and grants will allow students, independent scholars and faculty to conduct field research focusing on the region's diverse cultures. The Center will support visiting scholars, both at the University of Wisconsin and across the region. We will also help organizations to expand their research on languages, expressive culture and indigenous and immigrant groups. The Center will build partnerships with other state, regional and federal arts and humanities agencies to increase the funding opportunities available in the region.

The Center will nurture collections development across the region, especially striving to fill in research gaps in the languages and expressive cultures of the Upper Midwest's diverse peoples.

The Center is strongly committed to public programs and products. The Center aims to create and fund educational products that increase knowledge about the region.

For more information, please visit our website or contact Ruth Olson.

[Back to top](#)

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### *Thanks!*

It's been said, "gratitude expressed is the expectation of future favors." However, not expressing gratitude is indeed negligence.

This year the Friends have far surpassed their previous support of the Institute's programs -- from becoming life members, to supporting specific events, to giving to the Endowment and Publication Funds of the MKI, to renewing membership at a higher giving level. All these means of supporting the Friends, and thereby the Institute, have allowed our faculty, staff, and students to continue to do new and interdisciplinary research, to sponsor workshops and conferences that bring some of the best academic and community scholars to participate in broadening the scope of the

Institute and expanding our knowledge of the immigrant experience.

Increased support of MKI activities can equally be viewed as expressed gratitude by the Friends for the MKI, and thus, the expectation of future favors. We are most happy to oblige by offering engaging lectures, new publications, and many opportunities for our Friends to become involved. Together we're creating a win-win situation. Future favors aside, we thank you most sincerely for your support. On behalf of the Staff of MKI, we wish you happy holidays and prosperity in the year ahead.

**Mary Devitt, Assistant Director**

[Back to top](#)

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## New Library Acquisitions

**By Heidi Marzen, MKI Librarian**

We look on with delight as the MKI libraries continue to grow. In this issue, there is a mix of nineteenth-century German-American imprints donated to the Institute and more recently published books and pamphlets we have been given. The German-American volumes go into our unique collection of German-language materials published in the United States. The contemporary works go into our research collection on the second floor. We have also acquired several multimedia items, including some microfiche and CD-ROMs, which can be useful for genealogical research.

Please contact Heidi Marzen at 262-7546 or [hmmarzen@facstaff.wisc.edu](mailto:hmmarzen@facstaff.wisc.edu) if interested in using these items.

*ALC Congregation Records* [microfiche]. 1982.

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[Back to top](#)

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# German-Jewish Identities in America: From the Civil War to the Present

October 26-28, 2000

Sponsored by the  
Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
and the  
German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.

Co-sponsors:

George L. Mosse/Laurence A. Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies  
Department of German  
Center for Humanities  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Within the vast literature on both German-speaking immigrants to this country and on Jews in America, relatively less attention has been paid to the intersection of these two groups, German-speaking Jews. This conference will examine the experience of this large and historically important group of immigrants from the mid-19th century into the 20th. In particular, we will focus on the creation, recreation, and negotiation of a complex set of interlocking, overlapping identities: linguistic, national, regional, religious and ethnic.

A number of senior and younger scholars contributing to this area will present papers. The conference will be firmly anchored in History, but with strong connections to immigrant, ethnic and urban studies, as well as other neighboring disciplines.

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## Thursday, October 26

University Club, 803 State Street, on the Library Mall

6:30 p.m. Dinner and Welcoming Remarks

Dr. Joseph C. Salmons, Director, Max Kade Institute

Dr. Christof Mauch, Acting Director, German Historical Institute

8:30 p.m. Keynote Address, University Club

Henry Feingold, Graduate School, CUNY

Director, Jewish Resource Center, Baruch College

[\*German Jews and the American Jewish Synthesis\*](#)

**All plenary sessions will be held in the Memorial Union, 800 Langdon Street  
The conference is free and open to the public.**

## Friday, October 27

8:30 - 9:00 a.m. Registration and coffee

9:00 - 10:30 a.m. I. Community Formation

Moderator: Christof Mauch

Leah Hagedorn, Tulane University

*"We Allow No German Jews to Settle Among Us": Reconstructing and Deconstructing Confederate Civilian Anti-Semitism During the American Civil War*

10:45 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. II. Gender

Moderator: Karen Jankowsky

Anke Ortlepp, University of Cologne

*"Give to the Poor! Yourself You'll Bless!": Jewish Charities in Milwaukee 1865-1920*

Karla Goldman, Jewish Women's Archive

*Patterns of Philanthropy: Nineteenth-Century Women's Societies in Germany and the United States*

Lunch break

1:45 - 4:30 p.m. III. Community Evolution

Moderator: Marc Silberman

Gerhard Grytz, University of Nevada

[\*"Whose Frontier?": Experiences of Gentile and Jewish German Immigrants in Arizona during the 19th Century\*](#)

Tobias Brinkmann, University of Leipzig

[\*"We are Brothers! Let us Separate": "German Jews" in Chicago between Einheitsgemeinde and Network-Community 1847-1923\*](#)

Break

Ruth Goldman, University of Wisconsin

*"And These Were Jews?": A Documentary Film in Progress about the German-American Jewish Community of Cincinnati*

## **Saturday, October 28**

8:30 - 9:00 a.m. Registration

9:00 - 10:30 a.m. IV. German Jewish Institutions

Moderator: David Sorkin

Cornelia Wilhelm, University of Munich

[\*Shaping the American Jewish Community: The Independent Order of B'nai B'rith 1843-1914\*](#)

Derek Penslar, University of Toronto

[\*Brahmin Philanthropists: The Leadership of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee\*](#)

10:45 a.m. -12:15 p.m. V. Biographies

Moderator: Tony Michaels

Mitch Hart, Florida International University

[\*A Jew Grows in Brooklyn: German Science and American-Jewish Identity\*](#)

Bobbie Malone, Wisconsin State Historical Society

[\*Russians, Race, and Reform: The Making of a Southern Zionist in 1890s New Orleans\*](#)

Lunchbreak

1:45 - 3:15 p.m. VI. Theater and Culture

Moderator: Cora Lee Nollendorfs

Harley Erdman, University of Massachusetts

[\*German Jews and American Show Business: A Reconsideration\*](#)

Thomas Kovach, The University of Arizona

[\*German Jews and Ostjuden in the American South: Alfred Uhry's "Last Night of Ballyhoo"\*](#)

3:30 - 5:00 p.m. VII. Contemporary Perspectives

Moderator: Joe Salmons

Monika Schmid, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

[\*"I always thought I was a German - it was Hitler who taught me I was a Jew: " National-socialist Persecution, Identity, and the German Language\*](#)

7:00 - 10:00 p.m. Film and Discussion - Grainger Hall, Room 2120, 975 University Avenue

Moderator: Mary Devitt

Manfred Kirchheimer, Independent Filmmaker

[\*We Were So Beloved : The German-Jews of Washington Hts., New York\*](#)

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## ABSTRACTS

### Henry Feingold

#### *German Jews and the American Jewish Synthesis*

I want to suggest, hopefully without overstating it, that the basic terms of the Jewish encounter with America -- its strategy and its modalities -- were initially set down by the rustic Bayern, Hessians and Alsatians of Jewish faith who arrived on these shores in numbers after the 1820s.

[Back to top](#)

### Gerhard Grytz

#### *"Whose Frontier?": Experiences of Gentile and Jewish German Immigrants in Arizona during the 19th Century*

Historical studies on Jewish immigrants in the American West are plentiful. The majority of these studies neither distinguish German-speaking Jews as a separate group nor do they acknowledge their affinity to Gentile Germans. A different approach, however, shows that Jewish and Gentile Germans, together, "transplanted" nineteenth-century social structures, cultural values, and economic attitudes to the American West. This group of immigrants, overwhelmingly consisting of Jewish German merchants and Gentile German artisans, promoted "home-style" capitalistic ideas and values. In the case of Arizona, despite being a minority, they significantly influenced the socio-economic development of the Territory as a result of their advanced economic status. Together with other ethnic groups, the "Arizona Germans" played a substantial part in creating a new and unique regional "Creole Culture" in the American Southwest that was neither the product of a Turnerian confrontation between the individual and the frontier environment nor the result of assimilation to supposedly "dominant" Anglo-American values.

[Back to top](#)

### Tobias Brinkmann

#### *"We are Brothers! Let us Separate.": "German Jews" in Chicago between "Einheitsgemeinde" and Network-Community 1847-1923*

After the 1840s Jews in the United States organized communities increasingly beyond the religious sphere on ethnic terms. Jewish immigrants lamented the loss of close-knit Jewish "Gemeinschaft" and praised, sometimes in the same breath, the unique possibilities in the United States to form new Jewish communities. The paper will analyze the centrifugal and centripetal forces that influenced Jewish community-building in America's fastest growing city between 1847 and 1923. While Jewish immigrants individually had close relationships with other German-speaking immigrants and helped to organize the short lived German "umbrella"-community, the Jewish community was never a part of the German community. The paper questions the bipolar model of interpreting modern Jewish history by asserting that "assimilation" led not to the disintegration but rather to the transformation of Jewish "community" into what Arthur Ruppin characterized as "new [Jewish] milieux." The paper is based on my dissertation: *"Wir amerikanisch-deutsche Juden": Jewish immigrants in Chicago 1840-1900* (TU Berlin, 2000).

[Back to top](#)

## **Cornelia Wilhelm**

### ***Shaping the American Jewish Community: The Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, 1843-1914***

Founded in 1843 by German immigrants to the United States, the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith constituted the first and largest national American Jewish organization in nineteenth-century America, providing a platform for sociability and mutual support, a network of communication, representation and community for American Jews. Created as a fraternal lodge, it addressed a membership composed of diverse religious or denominational affiliation, ethnicity, or class, and defined a practical Judaism stressing a strong universalism and could embrace more than just one fraction of the diverse American Jewish groups. The paper will discuss how this organization helped to shape the young community structurally, for example by substituting old-fashioned concepts of "community" with a modern organizational framework, which allowed the American Jew to maintain a Jewish identity while adapting to American forms, or by balancing the economic and social situation of small and needy communities. It will explore how the organization succeeded in giving the young community a new vision of its role in America of raising the individual's self-awareness of his potential as a Jew in American society, continuously blending its mission with the general understanding of religiosity and with American Civil Religion and the limits of such activity.

[Back to top](#)

## **Derek Penslar**

### ***Brahmin Philanthropists: The Leadership of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee***

During the interwar period, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was the most powerful Jewish philanthropy in the United States and the second wealthiest in the world (behind the London-based Jewish Colonization Association). This paper will analyze the leadership style, operating methods, and goals of the Joint. Although the Joint's hierarchical managerial style caused friction with American Zionists, the goals of the JDC and American Zionism overlapped considerably. An examination of some of the Joint's most prominent leaders - including Felix Warburg and James Rosenberg - and of the Joint's activities in Palestine and Eastern Europe, will reveal that the Joint was viscerally linked with many aspects of the Zionist project.

[Back to top](#)

## **Mitch Hart**

### ***A Jew Grows in Brooklyn: German Science and American-Jewish Identity***

Early on in the 1997 novel *The Actual*, Saul Bellow's narrator is describing his first encounter with the elderly millionaire Adletsky. "In the New World, [Adletsky's] immigrant melting-pot malnourished teeny-weenies produced six-foot sons and large, luxuriant daughters. I myself was both larger and heavier than my parents, though internally

more fragile, perhaps." Bellow is reproducing here, in highly abbreviated form, a standard set of images and ideas from the scientific literature of the early twentieth century. This paper explores this scientific literature, and the theme of America as the place of Jewish physical and psychological regeneration. While American Jewish social scientists accepted to one degree or another the standard image of the modern Jew as degenerate, they sought to prove through science that the American environment would exert a meliorative effect on the Jewish body and mind. The Jew would literally grow in New York and elsewhere, if allowed to enjoy the political and social freedoms associated with the New World. The paper focuses on the reciprocity between scientific studies produced in Germany and the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century, the role of German science in shaping a particular sort of American-Jewish social science, and the politics impelling this social science.

[Back to top](#)

## **Bobbie Malone**

### ***Russians, Race, and Reform: The Making of a Southern Zionist in 1890s New Orleans***

Rabbi Max Heller was a man of both passionate conviction and inner contradiction. In his public life, he consistently sought center stage, sometimes as an agitator, and sometimes as a mediator. During his first two decades in the United States, Heller confronted some of the major social problems that dominated the late nineteenth century--emancipation and racism, nationalism and nativism, immigration and assimilation--issues that remain unresolved even today. In grappling with these issues, he found his own voice.

In his Germanized Jewish upbringing in Prague and in his rabbinical training at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Heller had imbibed the principles of a rationalized, liberal, and universalist Judaism. From the vantage point of his pulpit at Temple Sinai in New Orleans, his perspective began to change. By the turn of the century, these ideals no longer seemed adequate guidance in a world increasingly threatened by ethnic and racial nationalism. Earlier than most, Heller realized that such nationalism would ultimately cause European Jewry to be scapegoated. At the same time he recognized that the spiritual roots of his faith were embedded in traditions casually abandoned by the Jewish reformers who had come of age at midcentury. Their sanitized Judaism now appeared sterile. As the twentieth century dawned, the coincidence of local, regional, national, and international events created an epiphany for Heller. At midlife, these events impressed upon him the profound cultural as well as religious implications of the contemporary Jewish experience. Integrating his new conception of Judaism and its mission, he became a passionate Zionist and an ardent humanitarian, a risk-taker who championed social justice and defended the underdog. This paper will discuss the precipitating incidents in this epiphany, which centered around a small group of Russian Jews who had recently immigrated to New Orleans.

[Back to top](#)

## **Harley Erdman**

### ***German Jews and American Show Business: A Reconsideration***

Many accounts of the prominent roles Jews played in early 20th century American show business -- as performers, writers, composers, directors, and producers -- ascribe the phenomenon to a kind of lower-east-side "ghetto energy," linking these entertainment forms to a rising generation of Eastern European immigrants while noting the influence of Yiddish theater in particular and yiddishkeit in general. This paper reconsiders this popular narrative, arguing instead that many of the country's most influential and successful Jewish show business figures came from relatively assimilated German or Central European backgrounds (often from locations outside New York City). It suggests that the roots of "Jewish" show business in the United States may be more German than has been commonly assumed. The paper also considers why performing artists and historians alike have tended to "Yiddishize" the Jewish experience in American show business.

[Back to top](#)

## **Thomas Kovach**

### ***German Jews and the Ostjuden in the American South: Alfred Uhry's Play 'The Last Night of Ballyhoo'***

Alfred Uhry's Tony Award-winning play presents a family of well-to-do German Jews in 1939 Atlanta. As Hitler's armies are invading Poland to start the Second World War, the consequences of which are well known to the play's audience but unknown to the characters in the play, the family of Adolph (!) Freitag is discussing the arrival of Clark Gable et al. for the opening of *Gone with the Wind*. Thoroughly acculturated, they speak disparagingly about the "other sort" of Jews, those of Eastern European descent who live on the wrong side of town, represented in the play by the Brooklyn Jew Joe Farkas, the family firm's newest employee, who is amazed to see a Christmas tree in their home, and whose Yiddish expressions are met with blank stares by the family. In the course of the play, a romance arises between Joe and Sunny, the younger daughter of the Freitag clan, which serves to highlight the gulf separating the worlds they come from.

I will examine the play as a mirror of the tensions between the older German-Jewish families in the South and the more recent arrivals, examining Uhry's presentation in light of historical research on Jewish life in the South. However, I will argue as well that the tension between German Jews and Ostjuden represented in the play replicates to a remarkable extent the tensions between Eastern and Western Jews within Germany and Austria during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, I will discuss the play's ending, a kind of wish-fantasy in which Joe, Sunny, and the whole family join in saying blessings over a Shabbat dinner, a scene inconceivable in light of the family attitudes represented in the rest of the play.

[Back to top](#)

## **Monika S. Schmid**

### ***"I always thought I was a German - it was Hitler who taught me I was a Jew": National-socialist Persecution, Identity, and the German Language***

This paper will present the findings of a study on language use and language loss of German Jews who left Germany during the Nazi regime and have lived in English-speaking countries ever since. The study of individuals forgetting a language they grew up with (first language attrition) has only been a research topic for the past twenty years, and the influence of personal factors like age at the time of emigration, intermediate language contact, and personal attitudes is still very much in debate. This paper argues that the breakdown of a language system after sixty years of non-use or restricted use is to a large degree determined by personal attitudes.

[Back to top](#)

### ***We Were So Beloved : The German-Jews of Washington Hts., New York***

#### **A film by Manfred Kirchheimer**

This unique documentary examines the experiences of German-Jewish refugees who fled their country in the 1930's and settled in New York's Washington Heights. Having assimilated in Germany, they found themselves living exclusively among Jews for the first time, and were called "more German than Jewish." Today these people who lost so much are secure and patriotic Americans. In frank conversation they discuss the trauma of leaving their homeland, the difficulties adapting to life in the U.S., the relief and remorse of having escaped the Holocaust, and the moral and emotional implications of their survival. This important film fills a gap in American social history, showing us the story of this brave group of survivors.

145 Minutes, Color