



German Influences on Wellness, Health, and Pharmaceuticals in America



October 29–30, 2026

ABSTRACTS

SCOTT ANDERSON

Contrology and Culture: How German Ideas About the Body Shaped Joe Pilates — and American Well-being

Abstract: Joe Pilates is usually remembered as the inventor of a fitness method. Yet he was also the product of a remarkable period in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany, when philosophers, physicians, gymnasts, and social reformers debated the nature and purpose of the human body and the effects of modernity on it. This talk explores the German intellectual and physical culture currents that shaped Pilates' thinking: the *Lebensreform* movement's rejection of an increasingly sedentary society, the philosophical reclamation of the lived body from Nietzsche onward, and the rich gymnastics tradition that inspired both Pilates' method and his missionary zeal. The presentation will trace how these ideas traveled with him to New York, where they were quietly absorbed into American fitness culture. Understanding this lineage not only makes Pilates more interesting, but it also reframes how we think about the body, movement, and well-being today.

Scott Anderson, Ph.D., is a lecturer in the Department of Dance at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He is a meditation teacher, somatic educator, and fitness consultant who works at the intersection of contemplative practice, movement science, and nervous system health. He teaches and leads programs through his fitness consulting practice and holds a leadership role at the Tergar Madison Meditation Community in Madison, Wisconsin. His ongoing interest in the history of physical culture reflects his belief that understanding the origins of our ideas about the body is the first step toward inhabiting it more wisely.

RAE BLANCHARD

Constantine Hering, MD: German Immigrants and the Impact of Homeopathic Medicine in the United States

Abstract: Homeopathy, a holistic approach to health care, originated in late eighteenth-century Germany with Samuel Hahnemann, who based it on three principles: like-cures-like, the single remedy, and the minimum dose. Often called the “father of American Homeopathy,” Dr. Constantine Hering was among the early German immigrants who helped advance homeopathic education and practice in the United States during the nineteenth century. This talk explores the German American

presence in archival collections, highlighting Dr. Hering's significance and tracing the evolution of homeopathic practice in the United States.

Rae Blanchard is a project archivist at the Drexel University College of Medicine Legacy Center and holds a master's degree in information science. Her work focuses on increasing the visibility of and access to historical materials of all kinds. She also works with the collections at the German Society of Pennsylvania's Horner Library, which document German immigration, homeopathic medicine, and the history of women in medicine.

PATRICK DONMOYER

Die Braucherei: Ritual Healing Traditions Among the Pennsylvania Dutch

Abstract: German-speaking immigrants in the eighteenth century brought distinctive healing traditions to Pennsylvania, including rituals and customs intended to promote health and healing in humans and animals. Known collectively as *die Braucherei*, these practices provided the foundation for culturally specific forms of medical care that evolved over three centuries of adaptation and change. They persist today in forms of complementary and alternative medicine. Renewed interest in these traditions reflects broader trends among younger generations exploring alternative spiritualities and reconnecting with Pennsylvania Dutch as a heritage language.

Patrick Donmoyer is the Director of the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, a folklife museum and research center on the Kutztown University campus. A proficient speaker of Pennsylvania Dutch, his research explores folk art, vernacular language, rural architecture, seasonal customs, and healing traditions.

ALISON CLARK EFFORD

Training Future Mothers: Turners and Girls' Physical Education in the Late Nineteenth-Century United States

Abstract: The German *Turnverein* organization, known as the *Turners* in the United States, pioneered physical education for girls. German American *Turners* included girls in children's exercise classes from the 1850s and introduced classes for young women in the 1880s. Although other groups also advocated physical education in schools and opportunities for adolescent girls, the *Turners* were notably early, visible, systematic, and influential. They staged large-scale gymnastics events, opened an instructor training college in 1875, trained teachers to serve in public schools, and promoted the benefits of exercise for girls and women. Guided by their motto "A Sound Mind in a Sound Body," *Turners* viewed physical activity as a public health initiative, linking women's strength to their ability to bear and raise children. This paper argues that Turner training empowered girls physically and socially while also showing how its emphasis on motherhood reinforced ideas about racial and ethnic reproduction and eugenics, which limited its liberatory potential.

Alison Clark Efford is Associate Professor of History at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her research focuses on German immigrants during the Civil War era, abolitionist and feminist Mathilde Franziska Anneke, and immigration history.

GREGORY J. HIGBY

Louis Lotz, Edward Kremers, and the German Apothecary Tradition in Wisconsin

Abstract: “*Deutsche Apotheke*” could be seen painted on store fronts or shop windows throughout Wisconsin in the late 1800s. Customers entering such a “German pharmacy” would be greeted by a well-educated and urbane pharmacist. In contrast to other drugstores, these pharmacies had no shiny soda fountains or colorful displays of cure-alls. Instead, patrons would see dark wood fixtures and neat rows of apothecary bottles and jars. This talk explores the origins and influence of German pharmacists on healthcare in Wisconsin and beyond through the careers of Louis Lotz and his protégé, Edward Kremers. Lotz ran a traditional German-style pharmacy in Milwaukee from the 1870s into the 1920s, while Kremers led the University of Wisconsin’s School of Pharmacy from 1892 to 1935. During those years, Kremers reformed pharmacy education nationally based on his apprenticeship under Lotz and his graduate student experience in Germany.

Gregory J. Higby, Ph.D is the Fischelis Scholar of the American Institute of the History of Pharmacy and Senior Lecturer at the UW-Madison School of Pharmacy.

ANNETTE HOFMANN

Hydrotherapy, Naturopathy and Physical Activity: Benedikt Lust and the Transfer of Kneippism from Germany to the U.S.

Abstract: The naturopathy movement in America grew out of the work of German immigrants in New York, particularly Benedikt Lust (1872–1945) and John Scheel (1857–1927). Both were influenced by Sebastian Kneipp (1821–1897) a Catholic priest in rural Bavaria who gained fame for his hydrotherapy treatments. Kneipp’s holistic approach also emphasized specialized nutrition and physical activity. The first of many *Kneipp Vereine* (Kneipp clubs) was founded in Germany in 1890, and similar clubs soon appeared in the United States. Among those who introduced Kneipp’s methods to American audiences, Benedikt Lust played an important role. He established Kneipp water-cure institutes in New Jersey and Florida and founded the American School of Naturopathy in New York.

Annette Hofmann is Professor for Sports Studies at Ludwigsburg University of Education (Germany). She serves as President of the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE) and as Vice President of both the German Gymnastic Federation (Deutscher Turner-Bund, DTB) and the German Olympic Academy. Her research focuses on sport history and pedagogy, particularly Germans’ influence on American sports, gender and sport, and the history of skiing.

MELANIE LORENZ

The German American Midwife: Transplanting Paraprofessional Midwifery to Nineteenth-Century St. Louis

Abstract: In the second half of the nineteenth century, German Americans in St. Louis, Missouri, sought to build on the midwifery system they knew from Germany. They established formal midwifery schools, founded professional associations, and published the *American Midwife*, the first professional journal in the United States dedicated exclusively to midwives. These efforts reflected an awareness that, unlike in Germany, the American medical establishment had done little to integrate midwives into a formalized system of paramedical care. This paper argues that German American midwives did more than reproduce German practices in the United States. Drawing on their transnational professional knowledge, they adapted to conditions in St. Louis and worked to advance their profession from within, even though their initiatives ultimately proved unsuccessful.

Melanie S. Lorenz is an independent scholar in Basel, Switzerland, who recently earned her Ph.D. in history from Marquette University in Wisconsin. Her research explores the intersection of immigration and medical history, focusing on immigrant communities, healthcare practices, and the development of paraprofessional healthcare.

MARK L. LOUDEN

Max Kade and the Story of Pertussin

Abstract: Born in Steinbach, a small town in southwestern Germany, Max Kade (1882–1967) emigrated to New York in 1904. There he joined the German American pharmaceutical company Lehn and Fink, quickly rising to a senior managerial position. In 1909, Kade and another German immigrant and chemist, Walter Seeck, founded Seeck & Kade. Earlier, Seeck had managed the Taeschner Chemical-Pharmaceutical Factory in Potsdam, Germany, which produced a popular homeopathic cough syrup called Pertussin. Seeck secured the rights to produce and distribute Pertussin in the United States and Canada, which led to considerable commercial success for Seeck & Kade in the first half of the 20th century. Kade, who had bought out Seeck in the early years of their company, sold Seeck & Kade and the rights to Pertussin to Chesebrough-Pond's in 1956. This presentation explores Max Kade and his company by focusing on the evolution of the formula and manufacturing history of Pertussin, the pharmaceutical behind his success.

Mark L. Loudon is the Alfred L. Shoemaker, J. William Frey, and Don Yoder Professor of Germanic Linguistics and director of the Max Kade Institute for German American Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His research and public outreach center on Pennsylvania Dutch, varieties of German spoken in Europe and North America, and Yiddish. He also serves as an interpreter and cultural mediator for Amish and Old Order Mennonite groups in the legal and healthcare systems.

KATIE WILLIAMS

Serving Families from the Plain Communities

Abstract: In this presentation Dr. Williams will share her experiences as a clinician and researcher serving Plain patients and their families, primarily Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites. She will focus on her work with the Center for Special Children (CSC), a program of Vernon Health founded in 2015 in La Farge, Wisconsin, to support families from Plain communities facing complex medical needs and genetic conditions. CSC currently serves 789 active patients from 18 states, primarily in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa, providing primary care, genetic testing, and specialty care throughout all stages of life. Caring for Plain patients involves serving their extended families and communities, which requires understanding and respecting cultural diversity and practicing cultural humility.

Katie Williams, MD, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics, Division of Genetics and Metabolism at the University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Medicine and Public Health and a clinician at the La Farge Medical Clinic/Center for Special Children.