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**MAKING  
THEIR OWN AMERICA  
Assimilation Theory  
and the  
German Peasant Pioneer**

*KATHLEEN NEILS CONZEN*

*With comments by  
Mack Walker and Jörg Nagler*



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Sombart and the Sauk River Settlements

*Mack Walker*

Ethnic Persistence and Transformation:  
A Response to Kathleen N. Conzen

*Jörg Nagler*



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## Preface

One area in which American and German scholars have intensively cooperated in the past, and most certainly will cooperate in the future, is that of migration studies. As we all know, several million Germans emigrated to America between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Research has to establish the kind of information these people possessed about the New World while still living in Germany, their motives for leaving, their experiences while en route, and the often very complicated processes of getting settled. In almost all cases, the migrants' hopes and expectations were made up of a combination of political, religious, economic, and personal considerations. Consequently, research in this field has to take into account the general as well as the individual, the past of these migrants as well as their future. I am very grateful that Professor Kathleen Conzen from the University of Chicago was ready to discuss some aspects of this topic in our Third Annual Lecture, and I am equally grateful to Professor Mack Walker from The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and to Dr. Jörg Nagler from the German Historical Institute for commenting on Professor Conzen's address. One focus of the mission of the German Historical Institute in Washington is academic research in the area of transatlantic migration studies. It is our hope that our Third Annual Lecture helps to serve this goal.

HARTMUT LEHMANN  
*Washington, D.C., March 1990*



## **Making Their Own America Assimilation Theory and the German Peasant Pioneer**

*Kathleen Neils Conzen*

In 1950 a prominent New York journalist, Samuel Lubell, bounced his way over the unpaved roads of central Minnesota's Stearns County to the isolated rural parish of St. Martin, in a quest for the roots of a distinctive conservative voting behavior that he identified with farm areas of German and particularly Catholic background.<sup>1</sup> St. Martin's Benedictine pastor, Father Cyril Ortmann, who extended the visitor his full cooperation, felt betrayed when Lubell's initial findings appeared the following year in *Harper's Magazine*. In a few trenchant paragraphs, the journalist sketched a picture of a community dominated by its autocratic priest, one where many farmers still spoke German with greater ease than English, where many refused electrification because the old ways were best, where a father's word was law and children's ambitions extended no farther than farming or a religious vocation, and where both priest and people were bitterly anti-Communist but fatalistically reliant upon prayer alone as the resolution to the world's problems.<sup>2</sup> Father Cyril, who recognized derision when he saw it, finally found his opportunity to reply when he came to write the centennial history of his parish a few years later. Lubell, he observed, had failed to appreciate the worth of a rural way of life that Virgil had praised two millenia earlier. "Political analysts might well probe here for genuine reaction to political issues, and honest grass roots temper characterized by a tenacious adherence to the tenets of a democratic Republic, resting on sound premises." Those "sound premises," Father Cyril made clear, arose from the conjunction of Catholicism, German ethnicity, and farming. "Future students of

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with William L. Cofell, Collegeville, Minnesota, August 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Lubell, "Who Votes Isolationist and Why," *Harper's Magazine* 202 (April 1951): 29–36.

history might well marvel some day at the stamina and integrity displayed by the descendants of this ethnic group along the Sauk Valley, and come to realize that the impelling force stems from deep religious conviction translated into the unostentatious but practical every day way of Christian living."<sup>3</sup>

How and why the German Catholic peasants who settled the valley of the Sauk beginning in 1854 created and conserved the way of life that gave Lubell such pause and Father Cyril so much satisfaction form the subject of this paper. Despite their radically differing judgments on the value of this distinctive way of life, these two protagonists were in essential agreement upon its existence, its religious and ethnic roots, and its enduring significance for personal and political decision making. The phenomenon that they recognized forty years ago remains evident today: a significant segment of American rural life still rests upon communities and cultures that German immigrants like those of the Sauk created.

In Stearns County itself, the outward signs of this heritage are legible in the overwhelming preponderance of German names in the phone directory, in the steeples of the thirty parish churches in which German was once spoken, even in the rhythms and intonations of local speech and in the ubiquity and ambience of village saloons.<sup>4</sup> Less tangible evidence of local distinctiveness can be read in everything from the area's aggressive anti-abortion movement to the fiscal caution of its governmental bodies, the high persistence rates of its conservative farmers, the unusually large size of its families, and the traces of traditional legalism, clericalism, and devotionalism that still mark its spirituality.<sup>5</sup> Nor is Stearns County the only area in the United States where even the casual visitor can

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<sup>3</sup> Father Cyril Ortmann, O.S.B., *Saint Martin: A Century of Catholic Parish and Community Life, 1858–1958* (St. Cloud, Minn., 1958), 47, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Ingolf Vogeler, "The Roman Catholic Culture Region of Central Minnesota," *Pioneer America* 8 (1976): 71–83; Roberta Walburn, "Stearns Syndrome Hurts If You Don't Laugh," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Jan. 2, 1979, and "Letters," *ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Edward L. Henry, ed., *Micropolis in Transition: A Study of a Small City* (St. Cloud, Minn., 1971); Rev. Paul Folsum, *Rural Ministry, A Response to Change: What Has Happened to the Church on Main Street, U.S.A.*, Doctorate of Ministry Pastoral Project, Aquinas Institute of Theology, Dubuque, Iowa (1976); Barry M. Casper and Paul David Wellstone, *Powerline: The First Battle of America's Energy War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); Vincent A. Yzermans, *The Spirit in Central Minnesota: A Centennial Narrative of the Church of Saint Cloud, 1889–1989*, 2 vols. (St. Cloud, Minn: Diocese of St. Cloud, 1989), esp. 439–72.

perceive the traces of this distinctive patterning. Midwestern rural German Catholic islands as widely separated as DuBois County in southern Indiana, Effingham County in central Illinois, Fond du Lac County in eastern Wisconsin, and Osage County in central Missouri, to name only four among many, still bear its visible stamp.<sup>6</sup> Similar cultural persistence marks many German Protestant farming areas.<sup>7</sup> While there is widespread agreement among scholars that the urban German communities of the era of mass immigration have long since disappeared, at least some of their rural counterparts clearly remain, defined not only by homogeneity of descent within the community but by common values focused on the bond between family and farm that social scientists are able to attribute only to ethnic and religious origins.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the relative impress of German origins upon American farming has intensified rather than waned over time. Despite the rural origins of most German emigrants through the 1880s, no more than a quarter to two-fifths of the first- and second-generation German work force found its way into American agriculture during the decades of mass immigration—less than the national average—and the German-born never amounted to as much as 5 percent of

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<sup>6</sup> For historical background on exemplary parishes in these counties, see Albert Kleber, *Ferdinand Indiana, 1840–1940: A Bit of Cultural History* (St. Meinrad, Ind., 1940); Hilda Engbring Feldhake, *St. Anthony's Century, 1858–1958* (Effingham, Ill., 1958); Benjamin Blied, *St. John the Baptist Congregation* (Johnsburg, Wis., 1957); *St. Joseph Sesquicentennial, 1835–1935* (Westphalia, Mo., 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Russell L. Gerlach, *Immigrants in the Ozarks* (Columbia, Mo., 1977); Walter D. Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri* (Princeton, 1987); I am leaving out of consideration the well-known Pennsylvania German communities of eighteenth-century sectarian origin.

<sup>8</sup> James M. Bergquist, "German Communities in American Cities: An Interpretation of the Nineteenth-Century Experience," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 4 (1984): 9–30; Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Die deutsche Amerikaeinwanderung im ländlichen Kontext: Problemfelder und Forschungsergebnisse," in Klaus J. Bade, ed., *Auswanderer—Wanderarbeiter—Gastarbeiter: Bevölkerung, Arbeitsmarkt und Wanderung in Deutschland seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Ostfildern, 1984), 1:350–77. For recent work by social scientists on the continuing influence of ethnicity in differentiating farm populations, see e.g., Gary Foster, Richard Hummel, and Robert Whittenbarger, "Ethnic Echoes through 100 Years of Midwestern Agriculture," *Rural Sociology* 52 (1987): 365–78; Sonya Salamon and Shirley M. O'Reilly, "Family Land and Developmental Cycles among Illinois Farmers," *Rural Sociology* 44 (1979): 525–42; Sonya Salamon, "Ethnic Communities and the Structure of Agriculture," *Rural Sociology* 50 (1985): 323–40.

the American agricultural work force at any one time.<sup>9</sup> Even so, their potential impact upon American farming was not inconsiderable. Particularly in the midwestern core areas of the family farming region where German agricultural settlement was concentrated, from almost two-fifths to over half of all German-born workers made a living from agriculture, and they comprised 10 percent of all farmers in this region in 1880.<sup>10</sup> Their impact was greatest in the German-dominated state of Wisconsin, where they numbered almost 27 percent of all farmers; their next highest percentages—19, 16, and 14—were attained in the homesteading states of Minnesota, Kansas, and Nebraska, respectively. They were the single largest group of immigrant farmers in all but one of the twelve states and future states of this region.<sup>11</sup>

Even more significantly, persons of German descent have remained in agriculture to a disproportionate extent. By 1950, in contrast to their nineteenth-century underrepresentation, second-generation Germans were overrepresented in agriculture by 50 percent, while 1980 census figures suggest an even greater dominance when all persons who identify themselves as of German ancestry are taken into account.<sup>12</sup> Twenty-seven percent of the rural farm population in the twelve-state midwestern region in 1980 identified itself as of purely German ancestry, and another 22 percent reported mixed German ancestry, so that just under half of

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<sup>9</sup> On the selectivity of German emigration, see Peter Marschalck, *Deutsche Überseewanderung im 19. Jahrhundert: Ein Beitrag zur soziologischen Theorie der Bevölkerung* (Stuttgart, 1973), 77–82; Klaus J. Bade, "Die deutsche überseeische Massenauswanderung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Bestimmungsfaktoren und Entwicklungsbedingungen," in Bade, ed., *Auswanderer—Wanderarbeiter—Gastarbeiter*, 1:259–99, esp. 276–77. First-generation employment in agriculture peaked in 1880 at 36.1 percent of all employed first-generation Germans; second-generation employment in agriculture reached 39.8 percent in 1900. In 1890, 4.6 percent of the American agricultural work force was German-born. See Conzen, "Deutsche Amerikaeinwanderung," 1:351.

<sup>10</sup> Conzen, "Deutsche Amerikaeinwanderung," 353–54.

<sup>11</sup> The 1880 percentages were calculated from U.S. Census, 1880, Vol. I, *Population*, Table 31, "Occupations," 730. The states included in these and the following calculations are Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Michigan was the one state in which Germans were not the largest immigrant group among the farmers; here their place was taken by the British Canadians, who in cultural terms can be ranked with the native born.

<sup>12</sup> Kamphoefner, *Westfalians*, 173.

the farming population in the nation's family farming core claimed some German descent. Within the national rural farm population, 36 percent reported some German ancestry. Only persons of Norwegian ancestry were more overrepresented in agriculture than were the Germans; in the midwestern core, however, German overrepresentation in agriculture was greater than Norwegian in every state but Wisconsin with its large urban as well as rural German concentrations.<sup>13</sup> The descendants of German immigrants, it would seem, have not only preserved distinctive rural communities and cultures; they have also retained their commitment to a rural way of life to a greater extent than almost any other ancestry group—particularly Anglo-Americans—among today's rural farm population.

The origins and persistence of this and other rural immigrant derived cultures have remained largely unexplored by scholars, thereby limiting efforts to account adequately for the kinds of motivations and experiences that have structured the development of American rural life. The assimilationist conceptual framework within which they long worked left immigration historians little reason to spend much time in the countryside. Viewed in Turnerian terms, the individualistic American land system appeared to encourage rapid assimilation and Americanization, so that numerous

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<sup>13</sup> Percentages and indexes calculated from 1980 Census of Population, *General Social and Economic Characteristics*, United States Summary, Table 76, and individual state volumes for the twelve states, Table 60. The index of representation for German-ancestry rural farm population in the nation as a whole is 238 (an index figure of 100 means that persons of German ancestry are present in the rural farm population in the same proportions that they are present in the population as a whole). The problematic character of the 1980 ancestry data is well known; it is quite likely, for example, that persons within ethnically homogeneous rural communities would have a greater tendency to report an immigrant origin than would urban residents. But such a bias simply helps capture the disproportionate presence of such persons among the Germans; there seems little reason to expect that the bias would vary among ethnic groups. Because the calculated index summarizes variation in two conceptually separate processes—initial rural vs. urban settlement, and decisions to remain in or leave agriculture—its interpretation is complex, but the crude trends indicated here, taken in conjunction with nineteenth-century statistics, suggest that over time persons of German ancestry have had a greater tendency to remain in the agricultural sector (or move into it) than has been the case among other groups, with the notable exception of the Norwegians (and also the Dutch, though this emerges only in individual state figures, not in national totals) in states where they achieved an agricultural concentration early.

quantitative studies of farming communities found few ethnic differences in crop production, farming practices, types of tenure, and rates of decadal persistence and success.<sup>14</sup> "If there ever was an American melting pot," observed John L. Shover in his standard 1976 social history of American agriculture, "the place to look might be the American countryside."<sup>15</sup> The presence of immigrants in American agriculture might be acknowledged; the fact that they made some difference to the character of American rural development was not. Yet if immigrant farmers like those of the Sauk were indeed able to sustain distinctive ways of life of their own, then arguments for the dominance of market over culture in the transformation of nineteenth-century agriculture may require modification; explanations for the origins of an American rural ethos may demand more than their traditional Jeffersonian buttressing; and a more satisfactory understanding of the factors underlying present day commitments to family farming in the face of economic pressure may begin to emerge.<sup>16</sup> To seek to explain the enduring

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<sup>14</sup> Notable examples include Merle Curti et al., *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County* (Stanford, Calif., 1959); Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies* (Chicago, 1968); Donald L. Winters, *Farmers without Farms: Agricultural Tenancy in Nineteenth-Century Iowa* (Westport, Conn., 1978). For summary interpretations, see Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Immigrant in American History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), 53–76; Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (New York, 1951), 83–105, 257. This discussion draws upon my "Historical Approaches to the Study of Rural Ethnic Communities," in Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln, Neb., 1980), 1–18, and "Immigrants in Nineteenth Century Agricultural History," in Lou Ferleger, ed., *Agriculture and National Development: Views on the Nineteenth Century* (Ames, Iowa, forthcoming 1990); for other discussions, see Theodore Saloutos, "The Immigrant Contribution to American Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 50 (1976): 45–67; Robert P. Swierenga, "Ethnicity and American Agriculture," *Ohio History* 89 (1980): 323–44; Frederick C. Luebke, "Ethnic Minority Groups in the American West," in Michael P. Malone, ed., *Historians and the American West* (Lincoln, Neb., 1983), 387–413.

<sup>15</sup> . John L. Shover, *First Majority—Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America* (DeKalb, Ill., 1976), 48.

<sup>16</sup> For arguments on the impact of the market, see the essays in Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985); Allan Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (1989): 120–44; Mark Friedberger, *Farm Families and Change in Twentieth-Century America* (Lexington, Ken., 1988) and *Shake-Out: Iowa Farm Families in the 1980s* (Lexington, Ken., 1989).

presence of immigrant-derived cultures in rural America is thus also to address central issues of American agrarian history.

It will demand, however, an altered conceptual framework, with a clearer focus upon culture itself—the socially produced structures of meaning expressed in and engendered by public behaviors, language, images, institutions—than generally has been the case in immigration historiography.<sup>17</sup> For a variety of reasons, immigration history has tended to concern itself more with the fate of the immigrants themselves than with the origins and influence of the cultures they created.<sup>18</sup> Assumptions about the inability of immigrant cultures to withstand the onslaught of the American mainstream long encouraged scholars to focus on the seemingly more problematic issue of structural assimilation.<sup>19</sup> The "cultural turn" so evident in many areas of historical scholarship in the last couple of decades has also affected immigration history, encouraging a search for areas of life where immigrants were able to retain some autonomy, some control of their own destiny, and producing convincing evidence for the survival, resilience, and continuing transformation of immigrant cultures.<sup>20</sup> But most work in this pluralist mode remains content to view culture as, at best, an intervening variable—as, in the revealing metaphor so often used, "cultural baggage" that is unpacked, used, perhaps redefined, to console, support, and defend the immigrant in the process of

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<sup>17</sup> Hans Medick, "'Missionaries in the Row Boat'? Ethnological Ways of Knowing as a Challenge to Social History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987): 76–98, poses this demand of social historians more generally; for the concept of culture, see Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 3–30, and "'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," in Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York, 1983), 55–70.

<sup>18</sup> See the excellent development of this point in John Ibson, "Virgin Land or Virgin Mary? Studying the Ethnicity of White Americans," *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 284–307.

<sup>19</sup> Such assumptions were embedded in Milton M. Gordon's highly influential model of the assimilation process; see his *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York, 1964).

<sup>20</sup>. For the "turn toward culture," see Lynn Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, and Text," in Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989), 4. For a discussion of its effects on immigration historiography, see Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Resurgence of American Immigration History," *American Studies International* 17 (Winter 1979): 46–66.

integration. Ethnicization—the cultural construction of ethnic identity—has thus joined assimilation as a basic process to be studied. But most regard the actual "cultural matter" of ethnicity as significant only to the extent that it serves to define group boundaries and mobilize members around common interests and generally trace its influence no farther than the working class worldview within which most immigrants found their American cultural home.<sup>21</sup>

The same is true of historians who have been led back to the ethnic countryside by the "cultural turn." They have discovered that earlier researchers missed strong evidence of ethnic cultural influence by looking only at short-term measures of how people farmed or at ethnically mixed settlements. Chain migration linking European villages with American settlements, it is now clear, insured the homogeneity necessary for transplanting accustomed habits and values, which influenced not only noneconomic areas of life, but even long-term economic strategies. But they have nevertheless tended to adopt a version of the old straight line assimilation model in stressing first the modulation, then the disintegration of these cultures as they responded on their own terms to the demands of American economic opportunity and increasing penetration of the local order by forces from the wider world.<sup>22</sup>

As Lubell and Father Cyril recognized, however, at least some of these cultures did not disintegrate; they continued to evolve and became, in effect, locally hegemonic. The German Catholics of the Sauk made an America of their own, and to understand how and why they did so it is necessary to move beyond even the culturally

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<sup>21</sup> John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985), represents the most sustained development of this perspective to date; for a recent sophisticated case study, see Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: The Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890–1940* (New York, 1985). See also James A. Henretta, "The Study of Social Mobility: Ideological Assumptions and Conceptual Bias," *Labor History* 18 (1977); John H. M. Laslett, "Acculturation and the New Immigrant History: Some Methodological Considerations," in Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder, eds., *The Press of Labor Migrants in Europe and North America, 1880s to 1930s* (Bremen, 1985), 581–92.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Jon Gjerde, *From Peasants to Farmers: The Migration from Balestrand, Norway, to the Upper Middle West* (Cambridge, 1985); Walter D. Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri* (Princeton, N.J., 1987); Robert C. Ostergren, *A Community Transplanted: The Trans-Atlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West, 1835–1915* (Madison, Wis., 1988).

informed approaches to assimilation and focus directly on the creation of culture itself. We have to look more closely at the mentalities—the collective habits, dispositions, attitudes, values—implied by the pattern of meanings inscribed in local behavior and at the way those meanings were themselves constructed and reconstructed as they shaped responses to new circumstances.<sup>23</sup> In the Sauk Valley, I shall suggest, assumptions and ways of acting derived from Europe did indeed guide the adaptive strategies of German settlers in the fashion now familiar to scholars. But their impact was intensified by the complex system of migration selectivity and community networks that they produced and by the local circumstances that insured their ability to embed themselves deeply within the full range of local public as well as private and religious institutions. Thus as change occurred, it could proceed without the kinds of qualitative shifts implied by the familiar notions of acculturation and assimilation. Culture was more strongly localized—naturalized in the literal botanical sense of the term—than it was ethnicized, and the structures of everyday life, rather than being assimilated to those of some broader element within American society, responded to the transforming pressures of modern life on a parallel trajectory of their own. What follows, then, is a schematic overview of factors structuring the initial formation of the Sauk Valley settlement, the outlines of the distinctive culture created there, its use of local institutions, and some indicators of its gradual transformation, that may serve to illustrate this argument.<sup>24</sup>

One of the first Germans to arrive in the valley of the Sauk was a thirty-one-year-old Westphalian named John H. Tenvoorde, who had emigrated with his parents from the parish of Vreden, probably in the hard years of the mid-1840s when seventy-four separate family groups and individuals from that parish alone applied for emigration permission.<sup>25</sup> The Tenvoordes' search for a new home

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Volker Sellin, "Mentalität and Mentalitätsgeschichte," *Historische Zeitschrift* 241 (1985): 555–598; Aletta Biersack, "Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond," in Hunt, *New Cultural History*, 72–96. David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989) represents a provocative conceptualization of this problem as one of the transfer and elaboration of "folkways."

<sup>24</sup> Documentation for this overview must necessarily be illustrative rather than complete; the full argument is developed in a monographic study that I am presently completing, provisionally entitled *Up Sauk Valley: The Minnesota World That German Peasants Made*.

<sup>25</sup> Tenvoorde's story is told in William Bell Mitchell, ed., *History of*

took them first to St. Louis, where young John worked as a teamster, and then to the large north German colony at Evansville, Indiana, where his parents died and he married a fellow immigrant from his home parish. Now ready to settle down and raise a family, preferably on a farm, he realized the limited opportunities of a well-established German settlement dating back to 1836.

Others shared his perception, and thus during the summer of 1854 he left Evansville for the west as the agent of an emigration society formed by north German Catholics of the area who deputed him to select a location for a colony on public land. His search took him through Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa before he trudged up the Mississippi River to a point at the edge of the nation's northern frontier some seventy miles beyond the Minnesota territorial capital of St. Paul. Here, where the Sauk River flowed into the Mississippi from the west, a couple of crude log cabins and a few hundred yards of rail fence marked the newly cleared site of the speculative town of St. Cloud. This was still Indian country, though rumor insisted that Indian removal could be expected within a season or two. But for all its wilderness character, St. Cloud was also an international crossroads, the point where the annual ox cart trains heavily laden with furs from Canada's Red River country finally emerged from the woods to the head of navigation on the upper Mississippi.

The country clearly had potential, and so Tenvoorde decided to set off "up Sauk Valley," as he later recalled, to scout for land along the Red River trail. His route took him some seventy miles into the headwaters of the shallow Sauk. He found a rolling, lake-dotted landscape, trenched by the broad shallow trough of the valley and crowned by hardwood forests, dense thickets, and patches of natural meadow and prairie that finally yielded in the west to the endless vistas of the true prairie and oak-dotted savannah parkland. His trek was not without its adventures—he slept in trees at night for fear of wolves—but when he returned to St. Cloud he knew "emphatically" that he had found the perfect place for the colony. Its soil looked good, and it had the wood and water that were scarce in other places he had visited and, thanks to the Mississippi and the

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*Stearns County Minnesota* (Chicago, 1915), 323, and in an after dinner speech he gave that was published in the *St. Cloud Democrat*, March 3, 1863; see also Friedrich Müller, "Westfälische Auswanderer im 19. Jahrhundert—Auswanderung aus dem Regierungsbezirk Münster, I. Teil, 1803–1850," *Beiträge zur westfälischen Familienforschung* 22–24 (1966); Darrel E. Bigham, *Reflections on a Heritage: The German Americans in Southwestern Indiana* (Evansville, Ind., 1980), 3–5.

Red River trail, far better access to potential markets; there was no controversy over slavery, no malaria, and, perhaps best of all, no other white men were yet there—there was ample room for a colony.

Buoyed by the offer of free main street lots in St. Cloud, he hurried back to Evansville to make his report, and when he returned the following spring with his family and a stock of goods for a general store, he found that at least fifty German Catholic families had preceded him, many from towns through which he had passed on his return home.<sup>26</sup> The Indians did indeed leave in the spring of 1855, other Germans followed hard on the heels of the pioneers, and though Yankees also began to filter in, by the time of the 1860 census the pattern was clear. The nuclei of twelve German Catholic parishes were already established in the mixed forest and prairie stretching for some forty miles along the Sauk, flanked by three Yankee clusters on the open prairies to the south and one to the north. Both groups shared the market town of St. Cloud, but the patronage of German pioneers from the countryside had already shifted its business center from the Yankee to the German quarter. That year Germans headed 62 percent of the thousand households enumerated in Stearns County and 69 percent of the rural households.<sup>27</sup>

Both the population and areal extent of the German core ex-

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<sup>26</sup> See the comments in Rev. Francis Pierz, *Die Indianer in Nord-Amerika: Ihre Lebensweise, Sitten und Gebräuche* (St. Louis, 1855), Appendix, "Eine kurze Beschreibung des Minnesota-Territoriums." Information on the origins, migration paths, and local settlement patterns of early settlers presented here and in the following paragraphs was derived from genealogical tracing and mapping of families present in the 1857 manuscript territorial census and the 1860 manuscript federal census of population (both available in microfilm from the National Archives), using the resources of the Stearns County Heritage Center (St. Cloud), the Minnesota Historical Society (St. Paul), the Newberry Library (Chicago), and the Genealogical Society of Utah (Salt Lake City). Published and unpublished biographical information in these collections (including several hundred interviews conducted by the W.P.A. in Stearns County in the late 1930s, transcripts of which are available both at the Stearns County Heritage Center and the Minnesota Historical Society), in conjunction with census tabulations and genealogical data for one sample township, St. Martin, provide the basis for statements about the post-1860 population.

<sup>27</sup> "German" here and elsewhere is taken to mean "German-speaking" and includes immigrants not only from the future Reich but also from German-speaking areas of the Low Countries, France, Switzerland, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The place of birth of heads of household is a better index of ethnicity than is that of the entire population, since the

panded until the last virgin land in the "inland townships"—those off the two major highway, and later rail, routes—was finally claimed during the 1880s. By 1880 the number of German parishes within the county had increased to thirty, and Germans dominated a rural core of eighteen townships along the Sauk comprising some 650 square miles—an area roughly two-thirds of the size of the country of Luxembourg today. Within the county as a whole, the German-born amounted to 54 percent of the rural heads of household; within the German core, they were 75 percent, with many of the remainder their American-born children. When these children are added to the German total, eleven of the eighteen townships were more than 90 percent German-speaking, the others all more than 80 percent; six were 99 or 100 percent German.<sup>28</sup>

The way in which this population was recruited is the first factor in explaining the character and persistence of its culture. Certainly chain migration played a prominent role in peopling the county up to and including the last major period of new settlement during the early 1880s. But community homogeneity created by chain migration alone cannot explain the depth or persistence of the area's culture.<sup>29</sup> For one thing, families from virtually every Catholic area of German-speaking Europe participated in greater or lesser numbers in the peopling of the county. In 1860, Prussians comprised just over half of the German-speaking households, but genealogical evidence suggests that they were about equally divided between Westphalians and Rhenish Prussians, largely Eifelers. Bavarians, at 18 percent, were the next largest group, followed by Hanoverians at 9 percent. But there were also families of Luxemburgers, Badenese, Württembergers, Hessians, Alsatians, Swiss, and Austrians. By 1880, the Prussian proportion was down to 42 percent and the Bavarian to 9 percent as the dispersion increased along with the size of minor groups.

There was certainly a tendency toward local clustering of people of similar German origins, but initially it seldom exceeded a half-dozen families or so. One of the four oldest settlements, St. Joseph,

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American-born children of immigrants inflate the American representation in birthplace data for the entire population.

<sup>28</sup> Tabulation of the 1880 manuscript population census, National Archives microfilm. Figures for the students and faculty of St. John's College were excluded from the Collegeville township totals.

<sup>29</sup> For an argument for the central role of chain migration, see Walter Kamphoefner, "'Entwurzelt' oder 'verpflanzt'? Zur Bedeutung der Kettenwanderung für die Einwandererakkulturation in Amerika," in Bade, ed., *Auswanderer—Wanderarbeiter—Gastarbeiter*, 1:321–49.

was shared in 1860 by Bavarian, Badenese, Hessian, Hanoverian, Austrian, and Prussian clusters, and among the Prussians were separate clusters of Saarlanders, Eifelers, and Westphalians. The second, rural St. Cloud, was divided among Eifelers, Bavarians, and Westphalians. St. Augusta had a Hanoverian core and Luxembourg, Alsatian, and Swiss fringes, while Jacob's Prairie, the fourth of the 1854 pioneer settlements, was Bavarian, Eifeler, and Luxembourg. Local business, whether informal neighboring or more organized activities like parish founding and road building, had to be negotiated from the outset among people of widely varying German backgrounds, and choice of marriage partners and godparents quickly extended beyond the regional groupings. By the later 1860s and 1870s, both internal sorting and the shifting regions of emigration left some of the newer townships more regionally homogeneous than others. Sixty-nine percent of Lake Henry's 1880 German population was Prussian, for example, mainly north German, as was 70 percent of Spring Hill's population, in this case mainly from the Eifel. But these were the extreme cases, and by the turn of the century, these and the more local concentrations were breaking down under the restless search of the younger generation for marriage partners and land.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, such patterns derived from German regional origins were crosscut by associations previously established elsewhere in America. Common Missouri and Illinois origins brought Bavarians, Westphalians, and Hanoverians together to Jacob's Prairie and St. Augusta, for example, while Indiana origins linked Bavarians, Eifelers, and Westphalians in St. Joseph.

What these diverse German immigrants had in common, above all, was their Catholicism.<sup>31</sup> And it was the fact that they moved not just via family and village migration chains but within a migration system and community network defined by their commitment to Catholicism that insured the virtually simultaneous formation of initial migration chains linking the Sauk with a dozen different areas

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<sup>30</sup> This process is treated well in one local parish history: Robert J. Voigt, *Opoliana, 1887–1987* (St. Cloud, 1987). See also the excellent study of one Stearns County township by Stephen J. Gross, "Family and Social Structure in a German-American Community: Munson Township Minnesota, 1856–1900," unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1988.

<sup>31</sup> There were two small pockets of Protestant (Evangelical and Methodist) German settlement in the west central part of the German core, both originating when families of mixed Protestant-Catholic background arrived in the area as part of the Catholic migration stream and then were subsequently joined by Protestant relatives who started their own Protestant migration chains. The present paper will not consider these enclaves.

of German Catholic settlement in the United States and through them to numerous German areas of origin. By the time the Sauk Valley was settled, German Catholics had had almost a century and a quarter of experience in the construction of rural Catholic communities in the United States. Their numbers were admittedly infinitesimal until the 1830s, but the chains of communities they had established extended back through Father Dimitri Gallitzin's turn-of-the-century Loretto colony on the heights of the Pennsylvania Alleghenies to the first rural parish in colonial Pennsylvania.<sup>32</sup> The communication through personal letters that structured chain migration was supplemented by information flows directed by the priests in Europe and America consulted by immigrants in search of congenial settlements, by missionary letters in the mission society journals and Catholic press of Europe and by missionary visits to European pulpits, and beginning in the late 1830s, by letters in the German Catholic press of the United States. After the early 1840s, the earliest settlers in any new area tended to come from elsewhere in the United States rather than directly from Germany; only after an area had been pioneered would it attract direct migrants.

Thus the first news of the advantages of the Sauk appeared in a letter published in Cincinnati's Catholic *Wahrheitsfreund* in the spring of 1854. The writer was Francis Pierz, an elderly Slovenian missionary who had been laboring among the Ottawas and Ojibwas of the northern lakes for almost twenty years. With the Indians about to leave the area, he took pen in hand, as so many other Catholic promoters had done and would continue to do, to invite "good, pious" German Catholics to settle on the fertile lands of his region, where they would be safe from disease and anti-Catholic oppression, where they could arrive before anyone else, and where they could be guaranteed his pastoral care. In subsequent letters he traced the inflow of German settlers, reported a wondrous cross of light in the northern sky on the feast of the Three Kings that he read as a sign of God's blessing on the German settlement, and warned away "work-shy city vagabonds, proud freethinkers, and godless naturalists." He also publicized the colony in the journal of Vienna's *Leopoldinen-Stiftung* and was soon joined by other Stearns County pioneers as correspondents to the German Catholic press. He founded a half dozen of the earliest parishes and, in one of

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<sup>32</sup> An introductory sense of the dimensions of this system can be derived from Sister Mary Gilbert Kelly, O.P., *Catholic Immigrant Colonization Projects in the United States, 1815–1860* (New York, 1939).

his most significant further acts for the new colony, convinced the St. Paul bishop to invite Bavarian Benedictines from St. Vincent's Abbey in Pennsylvania to establish a new foundation in Stearns County.<sup>33</sup> Their presence guaranteed the pastoral services that settlers sought, and Benedictine information channels further publicized the new colony.<sup>34</sup> Well into the first three decades of the twentieth century, autobiographical reminiscences make it clear that German Catholic farmers continued to be drawn to the area not only by personal information channels but by farm advertisements in widely circulated German Catholic newspapers. It was Father Pierz's letters that drew Tenvoorde and other pioneering scouts from separate German Catholic settlements in northeastern and north central Illinois, northwestern Indiana, northeastern, north central, and southern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and central Missouri to the Sauk virtually simultaneously in the late summer of 1854, beginning the complex chains that quickly peopled the area with a heterogeneous group of German Catholics prepared to move through the Catholic settlement system.

But their response to the invitation suggests not only the significance of the settlement system in stamping the area with its distinctive character; it also points to the existence of a special kind of migrant selectivity. Margaretha and Georg Kulzer, for example, emigrated virtually penniless from Bavaria's Oberpfalz in 1854 to find initial employment in the rolling mills near Pittsburgh. Two years later they decided to join friends in preempting land in Illinois. But when they encountered among their fellow steamboat passengers the small group of pioneer Benedictines heading for the Sauk, Margaretha immediately convinced Georg that this was where they should settle.<sup>35</sup> Three characteristic selection factors emerge

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<sup>33</sup> On Pierz, see William P. Furlan, *In Charity Unfeigned: The Life of Father Francis X. Pierz* (St. Paul, 1952); his papers, along with transcripts of his letters and those of others to Cincinnati and Vienna, are housed in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Archives of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota. His Cincinnati letters were reprinted by other German Catholic papers, for example, the *Buffalo Aurora*.

<sup>34</sup> For the Benedictines in Stearns County, see Colman J. Barry, O.S.B., *Worship and Work: Saint John's Abbey and University, 1856–1956* (Collegeville, Minn., 1956).

<sup>35</sup> Ramona Kulzer, ed., *George Kulzer, 1831–1912* (Privately published, 1970), autobiography translated by May Obermiller Kulzer; St. John's Abbey Archives. For a similar path to the Sauk, see "Diary of Simon Lodermeier and his wife Crescencia, 1850," ms., Stearns County Heritage Center.

from the Kulzer story: their commitment to farming despite initial industrial employment, their desire for a Catholic community, and their poverty. Many immigrants chose to remain in the Catholic parishes of urban America, others took up land wherever it was cheapest regardless of religious provisions, and still others could afford to purchase land in established settlements. But the Catholic migration system opened a different option to people like the Kulzers, and the fact that they chose to take it suggests a preexisting degree of commitment to a certain kind of life-style that would not be present in all immigrant settlements. Most of those who pioneered in the Sauk were either young single men and families who had spent two to three years in an established German Catholic settlement and were now ready to pioneer on their own or older families who had established themselves ten to twenty years earlier in a German Catholic settlement and now were in search of land for their sons. Such migrants knew the kind of community they sought and came programmed to replicate it. Their children, in turn, would move along the same migration system to daughter colonies as far afield as Oregon's Willamette Valley, Idaho's Palouse, Saskatchewan's St. Peter Colony, and eastern North Dakota, where "Stearns County German" remains a common ethnic designation even today.<sup>36</sup>

But if the migration system helps explain how heterogeneous German Catholics were able to settle the Sauk and some of what they sought there, local circumstance also played a role that needs to be taken into account. Too often the case study approach to immigration history, necessary if cultural change is to be traced in detail, assumes that any case is a random sample of the universe of possible cases. But if the land in the Sauk had been less suitable for their needs, if they had encountered greater competition for it or a different set of initial challenges, their internal cohesion might have been weaker, their ability to achieve their goals more contested, and the meanings they inscribed in their actions less evident. Some of the relevant factors can be listed briefly.<sup>37</sup> The uncertainty of Indian

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<sup>36</sup> William C. Sherman, *Prairie Mosaic: An Ethnic Atlas of Rural North Dakota* (Fargo, N.D., 1983). The pension records of Civil War veterans in the National Archives are a particularly detailed source for the subsequent migration histories of families that moved on from Stearns County. For an account of an early German wagon train from Stearns County to the Pacific Northwest, see C.S. Kingston, "The Northern Overland Route in 1867: Journal of Henry Lueg," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 41 (1950): 234–53.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, *Stearns County*; N. W. Winchell, *History of the Upper Mississippi Valley* (Minneapolis, 1881); and Gertrude B. Gove, *A History of St. Cloud in the Civil War, 1858–1865* (St. Cloud, 1976), provide local

title continued longer here than in other fertile areas of Minnesota, keeping away the speculators who might otherwise have engrossed the best land and advertised for Yankee settlers before the Germans could arrive. The collapse of the land boom in 1857, followed by the Civil War and the Sioux uprising, further inhibited Yankee settlement and speculation, and more Yankees than Germans left for war service or in flight from the Indians and never returned. Initial settlers were able to preempt land ahead of survey and, thanks to national pressures for changes in the land system, did not have to begin paying for it until late in 1860, after some had already harvested six crops. When the Homestead Act was passed two years later, the majority of the county's land was still unpatented, and Germans were on the spot to dominate the ranks of county homesteaders. The heavy woodlands that covered much of the area permitted impoverished settlers to make farms with very little investment, living on fish and game, berries, and crops grown on the small clearings and taking advantage of nearby building materials, fencing, and fuel while gradually expanding their commercial acreage; at the same time, the commerce of the river and the Red River Trail, the railroad construction that began just before the war, and the pineries and mines to the north offered ready sources of supplemental cash income. The imported allegiance of Germans to the Democratic Party in a state quickly dominated by Republicans meant, first, that Yankee Democrats courted German voters from the beginning, and second, that Germans could inherit the party apparatus after the Civil War when the rest of Minnesota virtually became a one-party Republican state. The degree of German resistance to the draft during the Civil War solidified the settlers' sense of political otherness. The presence of the German Benedictines permitted the French and Irish bishops of St. Paul, perennially short of priests, long to ignore the separate development of the congregations to the north. And—an important final point—the very dominance of culturally alien immigrants making farms on a shoestring slowed the economic development of the county, perpetuating the relative isolation of its German communities and extending the risk of real seasons of hunger, along with the kinds of mentalities such precariousness supported, until the prosperous years of the 1880s when the prolonged period of land taking finally ended.

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histories for this period. Local government records and newspapers are basic to the telling of this story, as are state and federal records documenting land taking and Civil War participation.

Thus the course of local history during the first generation was particularly favorable to the development of an isolated, inward-looking, and autonomous immigrant settlement region, one able to impose its own view on its world. The frontier was indeed a source of opportunity to the Germans of the Sauk, the opportunity to develop along their own trajectory. A southern Minnesota cavalryman stationed in the region in 1864 captured the sense of discomfort and alienation that it evoked from Anglo-Americans when he wrote: "One would imagine while passing along the road that he was traveling in Mexico. Every four or five miles there are great crosses erected with Latin inscriptions on the bar. I may be counted wild in my remarks," he concluded, "but the next internal struggle will be a war upon the Catholics."<sup>38</sup>

His prophecy happily proved false, but he was correct in sensing that the German pioneers of the Sauk were constructing a local order profoundly at odds with the standard American rural model of that place and time. At Maine Prairie and Eden Valley on their southern flank and on the Winnebago Prairie to the north, Yankees from northern New England and Ohio were busily reproducing the societies they had left behind. Using their own or borrowed capital, they pushed to put their full acreages into rapid production, hired laborers—often German—to help work their land, gave their wives and daughters the comforts of a bourgeois life-style, tried to send their sons to college or set them up in town businesses, founded debating clubs, literary societies, and farm improvement associations, fought the railroads over shipping rates, and as the wheat frontier passed, cashed in on the capital gains of their land and retired to town on the proceeds.<sup>39</sup> Kin and community played central roles in the lives of these Yankee farmers; their migration chains tended to be even clearer and more direct than those of their German neighbors. But their resources were increasingly marshaled for individualistic, speculative ends.

Not so the Germans. If that cavalryman could have read the inscriptions—which were in German, not Latin—on those fourteen-

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<sup>38</sup> Letter in Hastings, Minn. *Conserver*, from a member of the Second Minnesota Cavalry Regiment, reprinted in *St. Cloud Union*, March 17, 1864.

<sup>39</sup> The rhythms and values of Stearns County's Yankee frontier emerge not only in the pages of its weekly English-language newspapers, but particularly in the extensive diaries and local history writing of the ex-schoolteacher and Maine Prairie farmer, Edward P. Atwood; Atwood Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

foot high mission crosses that dotted the Sauk Valley landscape throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he could have decoded one of the central values of the transplanted culture: "Blessed is he who perseveres to the end."<sup>40</sup> Endurance, perseverance—in its religious meaning of persistence in grace, this was a prime virtue stressed by nineteenth-century Catholicism.<sup>41</sup> But it also summarizes a dominant attitude in many areas of Sauk Valley immigrant life. Endurance, not success, was the good to be sought. Few Stearns County Germans left anything even implicitly formulating what they took to be the meanings that structured their lives and their communities, nor how they altered with time. But a little 1930 history of the town of Millerville, written in a curious combination of German and English by an elderly storekeeper deeply disturbed by recent changes in his community, provides revealing insight into the enduring values held dear by at least one product of the local culture.<sup>42</sup>

The poem with which Karl Matthias Klein begins his history, entitled "Der deutsche Engel," summarizes his basic theme: the immigrants, trusting in God, drove out evil as they cleared the wilderness, their farms becoming refuges and themselves "Herr auf dieser Au."<sup>43</sup> They had to work hard, but were able to provide for the German language and the church and could take joy in celebration; now it is the task of the younger generation to preserve these gains. But Klein worries whether they are up to it: "O you dear new world, faithless consequence of my choice! Every culture has its thorns, don't lose faith in your destiny."<sup>44</sup> His chronological listing of the main events in the community's history gives a sense of what was considered noteworthy: the homesteading of new farms and the

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<sup>40</sup> "Wer ausharrt bis ans End, der wird selig." Photo in St. Augusta parish file, St. John's Abbey Archive; Jay P. Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience, 1830–1900* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1978), 79–80.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1986).

<sup>42</sup> Karl Matthias Klein, *The History of Millerville* (Millerville, Minn., 1930). Millerville was a Stearns County enclave, founded in an adjacent county by Stearns County pioneers just after the Civil War; it continued to maintain trade and marriage ties with the county and drew from Stearns County its priests, nuns, and teachers. I have preserved Klein's spelling and punctuation.

<sup>43</sup> Metaphorically, master of my own corner of the landscape. The poem's title means "the German angel."

<sup>44</sup> "O du liebe neue Welt, Untreue Folge meiner Wahl! Dornen alle Kultur hält, Verzage nicht an dem Schicksal!"

introduction of new farm machinery; the development of local businesses; the hardships of early settlers; the founding of the parish, new church buildings, and changes in forms of worship; major religious celebrations; quarrels with the priests and nuns; bankruptcies, lawsuits, adulteries, and public violence; the World War (fought because "ever since the time the Germans wore the Catholic Roman Crown, the world hated them," when "our boys ... were dragged over to France, after war was made on Good Friday"); departures to other colonies; and prohibition. Missing was any political narrative, any pantheon of local heroes, or any celebration of economic progress and improved living standards—business events generally entered the story only as markers of community autonomy or parables of falls from grace. Included within his perceptual community were the local "Polanders" who usually knew German and "were in perfect harmony with our religion"; marginal members were the Irish who shared the community's religion and German Lutherans who shared its tongue; anathema were the Swedes whose "push" had to be "averted" and the English—Anglo-Americans—who had to be bought out, not because they were hated but "as neither had a heart for our religion or language, they were not desirable in our colony."

Equally revealing were the qualities for which he praised or disparaged his fellow townsmen. Men were valued for their farming ability, their willingness to work hard, their hunting skills, their moderate drinking, their strength, and their support of the church; business speculation, pride, and heavy drinking that led to fighting or neglect of the farm earned his disapprobation. His highest praise was reserved for "der fromme Peter": "Pious Peter ... He was a good practicing soul; helped the priest at church services; was pious, honorable, just, and moderate in drinking ... a true reader of German Catholic newspapers ... a model for this parish."<sup>45</sup> Much less praiseworthy was a local public official because "in politics he pretended to be the whole government; in religion he was the buck of the congregation, not coming up to his ordinary duties, and causing much discord and fear with his government authority, his pride." Women entered his narrative only when they operated farms on their own or had exceptional reputations for strength, working ability, or piety, like the woman who "seconded the

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<sup>45</sup> "Er war eine gut übende Seele; half dem Priester mit bei dem Dienst in der Kirche; war fromm, ehrbar, gerecht, and mässig im trinken ... ein treuer Leser der deutschen katholischen Schriften ... ein Muster dieser Gemeinde."

common prayer, sounding her Amen after the others, singly." A central part of a family's history was the worth of its farm and the details of its inheritance, as well as its ancestry, the date of its arrival in the community, and any exceptional gifts it had made to the church. His particular quarrel with the modern world was linked with the disappearance of the German language and the presence of a pastor who had pushed the parish deeply into debt with his building program. He found immoral both the debt and the pride that led to it and could interpret the priest's reaction to his disapproval only as personal spite. His disapproval of the automobile may have grown out of resentment for the loss of trade it meant for his store, but it also summarizes the prime sins in the mind of his community: "It is true there was drunkenness [in the past], but this drunkenness of liquor was not so bad in all, as the drunkenness of the automobile, with its squander, lewedness, falsehood, ignorance, and pride, dispersion."

The habits and beliefs of most Stearns County Germans, unlike those of Klein, must be read largely through their actions. But taken together, they suggest a similar picture of an unusually coherent culture nurtured by the cohesion and isolation of the founding generation, defended by German dominance of the full range of local institutions, and slowly and organically modified under the influence of new opportunities, constraints, and ideas. Its prime initial concerns seem to have been the perpetuation of the intertwined unit of the family and the farm and, inseparable from it, the salvation of the souls of its members. The farm, after all, insured the dedication of time and resources that religious practice required, while religion provided the farm and its family with protection from God's seasonal wrath, moral and educational support for the perpetuation of its life-style, the main source of status roles and communal festivity, and the grace that led to heaven.

The very act of emigration suggested that traditional peasant horizons had already expanded, and most had some exposure to a more risk-taking, profit-oriented economy before settling in the shelter of the Sauk. Yet the structure of the settlement process itself has suggested that their coming was a partial rejection of that kind of economy—not that they would refuse its profits, but that they preferred to avoid its risks, or better, that in seeking to attain other goals as well, they by and large denied themselves much exposure to the chance for large-scale profits. Unlike their Yankee neighbors, for example, they were unwilling to engage in any practice to restrict fertility other than postponement of the average age of

marriage by about five years as land became scarcer and more valuable toward the end of the century.<sup>46</sup> The average completed family had five children throughout the period, and among the stable families who remained in the area for at least two generations, families of eight or even twelve or more children were not uncommon. By 1940, German fertility was still higher than it was in nearby Yankee areas sixty-five years earlier, and today Stearns County's rural farm fertility is exceeded only by that of two heavily Amish counties among all counties in the twelve-state Midwestern area.<sup>47</sup> The county's German Catholics were long unwilling to make much investment in education beyond the minimum necessary for literacy and religious training, since this would only encourage children to leave farming; instead, adolescents of both sexes universally worked, if not for their parents, then for other farmers or at town jobs, returning their wages to the family coffer.<sup>48</sup> Debt was a necessary evil, undertaken periodically for the sake of the farm but not as a risk for the sake of potential gain. To avoid debt, many farms were cleared slowly and laboriously, two or three acres a year, by the hand labor of all family members over the lifetime of the first generation, while Yankees tended to bring their entire arable into production as quickly as possible; and where Yankees gave high priority to the replacement of log cabins with comfortable frame dwellings, many Germans remained in their small cabins—

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<sup>46</sup> For supporting evidence for this discussion of family patterns, see Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Peasant Pioneers: Generational Succession among German Farmers in Frontier Minnesota," in Hahn and Prude, eds., *Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*, 259–92. Compare Gross, "Family and Social Structure.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas C. Marshall, "The Decline in Farm Family Fertility and Its Relationship to Nationality and Religious Background," *Rural Sociology* 15 (1950): 42–49; 1980 Census of Population, *General Social and Economic Characteristics*, state volumes for twelve midwestern states.

<sup>48</sup> Many children of the pioneer generation had very little formal schooling since their labor was needed to clear the farm; by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most left school at the time of communion and confirmation, between ages twelve and fourteen. In 1940, the county exhibited the lowest education levels of any non-Appalachian white county, though the 1980 census showed education levels generally around state averages; Douglas G. Marshall and Milo Peterson, "Factors Associated with Variations in School Attendance of Minnesota Farm Body," *Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station Paper* 635, *Miscellaneous Journal Series* (July 1948); William L. Cofell, "An Analysis of the Formation of Community Attitudes toward Secondary Education in St. Martin," unpub. M.S. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1958.

fourteen by twenty feet was a large dwelling—until the prosperous eighties. While they had no principled objection to machinery, conservative investment strategies kept many still threshing with oxen or even flails through the 1870s.

German farms in Stearns County were family farms in the fullest sense of the term, owned by the farmer, worked by family labor, used to provide an equal start in life for each child, and retained in the family so that the next generation could begin the process anew.<sup>49</sup> Nowhere is this familial focus more evident than in the norms governing the transmission of the farm from one generation to the next. Both the scholarly literature and Stearns County examples suggest that by the last third of the nineteenth century dominant nonethnic midwestern practice dictated that farms either be sold outright at time of retirement or be retained and rented out until the farmer's death, possibly to one of his children but possibly not, and then sold at auction—again, one of the children might be the successful bidder—and the proceeds divided among the heirs according to the provisions of the will or intestacy law. But a rather different pattern prevailed among the farmers of St. Martin, for example, first settled by Eifelers in 1857.<sup>50</sup> Here, the usual practice, as in the homeland, was for farmers to turn the ownership of the land over to their children at the time of retirement, with the children then supporting parental retirement either through bonds of maintenance or, more frequently, through below-market mortgage payments using income derived from the farm. Nonfarming male heirs received their shares in cash, daughters often in stock, tools, and furniture at the time of marriage. But American circumstances also encouraged major differences. Though there is some evidence that farmers initially thought in terms of subdividing their usual 160-acre initial claims among their heirs, they quickly realized both the need for larger farms and the possibility of using family labor while sons and daughters were growing up to accumulate the funds to provide each son with a farm of his own when he reached marriageable age. This strategy depended on the willingness of the growing children to subordinate their individual interests to those of the family strategy and on the willingness of the farmer to forego landowner status during his retirement. Essentially the same system

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<sup>49</sup> This argument is documented in Conzen, "Peasant Pioneers."

<sup>50</sup> Gross, "Family and Social Structure," finds significant differences in demographic and economic patterns between the Eifelers and north Germans of neighboring Munson township, also raising the possibility of variation in patterns of land transmission by region of origin in Germany.

was still in operation in the mid-twentieth century; its success helps explain the Germans' ability to maintain their commitment to farming.

The family system placed special demands on its women. It probably gave them greater say in the family's financial affairs than was common among Yankee women, as well as differing kinds of spiritual responsibilities, but it also subjected them to much harder physical labor, constant childbearing, and little time for affectionate child rearing or bourgeois homemaking, while denying them any public sphere outside the church. Where one Yankee diarist's wife in Maine Prairie spent her days supervising housework and gardening, shopping, visiting neighbors, attending Grange sociables, and collecting donations for good causes, Margaretha Kulzer worked side by side with her husband clearing their land with a grub hoe and axe. She dug roots, hoed, plowed, lifted and rolled logs, tended the cows, picked berries, built furniture, managed the money, joined her husband in the saloon for a glass of beer, and even after they achieved some prosperity, cooked for his hotel guests so that they could accumulate money to set up their children in life.<sup>51</sup> Memoirists suggest that while the love between mothers and children could be strong and deep, such activities left mothers little time for affectionate child rearing; the vocabulary with which a child was addressed within the home might never exceed five hundred words, and most moral and religious instruction—beyond sharply enforced behavioral prohibitions—was left to the school, the pulpit, and the confessional. Marriages ended in divorce for German women only when physical danger within marriage became intolerable and the lesser remedy—legally binding their husbands to refrain from injuring them—failed to provide protection; they almost never sued on the grounds of adultery or desertion, which were most common among Yankee women in the county.<sup>52</sup>

Their family roles likewise governed women's public activity.<sup>53</sup> They played a far more active role in the process of estate devolu-

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<sup>51</sup> Atwood diaries; Kulzer autobiography.

<sup>52</sup> Only 27 percent of the eighty-five divorce actions in the county through 1880 involved Germans; Stearns County District Court, Civil Case Files, Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>53</sup> Much of the discussion in the following paragraphs rests on analysis of records of the Stearns County District and Probate Courts (including Will Books, Civil and Criminal Court Case Files, and Grand jury records), Minnesota Historical Society, and various justice of the Peace and Township records deposited there and at the Stearns County Heritage Center.

tion than did non-German women, as patterns of testation demonstrate, and while their husbands donated the money to build the churches, it was usually they who made the financial contributions for the Masses and prayers that they believed would release their loved ones from purgatory. German wives might join their husbands in saloons, at card games, and at dances and festivals. But their only organizations were church-based societies; teaching school was regarded as inappropriate; and township records make it clear that very few women dared vote in the first years that suffrage was open to them. Yet they were far more apt to appear in court as litigants in non-debt cases than their Yankee sisters. In particular, they sued one another for assault and defamation of character, and they sued their seducers for rape and bastardy, suggesting their acceptance of another family duty, the defense of family honor. Yankees maintained their honor and the purity of their women by silence; Germans forced public exposure, resolution, and reaffirmation of place in a community whose status system, in the absence of incentives for large-scale profit making, was linked as much to personal qualities and family honor as to achievement and wealth.

The men's world was equally governed by such considerations. Their main sphere of activity outside the farm and the church was the saloon, where business was conducted, politics debated, reputations discussed, and honor challenged and defended. Through the turn of the century, Germans were far more prone than their Yankee neighbors to be indicted for crimes against persons than crimes against property, a statistic that reflects not only their exaggerated respect for property rights but their propensity to engage in violence when honor was challenged, both under the influence of drink and in the property line confrontations that were a major feature of daily life.<sup>54</sup> These kinds of fights were almost unknown among Americans, who also did not sue for slander

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<sup>54</sup> In the fifteen years between 1871 and 1885, for example, crimes against persons amounted to roughly 44 percent of all the crimes for which Germans were indicted, compared with 19 percent for the Yankees and 17 percent for the reputedly much wilder Irish, while comparable figures for crimes against property were 22 percent, 64 percent, and 44 percent respectively. In one of the more powerful indexes of behavioral change with the coming of age of the second generation, German crimes against persons sank during the next fifteen-year period to 26 percent of the total while crimes against property rose to 42 percent, a figure still far below the 77 and 74 percent property crimes of the Yankees and Germans, however; computed from case files of the 944 criminal cases tried in the Stearns County District Court between 1855 and 1900.

nearly as often as the Germans.

The church was central to the defense of this familial rather than individualistic nexus and provided one of the main motives for its construction.<sup>55</sup> The church warned against the dangers of worldly ambition and urged the necessity of strong families; its rituals marked the major stages of the family life cycle and its teaching mission helped embed the values of the culture in the next generation. Moreover, the Sauk Valley farmers' Catholicism helped to contribute to their sense of being an island in a hostile Protestant sea, to be left only at great risk. The church also provided valley settlements with an educated leadership and mediators with the outside world. But their religion should not be thought of as a set of beliefs and demands imposed upon them by the heavy hand of clerical authority. Through the 1880s, there was a perennial shortage of priests, and most priests were young, often unfamiliar with America, overworked—several parishes frequently had to share one priest—and frequently moved; three years was an exceptionally long pastoral tenure throughout this period. This meant that the formation of parishes, the construction of churches, the manner in which religious education was provided, and even the dominant elements of worship were heavily influenced by lay leadership and demand, and unpopular pastors were easily removed by parish pressure. Thus, for example, it was largely lay demand that reestablished in the parishes of the Sauk the rich annual round of processions and pilgrimages that punctuated parish life in Germany, and only in the late 1880s and early 1890s did the more private and individualistic modes of worship favored by the American church begin to gain some ground.

That time period was a critical turning point in many areas of the local culture. The settlement phase was over, the older farms were finally coming into full production, and the wheat frontier was passing. Many of the Yankees left with it, but for Germans the shift to dairying, newly feasible with improved rail transportation to urban markets, made eminent sense. It was a way of effectively utilizing

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<sup>55</sup> Basic patterns of popular piety and church organization are reconstructed from the parish histories, mass announcement and sermon books, clippings collection, and files of parochial, clerical, and abbatial correspondence in the St. John's Abbey Archives; see also "Biographical Sketches," *The Scriptorium* (Collegeville, Minn.) 15 (1956); Barry, *Worship and Work*; Yzermans, *Spirit in Central Minnesota*; Ronald G. Kleitsch, "The Religious Social System of the German-Catholics of the Sauk," unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1958.

their surplus family labor after the clearing period, and they were culturally prepared to accept the home-bound never-ending round of labor that care for a dairy herd entailed. It tied them even more securely to their farms and communities while giving them a steadier source of income than they had thus far enjoyed. With the end of the hunger years and the prospect of a satisfying retirement in store for many of the pioneers, the horizons of life widened and standards of living improved. Better roads and the change from oxen to horses made farmfolk much more mobile, and ever more ramified networks of kin, business, and social ties broke down local isolation and drew the communities of the Sauk together. The coming of age of the second generation, without personal memories of the old country and with somewhat greater English facility than their parents, encouraged increased if still cautious contact with the outside world. And the church itself managed to impose its formal structure more securely on the parishes as the numbers and acculturation of the priests increased, their tenures lengthened, and the secular clergy pried all but a dozen of the parishes away from the Benedictines. Processions and pilgrimages faded, more individualized novenas and sodalities grew, parents stopped naming their children after godparents and turned instead to highly idiosyncratic, elegant-sounding saints' names, and the numbers of religious vocations mounted rapidly.

But if local life was changing in a somewhat more individualistic, progress-oriented direction by the turn of the century, the changes remained governed by the meanings of the prevailing culture, thanks largely to the extent of its embeddedness in local institutions. Scholars often insist almost without examination that the church was the only Old World formal institution that could survive transplantation.<sup>56</sup> Yet in Stearns County, even if the physical container of German village life was not reconstructed, many of its basic elements found their practical counterparts in the conditions of the frontier. In the context of the weak governmental reach of the nineteenth century, the lay-dominated church itself extended its reach into many areas of secular life, coordinating defense during the Indian uprising and relief work during periods of grasshopper plague or epidemics and by the end of the century moving into the provision of bowling alleys, dance halls, and baseball fields to keep the young under its guiding hand. The same leaders who sat on the

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<sup>56</sup> E.g., Ostergren, *Community Transplanted*, 210–13, 352; John G. Rice, *Patterns of Ethnicity in a Minnesota County, 1880–1905* (Umeå, Sweden, 1973), 39–48.

parish boards of trustees tended to dominate township government, with its responsibility for tax assessment, poor relief, road construction, and control of the open range—the public land where cattle ran at will. They also controlled the local public school boards, a control that permitted them to develop a system of tax-supported Catholic schools taught by seminary-trained lay Catholic men hired with the pastor's approval, who taught in German, let Catholic doctrine permeate their instruction, and directed the church choir and played the organ. They defended these schools equally against a series of legal challenges by local Protestants and against clerical efforts to create parochial schools staffed by nuns.<sup>57</sup>

German Catholic dominance of the local institutions that influenced their lives included the courts.<sup>58</sup> The system of justice of the peace courts for the resolution of minor crimes and lawsuits and for the initial hearing of major charges guaranteed that local justice would be dispensed within the community by its own members acting according to their own norms. And if cases were remanded or appealed to the county district court, Germans were generally able to control both grand and petit juries. Thus it was virtually impossible until Prohibition to get any conviction on violation of liquor laws, no matter how solid the evidence, unless community sentiment turned against the violator for other reasons. Most other areas of county government also passed into German hands by the early 1870s, so that within reason their norms governed taxing and spending policy. It is a cliché of immigration history that Germans lacked both political interest and ability, but in Stearns County, at least, this was not the case: local government was immediately recognized as an instrument for community construction and defense and was quickly mastered and put to use. Only in the mid-1870s was a local German weekly newspaper able to establish itself, but thereafter the Germans also had a formal communication medium of their own separate from the pulpit and the gossip of the

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<sup>57</sup> Sister Grace McDonald, *With Lamps Burning* (St. Joseph, Minn., 1957); Sister Nora Luetmer, "The History of Catholic Education in the Diocese of St. Cloud, 1855–1965," unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1966.

<sup>58</sup> For the role of government and the creation of a local political culture, see Kathleen Neils Conzen, "German Americans and Ethnic Political Culture: Stearns County, Minnesota, 1855–1915," John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien, Abteilung für Geschichte, Freie Universität Berlin, *Working Paper No. 16*, 1989.

saloon. Economic life too came under their purview; one of the earliest successful group efforts was the establishment of monthly cattle and horse markets on the German model in the two largest towns of the county. They developed what was essentially a separate system of banking and mortgage lending and by the 1890s found in the cooperative creamery movement their most effective base for economic defense.

They could not, of course, protect themselves completely either from the shifting economic realities of American commercial farming or from the growing intervention of activist state and federal governments, which they looked upon with suspicion as reservoirs of alien values from the outset. But, through one device or another, they protected their peculiar school system until the post-World War II era of consolidation. Nor, despite state law and church insistence, did English take over as the sole medium of instruction until that same time period.<sup>59</sup> During World War I they proved not as resistant to patriotic pressure as German communities elsewhere nor as victimized by oppression, thanks to their control of local government; township governments bought Liberty Bonds to meet local quotas for their residents, local officials turned a blind eye to state directives, and the only citizens who had any interest in forcing the issue were small-town German merchants who saw in an alliance with state anti-German fanatics a chance of breaking the hold of St. Cloud leaders on county politics and trade.<sup>60</sup> Federal officials met similar indifference during Prohibition, when Stearns County became notorious for both the number of its stills and the quality of its "Minnesota 13" moonshine. Though raids by treasury agents were common and numerous local residents spent a term in a federal penitentiary, such "sitters" lost little community status, and speakeasies and blind pigs proliferated. The main permanent loser was the quality of local beer.<sup>61</sup> Life would continue to change, but

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<sup>59</sup> Cofell, "Formation of Community Attitudes"; Luetmer, *History of Education*.

<sup>60</sup> Sister John Christine Wolkerstorfer, "Nativism in Minnesota in World War I: A Comparative Study of Brown, Ramsey, and Stearns Counties, 1914–1918," unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1973.

<sup>61</sup> Virtually every parish history contains its Prohibition folklore; a favorite tale accounts for the quality of the local home brew by the fact that many of the best stills were manufactured by a Benedictine monk who had honed his skills on the crafting of sacred vessels: *Stones and Hills, Steine and Huegel, Reflections: St. John the Baptist Parish, 1875–1975* (Collegeville, Minn., 1975), 117–18; see also Voigt, *Opoliania*, 89–95; or Vincent A.

change would continue to be assimilated through the local culture produced and reproduced without sharp break in the behavior and institutions of the Sauk.

The origins of this culture have to be sought more carefully in the villages and farmsteads of Catholic Germany and in the older German Catholic rural settlements of America, where the synthesis of various German traditions with American circumstance and opportunity began. That task, in anything like the detail it deserves, lies beyond the scope of this study. But existing secondary literature at least serves to suggest the roots of the values and goals which German peasant pioneers brought with them from the homeland, and the habits, attitudes, and assumptions of how things should and could be done that governed the initial choices they made.<sup>62</sup> Once institutionalized in the family, the church, and local governmental and social systems, such mentalities could continue to mold the course of local evolution as they themselves were modified. To term this process acculturation or assimilation makes relatively little sense; as long as they remained within the world they had made, they had little exposure to external standards or structures to which they could acculturate or assimilate. It seems similarly meaningless to define their construction of group identity and institutions as ethnicization alone, since its prime impulses did not spring from

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Yzermans, *The Shores of Pelican Lake* (St. Anna, Minn., 1987), 110–12, who recounts the following anecdote (112): when confronted with the unexplained absence of a local priest from a festive occasion, the bishop is said to have remarked: "Oh well ... a good priest is supposed to be with his people. I suppose Father Kromolicki is in Leavenworth, Kansas [site of a federal penitentiary], with most of his people!"

<sup>62</sup> On Catholic peasant life in preemigration Germany, see e.g., Hermann Höger, *Kirche, Dorfreligion und bäuerliche Gesellschaft: Strukturanalysen zur gesellschaftsgebundenen Religiosität ländlicher Unterschichten des 17. bis 19. Jahrhunderts, aufgezeigt an bayerischen Beispielen*, Studien zur altbayerischen Kirchengeschichte, 5 (Munich, 1978); Fintan Michael Phayer, *Religion und das gewöhnliche Volk in Bayern in der Zeit von 1750–1850*, Miscellanea Bavaria Monacensia, 21 (Munich, 1970); F. Michael Phayer, *Sexual Liberation and Religion in Nineteenth Century Europe* (London, 1977); Werner K. Blessing, "Umwelt und Mentalität im ländlichen Bayern: Eine Skizze zum Alltagswandel im 19. Jahrhundert," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 19 (1979): 1–42; Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton, 1984); Wolfgang Kaschuba and Carola Lipp, *Dörfliches Überleben: Zur Geschichte materieller und sozialer Reproduktion ländlicher Gesellschaft im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1982); Josef Mooser, *Ländliche Klassengesell-*

oppositional mobilization, it did not lead to primary identification with members of the same ethnic group elsewhere, and in particular it did not encompass the part society that the notion of ethnicity implies, but its local whole. Nor did it find its endpoint in the part culture of a particular class.

What did occur is encompassed within the currently popular term "transplantation" but in a fuller sense than in its usual pluralist usage—the sense of putting down local roots, of radication or naturalization, of localization. The German peasants of the Sauk made their own America of local materials structured by traditional patterns of meaning that adapted and evolved along with local life. It was a world defined initially by its alien origins, but over time it ceased to be alien and simply became "the way we do things here," a local charter culture. "[W]e old pioneers can be proud," Joseph Capser proclaimed in 1916; "we belong to the gang that cut the pathway to this far, widespread west. We belong to the party that planted this mammoth tree that branches out all over this great civilized, richly-settled country to which the entire United States looks for its bread and butter."<sup>63</sup> As this charter culture changed, it did so in response to the same pressures that affected other American communities but on its own trajectory, in a process of parallel transformation that might be termed "localistic inclusion" in echo of Morawska's characterization of ethnically defined social integration as "ascriptive inclusion."<sup>64</sup> The milestones of this localization can be counted off in such events as the German Catholic takeover of the county superintendency of schools in 1868, the German assumption of the Progressive reform mantle in the 1890s and early 1900s, the purchase of the leading English-language newspaper by the son of a Swiss Catholic pioneer in 1904, and the 1916 publication of the narrative of the county's pioneer experience, which its author—the leading Yankee editor for more than half a century—chose to present, in violation of all the rules of the genre, as a triumph of immigrant achievement.<sup>65</sup>

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schaft, 1770–1848: *Bauern und Unterschichten, Landwirtschaft und Gewerbe im östlichen Westfalen* (Göttingen, 1984).

<sup>63</sup> Speech of Joseph Capser at the Sauk Center, Minnesota, Homecoming festivities, September 1916, quoted in Laurence Hall, "The Story of My Grandparents in America," Stearns County W.P.A. Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>64</sup> Morawska, *Bread with Butter*, 9.

<sup>65</sup> Mitchell, *Stearns County*.

The question of how far this Sauk Valley process can be generalized remains open. Stearns County may well be the extreme case within the range of German Catholic rural settlement areas in the United States. Maps of the 1892 distribution of German Catholic parishes in the United States make it clear that Stearns contained a higher density of parishes within an exclusively occupied territory than any other similar settlement area, and while the 1980 census indicates that many of these other German Catholic areas have retained unusually high fertility ratios, Stearns again stands at the extreme.<sup>66</sup> What was the relative importance of the various factors that encouraged the clarity, strength, and persistence of the county's cultural trajectory? How important was the sheer size of the settlement and its ability to monopolize the local instruments of cultural reproduction? Comparison with smaller settlement islands, like that of Westphalia, Michigan, might begin to clarify this issue.<sup>67</sup> Or what about its frontier situation, which provided both unusual levels of opportunity and unusual isolation? Contrary to commonly accepted arguments that immigrants were "fillers-in" rather than frontier settlers, virtually every major area of German Catholic rural settlement had its origins on undeveloped virgin land.<sup>68</sup> But some of these, like that of Seneca County, Ohio, occupied pockets of wild land in older settled areas.<sup>69</sup> What difference did the nearby initial presence of a maturing American culture make? Again, what role was played by the Catholicism of the Stearns County community, in comparison, for example, with a Lutheran settlement? Did the church's institutional strength—its relatively easier access to European funds, its ability to limit schism, its provision of leadership—play a major role? Was its sense of alienation from the values of the host society a significant factor that remained embedded in the local cultural soil? Or was it the particular pattern of meaning

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. Heinz Kloss, *Atlas der in 19. und frühen 20. Jh. Entstandenen deutschen Siedlungen in USA* (Marburg, 1974), Series G; 1980 Census of Population, *General Social and Economic Characteristics*, state volumes for twelve midwestern states.

<sup>67</sup> On Westphalia, see Joseph Scheben, *Untersuchung zur Methode und Technik der deutschamerikanischen Wanderungsforschung* (Bonn, 1939); Westphalia Historical Society, *Of Pilgrimage, Prayer, and Promise: A Story of St. Mary's, Westphalia, 1836–1986* (Westphalia, Mich., 1986).

<sup>68</sup> Marcus Lee Hansen popularized the notion of immigrants as "fillers-in" in his essay, "Immigration and Expansion," in Hansen, *The Immigrant in American History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), 53–76.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. William Lang, *History of Seneca County* (Springfield, Ohio, 1880).

itself, the actual content of belief as opposed to the mere existence of difference, that was critical? Only comparison, between Germans within and outside of settlement concentrations, among various Catholic settlement situations, among German settlements of differing religious orientation, and among different immigrant groups, will ultimately sort out these factors and provide a fuller answer to the distinctive survival of rural German farming traditions in America. Stearns County may indeed epitomize the potential of the German Catholic settlement system, founded as it was when group information networks were at their most mature but just before the railroad permitted settlement at a pace that precluded subsequent areal dominance by a single group to the same degree.

But in the meantime, there are also some lessons to be drawn for historical assimilation theory. Localization, localistic inclusion, and parallel transformation—or some more euphonious equivalents—should find a place within our descriptive models of immigrant adaptation. Political scientists have been far more prepared than most historians to recognize that local cultures have proved as able as their ethnic counterparts to survive in the modern world; a full understanding of the dimensions of American pluralism requires that they too be explored.<sup>70</sup> Not chain migration alone, but also migration systems, migrant selectivity, and place characteristics—to be understood particularly in comparison with other places to which the immigrants might have gone—are important elements in the creation of ethnic cultures. The "black box" of the immigrant clustered community has to be broken open and the ways in which various institutions within it—family, workplace, church, government—actually provoked cultural change or communal persistence must be probed. And finally, we have to remember to ask what kind of America has resulted from the adaptive process.

Lubell worried about the public influence of values preserved within the shelter of the Sauk, while Father Cyril took pride in their contribution to the moral strength of the nation. This clash of values is still very much alive in the public arena today. The American world constructed by German immigrants on the Sauk continues to bear their stamp, a stamp that shapes the values and goals that their descendants bring to current public policy debates and thus to the continuous making of American culture far beyond the banks of the Sauk. The localization of an immigrant culture has been a key to its continuing significance.

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<sup>70</sup> See especially Daniel Elazar, *Cities of Prairie* (New York, 1970).

## Sombart and the Sauk River Settlements

*Mack Walker*

In 1920 the German sociologist and economist Werner Sombart published a book to which he gave the title *Der Bourgeois*—not "le Bourgeois" let alone "Der Bürger," but explicitly *Der Bourgeois*. This book has a chapter on emigration (pp. 380–98), with sections assigned to Jews, whom he designates "a migratory people" (*ein Wandervolk*), Scots, Huguenots, and Yankees, all of whom share a cultural experience which imparts to them a capitalistic, entrepreneurial, and materialistic mentality. Sombart is careful to say that "the migratory process and exchange of homes *as such* is the basis for the stronger development of the capitalistic spirit," and not some prior cultural disposition or material circumstances or motives of the migrants. He goes on to characterize migration as an *Ausleseprozeß*, a selective process which chooses (and here the buildup of German adjectives is irresistible) *die tatkräftigsten, willensstärksten, wagemuthigsten, kühlsten, am meisten berechnenden, am wenigsten sentimental Naturen*; emigrants are by nature, he wrote, those with the most enterprising, strongest-willed, boldest, coolest and most calculating, least sentimental dispositions, no matter whether they emigrate on a count of religious or political pressure or for economic advantage.

A few weeks ago in Germany I happened to be reading in *Der Bourgeois* for reasons not related to Kathleen Conzen's paper, which had not yet caught up with me but which I uneasily knew that I would soon be expected to comment upon. From her announced title and her earlier work it seemed a reasonable guess that she would indicate how recent immigration historiography and her own researches point to a persistence of prior cultural habits established in the homeland, carried *through* the migratory process, and reestablished in the American environment. She would, so I speculated, show the fallacy of the notion of the uprooted, of the American as the newmade man, and knock the last holes in the bottom of the melting pot. Then when my turn came, I could point

out how she had done this, make a few deprecatory remarks about Tocqueville and Turner, and for climax show how this new immigration history and research had now annihilated the mystical views of that anti-Semitic, Yankee-baiting, reactionary old Prussian professor Werner Sombart.

Thus relieved of anxiety over whether I would find anything to say here, I switched on the television to see what was happening there; and what should it be but columns of East Germans streaming across the border, seemingly in prospect of the Federal Republican golden calf. To a bothersome degree they looked, in their Trabants and Ladas and even Volvos, rather like Sombart's "Der Bourgeois" after all. Apparently some others got that message too, inasmuch as the response across the German political spectrum suggests that these migrants are deemed likelier recruits for an entrepreneurial market economy than for environmental preservation and the thirty-hour week.

So maybe Professor Sombart and his more benevolent counterparts in the older migration theories were not finished after all; anyhow a more chastened look at Professor Conzen's argument seems in order. In that sense there are two matters upon which I may comment. One has to do with the general question of the "transplantation" of Old-World social institutions and communal culture into the American context, and the other has to do with the particular qualities of the communities she cites and describes here; and these two questions are related.

Respective to the first, it seems worth remarking that Kathleen Conzen begins her settlement story with the Westphalian developer John Tenvoorde, who could have been invented by Werner Sombart and who in single pursuit of his enterprises climbs trees to get away from wolves (for all the world like a Trabi dodging hundred-mile-an-hour Mercedeses on the autobahns of the Federal Republic), and plays the Pied Piper for the Sauk Valley settlements. How the entrepreneurial and adventuresome Tenvoorde fits thematically with the conservative and communal settlements he serves to introduce in this argument is dubious, unless indeed it be through an element of romance common to both depictions which transcends their surface contradiction; and this might not be a trivial idea either. As for the transplantation of German settlers into Professor Conzen's Minnesota communities: they come as she tells us from various and scattered parts of Germany, making her job of showing cultural transplantation difficult and making criticism of it easy, because judging by geographical and topographical origins,

these settlers came from places with many sorts of settlement and kinship traditions; and with a few exceptions they formed no association with one another until they arrived in the American West or even in the Sauk Valley settlements. But she then heads off ethnicization theorists, who I believe claim that ethnic identity and association are only formed when immigrants confront an alien dominant culture, by pointing out that her communities were local and relatively isolated and that their association was more directly and substantially communal than ethnic. But that too would be to say that their commonality was developed in the place of settlement, not the places of origin; and so it seems not to dismiss a contrary proposition—to use and invert the classic terms of nineteenth-century German sociology—that the *Gemeinschaft* here was a product and not an antecedent of *Gesellschaft*.

What these settlers had in common from the beginning of course was that they were German, in the sense that they used spoken language more or less comprehensible to one another if they tried, but more particularly that they were Roman Catholic. This is no news for Professor Conzen, and if what she has found in the Sauk Valley holds true elsewhere, then perhaps she would agree that what we need to know next is what is *German* about them and what is *Catholic* about them (the kind of problem to be sure that Samuel Lubell was working with in those early McCarthy days). A start on this, as she says, would be to see what comes out of a comparison between German Catholic and otherwise similar German Lutheran settlements. To this I have but one suggestion, prompted by Conzen's remarks on the different roles of Yankee (and presumably Protestant) and German (and presumably Catholic) women in the area she studied: this suggestion has to do with literacy and its place in religious life. If we assume that a particular family role of women in both confessions is religious instruction and example in the home, then access to Scripture and especially to devotional books and manuals becomes an appropriate skill for Protestant women, far less so for Catholic, giving the Protestant women greater access in turn to the world outside the family. That would fit the observation Professor Conzen made of the respective spheres of activity of these two groups of women, but would tend to shift the burden of explanation from a national or ethnic to a confessional, but not ecclesiastical, characterization. I say confessional but not ecclesiastical because this observation is less one of church institutions than it is of religious culture (a notion that would probably infuriate Werner Sombart in view of his rivalry with Max Weber). But such

religious culture as variously conditioned might indeed turn out to be among the most telling and sturdiest transplants from the Old World to the New.

## **Ethnic Persistence and Transformation**

### **A Response to Kathleen N. Conzen**

*Jörg Nagler*

When I reread our two previous Annual Lectures, the first entitled "From Protestant Peasants to Jewish Intellectuals: The Germans in the Peopling of America" by Bernard Bailyn, and the second, "Culture versus Biology in the Thought of Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber" by Carl Degler, I found in them a common denominator: the transfer of German-speaking people and their ideas into American life, the dialectical interplay of the old and new cultures which produced a new entity and hence made the German experience a part of American history.

Again in our Third Annual Lecture today, Professor Conzen addresses that complex of ideas and events not only essential for our understanding of American history, but also of European history, since the transatlantic mass migrations of the nineteenth century marked both the transformational process in rural Europe and its reverberation in the changes in the *Gestalt* of urban and rural America.

Ever since the transplantation of peasant worlds into the New World began to affect America, that phenomenon has evoked the central question of the definition of the American character. Subsequent theoretical examinations of the various forms of immigrant adaptation have produced an impressive body of literature, each interpretation reflecting the prevailing political mood of American history. The central question always remained, which component of the national motto should find stronger emphasis: the *Unum* or the *Pluribus*. This question found its theoretical expression in the dualism of assimilation versus pluralism. The roots of this debate already existed in the eighteenth century, when European settlers in increasing numbers peopled the American frontier. The French-born romantic writer and agriculturist, Hector St. John Crevecoeur, answered his own famous question, "What is the American, this new man?" by arguing that he was the product of a melting process.

The melting pot metaphor and its assimilationist perception predominated in American history for a considerable time span, and it persists even today as part of the civic culture.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Frederick Jackson Turner conceptualized his notion of the (exceptional) American national character by stressing the significance of the frontier to its formation. In emphasizing the frontier, he shifted the interest of historians to rural America. I shall not dwell upon Turner's frontier thesis. Instead, I shall concentrate upon its underlying more basic observation, which is also Professor Conzen's concern, the settlement and peopling of America, recently called by Bernard Bailyn "the key to understanding American society."<sup>1</sup> Especially important are immigrants at the frontier and their patterns of cultural and social adaption as well as continuities. According to Turner, the frontier "prompted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people.... In the crucible of the frontier, immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics."<sup>2</sup> Encouraged by the collective frontier experience of the Midwest in the "steady movement away from the influence of Europe," the immigrants, although different in origin and culture, created a new and distinct national stock and character through the process of biological and cultural amalgamation: the American, democratic, individualistic, and self-sufficient in spirit. This "new product," as Turner argued, "held the promise of world brotherhood" and revealed the possibility of creating a newer and richer civilization without national enmities, but characterized rather by the submergence of ethnocultural particularities into an exuberant nationalism destined to spread over the continent.

Professor Conzen has advanced arguments precisely the reverse of Turner's, which indeed he never backed up with empirical evidence. She suggests that ethnic particularities *did* in fact persist at the frontier and that cooperation in the form of family and kinship relations prevailed over rugged individualism.

Interestingly enough, because his "frontier melting pot" theory placed geography instead of ethnicity and culture at its center,

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *From Protestant Peasants to Jewish Intellectuals: The Germans in the Peopling of America*, German Historical Institute Annual Lecture Series No. 1 (Oxford: Berg, 1988), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920), 22–23.

Turner failed to consider German frontier immigrants. Emphasis upon ethnicity and culture would have contradicted his theses that the accessibility of land eased the process of integration. German pioneer peasants, Professor Conzen argues, did have access to land, especially after the Homestead Act of 1862. Access to land did *not*, however, advance their integration process. Instead it retarded the process through a complex matrix of ethnic population density, willingness to cooperate, and structural and organizational ties provided by the Catholic church.

I believe that the importance of kinship in the process of immigration cannot be overemphasized. The essential ingredient cooperation and the precondition and core of an immigrant's successful survival and socialization was the family. The family served as a "decompression chamber," to use Milton Gordon's words, in the first and most essential stage of the immigration process. It became, as Professor Conzen convincingly argues, the vehicle of traditional values.

Professor Conzen has shown that Oscar Handlin's uprootedness thesis can no longer be defended. Handlin stated his arguments most explicitly in his path-breaking study, *The Uprooted*, published in 1951 and influenced by the existentialist Zeitgeist, that the "huddled masses" of European peasants suffered intense dislocation and disorientation because of the isolation of the individual and the family, the total break and discontinuity from the peasant community caused by the immigration process. Professor Conzen suggests instead that there existed a continuity of values from everyday village life, derived partly but not exclusively from the phenomenon of chain migration. Some other factor had to be added to ensure this continuity. Externally that factor was the binding tie of the Catholic Church, both in its psychological and organizational function. Internally, the family was the vehicle for a sense of economic and psychological security. I think that Professor Conzen is right to challenge the hypothesis that immigrants had been extremely alienated in the process of immigration by being separated from their Old World cultural environment. She argues instead that there existed a much greater continuity in the existential transition from emigrant to immigrant and a greater preservation of ethnic heritage than scholars had previously emphasized. Uprootedness existed, but I would suggest that we find it among the significant number of immigrants who failed, who were not able to fulfill their dream of owning a farm, but had to give up their cherished rural way of life and migrate or remigrate to cities where they joined the increasing

masses of industrial workers, a destiny they had tried to escape when they took the first step of emigration. It was among these people that we find the individuals who broke with the European past, a process which Turner assessed as positive and necessary in order to become an American and which Handlin interpreted as genuinely traumatic. Thus I agree with Professor Conzen's call to make ethnic groups in rural areas the object of research. When we locate the emigration and immigration in the context of global economic transformation as the expression of how people reacted toward the rapid changes of industrialization and the system of capitalism, we clearly have to understand causes and consequences of migration, both in the old homeland and the new. The process of industrialization affected urban and rural areas in deeply interrelated ways. Ethnic persistence then becomes a valuable analytical focus for understanding the forces of transformation. *Persistence and transformation*, seemingly contradictory, formed a dialectical entity, as Professor Conzen proposes. She calls the process "parallel transformation"; but can this be since, according to mathematical laws, parallels never meet? I would prefer the term "parallel integration," which Professor Conzen has used in a previous study.

The comparative approach toward the analysis of rural and urban ethnic life has been a research goal for quite a while, but studies of urban ethnic cultures probably blossomed in the wake of the accelerated urbanization and the salience of ethnic groups within this process in the post-World War II era. Herbert Gutman's notion that the "new social history" should also embrace studies of the interrelatedness of rural and urban life in the overall framework of the transformation process caused by capitalism, which permeated all realms of American society, has inspired historians to examine rural culture.<sup>3</sup> Investigation of rural regions then has to be pursued in that context and with that methodology, interpreting rural history as one distinct and integral orbit within the greater social and economic transformations but inherently intertwined with urban history.

Most German immigrants in the nineteenth century, urbanites as well as peasants, possessed no consciousness of nationality. Because of conditions in the homeland, most of the immigrants did not think of themselves in the first instance as Germans, but rather as

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<sup>3</sup> A very good example is Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

Bavarians, Württembergers, Mecklenburgers, and so forth. Their primary local attachment—a village or a province—shaped their sense of belonging and identity. Within the process of immigration and subsequent acculturation involving variable time spans which could last well over one generation, these various identities lost their microcosmic dimension and broadened into a national identity with a lingua franca which led to a cultural and social identification.

However, this did not mean the loss of ethnic "subidentities" within the broader national identity framework. The sense of belonging to a cultural minority could in fact lead to a self-awareness that consequently might prove to be culturally and politically effective for group action in their adopted environment. Professor Conzen has shown that German immigrants therefore built a subsociety of their own within American society. The endurance and strength of the ethnic subsociety rose in proportion to its ability directly and indirectly to create its own effective institutions.

Returning to Turner's thesis that the frontier created a new entity called "American democracy" by melting down amorphous ethnic groups, the reverse of Turner's thesis would imply that persistence of ethnic particularities *retarded* the process of democratization. This, I would suggest, is the underlying reason for the stark contrast between Lubell's negative assessment of the German ethnic enclave and Father Cyril's pride in the contributions of this enclave to America. It also represents an ongoing vital and controversial political question in the United States today.

In conclusion, let me raise some questions. The first is directed toward ethnic self-perception; in other words how and to what degree did these immigrants realize that they were actively creating their "own America"? Even in a relatively isolated ethnic island, there must have been an awareness of being in America. I would argue that through the process of internal migration or transmigration within the United States—before they found their final destination in Stearns County—German immigrants were exposed in various ways to the cultural and political values of their host society. There is evidence—by the considerable number of children of these settlers born in other American states, for example—that there was a significant amount of time spent in different socio-cultural environments before they settled in Minnesota. What kind of impact did this pre-Minnesota experience have upon their traditional German way of life on the frontier?

The second question aims at the problem of generalizing about the ethnic persistence of the Germans in Stearns County, with its

strong concentration of Catholics, when compared to the rest of the German immigrants in the United States. Because of the dominant role of the Catholic church, which cannot be overestimated, my question here concerns the connection of ethnic chauvinism and a Catholic confessional identity in a Protestant land. According to the Catholic Church, German Catholics were more industrious, were better farmers and Christians in their host country, and were supposed to populate this "earthly paradise." In other words the Catholic Church postulated the establishment of a German microcosm, designed as a persistent ethnic and thus religious community. The Catholic Church was the transmission belt for ethnic persistence and hence retarded adaption and acculturation. In addition to the remoteness of the frontier, the Catholic Church was obviously one of the essential factors in preserving German culture. Behind this cultural persistence lay a form of otherness, a distinctiveness combined with a certain sense of superiority (which is always a sign of weakness) and with the deliberate attempt to establish a demarcation line (*Abgrenzung*) separating them from the dominant Anglo-American Protestant society, both through negative measures and positive construction and reconstruction of familiar ethnic values.

A third question is, what precisely happened to the inner structures of the German community after the frontier had passed further west? What consequences did this have, for example, in regard to their attitude toward church, family, and farming practices? Also how did the market economy influence the farming practices in this period? I would suggest that the emigration process itself perhaps amplified the religiousness of the emigrants and consequently the role of the church, especially under the conditions of the frontier, where the priest of their parish embodied the transcendence of their microcosmic world and connected them through his own function to the greater world of the Catholic hierarchical structure, with all its social implications. It gave them security and a sense of order in their new world.

As Professor Conzen has demonstrated, the myth that immigrants were seeking their old European environments in the New World can no longer be supported. Only after the active process of clearing and cultivating was finished did settlers realize that there were resemblances to their past European environment and sent letters home stressing this fact. This is a very important statement and proves that immigrants were indeed capable of shaping the *Gestalt* of their environment in the physical and cultural sense of that word. The endeavor to do so demonstrates the yearning to

preserve the physical (landscape) framework of their lives. Anybody who has traveled to these American ethnic islands is surprised and overwhelmed by the striking similarities not only of the buildings but also of the surrounding landscapes to European landscapes. This observation had led to misinterpretations through a lack of historical understanding, for the location was chosen out of more complex decision-making processes and different considerations than resemblance to their homeland, as Professor Conzen has aptly demonstrated in her lecture.

Let me briefly conclude: the conceptual framework of Professor Conzen's is the essential question of transition and transformation, transition within the paradigms of the overall transformation from a rural economy to capitalism from—what Ferdinand Toennies has called *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*—and the social components of ethnicity, class, and religion within this process. Professor Conzen's study has aptly demonstrated that there is a new research frontier not only of immigration history but of social history as well, and she herself has proven to be one of the pioneers in that field.