

German Immigration to the US and Wisconsin (TTT Workshop)

How independent were German communities in the Midwest?

- In the mid- to late-19th c., funding of services was overwhelmingly local: 86% of tax was local in Wisconsin in 1860 (*HW* II:157-58).
- Germans tended heavily to intermarry, 7 of 8 among immigrants and children of immigrants (*HW*). Even in Milwaukee, one commentator calls marriage between Germans and Americans “negligible”.

How when did these communities become ‘Americanized’?

By 1902, Hense-Jensen & Bruncken (1900–02, II:254) describe the transition from an utterly German character of parts of Milwaukee to the emergence of a new, less German feel:

Noch um das Jahr 1870, ja selbst zehn Jahre später, gab es gewisse Wards der damals nicht sehr großen Stadt Milwaukee, in welchen man kaum ein englisches Wort auf der Straße hörte, und die Verkaufsläden beinahe ohne Ausnahme neben dem englischen auch ein deutsches Aushängeschild hatten. Nicht wenige bedeutende Geschäftsfirmen bedienten sich zum großen Theil in ihrer Korrespondenz der deutschen Sprache. Diese Eigenthümlichkeiten “Kleindeutschlands” sind jetzt fast ganz und gar verschwunden.

[Roughly: even in 1870, indeed even 10 years later, there were wards in the still not large city of Milwaukee in which one hardly heard an English word on the street and stores almost without exception had a German sign in addition to an English one. No small number of important businesses use German in a large part of their correspondence. These characteristics of ‘Little Germany’ have almost entirely disappeared.]

Note the curve of German-speaking immigration over time. The numbers go up and down a number of times from the mid-19th c. until the turn of the present century, when they drop off for good:

1882	250,000 +
1892	120,000 (approx.)
1895	30,000 (approx.)(Walker 1964)

A rough conservative estimate of speaker numbers is the sum of the number of German-born residents and the number of children of two parents born in Germany:

Total population	1,693,330	
German-born	259,819	15.34%
Children of 2 Gm-born parents	293,039	17.31%
Estimated German speakers	552,858	32.65%

A look at some key institutions/domains:

Religion

Jensen (1971) has argued that “religion was the fundamental source of political conflict in the midwest”.

Midwestern **Catholicism** was, of course, a multiethnic affair, in Wisconsin including large Polish, French and Irish populations (see Rippley 1985:43-45 and references therein). While in the mid-19th century united against the common enemy of Nativism, according to some accounts, the groups comprising American Catholicism split when the Irish began to oppose language maintenance as a barrier to unity across ethnic groups.

By the 1890's a struggle had begun within the Church which resulted in downplaying ethnic identity. The first meeting of German-American Catholics in 1887 dwelt largely on preserving their ethnic heritage and language (*Amerikanisch-deutsche Katholiken Versammlung 1887:27*). Tension is quite apparent, as speakers talk of “gewissen gehässigen Vorurtheilen” and stressing repeatedly that they as German-American Catholics were “echt deutsch und echt katholisch zugleich ... und obendrein hierzulande auch gute Amerikaner.” [Roughly: both truly German and truly Catholic, and on top of that in this country good Americans.]

Hofman (1966:139) has aptly described the various **Lutheran** churches of Europe, and later America, as “national in character”. Mergers eventually eroded that for some communities, but not for others.

In the conservative Missouri Synod, a very large group in Wisconsin, one observer noted in 1901 that “the change in language is not only impending but is in actual and accelerated progress at the present time” (Graebner 1965:98). (Similar patterns exist in other Lutheran immigrant groups, like Norwegians.)

Education

In education, like elsewhere, early Wisconsin provided a situation that allowed relatively easy maintenance of immigrant minority languages (*HW II*: 162-65). Here are the key characteristics in Wisconsin:

- a “highly localized system of common schools”;
- a state superintendent who had “little power except that of persuasion”;
- an imported tradition of church schooling from German-speaking Europe and Norway.

Indeed, when a 1854 law clearly mandated instruction in English, Germans ignored it, something possible because of these factors. Decades later, though, this situation was upset considerably by a kind of “English only” clause in an 1889 law providing for public education, the so-called Bennett Law:

An Act Concerning the Education and Employment of Children (The Bennett Law)

“No school shall be regarded as a school under this act unless there shall be taught therein, as part of the elementary education of children, reading, writing, arithmetic and U.S. history in the English language.”

Ebert & Zurstadt (1930:2): Vergleichen wir den gegenwaertigen Stand der deutschen Sprache in unsern Kreisen mit dem vor einem Jahrzehnt, so finden wir, dasz sich in den meisten Gegenden ein bedeutender Umschwung vollzogen hat. Die englische Sprache hat die deutsche verdraengt. Das sieht man auch in unsern Schulen. Waehrend frueher die Anfaenger zum groszen Teil die deutsche Sprache sprechen oder doch verstehen konnten, so ist jetzt das Gegenteil der Fall. Die Landessprache ist die Muttersprache der Kinder geworden. Es gibt allerdings noch Sprachinseln, in denen die alte Ordnung herrscht, doch wird dieser Zustand an solchen Orten sich mit der Zeit aendern.

Press

Wisconsin had over **500** newspapers/periodicals in German.

Milwaukee: Many German papers/periodicals had circulations from **10,000**, to well over **100,000**: *Acker- und Garten-bau Zeitung, Deutsch-Amerikanische Gewerbe- und Industrie-Zeitung, Das Goldene Buch, Der Hausfreund, Milwaukee-Herold, Kinder-Post, Des Kleinhändlers Advokat, Der Landwirth, Die Rundschau, Der Wöchentliche Seebote, Die Wahrheit, Vorwärts.*

Outline: History of Wisconsin German-American Newspapers & Periodicals

	#	Comments
1876	29	
1880	38	
1882	Peak of German immigration	
1883	53	Rise in all kinds of publications.
1890	89	Near-peak in number; decline begins.
1895	85	Few new papers are founded after this time.
1910	75	Most rapid decline in numbers occurs.
1920	43	Mergers, loss of supplements, etc.
1925	30	
1929	20	
1934	12	Mostly religious, specialty publ's, few newspapers Numbers excerpted from Arndt (in Arndt & Olson 1965:806).

Circulation of selected Wisconsin German-language papers, 1910–1920

Newspaper	1910	1920	
Appleton Gegenwart	7425	5300	(1919)
Appleton Volksfreund	7650	4657	
Die Wahrheit	1250	1236	
Marshfield Wochenblatt	1750	1500	
Dodge Co. Pionier	2600	2400	
Green Co. Herold	1525	1660	
Deutsch-Amerikaner	1175	1000	
Wisc. Telegraph	2250	1000	
Pt Washington Zeitung	1130	750	
Sauk City Pionier-Presse	900	890	
Volksbote-Wochenblatt	1450	1525	
National Demokrat	2750	3200	
Wisc. Wochenblatt	1500	9800	
Watertown Weltbürger	2925	2680	
Total		36280	37598

The decline of the immigrant press: Some traditional views.

- (1) German-language press was primarily a transitional phenomenon, fed directly by immigration, declined soon after the flood of immigration dried up. (See Marzolf 1979 on the Danish press in the U.S.)
- (2) It was a tool to integrate new immigrants into American society, declined after serving that function. (See Soltes 1924 on Yiddish press.)
- (3) The press was directly/indirectly forced out of business by government pressure before/during/after WW I. (Nollendorfs 1988, Wittke 1936)

Two more reasons:

- (4) Economics of small-circ. newspapers, other structural social changes
- (5) Later, loss of readers, due ultimately to shift of speakers to English

Some resources

- Arndt, Karl J.R. & May E. Olson. 1965. *German-American Newspapers and Periodicals 1732-1955; history and bibliography*. Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer. 2nd edn.
- Buchheit, Robert H. 1982. The Decline of German Settlement Dialects on the Great Plains between the two World Wars: Some Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Factors. *Schatzkammer* 8(1-2). 48-71.
- Buchheit, Robert H. 1985. "German Language Shift in the Nebraska District of the Missouri Synod from 1918 to 1950." *Yearbook of German-American Studies*. 20. 141-152.
- Conzen, Kathleen Neils. 1976. *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836-1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (Revised edition in preparation by the University of Wisconsin Press.)
- Conzen, Kathleen Neils. 1990. *Making Their Own America: Assimilation theory and the German peasant pioneer*. German Historical Institute, Annual Lecture Series, 3. New York: Berg.
- Ebert, E. & Zurstadt, H.M. 1930. *Lehrplan fuer den Unterricht in der deutschen Sprache in den lutherischen Elementarschulen und Anleitung fuer den Gebrauch desselben. Verabfasst im Auftrage des Lehplankomitees der Allgemeinen Schulbehoerde der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.
- Eichhoff, Jürgen. 1971. German in Wisconsin. *The German Language in America*, ed. by Glenn Gilbert. Austin: University of Texas Press. 43–57.
- Fishman, Joshua. 1966. "Language maintenance and language shift as a field of inquiry." *Language Loyalty in the United States*, ed. by J. Fishman, pp. 424–458. The Hague: Mouton.
- Fishman, Joshua A. 1991. *Reversing Language Shift*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Geiger, Steven R. 1999. Darmstadt Dialect in Sheboygan County. Paper to be presented at the 2nd Annual Max Kade Institute Mini-Conference on German Dialects in the Midwest.
- Graebner, Alan N. 1965. *The Acculturation of an Immigration Lutheran Church: The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, 1917-1929*. PhD dissertation, Columbia University.
- Haugen, Einar. 1969. *The Norwegian Language in America: A study in bilingual behavior*. 2 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2nd Edition.
- Heffner, Roe-Merrill Secrist. 1942. "German Settlements in Wisconsin." *Conference on Non-English Speech in the United States. (American Council of Learned Societies, Bulletin 34.)* 19-26.
- Hense-Jensen, Wilhelm, & Ernest Bruncken. 1900–02. *Wisconsin's Deutsch-Amerikaner*. 2 vols. Milwaukee: Die Deutsche Gesellschaft.
- [HW =] 1978–. *The History of Wisconsin*. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin. 6 vols. published to date.
- Jensen, Richard. 1971. *Winning the Midwest: Social and political conflict, 1888-1896*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Kamphoefner, Walter. 1994. "German American bilingualism: *cui malo?* Mother tongue and socioeconomic status among the second generation in 1940." *International Migration Review* 28:4.846–864.
- Kloss, Heinz. 1966. "German-American language maintenance efforts." *Language Loyalty in the United States*, ed. by Joshua Fishman, pp. 206–252. The Hague: Mouton.
- Labov, Theresa G. 1998. "English acquisition by immigrants to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century." *American Speech* 73:4.368–398
- Lind, Michael C. 1998. Pomeranian in Central Wisconsin. Paper presented at the 1st Annual Max Kade Institute Mini-Conference on German Dialects in the Midwest.
- Lovoll, Odd S. 1984. *The Promise of America. The History of the Norwegian-American People*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lucht, Felecia & Joseph Salmons. Forthcoming. 'Standard German' in Texas. *Festschrift for Glenn G. Gilbert*.
- Luebke, Frederick C. 1980. Legal Restrictions on Foreign Languages in the Great Plains States, 1917-1923. *Languages in Conflict*. Edited by Paul Schach. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 1-19.
- Milroy, Lesley & James Milroy 1992. Social network and social class: Toward an integrated sociolinguistic model. *Language in Society* 21.1–27.
- Nollendorfs, Cora Lee. 1985. Deutschunterricht in Amerika im Schatten des ersten Weltkrieges: Öffentlich-offizielle Verfahrensweise und gesellschaftliches Gebaren. *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch*. 35(2). 190-200.
- Nollendorfs, Cora Lee. 1988. The First World War and the survival of German Studies. *Teaching German in America*, ed. by David P. Benseler et al. Madison: University of Wisconsin. 176–196.
- Nützel, Daniel. 1998. *Morphosyntactic variation and change in Haysville (Indiana) East Franconian*. PhD dissertation, Purdue University.
- Ostergren, Robert C. 1998. "The Euro-American Settlement of Wisconsin, 1830-1920." *Wisconsin Land and Life*, ed. by R. Ostergren & T. Vale. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 137-162.
- Paasi, Anssi. 1991. "Deconstructing regions: Notes on the scales of spatial life." *Environment and Planning* 23.239–256.
- Petersen, Peter. 1974. "Language and Loyalty: Governor Harding and Iowa's Danish-Americans During World War I." *Annals of Iowa*. 3rd Series, 42.6. 405-417.
- Peterson Royce, Anya. 1982. *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of diversity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Purnell, Thomas, Joseph Salmons & Dilara Tepeli. Forthcoming. German substrate effects in Wisconsin English: Evidence for final fortition.
- Ripley, LaVern J. 1976. *The German-Americans*. Boston: Twayne.
- Ripley, LaVern J. 1985. *The Immigrant Experience in Wisconsin*. Boston: Twayne.
- Salmons, Joseph C. 1988. The Question of a German-American Vocabulary. *Germanic Linguistics II* ed. by Elmer Antonsen & Hans Henrich Hock. Bloomington: IULC. 102–111.
- Salmons, Joseph C. 1991. Register in the Formation and Evolution of an Immigrant Language: Evidence from some Indiana German dialects. *WORD* 42.31–56.
- Salmons, Joseph C. 1994. Naturalness and Morphological Change in Texas German. *Deutsche Sprachinselforschung: Eine Gedenkschrift für Hugo Jedig*, ed. by Nina Berend & Klaus J. Mattheier. Bern: Peter Lang. 59–72.

- Salmons, Joseph C. 2002. "The Shift from German to English, World War I and the German-language Press in Wisconsin". *Menschen zwischen zwei Welten: Auswanderung, Ansiedlung, Akkulturation*, ed. by Walter G. Rödel & Helmut Schmahl. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier. 179-193.
- Salmons, Joseph C. Forthcoming a. "Community, Region and Language Shift in German-speaking Wisconsin". *New Orientations in the Study of Regionalism*, ed. by James Peacock, et al. Madison: Monographs of the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures.
- Salmons, Joseph C. Forthcoming b. The role of community and regional structure in language shift. *Regionalism in the Age of Globalism*, ed. by James Peacock & Lothar Hönnighausen. Madison: Monographs of the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures.
- Salmons, Joseph, Dilara Tepeli & Thomas Purnell. Forthcoming. "Deutsche Spuren im amerikanischen Englischen." *Sprachinseln* ed. by Nina Berend. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang.
- Seifert, Lester W. J. 1949. "The problem of speech mixture in the German spoken in northwestern Dane County, Wisconsin." *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*. 39.127–139.
- Seifert, Lester W. J. 1994. The Development and Survival of the German Language in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. *The German Language in America: 1683–1991*, ed. by Joseph C. Salmons. Madison: Max Kade Institute. 322–337.
- Walker, Mack. 1964. *Germany and Emigration, 1816 – 1885*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Warren, Roland L. 1978. *The Community in America*. 3rd edn. (1st edn., 1963.) Chicago: Rand-McNally.
- Wiegand, Wayne. 1989. "In the service of the State: Wisconsin Public Libraries during World War I." *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 72(3).199–224.
- Wiley, M. 1926. *The Country Newspaper: A study of socialization and newspaper content*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wittke, Carl. 1936. *German-Americans and the World War*. Columbus: Ohio State Archæological and Historical Society. (Reprinted by Ozor, 1974.)