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FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

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The German-American Press and Women's Voting Rights

Mark Loudon

THE AWAKENING



"The Awakening," by Hy Mayer, *Puck* magazine, Feb. 20, 1913

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ds-12369

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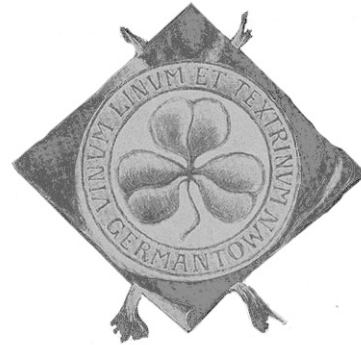
This year marks the one hundredth anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution ensuring that citizens may not be denied the right to vote on the basis of sex. In the earliest decades of the American republic, only property-owning, tax-paying white male citizens were permitted to cast ballots in most states. Over time, voting rights for certain groups were expanded at the state and federal levels. The 15th Amendment, for example, which was ratified in 1870, prohibited states

from denying males the right to vote on the basis of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude," though it would take nearly a century before the principles laid down in this amendment were guaranteed through the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The movement to expand the vote to include women began before the Civil War, notably at the first American women's rights convention, which was held in Seneca Falls, NY, in July 1848. The Declaration of Sentiments that emerged from the convention,

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**Society for German-American Studies (SGAS) 45th Annual Symposium
Five-Day Live Virtual Conference in April 2021
Call for Papers**



In Real Time: German-American Studies Around the Globe

The Max Kade Institute is co-organizing the 45th Annual Symposium of the Society for German-American Studies. The symposium will be held as a live virtual event over five days: Friday and Saturday, April 16 and 17; and Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, April 22, 23, and 24, 2021.

We regret that because of the ongoing pandemic we will not be able to meet in person as planned in Madison, Wisconsin, but we are excited about the new opportunities a virtual conference offers. In particular, we look forward to connecting with people across the nation and around the world in real time.

To maximize involvement and reach, we are making a few changes to the symposium format. There will be no parallel sessions. All presentations will take place between 10:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Central Daylight Time (Chicago time). Hour-long sessions devoted to specific topics will feature three lightning (10-minute) presentations followed by a 30-minute discussion period. **We invite presentations** on social and political structures, theoretical and practical science, education, religion, language, literature, the arts, history, comparative topics with a German-American component, and more.

- Membership in the Society for German-American Studies and symposium registration are required of those whose papers are presented.
- Jointly authored proposals are welcome, but only the names of authors who will present at the symposium will be listed in the program.
- Each presenter will have to have the necessary technical set-up and be comfortable with giving a live virtual presentation similar to a Zoom webinar.

Please submit an abstract of your proposed presentation (not more than 250 words), in electronic form, by January 4, 2021. Include your paper title, your full name as you wish it to appear in the program, your email address, your complete mailing address, and your academic affiliation, if any. Submissions will be selected for presentation according to the above criteria and with the new symposium format in mind. Presenters whose papers were accepted for the cancelled 44th SGAS Symposium in Georgetown are encouraged to resubmit their proposals.

Send your proposal to Mark Loudon (mllouden@wisc.edu) and include "SGAS 2021 proposal" in the subject line.

If you have questions, contact Mark Loudon (mllouden@wisc.edu) or Antje Petty (apetty@wisc.edu)

Dear Friends and Readers!

Greetings from the Max Kade Institute! This fall, we on the MKI staff have continued to work mostly remotely, following the recommendations of the University's Smart Restart plan, with occasional visits to campus to access certain materials that are available only on site. Fortunately, we have been able to keep up the pace of our work thanks to good internet connections and various electronic tools.

One important tool for us has been a Zoom webinar license that our Friends recently purchased and which has allowed us to inaugurate the MKI Virtual Lectures Series. This fall we sponsored four presentations by scholars from College Station, Texas; Alzey, Germany; Madrid, Spain; and Münster, Germany—each with an attendance of between 75 and 100 people. The geographic diversity of our attendees has been just as broad as the presenters, with people logging in from across the country and Europe. Although we are eager to resume in-person programming as soon as we are permitted, we plan to continue offering virtual lectures from time to time in order to continue to reach as many people as possible.

It is hard to imagine doing what we do today without computers and the internet and relying on just telephones and mail (the non-electronic kind), as we did earlier in our working lives. It is even harder to imagine how people like the editors of *Die Welt*, the periodical discussed in the Collection Feature in this newsletter,

were able to collect stories and information from around the globe and share them with their readers in the American Midwest. While the means and speed with which we are able to find our own stories and share them with you are much improved today, our aims are the same as the editors of *Die Welt*: to share, to inform, and to create community.

As 2020, a year that has brought numerous challenges, draws to a close, all of us on the MKI staff wish you, our Friends, now more than ever a healthy and peaceful holiday season. Thank you so much for your continued support of our work.

—Mark

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Edmund Goes and Benno Alexander: Contributors to *Die Welt*, 1910–1916

Kevin Kurdylo

The Library and Archives of the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies has a good run—though not every issue—of a journal titled *Die Welt*, first put out by The Press Publishing Company of Lincoln, Nebraska (1898–1925) and later by National Weeklies of Winona, Minnesota (1925–1955). *Die Welt* contains literary articles, historical and biographical sketches, fiction, and scientific reports; early issues also have illustrations, including portraits and cartoons.

Our earliest issue is for July 1898 (vol. 1, no. 5), and its cover bears the additional information: *Deutsche Litteratur. Eine deutsche Bibliothek für jedes deutsche Haus. Heimathsklänge. Eine Sammlung der besten deutschen Volks-, Studenten-, und Soldaten-Lieder, sowie eine Auswahl der populärsten amerikanischen Gesänge* (German literature. A German library for every German household. Sounds of home. A collection of the best German folk, student, and soldier songs, as well as a selection of the most popular American songs). A few of the American songs, in English, include “The Star Spangled Banner,” “The Old Oaken Bucket,” “Down in Poverty Row,” “Auld Lang Syne,” “A Hot Time in the Old Town,” “America,” “Comin’ Thro’ the Rye,” and “Hail! Columbia!” The final song in the issue is “La Marseillaise,” in French.

The next issue of *Die Welt* in our

collection is dated January 1903 (vol. 3, no. 1). With volume 3 published in 1903, volume 2 could have been put out anywhere from 1899 to 1902, with the implication that the journal wasn’t published for some of the years during that span. From 1903 until 1915, covers for *Die Welt* also bear the line “Eine illustrierte Vierteljahrsschrift für deutsche Familien” (An illustrated quarterly magazine for German families). In 1916, although still published quarterly, the covers switch to “Ein deutsches Magazin für deutsche Familien,” dropping reference to illustrations. Looking through the journals dated before 1916, not every issue had illustrations anyway, except for advertisements. We lack any issues from after January 1925 until March of 1940, when *Die Welt* appears as a monthly publication, and in a larger format.

Examining issues from 1910 to 1916, and noting articles either about or by German Americans, we encountered two interesting individuals: Edmund Goes and Benno Alexander. Both authors wrote adventurous frontier stories, some fiction and some nonfiction, or based on true stories, set in wildernesses either in the Wild West, Alaska, or Canada. In the January 1915 issue of *Die Welt* appears a story titled “Die Bärenfalle. Das Schicksal eines Trappers” (The Bear Trap. The Fate of a Trapper). The attribution “Von Edmund Goes” is followed by the helpful information, “Milwaukee.” Intriguingly, Goes’s



Cover of the January 1911 issue of *Die Welt*, featuring a story by Edmund Goes

main character in this story is Martin Govern, whose “parents emigrated from Ireland.” A passage from the story also provides both English and German terms for the types of work Martin pursued:

Martin wurde in Aamerika [sic] geboren und erzogen und kam als junger Mensch in die nördlichen Wälder, wo er sich viele Jahre theils als Lumberjack (Holzfäller), theils als Miner (Bergmann), wie auch als Jäger und Trapper und als “helper” (Helfer) in allen möglichen “Jobs” (Arbeitsgelegen-

heiten) bethätigt hatte.

Martin was born and raised in Amerika; as a young man he went to the northern forests, spending many years sometimes as a lumberjack, at times a miner, a hunter or a trapper, as well as working as a helper in all manner of jobs.

Other stories by Edmund Goes that appear in *Die Welt* are (translated) "The Goldmine of the Dead: A True Story from Colorado's Mountains" (January 1911); "Kennedy's Knife: A Story from California's Goldmines" (April 1915); and "Kate Dierks: A Story of Immigrant Life from Northern Wisconsin" (January 1913), which takes place along the Yellow River among immigrants from Sweden.

Efforts to research Edmund Goes yielded only a relatively small amount of tantalizing information. The 1905 US Census shows an Edmund Goes in Milwaukee,

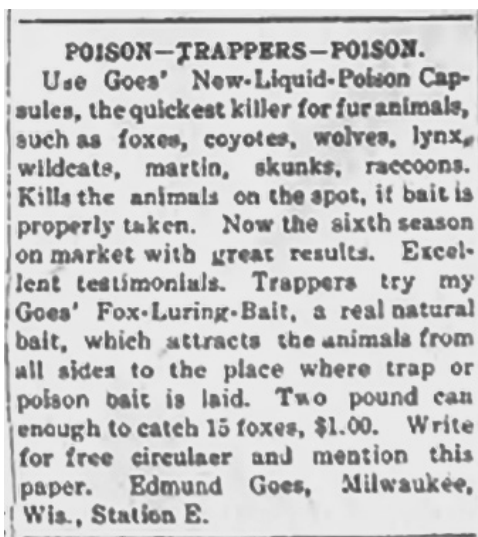
born "about 1855" in Germany. At this time, Edmund was married to Auguste Amalie Dau, with three children: William (aged 14), Edward (aged 11), and Reinhardt (aged 3). He was a naturalized citizen, and his occupation is listed as confectioner, an interesting profession for someone who would write so much about wilderness adventures. However, on the 1894 birth certificate for son Edward, Edmund claimed to be a mason, and in 1901, at the birth of Reinhardt, he professed to be a photographer. And then, on the 1910 census, Edmund's occupation is listed as author, with "magazine" appearing in the General Industry column, confirming that we indeed have the same fellow as the one who wrote for *Die Welt*.

Additionally, Edmund's outdoor life is evident from the appearance of his name in the appendices, under Zoology, of the 1893 *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee*; here he is the donor of a great blue heron from the Fox River. We also discovered two advertisements, one from 1913 and one from 1918, for Goes' Liquid Poison Capsules and Goes' Luring Bait for trappers. The ads claim it is "the quickest killer for fur animals, such as foxes, coyotes, wolves, lynx, wildcats, martin, skunks, raccoons," and it has "first-class testimonials." In 1913 one could purchase a two-pound can, "enough to catch 15 foxes," for \$1.00 from Edmund Goes in Milwaukee. In 1918 the trappers poison was in its "thirteenth season," meaning Edmund Goes had been involved in the business since 1905, even when he apparently also worked as a confectioner!

Finally, Edmund's work as a writer

is evident at least as early as 1898, when an article he wrote titled "Milwaukee, die Deutsche Stadt Amerikas," appeared in the German journal *Ueber Land und Meer*. A translation, "Milwaukee: The German City of America," is found in *The Chautauquan*, also from 1898. In his article, Goes describes Milwaukee's rise from a wilderness of marsh, Native villages, and sacred sites to a city of 250,000 in about sixty years, with the large number of German immigrants influencing the city's social and cultural development through the founding of newspapers, theaters, musical societies and social clubs, and German language schools. Goes notes:

... at least from fifty to sixty if not a greater per cent of the people have command of the German language, which is taught in the public schools. In almost every business ... the German language is used along with the English and so ignorance of German is regarded as great a fault as ignorance of English, if not a greater one. Recently an attempt was made to remove the German language from the curriculum of the public schools, but the ... overwhelming majority of the non-German parents decided in favor of having their children taught the German language. [See: Stohs, Christopher, "The Bennett Law, the *Germania*, and the Körner



Advertisement from *Maine Woods*, January 16, 1913

Pamphlet,” *MKI Friends Newsletter*, vol. 25, no. 23, pp. 10-12.] Thus Milwaukee, in this case also, has made good her reputation as the German city of America.

Turning now to Benno Alexander, the other author discovered within *Die Welt*, we find he appears four times between 1910 and 1916 (in the issues that MKI owns). Alexander’s titles (translated) include “Scenes from the Life of Canadian Geese,” “In the Far North,” “Midnight Secret,” and “The Sealers: From the Life Story of a Prodigal Son.” The January 1910 issue even has one page devoted to Alexander, with a photo; it says, in part:

Our long-time contributor from the far north, the author of Alaskan travel reports, exciting sketches, and poignant stories from the northern wilderness, wrote the editor of *Die Welt* and sent along his likeness taken at camp. We show it here so that our readers can now get an accurate image of the man who has so often delighted them with his exquisite narratives from the icy regions.

Benno Alexander comes from a true German family. He is a United States Land Surveyor and travels the Canadian-Alaskan border on behalf of our federal government.

Benno Alexander is his writer’s name, his family name is one of the best in Germany.

Although we cannot be sure of his actual surname, our research uncovered several references to him as Benno Alexander. For instance, in the June 27, 1897 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, there is an article called “The Aggie’s Voyage,” which states that the “American advance guard of the Italian Mount St. Elias expedition left Seattle aboard the *Aggie*,” with fourteen persons aboard, including Benno Alexander. There is a 1901 poem by Benno Alexander—at the time editor of the (Seattle) *Washington Presse*—honoring Edward F. Leyh, who had been editor of *Der Deutsche Correspondent* of Baltimore. And there is “The Lure of the Lone Trail,” Alexander’s account of gold prospecting in Siberia, which appeared in *Outdoor Life* and several English-language newspapers in 1911. To give a taste of his style, in this piece Alexander writes:

The Lure of the Lone Trail seldom pays its soldiers of fortune in cold cash. But there are other glorious compensations. In the glowing health of outdoor life, trail-hardened and the savage strength of brute in every thew, we have felt the throbbing pulse of life primeval and lain close to the loving heart of our mother, the earth.

Given these references, we are confident that we have discovered the



The unfortunately grainy image of Benno Alexander from the January 1910 issue of *Die Welt*

same Benno Alexander in various US censuses and city directories. In a 1900 Tacoma, Washington, directory, there is a Benno Alexander listed as a surveyor, his residence the Hotel Rhein. Also for 1900 there is a Benno Alexander listed as the president of the German Publishing and Printing Company in Seattle, Washington; in 1901, Benno S. Alexander is listed as the editor of the *Washington Presse* in Seattle. And he appears in the 1910 census as born in Germany about 1872, having immigrated in 1888, a naturalized citizen who was single, spoke English, and lived in Fall City, King County, Washington. His occupation is journalist, working in the magazine industry.

Mr. Alexander was indeed an intrepid explorer. In Charles W. Gilmore’s 1941 “A History of the Division of Vertebrate Paleontology in the United States National Museum [now known as the National Museum of Natural History],” we see that Benno Alexander was employed twice by the Smithsonian to collect Pleistocene-era fossil vertebrates: once in 1907,

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which was written in the style of the Declaration of Independence, enumerated the many ways in which “[t]he history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” The first example of such oppression: “He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.”

The movement to advance women’s rights, including ensuring their right to vote, proceeded in parallel in Europe over the course of the 19th century, with Finland being the first European nation to guarantee women’s suffrage in 1906. Before, during, and after World War I, many other countries followed suit, with some restrictions, including Norway in 1913, Denmark in 1915, the Netherlands and Russia in 1917, and Great Britain, Austria, and Germany in 1918. The last European region to extend voting rights to women was the Swiss canton of Appenzell Inner-rhoden (population 16,218 in 2019) in 1991.

There is a large body of research on the history of women’s suffrage in the US, but mostly from the perspective of Anglo-Americans. This makes sense, since the movement was largely dominated by Yankees, especially New Englanders. In what follows I explore how the suffrage movement was received in the German-language American press.

In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German-American newspapers, when women’s rights were

discussed, editorial opinions were often negative, noting the connection between the women’s movement and the larger campaign to limit or prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol. Temperance was undeniably a political and cultural third rail for German Americans. It is interesting to note that the 18th Amendment, which banned the “manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors” in the US, was moving toward ratification at precisely the same time as the 19th Amendment. German Americans’ negative views of the women’s suffrage movement were strongly colored by their opposition to prohibition and likely also influenced by broader cultural tensions between themselves and Anglo-Americans, the main advocates of temperance.

One especially critical discussion of the women’s movement appeared in the July 12, 1912, issue of the German-language newspaper *Amerika*, published in St. Louis. The tone of the article was already set in the title, “Über Weiberrechte und Weiberrechtlerinnen” (On Women’s Rights and Women’s Rights Advocates) in which the word for ‘women’ is the derogatory *Weiber* rather than the more respectful *Frauen*. The article, which was printed under the curious pseudonym “Mixis” (meaning ‘sexual intercourse’ in Greek), begins with a quote from the poem “Dignity of Women” (*Würde der Frauen*) written in 1795 by Friedrich von Schiller.

“Honor women! They entwine and weave heavenly roses into our earthly life.” Thus sang more than one hundred years ago our great German poet,

and still today these words have full meaning when we consider German women. Had Schiller lived a century later and known the American woman as well as he knew her German counterpart, he might have rephrased the above thoughts as follows.

“Honor German women! They entwine and weave heavenly roses into our earthly life. Meanwhile, do not overlook the prickly thorns of American women.”

“Mixis” goes on to deliver a scathing indictment of “hysterical” American women who dominate men, including judges in court, legislators, and their own husbands. “Under such circumstances it is no wonder that in our free country the prominence of women in public and especially political life is so considerable and that their influence proves not seldom to be baneful, damaging, and downright dangerous.” “Mixis” compares women’s rights advocates in America (*Temperenzweiber*) and Great Britain (*Suffragetten*) negatively to their “noble” (*edel*) counterparts in Germany. Here again Schiller is quoted: “Da werden Weiber zu Hyänen” (Women become hyenas).

According to “Mixis,” American women, through their natural inclination to dominate men, do not need the right to vote. He argues further that honorable women would not want to get drawn into the dirty business of politics and that those who do are axe-wielding prohibitionists. “Mixis” does acknowledge problems with the consumption of alcohol in America, but blames

them on the culture of American *Saloons*, which are nothing more than “drinking holes” (*Trinkstätten*) that ought to be reformed on the model of *Wirtschaften* run by respectable German-American innkeepers.

A much less vitriolic but still critical view of extending the right to vote to women was expressed in another article, “Should Women Have the Right to Vote?”, that appeared in *Der Nordstern* on August 8, 1918, a weekly German-language newspaper published in St. Cloud, Minnesota. The underlying message of this article is that a woman’s rightful place is in the home, tending to her family.

What will happen if in the evening not just the father but also the mother goes to the political club and no responsible person is at home to put the children to bed on time! And what would happen to the household if women read the political news in the morning paper instead of keeping the home and kitchen in order! Since dissatisfaction often comes from a growling stomach, many a father of the house would complain about poor meals, fly into a rage, and storm off to the nearest tavern.

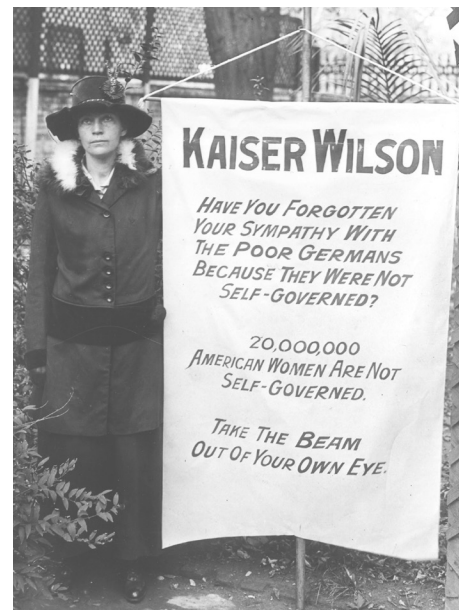
The unnamed author of the *Nordstern* article goes on to say, half-jokingly, that women who vote would end up invalidating their ballots by adding a postscript (*Nachschrift*) to them and in any case as a group would be unable to agree as to who the better candidates are. But in all seriousness, the author continues, echoing the views of “Mixis,” politics is no place for a woman.

She is the nurturer of youth, she is the advisor to her husband. She can exert a much greater influence through her children and her husband than if she were to act directly. Her strength is rooted in the family; if she abandons the hearth, she will be a weakly competitor to a man; if she labors and succeeds in the home, she is a true woman, a mistress (Herrin).

The author closes by saying that through her natural, God-given role within the family, a woman can influence the political choices of the males in her household. “It is not only her right but her duty to see to it that her husband and adult sons fulfill the obligation that comes with the right to vote.”

Other German Americans, if not exactly embracing women’s suffrage, were more open-minded about it. In an article titled “On Women’s Right to Vote” that appeared in *Die Westliche Post*, another St. Louis newspaper, on December 24, 1912, the unnamed journalist reported on the results of recent elections in the state of Colorado. Prior to the passage of the 19th Amendment, 15 US states had granted women the right to vote, all but two of which were west of the Mississippi, including Colorado, which approved women’s suffrage by referendum already in 1893, the second state to do so after Wyoming in 1890.

The article from *Die Westliche Post* looked closely at how Coloradans voted in 1912 on two ballot measures of particular interest to women. Measure 3 established an eight-hour



“Kaiser Wilson” banner held by a National Woman’s Party member picketing the White House, ca. 1917–1918

workday for female laborers and passed overwhelmingly with 77.29% of the vote. Also passed, with 68.5% of the vote, was Measure 17, which allocated public aid to “dependent and neglected children” of single mothers. The measure at the top of the ballot, however, was a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would have prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. It failed to pass, garnering only 40% support. These results led the author of the article to conclude that women could in fact be trusted with making “wise use” of their right to vote by supporting socially progressive measures while rejecting prohibition.

One group of German Americans that actively supported women’s rights, including the right to vote, were socialists. Exactly one week after the 19th Amendment was ratified, on August 25, 1920, the *Vorbote*

(Herald) newspaper from Chicago reflected on the political history of the suffrage movement in America.

It must be recalled that of all parties only the Socialist Party consistently advocated for the right of women to vote. Without the agitation of the Socialist Party, women's suffrage would not be popular; but it was achieved.

Oh, how times change!

Socialists were criticized by the right and the left for supporting women's suffrage.

Conservatives claimed that marriage and the family would collapse if women were permitted to vote and the "eternal femininity" would disappear. The home, that was a woman's domain.

Liberals claimed that women were too stupid to understand anything of public life. Besides, they were viewed as naturally reactionary and would always oppose progress.

The late lamented champions of "personal freedom" opposed the right to vote for women because they were supposedly in favor of prohibition. Well, prohibition came before women were allowed to vote.

But now everyone is shouting, "Come here, women, we want to clasp you in our loving arms!"

As the *Vorbote* observed, now that women had joined the elector-

ate, their votes were being actively courted by political parties that had previously ignored them. German-American journalists who had been similarly unsupportive of women's rights pivoted as well. For example, the editors of *Der Nordstern* issued a call on September 2, 1920, to German-American women to turn out in large numbers in the upcoming presidential election to vote against Democrats and the policies of Woodrow Wilson, who was widely unpopular among German and many other Americans during World War I.

A very certain fact is that the majority of female American citizens of German extraction were not actively engaged in the struggle for extending the right to vote to women and were generally indifferent to the whole concept. Nevertheless, hopefully they will henceforth exercise their new rights with the German sense of duty and German conscientiousness (*mit deutschem Pflichtgefühl und deutscher Gewissenhaftigkeit*), just as women of other backgrounds will do. Under no circumstances should they not vote in the next presidential election, but take an active part in it so that the adoptive fatherland of German Americans not be

blindsided and a president elected who is hostile to German Americans. The battle cry against Democrats and Wilsonism should unite all German Americans and call them to the polls. Women and adult daughters of German Americans who will be able to exercise their full rights for the first time this November 2 are hereby given this advice. Stand up for your adoptive fatherland with your full strength, do not be deceived by selfish politicians, act with common sense and help those candidates who want the best for our fatherland by electing them with a large majority.

Warren G. Harding, the Republican candidate for president, won the 1920 election by a landslide, garnering considerable support from women and German Americans.

Opposition to women's suffrage in the German-American press ceased after the 19th Amendment became the law of the land, though hints of misogyny lingered, as in the short item (pictured below) from the August 27, 1920, issue of Minnesota's *New Ulm Post*:

Women of the entire country now have the right to vote. They have long had the last word. 

:—

**Die Frauen des ganzen Landes
haben nun das Stimmrecht. Das
letzte Wort hatten sie schon lange.**

Examining German Immigrants' Contributions and Influence In Illinois

Antje Petty

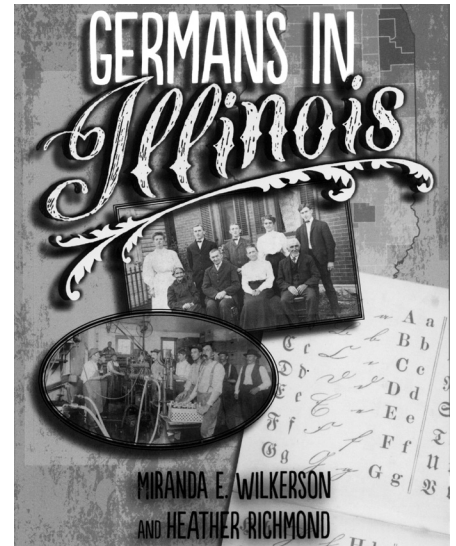
Germans in Illinois by Miranda E. Wilkerson and Heather Richmond, Southern Illinois University Press, 2019, 224 p.

In the 2013 American Community Survey, 13.5 percent of people living in Illinois claimed German as their primary ancestry. This number is far lower (by a third to a half) than in Illinois' neighboring states to the north and west, but it still places Illinois squarely on the "German belt" of settlement in America with its "buckle" in the Midwest. With their book *Germans in Illinois*, Miranda E. Wilkerson (Associate Professor of Language and Communication Studies at Columbia College, Missouri) and Heather Richmond (Archivist at the State Historical Society of Missouri) provide a general history of German immigration to Illinois in the larger context of immigration to the Midwest in the second half of the 19th century.

Drawing mostly on existing scholarly publications, *Germans in Illinois* begins with an overview of the three waves of German immigration to America, the situation in German-speaking Europe that pushed people to leave their home countries, and the different routes they took, depending on when the migration took place. In five additional chapters, while following a roughly chronological timeline, the German experience in Illinois is grouped under "Rural and Urban Living," "Nativism, Politics, and the

Civil War," "Cultural and Institutional Life," "World War I and its Aftermath," and "Heritage and Linguistic Landscape Today."

Each chapter is followed by "side stories," accounts by or about individuals or significant events. Some of these stories provide historical background or describe a common (German) immigrant experience; others have a more specific Illinois angle. An example of the former is Cornelius Schubert's "Diary of a Journey" about his 1834 travel with members of the Gießen Society from Germany to Missouri, an account that has become part of the lore of this earliest group of German settlers in the Midwest. Similarly, the "1868 New York Immigration Commission Report on the Leibnitz" describes an especially harrowing transatlantic journey, but one that could have been experienced by any immigrant who crossed the Atlantic on a sailing ship. Among the informational essays is an overview of "Lincoln, Liberty, and the Know Nothings," and a summary of recent scholarship "On the Shift from German to English." Personal stories include a sidebar on Georg Brunsen, who made his name as an educator in Belleville, and an outline of the life of Friedrich Hecker, who was well known among Germans on both sides of the Atlantic before he arrived in Illinois. He had risen to prominence as a Forty-Eighter and active revolutionary in Germany and later led different Union regiments during



the American Civil War.

Germans in Illinois is filled with a wealth of information, although some of it is at times hard to find. For example: while businesses, industrialization, and working conditions are covered in the chapter on "Rural and Urban Living," the history of the labor movement in Illinois and the infamous Haymarket Affair are tucked away under the subheading "After the War: the Gilded Age" in the chapter on "Nativism, Politics, and the Civil War." Furthermore, some aspects of American society that profoundly influenced the lives and experiences of German Americans in both rural and urban communities are given rather short shrift, in particular religion, but also education and the German press. A few more quotes and articles from Illinois' many German-American papers could have provided readers

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Introducing the Wirrer Collection of American Low German Recordings

Mark Loudon

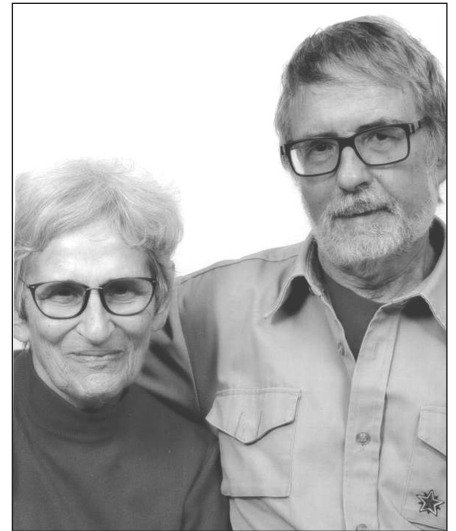
Last year, the Max Kade Institute was the grateful recipient of an impressive collection of recordings of varieties of Low German collected by Prof. Dr. Jan Wirrer, who was a professor of Low German linguistics at the University of Bielefeld from 1976 until his retirement in 2009. A speaker and author of Low German, Prof. Wirrer's research has been of central importance in the documentation and linguistic analysis of Low German in Europe and America. Before presenting an overview of the treasures that the Wirrer Collection contains, a few remarks about Prof. Wirrer's long and productive career are in order.

Prof. Wirrer's research interests extend across three major and intersecting areas: Low German linguistics and literature, phraseology (the linguistic subfield that examines fixed multi-word expressions, such as idioms), and endangered languages. Prof. Wirrer has authored and edited dozens of publications in these areas, two of which deserve special mention. The first is *Niederdeutsche Grammatik* (Low German Grammar; Verlag Schuster Leer, 1998), which was coauthored by Prof. Wirrer and is recognized as the standard reference work on Low German. A second major work of Prof. Wirrer's is a massive bilingual collection of articles titled *Die deutsche Präsenz in den USA/The German Presence in the USA* (LIT Verlag, 2008), which he coedited with the late Josef Raab,

a professor of American studies. This volume was the product of a symposium hosted by Profs. Wirrer and Raab in Bielefeld in 2004 that brought together European and American scholars working in diverse fields related to German-American studies.

Low German is often regarded as a dialect of German, but in fact it is officially recognized as a distinct language. Standard German is descended from the so-called High German dialects spoken historically in the central and southern regions of German-speaking Central Europe, where elevations are higher than in the north, where Low German is spoken. This is why the names "Standard German" and "High German" are interchangeable. Low German is spoken today across a large territory from the eastern Netherlands to the far northeastern reaches of the Federal Republic of Germany. Before World War II, the Low German language territory extended farther east across what is today northern Poland and the Baltic Countries, a legacy of the Hanseatic League, for which the medieval variety of Low German (Middle Low German) was the common language.

Today, fewer and fewer children are acquiring Low German as their mother tongue, which means that the language is endangered, like so many minority languages across the globe. This is also true of the many Low German varieties that were brought



Jan and Bärbl Wirrer

by immigrants from northern Europe to places such as the American Upper Midwest. Pomeranian Low German, for example, was at one time widely spoken in Wisconsin.

Not all varieties of Low German are endangered, however. One major exception is Mennonite Low German (Plautdietsch), a language spoken by the descendants of Mennonites who migrated from Low German territory into the Russian Empire in the 18th century along with many other speakers of German-related varieties at the invitation of Catherine the Great. Mennonite Low German is thriving in many communities around the globe, especially in Latin America and Canada, but also in Germany and parts of the former Soviet Union.

Between 1993 and 2007, Prof. Wirrer made four major research visits

to communities in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Wisconsin in search of Low German speakers. His investigations yielded interviews with 82 consultants who spoke Low German to some extent and were the descendants of immigrants in the third, fourth, and fifth generations. These interviews comprise the Wirrer Collection of American Low German. All of the speakers Prof. Wirrer recorded were older adults, meaning that the number of Low German speakers in the states he visited is dwindling rapidly.

Prof. Wirrer drew on a number of different techniques in conducting his interviews, blending structured tasks, including translations of sentences from English into Low German and a narration of a story from a picture book, with free conversation on topics such as work and home life. Some consultants were asked about experiences with tornadoes, which is an example of a “danger-of-death” question used in linguistic interviews. The idea here is to reduce a speaker’s self-consciousness about being formally interviewed by asking them to recall a past situation that was especially memorable and emotionally laden without leading them to relive a past trauma. Prof. Wirrer’s interviews with some speakers included an exercise designed to elicit their awareness of some of the major linguistic features that differentiate Low from High German, e.g., LG *Peerd* and *Huus* vs. HG *Pferd* and *Haus*.

It is safe to say that most speakers of Low German around the globe, as members of linguistic minority communities everywhere, speak at least one other language besides Low



Plaque memorializing the relationship between Melle, Germany, and New Melle, Missouri

German. For example, Low German speakers in Europe also speak German or Dutch, depending on the country in which they live. All of Prof. Wirrer’s consultants in the US of course also spoke English, in many cases more fluently than Low German. In any community where bi- or multilingualism is the norm, the languages spoken will naturally influence one another, at a minimum in their vocabulary. Especially words like *baseball* and *air conditioning*, which refer to objects and concepts that were unfamiliar to immigrants from abroad, are frequent in the interviews in the Wirrer Collection.

As an aside, English itself was the recipient of Low German words during the heyday of the medieval Hanseatic League. In particular, some maritime vocabulary was borrowed from Middle Low German, including *bulwark*, *dock*, and *freight*.

Approximately three-quarters of

the interviews in the Wirrer Collection were made with speakers from Illinois and Missouri, with smaller numbers from Iowa, Kansas, Wisconsin, and also Nebraska. Many of the Illinois consultants were from the community of St. Libory, St. Clair County, in the southern part of the state. St. Libory was settled in 1834 by immigrants from the village of Glandorf, which is located near Osnabrück, in the Westphalia region of Germany. This general area was also the homeland of the founding settlers of New Melle in St. Charles County, Missouri, another community from which many of Prof. Wirrer’s consultants hailed. New Melle was settled in 1850. In 1988 the New Melle–Melle Friendship Society was founded, which is honored on the memorial marker pictured above. The quote from Goethe on the

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Die Hausfrau

Jahrgang 17 No. 3

Dezember 1920



Zur Weihnachtsandacht in alter Zeit
Nach dem Gemälde von R. Campenrieder

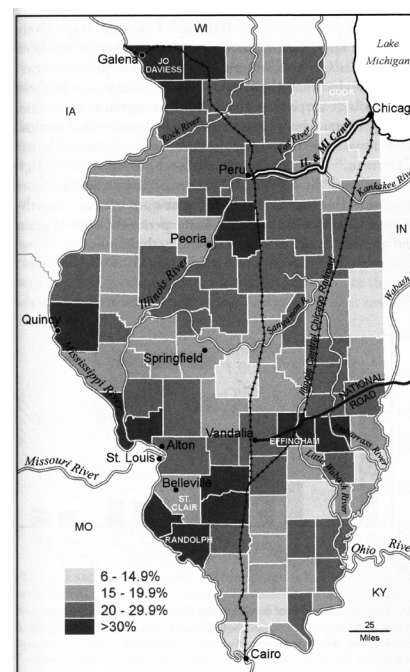
Cover of the December 1920 issue of *Die Hausfrau*, a monthly magazine published in Milwaukee, Wis., and aimed at German-American housewives. The image, titled “Going to the Christmas Service in the Old Days,” shows an idealized European *Heimat* scene and reflects the magazine’s endeavor to emphasize warm feelings and remain non-controversial in the post-war years. This included the editors’ choice to barely mention that women fought for and gained the right to vote!

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with the opportunity to learn what German Americans thought about a variety of topics when they wrote in their own language and for an audience of their own.

There is a lot of interest in place-specific ethnic history in the United States today. Wilkerson and Richmond's book fills a gap by providing an overview of Germans in Illinois for a general audience. As with any book that focuses on an ethnic group within a single state, one wonders how significant those borders really are. Did it matter that the state line between Illinois and Missouri runs right through the larger St. Louis–Belleville “German” region? Were there Illinois-specific conditions, laws, policies, or regulations that affected the lives of its Germans differently than those of their compatriots in Wisconsin or

Iowa? Do German-American ethnic identity and expressed heritage today vary from state to state? Wilkerson and Richmond do not specifically address these questions, but by placing Illinois in the larger context of 19th-century German migration to the Midwest, *Germans in Illinois* will attract not only readers interested in the state of Lincoln, but anybody who wants to learn more about the German-American experience in the nineteenth century. 🗺️



German ancestry in Illinois, by county, 2013

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under C. W. Gilmore himself, to assist an expedition to Alaska's Yukon Valley; and later in charge of a 1914–1915 expedition to Siberia's Kilyma Valley, where “Mr. Alexander obtained a nearly perfect skull of *Elephas primigenius* and a large miscellaneous collection of some 200 Pleistocene bones.”

A death certificate indicates Benno Alexander died July 19, 1928, in Kenndale, King County, Washington. Here his age is given as 60, and his estimated birth year about 1868, four years earlier than thought in the 1910 census. So far, this is all we know of Mr. Alexander and Mr. Goes. Perhaps one day we will learn more! 🦋

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Gilmore, Charles W. “A History of the Division of Vertebrate Paleontology in the United States National Museum,” *Proceeding of the United States National Museum*, 90.3109 (1941): 305–77.

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Continued from page 12

plaque reads in English as follows:

The world is so empty when
we think of only towns and
hills and rivers in it, but to
know of someone here and
there with whom we accord,
someone who is living on
with us, even in silence—this
makes our earthly ball a
peopled garden.

The Wirrer Collection is a welcome complement to our North American German Dialect Archive. Previously, most of the Low German recordings in our holdings had been made with speakers from Wisconsin, including many Pomeranian speakers. (The nine Wisconsin speakers interviewed by Prof. Wirrer were also Pomeranians.) By adding interviews with Low German speakers from the other states represented in the Wirrer Collection, we have expanded our archive's scope with regard to where speakers are from and which varieties of Low German they used.

The Max Kade Institute expresses its heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Wirrer for his generosity and wishes both him and his wife Bärbl (pictured on p. 11) all the best! 🦋

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies is published three times a year at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Submissions are invited and should be sent to:

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