

THE FOREIGN MARK ON KANSAS

J. NEALE CARMAN

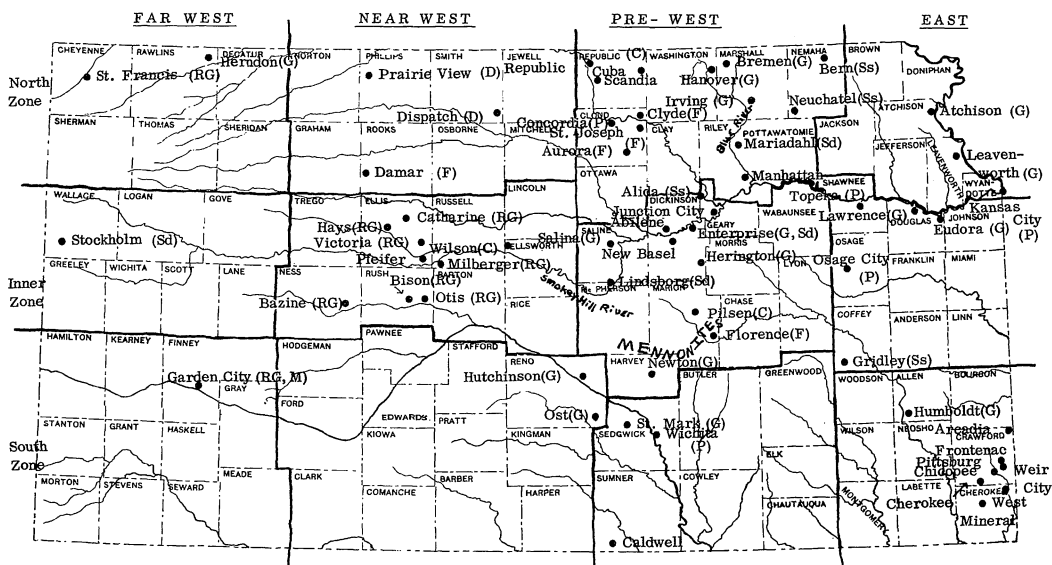


Figure One: A map of Kansas with a guide to places named in the article.
KEY: G, German; RG, Russian German; P, Polygot; F, French; C, Czech; Sd, Swedish; Ss, Swiss; M, Mexican; D, Dutch.

Kansas was settled between 1854 and 1885; population spread west and south from the Missouri River. Foreign settlements were always in the vanguard during the advance. In Territorial times, 1854-1861, the southern part of Kansas was still Indian country; the rest of the East and points along the best valleys beyond in the Pre-West received settlers then. Among them were Germans in the Missouri River towns in 1854, near Salina in 1857. By 1875 general population had occupied the Southeast and nearly all the Pre-West and also some points beyond along the newly built railroads. Well out along the Kansas Pacific at Hays there were Germans from the Volga in great numbers in 1875. Five years later the Near West had all the important pioneer nuclei; by 1885 the same thing was true in the Far West. In

TOP RIGHT: Gravestone, Reich German, Protestant, Kansas (place unknown). Repainted homemade inscription. The addition seems to be faulty.

that year Germans from the Black Sea could look into Colorado from their farms near St. Francis in the Farthest Northwest. Other nationalities, though less numerous, advanced as fast. For example there were Czechs at Everest in the Northeast in 1857, at Wilson, well into the Near West, 1874, in Rawlins County in 1877 and in 1884 on its western edge thirty miles from the Colorado border.

Visual evidence of the history and origin of European neighborhoods in Kansas is present; it is often unrecognized, perhaps because we do not see, perhaps because we do not reflect, perhaps because we stay on the main roads. Inasmuch as nearly a decade usually elapsed before a group put up permanent buildings, the churches, monuments, cemeteries and community planning of even the oldest foreign settlements are the product of the hundred years of Kansas statehood.

The peculiarly foreign aspects of a place may be hard to separate from the general character of the area where immigrants chose their homes. At Atchison the situation is Rhenish; the bluffs rise steeply from the river except for a valley down to the original landing, and the whole atmosphere of the place conforms. A visit to St. Benedict's College makes this most evident. The monks who founded the monastery there in 1857 were Germans, and are still largely of German background. In Leavenworth too, Germans were the most important foreign element, though Polish coal miners built curious St. Casimir's Church in the south of town. The most easily accessible building of German flavor is another Catholic establishment, the St. Joseph Carmelite Church with its surrounding buildings. The Carmelites began their work among the Germans in 1858, and the present church was erected ten years later. Because the building is of much more recent construction, St. Paul's Lutheran Church not far away gives a slightly less marked impression of German background, though the parish dates from 1862. In Lawrence the stone building that used to ring with the merriment of the Turnverein still has its original purpose certified by an inscription in German.

In Topeka the interesting groups are the Volga Germans and the Mexicans, both clustered primarily about the Santa Fe shops and the packing houses. The Mexicans are much more recent arrivals than other foreigners (after 1905), and have little stores and restaurants that declare their national background. Our Lady of Guadalupe Church is built in Spanish Renaissance style, and its surroundings are not incongruous. The Volgans who came in 1875 have been "clannish." The Franciscans long encouraged and latterly have humored this tendency, so that their principal church, St. Joseph's has a nationalistic air.

In the Mexican quarter of Topeka the floodwaters of 1951 were quiet and did little permanent damage, but the situation among the Mexicans of the Armourdale section of Kansas City was different. The flood bore away so many houses that not all have yet been replaced. It also destroyed a fair little

Augustinian establishment, fragrant with the odor of old Spain. Some Mexican commercial enterprises remain in Armourdale, but in Kansas City, Kansas, Spanish building is best seen immediately south of the Kaw River in Argentine.

North of Armourdale a small portion of Kansas lies in the bottoms on the east side of the Kaw River. Here the earliest packing houses were located, and in 1895 all the Croatians in Kansas City lived in the "Patch" between the Armour plant and the Kaw. But the 1903 flood covered the Patch. In 1951 when the river again washed over this land, the area was no longer Croatian; forlorn St. Brigid's Church with its Slavic air stood in the midst of a typical Negro quarter. Industry has finally crowded it out. In 1903 the flood drove almost all the packing house workers who were not already there up on Strawberry Hill, that is, the steep bluffs that border the river opposite the old Patch. At the north end of these slopes, the Croatians built their large church, St. John the Baptist. Further south on a broad bench in the hillside the Slovenians erected Holy Family Church. The two churches remain now with diminished parishes because the terminal construction of the Kansas Turnpike destroyed much of their residential area. Back farther from the river than the Croats and the Slovenians the Germans had settled; at the north end of their region, commerce and civic construction have usurped much. Saint Anthony's great German church looks across at Federal and County buildings with an air of affronted Prussian aristocracy. These churches and most yet to be discussed are Roman Catholic, each redolent of the nationality worshiping in it. St. Luke's Church, however, is Lutheran, Missouri Synod. There until about 1958, preaching in German could still be heard. St. Luke's, in a neighborhood of close-set, well constructed houses on the hill's edge, looks as German as Saint Anthony's, but it seems built for burghers rather than for aristocrats. Skipping over the rest of the Strawberry Hill neighborhood, even the onion-topped Russian Orthodox Church and great St. Joseph's Polish Church isolated on their peaks above the Turnpike, neglecting much more of Kansas City, Kansas, let us alight for a moment at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church originally well out in the country to the south of town in Kinney Heights. It was Flemish until 1942 when so many other Catholics moved into the district that the bishop made it a territorial parish. The very modest church faintly suggests the grace, though not the forms, of Bruges, expresses the artistic impulse that besets this long-laboring people when it unbends its back and looks toward heaven.

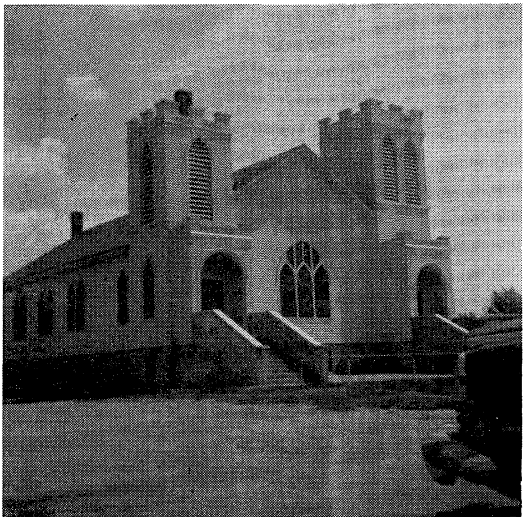
An even more tangible evidence of foreign origin than a church is a cemetery, for there the monuments show the foreign names, and frequently the inscriptions are in the language used earliest by those beneath. The Catholic churches of Kansas City have a cemetery in common on the west edge of the city where inscriptions in the various Slavic languages are numerous; a few are in the Cyrillic alphabet. The monuments bearing Flemish

names sometimes have French rather than Flemish inscriptions; tradition said that their language of record should be French and French it is.

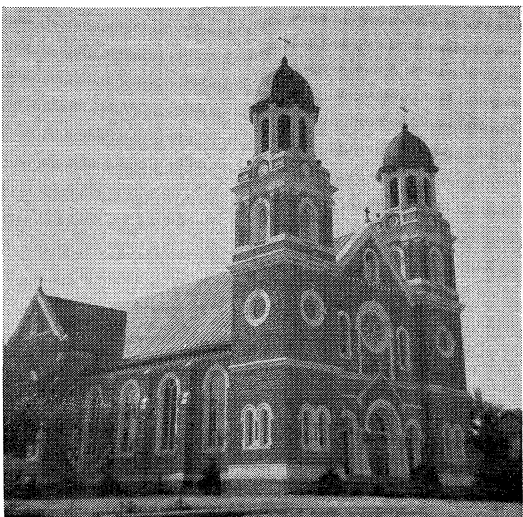
No more about urban centers, not even about the Germans, Mexicans and Syrians of Wichita. No other place in Kansas has quite such a complex of colonies as Kansas City, but the Pittsburg mining area in the Southeast approaches it. Here there is an older layer of French, Germans and Scots almost buried by later arriving Italians and Slavs. The Slavs are nearly all Slovenians, locally called Austrians even by themselves, but there are some Poles. Except the Germans, who are Lutherans, these groups do not have national churches. In the old days, roughly between 1880 and 1920, when the mines were flourishing, the population was too fluid to permit such a thing. The camps were often not permanent; the people lived mostly in housing furnished by the mining companies, who assigned quarters without regard to national origin, and a national group was often too poor to support a church. The churches are thus less numerous than the camps, and served several nationalities. The cemeteries furnish the most tangible evidence of the history of foreign groups. The one at Frontenac is the most interesting. It lies above old deep-shaft workings which have caused the ground to settle with marked irregularities every few feet. Walking is therefore precarious, monuments tilt oddly; perhaps caskets have dropped into subterranean pits. The neighbors still think of Frontenac as a wild Italian camp, but the inscriptions in its cemetery are almost as frequently Slovenian as Italian.

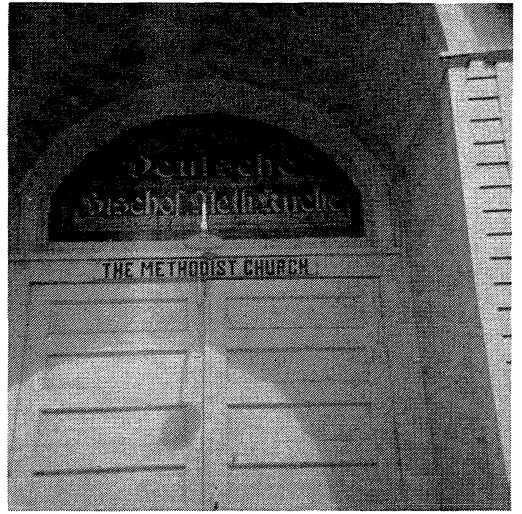
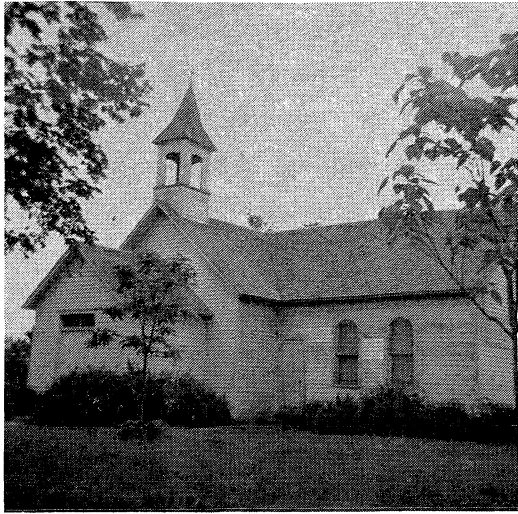
On the edges of the district where the mines gave out early and farming was not unknown, the stores and the homesteads preserve something of the atmosphere of a European village. Arcadia, Weir City, and West Mineral are examples. Cherokee is a ghost town from which the spirit has not yet departed. The plan of Chicopee, if plan it can be called, is a witness to old conditions. The miners here were principally Italians; the north Italians and the south Italians had even less regard for each other here than at home; therefore West Chicopee and East Chicopee are separated by a gap of land so that each group may have its own domain. Such is the story, though probably the vagaries of company housing accounted for the gap, and the separation of the population developed later. Pittsburg itself was never primarily a mining camp. The Germans, who have an agricultural settlement just to the southeast outside of the coal fields, did not often become miners, but were very frequently employed in town in the smelters and brick plants. Their churches suggest their background, particularly St. John's, the American Lutheran Church. The Zion congregation, Missouri Synod, while very definitely German in tone, has a younger church building.

Osage City in the Inner East is another coal mining town. Its coal is mediocre and the strata are thin, so that mining early became rather unprofitable. The quarters of the town devoted to the various nationalities have remained their possessions, and each has its bit of European atmosphere. The French and Italians have Dog Town, a section to the east of Osage City proper.

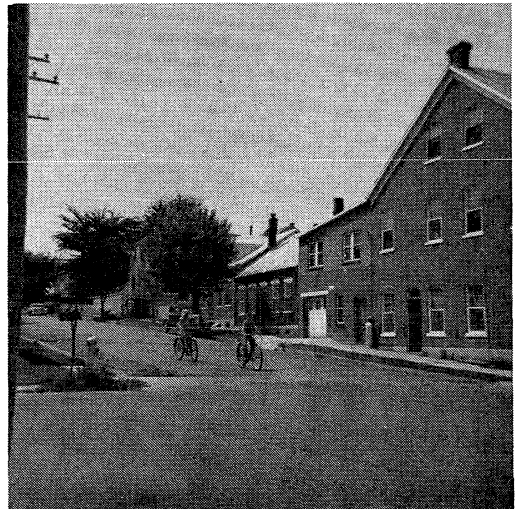
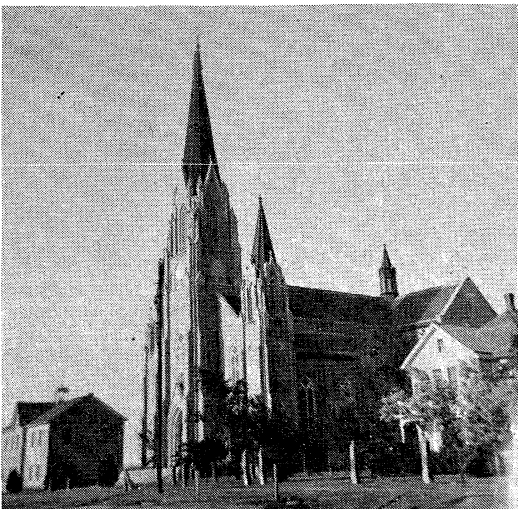
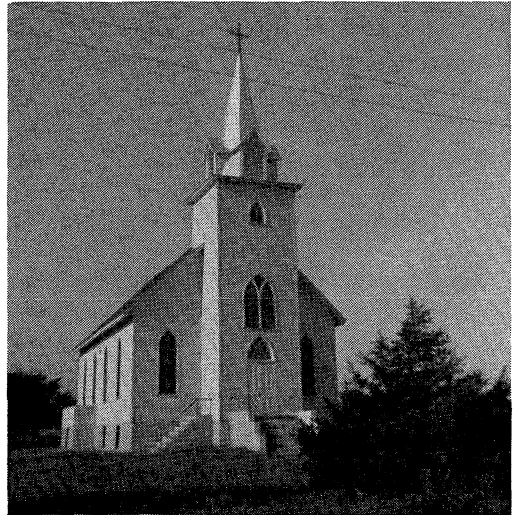


KANSAS FOREIGN CHURCHES.
TOP LEFT: Surrounded by handsome formal plantings, this Mennonite church at Pretty Prairie in Reno County was built early in this century, but retains the traditional two front entrances. ABOVE: Mennonite church in Harvey County, east of Buhler. LEFT CENTER: Christian Reformed church, Dutch, Prairie View, Phillips County. BOTTOM LEFT: A French R. C. church at Damar, Rooks County. BELOW: R. C. church at Flush, Pottawatomie County, built by a small Reich German rural community.





ABOVE: At Alida in Dickinson County stands this charming Evangelical and Reformed church, built by a community of Swiss and Reich Germans. TOP RIGHT: Signs in two languages on the door of this Russian German Methodist church in Bazine in Ness County testify to the amalgamation of the English and German Methodist churches. RIGHT CENTER: A forthright Swedish Lutheran church at Windom, in southwestern McPherson County. BOTTOM RIGHT: A street near the square in Hanover, Washington County, a Reich German community of mixed religion. BELOW: A strikingly perpendicular Russian German Roman Catholic church in Pfeifer, Ellis County.



The rest of the east holds general population, the south has Welsh, the west the Swedes. The Swedes stretch on as farmers several miles farther; their most interesting architectural accomplishments are an octagonal service house in their cemetery where Highway 56 turns west without even entering Osage City, and the Stotler Mission Covenant Church on the County line a mile north of the same highway.

Here we have already embarked on the consideration of small towns, and not of the very earliest, for the mining areas did not develop until the early 1870's. Of older towns Humboldt has more obviously an old world air than Eudora. Both were founded by German town companies in 1857. Eudora, for decades a town of 600, was always over-shadowed by Lawrence, and had no harness factory or brick plant. On the other hand Humboldt did; its population in 1885 was 2,045 and grew a little larger; therefore its German civic life was more fully rounded. Eudora built mostly with wood. Humboldt erected more permanent structures, largely with brick.

The peculiarities of business development have made another town, Hanover, about a hundred miles west along the Nebraska border, preserve better still its German character. It was laid out in 1868 with a public square. The business of the town accepted this as a center for a score of years, and built around it or in the streets leading to it. But it ultimately became clear that firms on North Street from which issued the roads into the surrounding country were better located, and the others almost all moved over with them, leaving the buildings near the square as they were. The old brewery with its low masonry arches is the best. In the heavy German Lutheran settlement to the east of Hanover, the Immanuel Church near Bremen possesses a very good example of the chronologically arranged cemetery. In the old days without regard for kinship each new corpse was buried beside the one most recently inhumed. Unconfirmed children formed a separate series. It was not until after the beginning of this century that a few defiant spouses managed to arrange matters so that when their turns came to be put underground they could rest beside their mates. These exceptions ultimately caused the abandonment of the chronological system. The older pattern offers the most convenient opportunity that there is of observing chronologically the shift from the use of German to the use of English in the inscriptions. Another cemetery of this type is to be found at the Lyons Creek Church, St. John's Lutheran, near Herington.

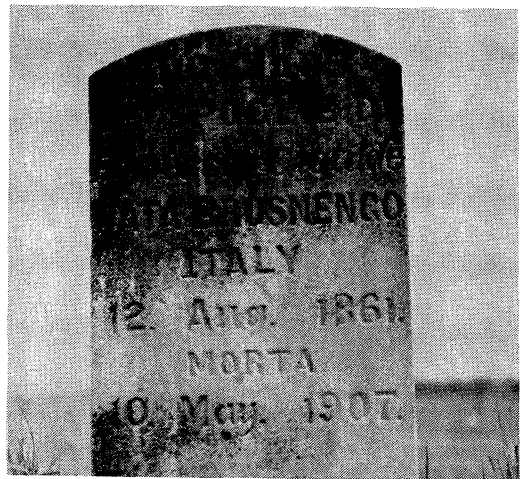
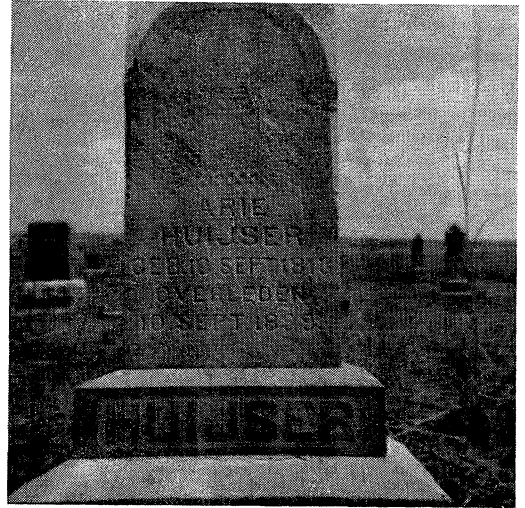
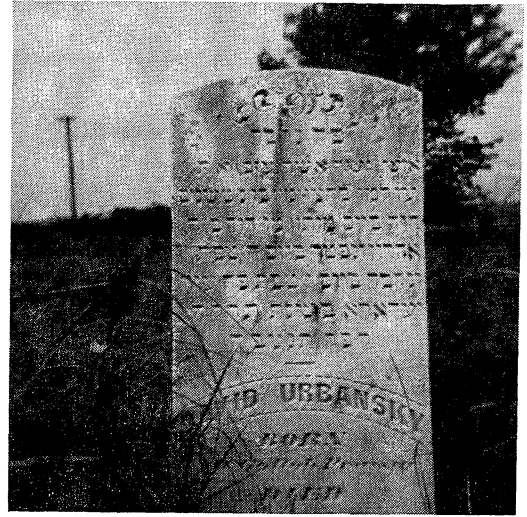
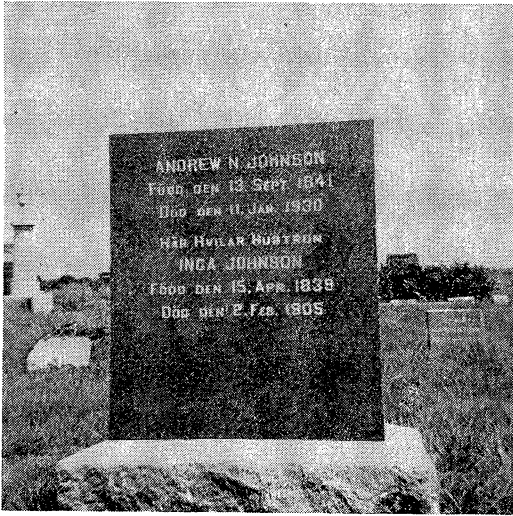
In rural areas as at Bremen and Herington the Pre-West has much larger foreign settlements than the East, and some of them are just as old. Old but very small is Neuchatel, fifty miles northwest of Topeka. French Swiss settled there in 1857. Their village as such long since disappeared. But the now unused French Presbyterian Church remains. Behind it a spacious cemetery, only very partially filled, slopes off toward French Creek. Here are French names and a few inscriptions in that language. The church is of wood, which detracts from its Swiss appearance, but it is wider in proportion to

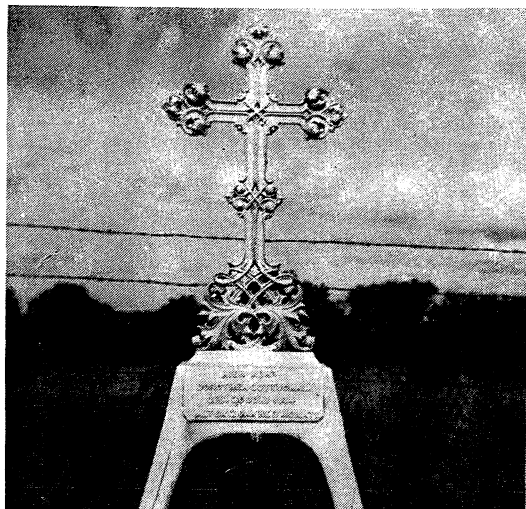
its length than most and gives an impression of Calvinistic firmness contrasting with gracious picturesqueness of the surroundings partly caused by remnants of the old settlement. Other Swiss settlements in Kansas are German. That established in 1864 just west of Alida, ten miles northwest of Junction City, has something of the quality of Neuchatel. There the square uncompromising Evangelical Church (now EUB) looks across a valley at the delightful little Reformed Church (now ER). The Swiss tend to put their church upon handy high places. At Neuchatel and Alida and Gridley twenty miles southeast of Emporia in the eastern approaches to the Flint Hills one thinks little of this characteristic. In the other Swiss settlements, all in the Pre-West, it is obvious, as at New Basel established in 1860 south of Abilene. There, approaching from the valley to the east where the German Baptist Church is, you find the Swiss worshipping above them in their Reformed Church (now ER). Near Neuchatel but farther north the square outlines and high country give the Apostolic Christian Church of the younger Swiss settlement near Bern an air of almost majestic austerity. The adjoining cemetery is curious. The Apostolic Christians did not at first permit grave stones: after they appear, the gradual acceptance of this bit of worldly vanity is apparent in the progressive increase in size of the monuments. (The Amish in their cemetery southwest of Hutchinson yielded later and less completely to the world in this respect.)

One of the most picturesque areas of foreign settlement is in the basin of the Blue River above Manhattan, beneath and beside the waters behind Tuttle Creek dam. On the outskirts of the lake country in the charming topography of the Fancy Creek Valley around Winkler--August Winkler, who built the Mills, arrived in 1857--German influence can still be felt. But the hewn stones of the Mariadahl Swedish church down by the river are no longer to be seen.

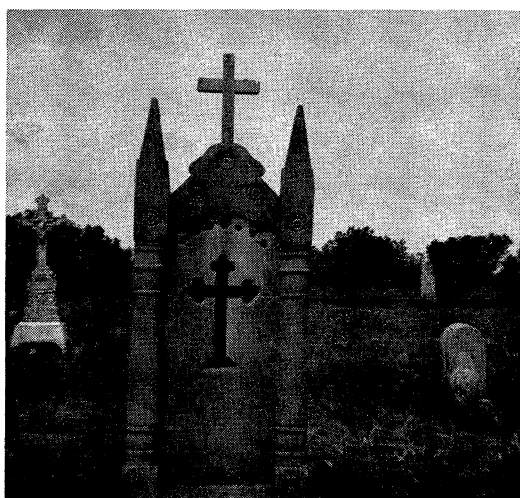
The Mariadahl settlement is little older than the Swedish settlement east of Enterprise, itself east of Abilene. Here the supply of good stone is ample, and here, more extensively than in the Blue Valley, the Swedish masons built. There are still present a score of their houses and a Lutheran church, and particularly there is the Mission Covenant Church with its surrounding cemetery where scores of evergreens trimmed into globular shape are maintained by workers of the whole community at an annual festival. The plantings and the festival are characteristically Swedish.

Regretfully we pass by many Swedish settlements, even important ones like the neighborhood of Scandia in the Republican Valley, but Lindsborg, founded in 1868 south of Salina, has demands upon us. Its citizens, their fellow Swedes will tell you, have become quite touristically, and perhaps factitiously, Scandinavian, but this later spirit cannot detract from the stern and chaste beauty of their Bethany Church nor from the generally Swedish character of the Smoky Valley, as these seekers of the quaint call the stretch of the Smoky Hill River flood plain which they own. The country churches,





A SAMPLING OF FOREIGN GRAVESTONES IN KANSAS. TOP LEFT: Swedish, Brantford, Washington County. LEFT CENTER: Welsh, Arvonja, Osage County, not far from Emporia. BOTTOM LEFT: Czech, Timken, Rush County. TOP CENTER: Jewish, south of Eudora, Douglas County. CENTER: Dutch, Luctor Cemetery at Prairie View, Phillips County. BOTTOM: Italian, Osage City, Osage County. ABOVE: Russian German, Catholic, Schoenchen, Ellis County. TOP RIGHT: Slav, Kansas City, Wyandotte County. RIGHT CENTER: Russian German, Catholic, Schoenchen, Ellis County. BOTTOM RIGHT: Russian German, Catholic, place unknown. All photographs from the private collection of the author.



while not so finely groomed as Bethany, are well worth inspection. Even the less happy building at Assaria, like the Messiah Church in Kansas City, demonstrates something characteristic of Swedish Americans in the first decade of this century, a thirst to show that they were one of the solidest elements in the United States.

Close to the Nebraska line, east of the Swedish settlement on the Republican River, is situated one of two largest Czech settlements, generally identified by the town of Cuba. The Czechs came to this area in 1866, and numbered 1,500 in 1895. The other large Czech group, half way between Salina and Hays, first appeared in 1874 (1,800 in 1895), and is referred to as the "Bohemians around Wilson." Most Czech settlements have many inhabitants with a low opinion of churches. Once in a while, as at Pilsen, east southeast of the Lindsborg Swedes, or in the settlement above Atwood in the Far Northwest, they are distinguished for their Catholicism, and more rarely as at Cuba, and at Irving, above the Swedes on the Blue River, the descendants of the Hussites are in sufficient numbers to maintain a small Bohemian Presbyterian church, but generally other organizations take over a great part of the social functions of the church. Visually this situation has resulted in the existence of Czech national cemeteries and Bohemian halls. The halls are usually the property of a lodge, most often the ZCJB. The lodges had their hey-day, like other lodges, in the decades at the turn of the century. Their neighbors usually call their parties "wild," because they are noisy, and the young men eject any intruders roughly and gleefully. Even in their most boisterous days, however, the parties were community affairs attended by large numbers of solid citizens. The lodge halls, sometimes in the towns, just as frequently in the open country, are an easily identifiable feature of the landscape in a Czech community. They have, however, no architectural distinction and often look rather forlorn. The Czech national cemeteries usually proclaim their identity by a sign in Czech over the gate. At Cuba within the last decade the old sign was changed for one in English. The use of Czech on tombstones is more universal and persists longer than in the cemeteries of most foreign groups, but few Czech inscriptions are later than 1945.

Southeast of Concordia on the Republican River, not far from Swedes and Czechs lies a considerable French-Canadian settlement (1,700 in 1895) founded in 1868. Aurora is usually cited as the true Canadian town of the area, but it is easier to find visual evidences of French influence in Concordia and Clyde on the settlement border. The hamlet of St. Joseph, however, indubitably possesses the most French Canadian air--French Canadian rather than French, since for unpretentious structures the Canadians long ago like other Americans adopted wood as their building material and make no effort, as European immigrants sometimes do, to force wooden structures to take the architectural contours of stone. Damar, a daughter settlement forty miles northwest of Hays, has a French Canadian atmosphere even

more marked than St. Jo's. To be sure the contrast between the elaborateness of the church establishment and the comfortable informality of everything else is somewhat greater there than in the trimmer and more closely built villages of Quebec.

South and southeast of the Lindsborg Swedes, occupying much of the southwestern part of the Inner-Pre-West, is the Mennonite country. The Mennonites came from South Russia, just above the Crimean Peninsula, in 1874. They had been in that area since the latter part of the 18th century. There as in Kansas they settled shortly after nomadic inhabitants (in Russia, Tartars) had been moved out. The pressure of Russian culture upon them had been slight, and they were as German when they arrived in Kansas as they had been before going to Russia from the Vistula Delta, so German that they thought, incorrectly, that when Russian neighbors used words like theirs, the Russians were the borrowers. They were prepared to be just as German in Kansas as in Russia. They began by organizing small villages here, and in certain places the landholding maps still bear witness to this fact. They were prosperous wheat farmers in Russia, and in Kansas they have become prosperous wheat farmers who keep up with the times. Their farmyards are not greatly different from others. Perhaps they have not resisted the language of the land longer than any other group. In homes among them where there are growing children, English has for a quarter of a century been the usual speech. But they are reverently German, and have remained faithful to their religious practices. Their church buildings are always conservative, sometimes with two front doors, one for each sex; even the opulent new buildings speak of solidity, comfort and repose in a way unusual in the middle of the twentieth century.

South of the Mennonites, somewhat west of Wichita, there is a settlement of Catholic Germans, whose nucleus came in 1872 by way of Minnesota from Trier, on the western edge of the Rhineland east of Luxemburg. There were 1,300 of them in 1895. Their religious establishments have monastic richness and tranquility, particularly at St. Mark where tree-lined alleys shelter the cemetery behind the church. It seems a natural place to find a priest reading his breviary. Right or wrong, a visitor in Catholic German settlements often has the impression that life there is idyllic. You feel it at St. Benedict north of Seneca, but especially at St. Mark.

There are in Kansas only two settlements of Holland Dutch: Dispatch, founded in 1870 (200 Dutch in 1895) and Prairie View settled in 1877 (500 Dutch in 1895). Both are located in the northern tier of counties of the Near West at a distance of about 60 miles from each other. Each has or has had a Dutch Reformed and a Christian Reformed Church. In the early days the two colonies kept in close touch with each other, and are quite similar in character. The Dutch features in them, aside from inscriptions on tombstones, are limited. At Dispatch, however, a few of the old families still live in the hamlet and maintain homes that bespeak loving Dutch industry.

The best known and most important foreign settlements of the Near West are those of the Volga Germans in the Inner Zone. The Volgans are divided into two groups, the Hays Catholics in the southeastern half of Ellis County and the adjoining parts of Rush County, and the Protestants whose settlement forms a semicircle around them to the south, east and west. The Catholics are a more solid group territorially, and are much more closely united socially. In Russia the Volgan settlements were a quarter of a century older than those of the Mennonites, but the immigrants of 1875 were no more Russified. The village system was deeply bred into them, however, and despite the dissociating effect of the homestead law, the seven original Catholic villages still persist, and in some of them families with small children are still using German. The best known of the villages is Victoria, which has absorbed earlier Herzog or Hartsook. It is not far from Highway 40 and has a church which has become known as the Cathedral of the Plains. Because of the Capuchin Monastery beside it, this church is larger than those in the other villages. The one in Pfeifer, though, is a large and elegant affair, and that in Catherine shows a curious attempt to make little gables at the bottom of a spire give an onion effect. Because the original immigrants were quite poor, their early structures were so modest that they have been replaced, but there are still a few little houses without front doors. Their cemeteries furnish the most graphic illustrations of the progress from poverty to wealth. Many early graves have wooden crosses with painted inscriptions which have weathered away. Some graves are unmarked because the rotting crosses have fallen. Other early graves have small sandstone markers. The inscriptions on these too have often weathered away. Those that remain are usually rough local efforts, sometimes in the shape of German script. Where prosperity began to dawn, marble and granite appeared along with wrought iron crosses bearing at the junction of the arms an enamel plaque with the vital data on it. Now some of the most elaborate monuments in the state can be found in these cemeteries.

The Protestant Volgans were a less unified and more tempestuous lot than the Catholics; in their centers in Rush County at Otis and Bison and farther west at Bazine yeast seems in fermentation. But at the hamlet of Milberger twelve miles south of Russell one can inspect such a group after it has settled down to a sort of tranquility. All types of Russian Germans yet considered have sent settlements into the Far West, the Protestant Volgans in no great numbers, the Mennonites and Catholics in bodies of some importance. We will pause for only one of these, the beet farmers on the Arkansas River out near Garden City where about 1907 the sugar companies, like their competitors in Colorado, found most satisfactory employees Volgans and Mexicans with their patriarchal families in which young and old worked from "kin see" to "can't see" in the fields. The Volgans at Garden City were mostly drawn from the Catholics at Hays. Their homesteads because of

their tenant character offer little that can be identified as German, but in Garden City there is a church which expresses its origins.

Other types of German colonists from eastern Europe are represented in western Kansas, Bukovinans in the part of Ellis County not occupied by the Catholic Volgans, and in the Far Northwest Protestant Blackseamen from west of Odessa, Russia, and Hungarians.

The Hungarians, though from just south of Vienna and unable to speak Magyar, attempted to name their shopping center Pesth, but a Republican postmaster was more powerful; it is Herndon--sixty-five miles from Colorado, five from Nebraska. The settlement is half Catholic, half Protestant, territorially divided except in town. The Catholic church, served by the Capuchins, is a product of its people, who molded the cement blocks with which it is constructed. It has transepts, one little gable on each side of the building.

Straight west of the Hungarians almost upon the Colorado line dwell the Blackseamen; most of their churches are now in St. Francis, but they built them first on the bald and lonesome prairie. Only sturdy Salem Lutheran Church is still rural. About eighty miles south along the border another solitary Lutheran church, now unused, marks the location of Stockholm. Today its Swedes worship in the towns along the highways.

We have passed over hundreds of foreign settlements in Kansas--the total number is 500. We have not looked at those foreigners who preceded us all, the Pottawatomies, Kickapoos, Iowas, Sacs and Foxes. The tribes were brought to their reservations from 20 to 30 years before Kansas was opened to white men. We have not visited either several stocks from beyond the sea, Danes, Norwegians, French from France, Syrians. Still we have found that something always preserves for the eye the history of foreigners in Kansas.