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Milwaukee's German-American Community and the Nazi Challenge of the 1930's

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MILWAUKEE'S history has long been linked with German immigration and settlement. The heavy Germanic influence in Wisconsin's largest city, less obvious today than in previous eras, once upheld the proud image of "the Munich of America," "a German Athens," a place where solid, industrious burghers flourished within the tradition of good-natured sociability known far and wide as *Gemütlichkeit*. And it was generally true that Germans were among the most favored of immigrants. They enjoyed acceptance, overall prosperity, and, if they desired, rapid assimilation into Milwaukee's social, political, and commercial life. There were, however, two periods in the twentieth century which found German-Americans in less-than-happy circumstances. The first and best-known occurred during World War I when the German-American community was internally divided and simultaneously vilified by the larger community. The second period, during the 1930's, was less a crisis than the first, but once again it arose out of internal divisions and opposing ideologies during a time of great international stress.

During the decade of the 1930's, Milwaukee was the nation's third-ranking city in German-born population. Only the major metropolitan areas of New York City and Chicago showed larger numbers.¹ In 1930 the

federal census listed 40,787 German-born persons residing in Milwaukee out of a total population of 587,000. Many others, born in the United States, still shared significantly in the language, culture, and values of their German parents. Fifty years ago, whole sections of Milwaukee were retaining their ethnicity without difficulty. In particular, the north side of the city was frequently viewed as a German domain. Its streets bore German names: Humboldt, Bremen, Meinecke, Auer, Teutonia; many groceries and bakeries still depended on a steady German clientele, as did bars and restaurants. This was, of course, no ghetto—it was simply the preferred location for many of the most recent immigrants. Beyond the city, German Milwaukee melted into German Wisconsin, where in the outlying regions those of German background comprised 43 per cent of that portion of the state's population (1,477,367) which was either foreign-born or had one or both parents born abroad.²

Many of the issues faced by the Germans of Milwaukee predated the 1930's. Germans cor-

²Robert C. Nesbit, *Wisconsin: A History* (Madison, 1973), 478. While it seems certain that Germans throughout Wisconsin were aware of the wartime conflicts experienced by their fellow ethnics in Milwaukee, it cannot be assumed without further research that the events in Milwaukee pervaded all German-American enclaves with the same impact. For an account of conflict in a more rural setting, see Jonathan F. Wagner, "Nazi Propaganda Among North Dakota's Germans, 1934-41," in *North Dakota History*, 54:15-24 (Winter, 1987).

¹*Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, 1980), 413.



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The Pabst Theatre on East Wells Street in Milwaukee, about 1936–1940. Photo by Harold Hone, Madison.

rectly perceived themselves as a large and important immigrant group, one with a potentially significant cultural and political role to play. That role needed to be defined in the face of assimilative pressures from the larger American community. The most specific issue of the 1930's was how to create a sense of community in a political context shaped by the rise of Adolf Hitler, National Socialism, and an expanding Third Reich. Perhaps at no other time did the German community in Milwaukee so desire to establish itself as an accepted presence; and never was it so divided as to how this might be accomplished. These were issues which were dramatically brought forward by the presence in Milwaukee of pro-Nazi groups which energetically proposed to resolve these questions once and for all, and at the same time to claim the allegiance of *das Deutschtum*.

The term *Deutschtum* was frequently used by both German-Americans and others. It connotes a community of German descent, bound together by language, heritage, and an

appreciation of *being* German. The term had global implications which had developed along with German nationalistic movements of the nineteenth century and had culminated with National Socialism after World War I. In the United States, the term referred specifically to the German-American community within a state or city. But although population density and settlement patterns led to easy conclusions about the existence of a German world in America, any further assumptions about the cohesiveness of that world often broke down. *Das Deutschtum* had many sub-sectors. In matters of religion the Germans were divided between Roman Catholics, Protestants of various denominations, anticlericals, the non-affiliated, and organized humanists. Regionalism persisted, suggesting a strong bond to a provincial place of origin: the popularity of Swabian, Westphalian, Pomeranian, Bavarian, and similar organizations was evident in Milwaukee. No obvious political orientation could be assumed for German-

Americans, either. In the period between the world wars, some supported established mainstream political parties while others maintained a strong labor and socialist tradition. Most Germans were not active or keenly interested in politics. Finally, matters of class, economic status, and educational attainment—crucial aspects of the individual in Europe—continued to be important in the United States as well. Overall, the Germans in America enjoyed a pattern of acceptance and mobility equaled by few other immigrant groups. As a result, the need for solidarity with their fellow ethnics was less urgent for German-Americans when compared to less-favored groups.³

Added to the problem of assuming a united, self-conscious German-American community in Milwaukee and in Wisconsin was the outbreak of virulent anti-German feeling during World War I. This experience had been a severe blow to many members of *das Deutschtum*. It had marked their sudden conversion to pariah status.⁴ For some, the effect of those years encouraged timidity and a lowered profile. For others, the memory of public scorn and humiliation caused a longing for prewar status and respect. The recollection of mistreatment and intense alienation was shared with the postwar immigrants, so that during the 1930's many German-Americans considered in personal terms the implications of deteriorating relations between Berlin and Washington. Could it all happen again? Fur-

thermore, one of the most significant casualties of the wartime hysteria had been German language instruction in the public schools. Such a policy was broadly interpreted as the repudiation of a people as well as a severe obstacle to the survival of a cultural community. How could *das Deutschtum* survive without children who spoke its language?

While the First World War signaled a distinct setback for the German-American community, certain trends had foreshadowed that era. A decrease in German immigration to the United States in the twentieth century (noticeable as early as the decade 1890–1900) meant a corresponding reduction in the number of persons requiring German-language newspapers and periodicals. Not surprisingly, the number of these had begun to decline before the war, and the process was hastened considerably by the intolerance of 1917 and after. The rate of extinction of the German press reached alarming proportions by the 1930's. Even Milwaukee was served by only one locally printed daily after 1932. There were other indicators of reduced cultural vitality: a decline in the German theater (without a significant development of a German cinema), a shift away from German-language church services, and the gradual weakening of the *vereine* (the various social clubs which were the backbone of *das Deutschtum*).

The 1920's saw the largest number of German immigrants enter the United States of any decade between 1900 and 1950. Although sufficient in number to temporarily arrest the numerical decline of the German-born (Milwaukee's German-born population stood at 39,771 in 1920 and 40,787 in 1930), the new immigrants were not to solve the problem of cultural decline or reverse the diminishing vigor of the community. Some important leaders did come out of the immigration of the 1920's, but on the whole the post-World War I immigrants were less interested than those who had arrived earlier in finding a permanent niche within the comforts and security of *das Deutschtum*. More varied and better-educated than earlier immigrants, these newcomers had left behind a chaotic postwar Germany and were often intensely interested in an upward mobility not readily available in their homeland. Although some of the new

³Throughout this study, no distinction is made between "Germans" and "German-Americans." The terms are used to mean the same thing without recognition of the usual categories important to immigration historians, such as *German-born*, *resident alien*, *naturalized*, or *American-born*. The concept of *das Deutschtum* incorporated all of these, though its most active members were usually recent immigrants.

⁴Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (De Kalb, 1974), is the best treatment of the anti-German phenomenon. See also La Vern J. Rippley, "Ameliorated Americanization: The Effect of World War I on German-Americans in the 1920s," in Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans* (Philadelphia, 1985), II:217–231. The situation of the German-Americans in Wisconsin is presented in Lorin Lee Cary, "The Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, 1918–1919," in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 53:33–50 (Autumn, 1969).

immigrants were inclined to view the established German immigrant community with some circumspection, most did become participants—active, temporary, or marginal—in the life of *das Deutschtum*. Soon, during the 1930's, they and the others would be taking sides in a conflict that tore at the German-American community and elsewhere led to the Second World War.

THE Wisconsin Federation of German-American Societies (*Zentralverband deutschstämmige Vereine*) was established in late 1932 as a response to the recognized decline of *das Deutschtum*. Although talk of focusing the strength of the community into an umbrella organization had been heard before, 1932 was a promising year for such a venture in Milwaukee. In June some forty-five German-speaking societies cooperated to stage a centennial celebration marking the death of the poet Goethe. On June 19 a parade moved from Wisconsin Avenue and Twenty-eighth Street to the Schiller and Goethe Monument in Washington Park. Some 30,000 persons gathered at the park to hear speeches and songs, and to participate in other manifestations of cultural pride and unity. Such unity was superficial, but the event sparked the hope that a more lasting solidarity was within reach. The German-language *Milwaukee Herald* praised the Goethe celebration (with scarcely a mention of Goethe) and editorialized that the day had been "a demonstration that the German element is not only large and strong in the city, but that it can also be unified and be a power and a factor in American public affairs." Noting that calls for unity and strength were not uncommon, the paper acknowledged that German-America remained a second-class citizenry, "torn, leaderless, and unconscious." To ask for recognition would not be sufficient. But how would such recognition be won while the condition of the German-American community in Wisconsin was too often marked by despondency, arrogance, and indifference? Only by organizing, the *Herald* concluded, would these problems be overcome and a proper place be secured in the new homeland.⁵

The Goethe event was followed within

weeks by a folk festival in which the keynote address was offered by Professor Ernst Voss of the University of Wisconsin's German department. Voss informed his audience that the need for cultural pride was acute, that German-America had suffered greatly, and that the popular concept of America as a melting pot of culture was essentially contrary to the needs of ethnic groups to preserve their uniqueness.⁶

The folk festival was the project of the civic-minded *Deutscher Klub*, perhaps the most active group in promoting organizational cohesion among the Germans of Milwaukee. Another project of the club was to create a focal point for the community to be known as *das Deutsche Haus*. Other cities had such places, but in Milwaukee the many activities of the German-speaking community had been diffused with more than half a dozen meeting halls in regular usage. To have succeeded in creating a *Haus* would clearly have symbolized a unified community, but such a place was not built. While the political divisions within the community during the 1930's and beyond no doubt made such a goal difficult, it is likely that the size and diversity of the German-American community in Milwaukee also hampered such a project. Some of the larger organizations already had well-established places to meet such as the *Freie Gemeinde's* Jefferson Hall on North Fond du Lac Avenue at Twenty-seventh Street, a new and spacious building quite without the Germanic styling usually associated with a *Deutsche Haus* elsewhere.

With editorial support from the German press, and with the momentum gained during the summer of 1932, the new organization of federated societies appeared with the objective of providing "strength through unity" to *das Deutschtum*. More specific goals were to support and encourage German-American cultural events, strengthen the German language, publicize the activities of member and other societies, and to represent and safeguard the rights and status of the German-American community in Milwaukee and Wisconsin. Throughout the formative period, the

⁵*Milwaukee Herald*, June 22, 1932.

⁶*Ibid.*, June 28, 1932.



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The Schiller and Goethe Monument in Washington Park, Milwaukee, about 1905–1910. Photo by J. Robert Taylor.

Milwaukee Herold was the communications link for the new federation. When the *Herold* changed from a daily to a weekly (in October, 1932) administered from Winona, Minnesota, its coverage of Federation activities diminished. However, a new newspaper was

founded at this time: the *Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, which became closely associated with the Federation and was sometimes referred to as its organ by Bernhard Hofmann, one of the principal founders of the Federation and its first and frequent president. Hofmann was

part of an emerging group of younger persons interested in organizational development. He had come to Milwaukee from Germany in 1923, became a naturalized citizen some years later, and was associated professionally with German-language radio broadcasting. Also active in the Steuben Society, a postwar national organization, Hofmann hoped to lessen the distinctions between German-Americans, whether they were regional, religious, or political, and thus to promote the well-being of the community as a whole. Like those who favored umbrella organizations elsewhere, Hofmann did not foresee, in 1932, the bitter partisanship which would soon threaten the Federation and require much of his energy.

In many ways the Wisconsin Federation of German-American Societies was a success. The number of member societies usually ranged between seventy and ninety during the 1930's. While most were based in Milwaukee, the Federation did attract member societies from Kenosha, Madison, and Sheboygan and attempted to maintain contact with *vereine* throughout the state. Musical clubs, regional organizations, hobby groups, benefit societies, and other types of associations were under the Federation umbrella. Each club sent a delegate to attend the regular Federation meetings and elect its officers. The Federation sponsored an annual *Deutscher Tag* (German-American Day) each summer which followed the formula of the Goethe centennial (parade, speeches, song, dance). Much importance was attached to this event, especially such aspects as crowd size and the number and prominence of the politicians who praised German contributions to America. A major objective of the Federation was to reinstate German language instruction in the public schools, an objective which it failed to realize. Extracurricular instruction in the German language as well as a youth program eventually became important Federation activities. Later, in 1939, Carl Schurz Park, a recreational facility, was developed. The Federation, together with the *Deutsche Zeitung*, served as an effective clearinghouse for information about social and cultural events of interest to the German-American community. To some degree, nearly all of these projects and functions were

shaped or even inspired by the parallel development of the *Amerikadeutscher Volksbund*, known as the Bund.

WHILE the Wisconsin Federation of German-American Societies was a local affair with no direct connection to similar groups elsewhere, the Milwaukee Bund was part of a larger organization whose most active center was New York City. The founding of the Milwaukee chapter took place in late 1933 as a unit of an organization called the Friends of the New Germany (*Freunde des Neuen Deutschland*). The Friends and the Bund were identical in purpose and members. Although the 1933 founding of the local Friends unit reflected to some degree the coming to power of Adolf Hitler in the same year, interest in National Socialism in Wisconsin certainly predates that event. As early as 1924 an overview of National Socialist goals in Germany appeared in a Milwaukee German paper. It was written by George Froboese, who was destined to become the most important Bundist in Wisconsin.⁷ Froboese was a mechanical engineer who had emigrated to the United States in 1922 and became a citizen in 1934. He was a skilled writer who served as editor for the midwest edition of the Bund paper. By 1936 he was the Bund's midwestern leader and in 1941 he briefly became national leader of the Bund during its last days.

Although Froboese displayed great energy and prominence, his home chapter in Milwaukee was a rather unremarkable one which failed to become the exemplary unit expected of a city and state commonly thought of as being the most German in the nation. Its program for bringing its views before the public was ambitious, but it failed to convert the thousands it must have hoped for. Its active membership totaled perhaps 200 to 300 during the period—hardly a mass movement.

Despite its size, however, the Milwaukee Bund unit could not be accused of modesty. Its first public meeting, held at the Eagles Club

⁷George Froboese, "Die Kommende Führergeneration in Deutschland," in *Milwaukee Sonntagspost*, September 7, 1924.



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The Mueller, Moosreiner, and Ederegger families on a winter picnic at Carl Schurz Park, probably January, 1944. Photo courtesy Rudolph Mueller, Grafton, whose father took this and other pictures accompanying this article.

on Wisconsin Avenue in late January, 1934, was designed to suggest that this was no fledgling club but rather an organization already possessing strength. Several hundred members of the Chicago chapter were there, swelling the crowd to some 600 persons. Many wore the Friends insignia. Swastika banners were displayed, "Deutschland über Alles" was sung, and anti-Semitic literature was sold. A speaker from Chicago, the Rev. Johann Schoeneberger, assured the crowd that the great masses of the Soviet Union were awaiting their deliverance through the triumph of Adolf Hitler's National Socialism.⁸

Pageantry and politics would characterize many of the larger Bund meetings until they ceased when the United States entered the Second World War. Several times a year, especially after 1936, the Bund rented the spacious Milwaukee Auditorium to put on rallies for

the general public which sometimes attracted crowds of several thousand of the interested, the hostile, and the merely curious. In general, the larger and more open the meeting, the more likely one was to hear a message stressing the Bund's version of "Americanism." Smaller meetings held in various halls, but most commonly at the Republican Hotel, were designed more for a sympathetic and usually German-speaking audience. Here discussions focused on recent developments in Germany or the proper relationship of German America to the global *Deutschtum*.

The use of a disciplined corps of troopers, the *Ordnungsdienst* or OD, at Bund meetings was a major irritant to anti-Nazis. The Bund insisted that it needed such a group to keep order and to defend itself against leftist attacks. Such a threat was not imaginary. On June 22, 1934, a Bund meeting at the Bahn-Frei Hall at Twelfth Street and North Avenue was attacked by avowed Communists. A large crowd gathered to watch the conflict and only the presence of about a hundred police officers

⁸*Milwaukee Journal*, November 27, 1933, January 22, 1934.

restored order.⁹ Similar incidents occurred on other occasions.

The OD troopers also existed in preparation for *der Tag*—meaning The Day or The Period of intense struggle which would, in Nazi ideology, usher in a new era.¹⁰ Until that day arrived, the Bund had much to do. Many meetings were held to discuss the need to create a favorable image for the movement and the new Germany, thwart British or Jewish propaganda, and develop a community of interest based on the racialist principles which the Bund believed would save America. Special appeals were made to the German-American community, for if it rallied behind the Bund one of the oldest dreams of some German-Americans would be realized: a unified, politically potent interest group capable of influencing public opinion and commanding national attention. A related objective was to help coordinate the policies of the United

States with those of Germany in order to defeat the common foe: Marxism. In the Bund's view, Hitler had proven himself to be a highly effective opponent of Communism. It asserted that Hitler's malignant image in the American press simply showed that the anti-German sentiment which had prevailed during the last war was still virulent. Would German-Americans respond to the imperatives presented by race and nationality? Or would they stand aside, argue some vague neutrality, and let anti-German feeling once again overwhelm them?¹¹

It was obvious as early as 1934 that the Federation of German-American Societies and the German-American Bund differed sharply in style and political orientation. At the same time, however, both shared important objectives which centered on the unity of the community. Both

⁹*Ibid.*, June 23, 1934; *Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, June 23, 1934.

¹⁰For general accounts of the Bund as a national organization, see Sander Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924–1941* (Ithaca, 1974), and Leland Bell, *In Hitler's Shadow: The Anatomy of a Hate Movement* (Port Washington, New York, 1973).

¹¹Mathilde G. Schley, *Deutschamerika* (Milwaukee, 1934). The relevant chapter, "Und du?" appears on pp. 74–80. A representative piece in the official Bund paper, *The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter* (Chicago), is in the issue of September 6, 1940.

The Milwaukee Auditorium, about 1935–1940.

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The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway station in Milwaukee, 1939. The photo, taken by the Federal Writer's Project, is titled, "Milwaukee's Back Door."

sought to increase the influence of German-Americans generally. Finally, both hoped to provide for the continuity of German culture in America by maintaining cultural and linguistic traditions, especially among the young. To accomplish this, both needed to work with the individual clubs and societies, *die vereine*, which were seen as so many building blocks towards the goal. Most of those societies were not associated with any obvious political positions, a characteristic which benefited a Federation hoping to construct its version of unity on an essentially apolitical basis. A quite different (and uphill) challenge faced the Bund: it sought to fashion German-American cultural presence and unity on an intensely ideological foundation.

The Bund made it clear from its earlier press conferences that it expected to grow rapidly, and that such growth would be drawn

from existing clubs.¹² Ideally, each club would have enough members sympathetic to the Bund that its delegates to the Federation would also be in the Bundist camp. If sufficient clubs were infiltrated to the point of being pro-Bund, then the Federation of German-American Societies would itself soon become an advocate of the Bund position. Beginning in 1934 the Bund pursued a policy of heavy propaganda, in hopes of attracting individuals and subverting clubs. Besides its frequent and well-advertised public meetings, the Bund distributed its national newspaper, *The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter*, organized a youth group, and founded a summer camp. As energetic as these attempts were to command the attention

¹²*Milwaukee Journal*, November 27, 1933.



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The Milwaukee County Courthouse being demolished, June 19, 1939. Photo by J. Robert Taylor.

of the community, the Bund still had to compete with the many activities and diversions provided by the established Germanic societies. On the other hand, the possibility of making inroads into the structure of the Federation itself seemed more rapid and less tedious. Control of the Federation would provide the opportunity to set the theme for the annual German-American Day extravaganzas which were the symbolic centerpiece of Federation activities. Therefore, in little more than a year after its appearance in Milwaukee, the Bund began a major effort to take over the Federation.

IN early 1935 the Bund openly challenged the concept of an apolitical German-American organization, argu-

ing that it was inappropriate for the Federation *not* to involve itself in political affairs or to be supportive of the Third Reich. Using its earlier name, the Bund sponsored a meeting in the city auditorium and advertised the evening's topic as "The Friends of the New Germany and the German-American Societies." The featured speaker was to have been Fritz Gissibl, a recent immigrant and Nazi party member in Germany; but when he was unable to attend the presentation was offered by George Froboese.

Froboese argued that National Socialism was channeling the formerly divided strengths of Germany, and that such philosophical and organizational principles should serve as a model for German-American organizations. The critical editor of the *Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, Hellmuth Falk (who also

served as a vice-president of the Federation), reported that many blunt questions and comments were addressed to Froboese and that some persons were intimidated by the OD for their boldness. Falk began a new feature in his paper, the *Open Forum*, in which readers contributed their thoughts on the future direction of the Federation as well as the larger question of the relationship of German-Americans to the "new" Germany. Falk responded to each letter by building a case for a Deutschtum loyal to the German people and heritage, but not required to lend its support to Hitler. "What has the Federation to do with the Third Reich?" he asked, answering, "Precious little!" The Federation, he added, was based on a recognition that the German immigrants had come to America voluntarily. No one had forced them to come. And despite affection and support for Germany, that was reality. Persons who could not acknowledge that reality had no place in the Federation. The Friends of the New Germany, whom Falk labeled "foes," must realize that they were out of step with the majority, both in the Federation and in the larger community: "I know, without exaggeration, thousands of the German-descended in Milwaukee who are totally in agreement with my ideas, who would at any time stand up for the German people. But they cannot stand up for the swastika."¹³

Indeed, the swastika was to become a major dividing point. By July, 1935, the Bund's challenge to the Federation had become focused on the details of the German-American Day celebration scheduled for the weekend of July 27 and 28. The Federation at this time had perhaps a dozen Bundist delegates who, like George Froboese, represented member societies. Their proposal at the July 13 Federation meeting at Pioneer Hall on North Nineteenth Street was that the German national flag should be displayed in the parade and at ceremonies in Washington Park. The issue was decided by secret ballot and the result was announced as twenty-seven delegates voting against display of the swastika, fourteen for, and six neutral. As the ballots were being counted, however, a pro-Bundist on the vot-

ing committee attempted to determine which delegates had voted against the swastika. Froboese was thereupon accused of planning the intimidation of non-Bundists. An angry delegate asked whether the Federation was an American organization or the agency of a foreign government. Tempers flared, and after some parliamentary difficulties the majority voted to expel Froboese from the meeting on a charge of disruptive behavior. The police were summoned but were not needed as Froboese and some twenty sympathizers left the meeting in protest. Federation President Hofmann explained to reporters that the action taken by his organization had proved its "Americanism."¹⁴

German-American Day, 1935, the second such event organized by the Federation, was boycotted by the Bund. As reported in the *Deutsche Zeitung*, the day was a great success which drew perhaps 40,000 more persons to the park than would normally be seen on a summer Sunday. Throughout the day, invited guests such as Governor Philip La Follette and State Supreme Court Justice Thomas Fairchild as well as officers of the Federation developed the theme that German-Americans were loyal citizens of the United States who took legitimate pride in German culture and accomplishments.¹⁵ The sorry episodes involving the Bund were not recalled, and they did signal the end of attempted direct participation in the Federation by Bund leaders. The swastika issue, however, had not been laid to rest.

FOR the 1936 celebration the Federation's planning committee had invited a number of political figures to make short speeches. These included Governor La Follette, U.S. Senator F. Ryan Duffy, and Daniel Hoan, mayor of Milwaukee. Of-

¹³*Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, February 9, 13, 1935.

¹⁴*Milwaukee Journal*, July 14, 1935; *Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, July 15, 1934. Reporters for the *Journal* hoped to cover the meeting but were asked to leave as the proceedings became heated. Federated leaders felt strongly that unpleasant incidents within the German-American community should not be widely publicized and possibly distorted.

¹⁵*Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, July 29, 1935.



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The Milwaukee River, north of Wells Street, about 1940.

ficial representatives of the Austrian, German, and Swiss consulates were also invited. The planning committee took the view that the flag of each foreign guest would have to be displayed, and that to disallow the swastika banner of the Third Reich would be a serious affront to Dr. Wilhelm Tannenberg, the German vice-consul from Chicago. Mayor Hoan, a Socialist, cancelled his appearance.¹⁶ On the day itself, July 26, Federation President Paul Voigt told a crowd estimated at 25,000 that the event was cultural and not political. These assurances were premature: a group of Bund *Ordnungsdienst* troopers appeared as an honor guard for the German national flag and gave the fascist salute during the singing of the German anthem.¹⁷ A scuffle developed, and persons later identified as Communists tore the swastika banner. The *Deutsche Zeitung* viewed the incident as mean-

ingless, and hardly enough to detract from the success of the day, but expressed fears that the English-language press would make the most of it, causing the German-American community to appear foolish.¹⁸

The incident, minor in itself, demonstrated the increased polarization of the German-American community as well as the impaired ability of the Federation of German-American Societies to control events. A number of member societies had taken an anti-fascist view of the event and were not satisfied by what they saw as a thin rationale for displaying the swastika: as a courtesy due a visiting official of the Third Reich. For example, Otto Reiss, secretary of the large German Workman's Sickness and Health Benefit Fund and a future president of the Federation, announced that his organization saw the emblem as that of a dictator

¹⁶*Milwaukee Journal*, July 25, 26, 1936.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, July 27, 1936; *Milwaukee Leader*, July 26, 1936.

¹⁸*Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, July 27, 1936. Although usually the most restrained of Milwaukee's daily newspapers, the *Journal* called the flag incident a "battle."

and not a nation.¹⁹ The leftist *Milwaukee Leader*, which took a keen interest in German-American issues, viewed the Federation as divided because of the presence of Nazi sympathizers on key committees.²⁰ In August, 1936, less than a month after German-American Day, this division became obvious when a number of Federation officers and delegates founded a new organization, the *Deutsch-Amerikanischer Buergerbund* (German-American Citizens Alliance). Listed as principal officers were Bert Weisflog, Karl Bennewitz, and Paul Voigt, who had so recently been president of the Federation. The Citizens Alliance leadership explained that the Federation had proven itself to be an inadequate representative of the needs of the German-Americans. In their view, the Federation was characterized by a lack of respect for the United States Constitution and had become a vehicle for the selfish ambitions of a few men—a reference to Bernhard Hofmann and Hellmuth Falk. These charges were not elaborated but were similar to the Bund's views. Unlike the Bund, however, the Citizens Alliance counseled neutrality and denied that it had Nazi sympathies. It would "stand in contrast to those groups who have neither German nor American sentiments" and would refuse to "meddle in foreign affairs."²¹ Two members of the socially prominent Steuben Society came to the defense of the Federation and quickly repudiated the new Citizens Alliance. Dr. F. F. Dollert saw it as a right-wing consolidation effort bent on increasing influence among German-Americans. Attorney Andrew Brunhardt, a former president of the Steuben Society, was more blunt: "It looks like a nice Nazi group . . . they would be much better describing themselves as Germans in America. Democracy to them must be a joke—that's the Nazi idea."²²

Although the Citizens Alliance came to be seen as a front for the Bund itself, at the time of its founding it did undoubtedly appeal to those who may have been uncertain about the Bund's paramilitary and foreign image yet felt

unable to express sufficient pride in recent German European accomplishments through the Federation. The man who would shortly emerge as leader of the Citizens Alliance was Paul Knauer, a naturalized citizen. Knauer had been active in the Federation, but had become an articulate and energetic proponent of National Socialism associated with George Froboese. Despite that association, he worked to keep himself and his organization separate from the Bund itself and gradually built the Citizens Alliance into a rival federation with some two dozen member societies.

While the German-American Citizens Alliance never achieved the size or success of the Federation, it did represent a formula through which the Bund hoped to organize *das Deutschtum*. Still another organization appeared in 1940: the Cooperative Organization of Americans of German Origin. Both Knauer and Froboese were at its first meeting and were assumed to be among the principal founders.²³ This effort seems not to have developed beyond the planning stage and, like Knauer's Citizens Alliance, failed to seriously challenge the position of the Federation in the organizational life of the German-Americans. The Federation, again under the leadership of Hofmann, survived the competition offered by the Citizens Alliance and staged a successful 1937 German-American Day which it advertised as being the work of its seventy-five member societies and "free of politics."²⁴

While the various German-American Day celebrations attracted enormous crowds, and even Bund or Citizens Alliance rallies could occasionally also draw a respectable number, the number of persons directly affiliated with these organizations was much smaller. The Bund was estimated to have had several hundred members in its chapter. The Federation could claim about ninety member societies during some years. The total number of persons affiliated with the latter is difficult to estimate without knowing the actual number of members in individual societies. However, assuming that the Federation had between four and five thousand members under its um-

¹⁹*Milwaukee Journal*, July 26, 1936.

²⁰*Milwaukee Leader*, July 27, 1936.

²¹*Milwaukee Journal*, August 25, 1936.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*, June 6, 1940.

²⁴*Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, June 4, 22, 1937.



WHI(T5)13

A Milwaukee neighborhood, around Second and National Avenue, about 1940.

Photo by J. Robert Taylor

brella, it is probable that only a small fraction were active in political matters of the day. The same is likely true of the Citizens Alliance. Therefore the question of who spoke for *das Deutschtum* was actively participated in by relatively few individuals. As for that larger community which these organizations hoped to lead, most persons responded with caution or indifference—something that all organizations, but especially the Bund, recognized and regretted.

FOR some years, then, the German-American community had heard and read much about the need for strength through unity. Beginning in 1934, such unity became increasingly difficult to

achieve. This was a source of frustration for the Federation, the Bund, and the Alliance. Until 1938, however, the Federation continued to avoid the idea of an open break in *das Deutschtum*. The pro-Federation *Deutsche Zeitung* continued to give coverage to Bund events and faithfully to note its activities as well as those of the Alliance in its section on club activities. For a few years the paper took the view that Federation and Alliance had much in common, for both did work towards supporting German culture and language among youth. If only the divisive issues of ideology could be set aside, true unity of purpose could be realized! Gradually, however, the hope for unity came to be expressed rather wistfully if at all. Finally, in a meeting of March 12, 1938, the Federation adopted a resolution

for distribution to the press scorning the Bund for its "racial hatred and religious intolerance," qualities which were now officially and openly explained as having caused the Bund's expulsion from the Federation years ago. On behalf of all of its members, the Federation condemned the Bund for harming German-American interests and concluded: "Therefore let it be said here and now that it is not true that the average German-American is a Nazi but in fact is strongly opposed to their doctrines of hate. Our disposition in this matter of intolerance is ample proof of the common sense that prevails within our group in distinct contrast to the Amerikadeutscher Volksbund. America, please take notice!"²⁵

Why had the Federation not placed itself openly in the forefront of anti-Bund activity from the Bund's beginnings in 1933? Several explanations may be advanced. First, the Federation and many German-Americans were caught off balance by the sudden and dramatic appearance of the Bund. The single-minded and aggressive qualities of the Bund challenged the more traditional organizations whose leaders were philosophically diverse and who disagreed on what to do next. The basically apolitical Federation did not initially possess weapons with which it could meet the Bund. The result was a tendency to hope that an accommodation might be found or, better yet, that the adversary would simply go away. Second, the significance of developments in Germany obviously could not be fully appreciated until later in the decade. Certainly many Germans who had immigrated after World War I must have been struck by the political and economic accomplishments of the Third Reich. At least the world depression seemed under control *there*. Germany's new leaders were capable of lessening the burdens of the unpopular Treaty of Versailles. The pleasure of feeling some pride after the defeat and despair associated with the war and its aftermath was widely felt by Germans in the United States. Under these circumstances, outright rejection of the Bund seemed unreasonable. Finally, the tendency of the German-American leadership to distrust the English-

language press and their preference for keeping German-American community problems out of public scrutiny lasted through much of the 1930's. An outgrowth of the virulent anti-German feeling during the First World War, this fear of misinterpretation and even ridicule encouraged discretion. To have not done so would have endangered a major item on the Federation's agenda: improved status and respect for German America.

An immediate cause for the Federation's 1938 denunciation of the Bund was the swelling anti-fascist (and specifically anti-Nazi) sentiment in Milwaukee. In particular, a Bund rally at the auditorium in February had attracted heavy picketing. This meeting, as well as one in March at the same location, had brought out several thousand anti-fascists and had required the presence of hundreds of police. Although the picketing was orderly and only a few arrests resulted, these were ideological confrontations of a character and scale not often seen in Milwaukee. Communists and other distinctly left-wing groups had been protesting and disrupting Bund meetings for years, but the actions of 1938 and 1939 were more broadly based efforts made up of a variety of groups opposed to the rise of fascism in Europe. (The Spanish Civil War, which raged from mid-1936 to the spring of 1939, had of course aroused much passion in America on both the left and the right.) In March, 1938, they were joined for the first time by members of the Wisconsin Federation of German-American Societies. As Europe edged towards war and anti-Bund feeling in the United States began to snowball, it was only appropriate for an organization of anti-Nazi Germans to openly repudiate the Bund. Federation attacks on the Bund not only condemned the Nazi philosophy but strongly emphasized the distinction between Bundists and loyal, democratic German-Americans.

There were other opportunities for the Federation to present itself and the majority of German-Americans as good citizens who could not be lumped with the Nazis. In May, 1938, Alderman Samuel Soref sponsored a resolution in the Milwaukee Common Council which favored revocation of tavern licenses for establishments which permitted their premises to be used as a meeting place for

²⁵*Milwaukee Leader*, March 16, 1938.



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The Humboldt Gardens Hotel at the southwest corner of North and Humboldt avenues, about 1930.

groups which advocated racial or religious intolerance. Specific targets were the Forst Keller at North Tenth and Juneau and the Highland Cafe near North Eleventh Street and Highland Boulevard. Soref's timing reflected the high tide of feeling against the Bund after the disturbances at the Milwaukee Auditorium as well as concern that the Bund had been meeting in local taverns with other right-

wing groups such as the Silver Shirts and the Protective League. The Bund itself promoted the impression that a coalition of as many as twelve pro-fascist groups was about to emerge.²⁶ Despite a few quiet expressions of

²⁶*Ibid.*, May 20, 1938. The *Leader* watched the Bund and similar organizations with particular care. Its view was

concern about its legality, the Soref resolution attracted considerable attention as a means to stop the Bund. At Jefferson Hall some 600 protesters were reminded that Hitler had started his Nazi organization in secluded places and in secrecy.²⁷ Shortly after its introduction, the Common Council and Mayor Hoan approved the resolution. The Bund and its sympathizers were outraged at the discriminatory nature of the measure. Paul Knauer of the Citizens Alliance telegraphed the common council and demanded that Jefferson Hall have its tavern license revoked since, in Knauer's view, the place was a "communist hangout" and a focus for groups that "plot violence and riot." He pointed out that Jefferson Hall was owned and operated by the *Freie Gemeinde*, a German-American organization of freethinkers and humanists which in Knauer's view was "godless and communistic" and should not qualify for a license. Bernhard Hofmann, as president of the Federation (which did not meet at Jefferson Hall), joined in the successful defense of the *Freie Gemeinde* and by extension the various German leftist groups that did meet there. He appeared before the Common Council to call the Bund's attack slanderous and to reiterate that the Bund and the Citizens Alliance did not represent the views of the vast majority of German-Americans.²⁸

Less than six months later, Hofmann was making headlines as a witness before the House Special Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities (the Dies Committee) in Washington. The committee was only moderately interested in the Wisconsin situation, but since Camp Hindenburg had received some publicity as a possible paramilitary training ground and because of the apparent importance of George Froboese within the national structure of the Bund, its attention was briefly diverted from the Bund chapters in the East. Hofmann gave the committee an overview of

the situation in Wisconsin where, he argued again, very few German-Americans were interested in what the Bund had to offer. Then he revealed that on several occasions during 1935 and 1936 George Froboese (who had once been his friend) had tried to persuade him to merge the Federation with the Bund. Hofmann charged that the Bund was keenly interested in a radical change in the American form of government. He also stated that the Bund had used intimidation to encourage conformity to its views and in particular sent threatening mail or arranged with the German consulate to deny visas for travel to Germany. In further exchanges with the committee he outlined the close ties between the Bund and the Citizens Alliance and noted that the two had recently held a rally together in Milwaukee and, Hofmann added coyly, one of the featured speakers had been a former Congressman seeking re-election that November, John C. Schafer.²⁹

ALTHOUGH there was some interest within the Dies Committee that a conservative Republican candidate for the House of Representatives was comfortable enough with a group under investigation to speak before it, there was considerably more discussion in Wisconsin's Fourth Congressional District, which Schafer hoped to represent as he had from 1923 to 1932. Schafer was strongly anti-communist, and he assailed some of the groups which consistently picketed Bund or Citizens Alliance meetings, notably the League for Peace and Democracy, which he classed as a communist organization. The Milwaukee left, communist or otherwise, hoped to link Schafer with fascist causes and with anti-Semitism. Schafer won the election narrowly in a three-way race against a Democrat and a Progressive. For George Froboese, the election result was a vindication after the frustration of having Hofmann use the Dies Committee as a platform for Federation views.

that some of the groups in the proposed "fascist coalition" existed on paper only.

²⁷*Milwaukee Journal*, June 4, 1938; *Milwaukee Leader*, June 4, 1938.

²⁸*Milwaukee Journal*, June 6, 1938; *Milwaukee Leader*, June 18, 1938; *Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, June 7, 1938.

²⁹U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, *Hearings*, Vol. III, pp. 2117-2129 (November 5, 1938).



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Hikers at the third Grafton waterfall in Carl Schurz Park, summer, 1942. Photo courtesy Rudolph Mueller.

In a wire to Committee Chairman Martin Dies he claimed Schafer's victory showed that German-Americans were supportive of Schafer and the Citizens Alliance and that Hofmann was a mere renegade to his people and preferred "communist infested" organizations.³⁰ Hofmann, disappointed with the election and stung by Froboese's assertions, asked whether his antagonist really believed that German-Americans were either Nazi sympathizers or communists. He then announced a major Federation program of information-gathering about cases of Bund intimidation.³¹

This verbal sparring between Hofmann and Froboese in late 1938 continued until the Bund was silenced in late 1941. Hofmann continued to see the Bund and Bundist organiza-

tions as atypical of German-America, aberrations which were un-American. Froboese, on the other hand, usually directed his barbs at Hofmann and others, hoping to separate the Federation's rank and file from its leaders. The usual charges were either acute self-interest, egomania, or communism. To George Froboese, the tragedy of the German-American community in Wisconsin was that it had been misled by transparent opportunists who were waiting for the Nazis to deliver Germany from chaos so they could return to their homeland and enjoy the fruits of the National Socialist efforts. Presidents of the Federation, such as Hofmann and Otto Reiss, were lumped together with others who especially displeased the Bund: Mayor Daniel Hoan and the widow of Milwaukee's late Socialist Congressman, Mrs. Victor (Meta) Berger. In the pages of *The Free American*, Milwaukee became "Karl Marx Town." The continuing success of

³⁰*Milwaukee Leader*, November 7, 14, 1938.

³¹*Ibid.*, November 15, 1938.



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Photo courtesy Rudolph Mueller.

An adult soccer game at Carl Schurz Park.

the Federation's German-American Day was, of course, an irritant to the Bund which lampooned the event as "Daitscher Tag," implying that one was not likely to hear good German spoken there.³²

Both organizations prided themselves on their efforts to work with youth and to reinforce the German language and heritage among them. The Bund, both nationally and locally, encouraged a youth movement (the *Jugendschaft*) which attracted considerable attention because it was often thought to be modeled after the more famous *Hitler Jugend*

(the Hitler youth movement in Germany). The Bund saw no future for itself unless its young people were carefully prepared. Ideally, all German-American youths would join the movement, but in fact mainly the children of Bund members were involved. The national leader of the *Jugendschaft*, Theodore Dinckelacker (as well as the magazine *Junges Volk*), indicated that there were serious reasons behind the movement's existence: the formation of a new generation of *kämpfendes Deutschtum* (the fighting German-American community), and the provision of alternative cultural outlets for these young people who faced the challenge of reaching maturity in the United States. Bund parents, like others, were concerned about delinquency; but some also believed that the public schools which their children attended would promote racial and cultural "mongrelization." The coming struggle for youth, in the Bundist view, would

³²*The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter* (Chicago), September 6, October 10, 1940. The curious comment about "Daitscher Tag" related to the common goal of many German-American societies to promote German language and culture. This goal was partially responsible for the parallel development of youth movements by both Bund and Federation.



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Photo courtesy Rudolph Mueller.

Campers and parents at Carl Schurz Park, summer, 1940.

be to reclaim America from the non-Nordics. The *Jugendenschaft* gave children the chance to keep themselves out of the mainstream of American culture. Instead, the Bund encouraged drills, the singing of approved songs, the chance to maintain and perfect German language skills, instruction in National Socialism, as well as recreational opportunities.³³

A Dies Committee witness, James J. Metcalfe, testified in 1938 that the Milwaukee chapter of the *Jugendenschaft* "was encouraged to adhere to the German language, to sing German songs, and not to associate with American children and to stay away from strangers who might come up to them and speak English."³⁴

³³Bell, *In Hitler's Shadow*, 23–26; U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, *Trial Brief of Evidence. German-American Bund. Denaturalization* (Washington, 1943), Vol. I, pp. 123–124.

³⁴House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings*, Vol. I, p. 80 (August 12, 1938).

Metcalfe had infiltrated the Bund and had visited Camp Hindenburg in 1937 as part of a national survey of Bund activity. Like other observers, he noted distinctive uniforms and symbols. The Milwaukee *Jugendenschaft* used Camp Hindenburg for several weeks each summer, sometimes in the company of similar groups from Chicago. On the basis of what was observed at various Bund rallies, it seemed likely that the Milwaukee *Jugendenschaft* consisted of approximately forty members.³⁵ During the denaturalization trials in 1943 (in which the government sought to deny citizenship and to deport more than a dozen Bund members and sympathizers) the prosecution charged that these young people had been recklessly exposed to civil disturbances. This was thought to be particularly true of the

³⁵*Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 13, 1938; *Milwaukee Journal*, May 28, 1939.

Bund's Youth Day in 1938, which had attracted a large number of anti-Nazi pickets. In general, little was known about the *Jugend-schaft* (and much was suspected) until after the collapse of the movement.³⁶ What was obvious was that the Bund was proud of its youth movement and pleased with its effort to provide children with a camp where "radio jokes, morally damaging films, and trashy literature" could be avoided by tomorrow's leaders.³⁷

THE Wisconsin Federation of German-American Societies did not develop its particular youth movement, the *Deutschamerikanische Jugendbund*, until late 1936. There had not been a reason to found one earlier since children associated with the Federation experienced social and cultural activities within their parents' clubs. On the other hand, the Federation did have some youth-related issues. The most important of these was to convince the public schools of the need to offer German language instruction throughout the elementary and secondary curriculum. Since little progress was made in that direction, the Federation eventually began holding German classes of its own on Saturdays. A second educational issue was Hofmann's concern with the use of an American history text in the high schools which was thought to possess an anti-German bias. These were issues which the Federation and the Bund could have agreed on. The obvious political qualities of the Bund's youth movement were not negotiable, however, and so the Federation's decision to found a movement of its own was largely a matter of responding to the Bundist *Jugend-schaft*.

Initial publicity for the Federation's *Jugendbund* began in the summer of 1936 and stressed that there would be no political orien-

tation to the new organization. It would be open to all children, either German-born or of German parents, and could be joined without cost. As soon as one hundred young people enrolled, a red, white, and blue uniform was to be developed. Parents were advised that the new organization would pledge itself to continuing German language and culture in America. Basing its appeals on the imperatives of cultural survival and, to a lesser extent, on the need to simply provide children with a wholesome outlet for their energies, the Federation made insistent and emotional calls to parents. Its effort was rewarded with a response of some 250 members by the spring of 1938. In April, 1939, the Federation was able to sponsor a youth festival in the Milwaukee Auditorium which demonstrated to a capacity audience its success in developing a *Jugendbund* loyal to the United States, respectful of the German heritage, and involved in the maintenance of parental linguistic and cultural traditions.³⁸

Both the *Jugend-schaft* and the *Jugendbund* (how much confusion did this similarity cause?) were not unusual in the sense that ethnic groups do found youth movements in the interest of preserving cultural awareness, especially when that culture is perceived to be eroding. Genuine fears about cultural loss did exist in Wisconsin, as elsewhere. However, the political context in which the two youth movements existed was unusual, giving them a symbolic function and a more urgent quality. For example, in late June of 1937 the Federation had prepared its youth group for active participation in the German-American Day celebrations and had widely publicized the forthcoming presence of "our youth." Some weeks later the Bund, playing its strongest card, invited all German-American youth for a day at Camp Hindenburg. The Federation countered by advertising the participation of the *Jugendbund* at a folk festival at Old Heidelberg Park on the city's far north side to be held on the same day as the Bund event. The *Deutsche Zeitung* subsequently called the event at Old Heidelberg a "bombastic success."³⁹ During the

³⁶The Milwaukee *Jugend-schaft's* leader, Helmut Prause, was one of the defendants in the 1943 deportation trial largely because of his position of responsibility within the local Bund. See RG 21, United States District Court—Eastern District of Wisconsin, January term, 1943, Civil Action No. 961, in the Federal Archives and Research Center, Chicago.

³⁷*The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter* (Chicago), May 16, 1940.

³⁸*Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung*, August 1, 1936, April 27, 1938, April 21, 1939.

³⁹*Ibid.*, July 29 and 30, August 2, 1937.

late 1930's, the question of "whose kids are having the most fun" had become a contest. It was that competition, together with the broader polarization of the German-American community, which explains the founding of rival recreational facilities by 1939.

The idea of private recreational facilities close to Milwaukee was not unique to the Bund or the Federation; a number of clubs had developed them in the past. They were a response to the traditional, if somewhat romanticized, Germanic love of nature as well as the desire to escape the city in summer. The Bund developed its *sportplatz* on the Milwaukee River near the Ozaukee County town of Grafton and used the site for picnics, recreation, and ceremonies. For a few years, as part of the effort to attract new members, the Bund invited the public to its facility and sometimes reserved a special interurban train which left downtown Milwaukee for Grafton on Sundays. In August, 1934, visitors were promised sports and children's events, plus the Cedarburg fire department band, which played "lively marches and German melodies."⁴⁰

By 1937 the *sportplatz* had a more impressive name: Camp Hindenburg. Named after Paul von Hindenburg, a German military hero of World War I and president of Germany from 1925 until 1934, the camp was modeled after similar Bund facilities on Long Island and in New Jersey. The scene of youth and *Ordnungsdienst* activities, rallies, and social gatherings, Camp Hindenburg was regarded by the Bund with some emotion as the spiritual equivalent of German soil.⁴¹ Milwaukee's Bundists extolled Camp Hindenburg as the finest facility of its kind in the Midwest. However, the site was on rented land, and in early

1939 the Federation succeeded in taking over the lease. The loss of the first Camp Hindenburg was a severe shock to the Bund, but it was resourceful enough to raise money through a subsidiary, the Grafton Settlement League, Inc., and to purchase a neighboring site. The new Camp Hindenburg resumed operations during the summer of 1939 and placed buildings there in 1940.⁴²

As a result of this development, the Milwaukee River near Grafton, some twenty miles north of Milwaukee, became the setting for two rival camps. The Federation had boldly given its conflict with the Bund a new geopolitical dimension. Located less than a mile from the Bund camp, the Federation's facility was named Carl Schurz Park after the nineteenth-century immigrant who was promoted by the Federation as a potent example of successful and respectable German-Americanism. There was some apprehension about possible violence due to the proximity of the two camps, since the divisions within the German-American community were widely known by 1939. The *Cedarburg News*, which served the Grafton area, noted in an editorial that the two camps were a source of tension in that community and that many residents simply wished that the "Milwaukeeans would keep their troubles at home."⁴³ However, for three summers (1939–1941) in which both camps were active, there was no warfare among the cedar groves along the river.

BOTH sides proclaimed the excellence of their respective camps and competed for the attention of the press and the wider German-American public. On the last weekend of May, 1939, the Bund had invited its national leader (*Bundesleiter*), Fritz Julius Kuhn, to appear at a rally in Milwaukee on Saturday night. The next day Kuhn, his entourage, and the local Bund chapter arrived at Grafton and proceeded on foot to Camp Hin-

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, August 31, 1934.

⁴¹In 1938 the Bund claimed twenty-one camps in the United States with ten others planned. The actual number was closer to twelve, half of which were without buildings. The best-known, or model, camps were Camp Siegfried on Long Island and Camp Nordland in northern New Jersey. *Milwaukee Journal*, June 6, 24, 1938. The Bund's idealized views of its camps are evident in such publications as *Souvenir Booklet for Camp Nordland, 1937*, reproduced in U.S. Department of Justice, *Trial Brief of Evidence. German-American Bund. Denaturalization* (Washington, 1943), Vol. III, p. 339.

⁴²*The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter* (Chicago), May 16, 1940. Nearly 100 stockholders of the Grafton Settlement League were listed by the FBI during the 1943–1944 denaturalization trial. *Milwaukee Journal*, September 24, 1943.

⁴³*Cedarburg News*, June 14, 1939.

denburg. Present also was the *Ordnungsdienst* and the *Jugendenschaft*, who passed near Carl Schurz Park and offered an enthusiastic rendering of the Horst Wessel song, the anthem of the Hitler movement, for the benefit of any anti-Nazis who cared to listen. At Camp Hindenburg itself, Kuhn stood beneath a banner urging "Germans Awake" and told a crowd of about 350 that they must defend their camp "as long as one of you is left."⁴⁴

But the Bund failed to achieve the kind of positive press coverage it so obviously desired. Rumors that the camp was a "training ground" and "dangerous" were common as the fortunes of the Bund began to decline both locally and nationally in 1938. In June of that year, Froboese invited the Milwaukee press and the interested public to inspect the camp on a Sunday afternoon. Few visitors took advantage of the invitation, but reporters and photographers from the *Milwaukee Journal*, the *Sentinel*, and the *Leader* did. Froboese was unlikely to have been satisfied with any of the stories which appeared a day later. The *Journal* did not feel it was necessary to elaborate on the familiar anti-Semitic and political views of the speaker (Froboese himself) and concentrated instead on the number and type of flags flown, how they were saluted, and the fact that at least some people seemed to be there mainly for recreation. The *Socialist Leader* emphasized the low attendance of an ostensibly public event (approximately 300 people and two dozen dogs). The paper noted that the speaker's stand on a hillside resembled "a Biblical altar of sacrifice" and served as the focal point of the camp. *Sentinel* writer William H. Radloff's account suggested a rather ludicrous outing of stereotypical Germans who mixed beer, picnic lunches, and politics. He echoed the *Leader* by observing that the most exciting moment of the entire day occurred when two dogs started to fight in the center of the camp.⁴⁵

By contrast, the reporting of events at the Federation's Carl Schurz Park suggested it was a well-attended place of great conviviality.

Opening and closing ceremonies for each summer season as well as the not infrequent appearance of political figures ensured the friendly attentions of the press. The success of Carl Schurz Park in its first season (1939) was a source of great satisfaction to Federation leaders, who had begun their organization with a call in 1932 for a *Deutsche Haus* in Milwaukee but had instead been challenged by conflict and circumstance to develop a rural park for picnics and recreation.

The successful establishment of Carl Schurz Park in 1939 coincided with the decline of public activity by the Bund. Adverse publicity from congressional investigations and the press, growing distaste for Hitler and the Third Reich, and the "alien" qualities of Bund pronouncements and rallies diminished audiences. The internal problems of the Bund became more acute and subject to public scrutiny. In 1939, Fritz Kuhn was charged with misappropriation of organizational funds, and the ensuing scandal shook the Bund. The Milwaukee Bund was further from finding the key which would unlock popular support than it had been five years earlier. Larger and more broadly organized numbers of protesters had become a regular feature at Bund and Citizens Alliance events. Camp Hindenburg became less a showpiece than a hideout. With America's entry into the war in late 1941, the organization disbanded and some of its members faced prosecution and internment. George Froboese, under subpoena to testify before a federal grand jury in New York in June, 1942, committed suicide. A lengthy trial for the purpose of revoking citizenship for fourteen pro-Nazis began in Federal District Court in Milwaukee in the summer of 1943 and lasted until May, 1944. Most Bundists were cooperative and hoped to distance themselves from the charge of disloyalty to the United States. Paul Knauer, the best-known of the defendants, was eventually denaturalized and deported, though he returned to Milwaukee many years later.

BUT the decline and destruction of the German-American Bund did not create an obvious mood of victory for the Wisconsin Federation of German-

⁴⁴*Milwaukee Journal*, May 29, 1939; *Milwaukee Evening Post*, May 29, 1939.

⁴⁵*Milwaukee Journal*, June 13, 1938; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 13, 1938; *Milwaukee Leader*, June 13, 1938.



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Raising the flag. Left to right: the Schimeyer boy, Emil Kagelmann, and Hans Bergmayr, summer of 1940. Kagelmann now lives in Mountain (Oconto County), Wisconsin; Bergmayr died in Holland after stepping on a German land mine while serving in the U.S. Army. Photo courtesy Rudolph Mueller.

American Societies. After years of conflict with an energetic adversary, the Federation could not claim that a clear mandate for community leadership had resulted. In January, 1942, Federation President Otto Reiss noted the misfortunes of the Bund but continued to express some apprehension about possible efforts by Bundists to infiltrate or sabotage his organization. In a statement to reporters he revealed the insecurity of Federationists stem-

ming not only from the lengthy conflict with the Bund but from the inescapable fact that the United States was again at war with Germany: "The Federation stands for American principles. It is American first and German second. It still has the right to foster German culture. It can no longer be said 'If you are a German, you must surely be a Nazi.'"⁴⁶

⁴⁶*Milwaukee Journal*, January 26, 1941.

Reiss's statement was a summary of what the Federation had hoped to achieve in its conflict with the Bund. With the memory of the anti-German hysteria of World War I as a backdrop, the Federation had sought to convince others that the vast majority of Americans of German descent and non-naturalized Germans were loyal to the United States and at the same time appreciative of their heritage. Without that effort, the image of *das Deutschtum* might have been entirely beclouded by the views and activities of the Bund. However, the actual role of the Federation in bringing about the end of the Bund was marginal. Nor did the demise of the Bund usher in an era of untroubled domination of the German-American scene for the Federation in the years that followed. In the postwar period, the Federation again became an ideological battleground in which leftists attempted to dominate the organization. The early Cold War led to defection and purges until, by 1950, the Federation was composed of only seventeen member societies and faced with extinction, a fate it suffered some years later.⁴⁷

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, December 1, 1949, February 25, 1951.

What happened after the Second World War is perhaps the topic of some future study of German-Americans in Wisconsin. Regrettably, most of the people actively involved in the events of the 1930's are gone, so their first-hand accounts are lost to us. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility of further research into the recollections of persons who were still young at the time and were touched by some of the events that shook the German-American community. In any event, it is clear that the decade of the 1930's was a singular one for *das Deutschtum*. At a time when the German presence in Milwaukee was still significant, and when the attractions of assimilation seemed somewhat abstract and distant for many, three rival organizations had engaged in a bid to dominate the German-American community. In many respects the Federation, the Bund, and the Citizens Alliance shared a concern for the status of German-Americans and for the preservation of their cultural heritage. Despite these common aims and ideals, however, the memories of one war, the anticipation of another, and strongly held ideologies prevented the achievement of a desired unity.