

**GERMANS IN CALIFORNIA:  
THE CALIFORNIA DEMOKRAT OF SAN FRANCISCO**

by

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The vital role played by Germans in the development of California has received only limited scholarly recognition while the Spanish heritage, also so significant in the history of the state, is as well known as it is documented. Not until one hundred years after the German Jesuit missionary work had already begun in California did the Spanish Franciscans commence their mission.

Father Euebius Franciscus Kino S. J., born in 1644 in Tyrol, is the progenitor of German immigration of California. This learned man, who entered the Jesuit Order in 1665, was offered a professorship at the University of Igolstadt, however, he preferred to dedicate himself to missionary work and therefore departed for Mexico (i.e. California) in 1681. Until his death in 1711 he labored with great enthusiasm for the spiritual conquest of California and "enjoyed great fame as a missionary, educator, rancher, scientist, and explorer."<sup>1</sup> As a result of Father Kino's constant urging, the exploration of all of California (not just of the southern peninsula) followed in the decades after his death. His work was carried on by other German Jesuits, among them Johann Grashoffer, Philipp Se-gesser, and Kaspar Steiger, who were instrumental in the founding of the first permanent missions and settlements within the borders of land destined to become part of the United States.

After the Jesuits were disbanded in 1767, German interest in California seems to have subsided; it was not renewed until the publication of travel reports made by Alexander von

Humboldt in 1804 and Adelbert von Chamisso in 1816.<sup>2</sup> Many Germans connected with the history of California served in the employ of Russia, which desired expansion southward from Alaska. Otto von Kotzebue, son of the well-known writer, made exploration jounies into San Francisco Bay sailing under the Russian flag. Hegemeister and Wrangel, governors of Alaska, frequented Northern California, especially Fort Ross which was commanded by Christian Beusemann, a Prussian. During the 20's and 30's of the last century the Rhinelander Heinrich Virmond controlled trade on the entire West Coast with his fleet of merchant ships and was assisted by an extensive and able staff of fellow Germans. A trapper, Jacob Primer Leese, the son of German-Americans and himself born in Ohio in 1809, arrived in 1831 and several years later became the founder of modern San Francisco.

Johann August Sutter, who was born in Baden in 1803 and who emigrated to New York in 1834 and to California in 1838/9, can deservedly be called the foremost pioneer of California. His contributions in agriculture, government, economics, and development in general have been well documented.<sup>3</sup>

Ground work for the conquest of California by the United States was laid by John F. Fremont who was assisted by a German engineer and topographer, Karl Preuss. Preuss produced the first official map for the U.S. government. Prominent in the revolt itself were Charles (Karl) Marie Weber of Homburg in Rheinisch Bavaria (a major entrepreneur who was important in the development of San Jose and Stockton), John Daubenbiss, a Bavarian, and Samuel Neal, a Holsteiner.<sup>4</sup> Among the members of surveying parties sent by the U.S. government immediately following annexation one finds numerous Germans and German-Americans: D. Ottinger named Humboldt Bay; Arthur Schott of Stuttgart surveyed the new U.S.-Mexican border; Balduin von Moellhausen, a noted writer, explored the Colorado River.

It has been noted that "the German element very early became a vital factor in the development of the State and the

immigration of Germans was officially encouraged, especially after the legislature in 1870 granted \$100,000 in aid of such immigration.”<sup>5</sup> The Germans were particularly strong in Sacramento, Marysville (originally named New Mecklenburg), Stockton and the wine areas. Anaheim (south of Los Angeles) was predominantly German. Of the larger settlements in the 19th century, Los Angeles had a smaller although significant German community while San Francisco boasted a German population which played a major role in the economic, commercial, and cultural emergence of the city as the jewel of the Pacific Coast.

Jacob P. Leese established his trading post on the bay in 1836, therewith beginning the nucleus of the future metropolis. Development of the city remained slow, indeed by 1845 it had only several hundred inhabitants, the Germans being the chief non-native American group. Among the most influential mid-nineteenth century Germans of the city were: Emanuel Russ of Thuringia who arrived in 1847 and attained prominence in commercial and political life; James Lick (originally Lück), a wealthy Pennsylvania-German, who came in 1848 and is probably most known for his philanthropic support of scientific work, especially the Lick Observatory; the Rhineland Adolph Sutro who reached San Francisco in 1850 and amassed his wealth in commercial and mining enterprises. His generosity in civic projects resulted in the funding of Sutro Heights, the Cliff House, Sutro Forest, and Sutro Baths. This California-German, so much admired by his fellow citizens, was twice elected mayor of the city. Frederick Zeile of Wurtemberg established the first public hospital on the West Coast; Charles Kohler is linked to the emergence of the cable car system; A. W. von Schmidt initiated the water works; Albert Miller founded the first savings bank; Claus Spreckels of Hanover established a vast financial empire; and Levi Strauss began the manufacture of jeans.

A German language newspress found, understandably, a most receptive readership in San Francisco during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

The city has the distinction of being the home of the first German-American newspaper of the state, the *California Demokrat*. San Francisco supported vastly more German-American papers in the past one hundred years than any other Californian city, surpassing Los Angeles, its only potential rival, by almost five to one.<sup>6</sup> Among the best sources for understanding this country's past is its newspapers. In our era the foreign press in the United States has become a waning phenomenon. We would do well to attempt an analysis and an evaluation of its major impact upon the formation of the American way of life.

The *California Demokrat* (1852-1942; 1961-1966), published for about one hundred years, offers an excellent reservoir for understanding transitions in the German community of San Francisco and Northern California. Some circulation figures aid in indicating the influence this journal exercised: 1870 3500; 1900 5600; 1906 estimated between 5000 and 8000; 1915 9360; the Sunday edition still retained 14,000 subscribers in 1918. Circulation dropped markedly after 1918 and was down to approximately 2000 by 1942.<sup>7</sup> Its height would, therefore, appear to be in the years prior to active involvement of the United States in World War I. The basic format of the paper was altered from time to time, even the four page daily was enlarged to eight while the Sunday reached sixteen pages.

The *California Demokrat* leaned towards the Democratic party in politics, yet usually maintained a rather independent point of view. The omission of an accompanying motto, one proclaiming a moral or political belief—a practice common in the German language press of the United States—is most surprising. This tends to substantiate the editor's claim of full independence.<sup>8</sup> The paper's first emblem, the seal of California, appeared on June 9, 1874 in its title.

Yet, one underlying theme did find expression throughout the existence of the *California Demokrat*, namely a healthy pride in Germany and her contributions to culture and civilization coupled with pride in German-America. This became

the vehicle demonstrating the necessity for a common bond of friendship and understanding between Germany and the United States. The editions of June 10 and 11, 1894 provide an exemplification of this policy. The German Day celebration of that year (Claus Sprekels was honorary president) gave cause in these two numbers to remind German-Americans that, although residing on this side of the Atlantic, they should never forget their German origins. Also in California "... wird das Deutschtum blühen und fortbestehen." Feature articles and special illustrations call to mind major German scholars and poets. The seal of the United States and that of Germany are placed side by side to emphasize a mutual commitment to concord. Reports of American travelers in Germany related their love for that country and the warmth of her people. Indeed this aim remained paramount prior to World War I.

The *California Demokrat* spanned the gamut of news reporting: international; national; local; extensive advertisements; and columns of literary interest.

International news communiques focused for several years upon events in Mexico, lending support for its attempts to dispel the yoke of French imperialism. Other Central and South American areas also occasioned news stories. Toward the end of the 19th century the *California Demokrat* ardently supported the economic imperialism of the United States and joined the outcry for Cuban and Panamanian independence, moves aimed at bolstering American economic expansion.

Articles from the European scene cover an extensive spectrum from mundane items such as the cultivation of hops in Alsace or weather conditions in Norway to the burning political questions of the day, e.g. Schleswig-Holstein, the Franco-Prussian War, German unification, and the problem of the rights of nationalities. Developments in Germany found wider expression than incidents elsewhere and reflect respect for her achievements as, for example, the claim that the creation of the German Empire evolved from German Idealism.

The concern for international reporting together with a

keen awareness of national and local events maintained the high niveau of the *California Demokrat* and allows a favorable comparison with any other American newspaper of the day. Through the implementation of telegraphic reports from Europe news retained the same freshness exhibited in English language counterparts.

The ramifications of World War I proved catastrophic for the German language press in America. Before the United States entered the war, the *California Demokrat* supported objective reporting even though seasoned with pro-German sentiment. It attempted to counteract the overt pro-British and anti-German views of the anglo-American press before the outbreak of hostilities by demonstrating Germany's strong desire for peace and her active pursuit of programs for pacification and equality among nations. When the conflagration burst into flames in the summer of 1914 the government in Berlin, it emphasized, was still feverishly working for disengagement in all the capitals of Europe, only to be blocked by the ambitious designs of Russia and England.

Due to the hostility toward Germany by the Anglo-American press, the German-American papers recognized their mission in offering the public objective reporting of European affairs. "In dieser Zeit, zu der jeder deutschlebende Europäer versucht, sich genau über die Vorgänge in dem furchtbaren Weltkrieg zu unterrichten und bereits Beweise genug dafür hat, dass die nun fast ausschliesslich über England oder Frankreich hierher gelangenden Berichte eine stark antideutsche Färbung haben, muss er nach einer deutschen Zeitung greifen, deren Redakteure über die politischen Verhältnisse in Europa genau unterrichtet und bemüht sind, die Vorgänge auf den Kriegsschauplätzen soweit es nur möglich ist, wahrheitsgetreu zu schildern oder übertriebene sensationelle Meldungen als solche zu kennzeichnen" (August 9, 1914).

Preceding the active participation of the United States as a belligerent, the following formed the basis of news accounts: encouragement in German military advances; the claim of American hypocrisy in its policy of bellicose neutrality which

essentially aided the war aims of England; the sinking of the *Lusitania* as a justified act against a camouflaged war ship; condemnation of Allied refusal to discuss terms of peace with the Central Powers, and complete disclosure of Allied atrocities.

After April 1917, the German-American newspress found itself in a most precarious position. A federal censorship law of October 6, 1917 required the foreign language papers to deliver English translations of their news stories, a task which served to cripple German-American journalism. Similar to most of its compatriot journals, the *California Demokrat* now emphasized the strength of the parliamentary system in Germany as well as her propensity towards true democracy and western style liberalism. Ads for the purchase of war bonds mushroomed: "Sei wirklich ein Amerikaner—kaufen Sie einen Bond."<sup>9</sup>

The anti-German pressures exhausted the energies of the editors who ceased publication on May, 11, 1918, expressing, though, their hope to reissue the paper after the resentment of everything German had subsided. Upon reappearance after the war, San Francisco's oldest foreign language newspaper was reduced for a time to a weekly and tended to concern itself conspicuously more with local events.

The advent of Naziism in Germany in 1933 forced a response from the *California Demokrat* and it forthrightly rose to the occasion by attacking this "faschistische Diktatur" and by praising FDR; scepticism, however, expressed itself against Churchill for his alleged indefensible and emotional anti-German outbursts. Anti-Naziism did not blind the editors to justified claims Germany was believed to have. Numerous articles documented the widespread suppressions and persecution of German minorities in Czechoslovakia and Poland; Germany's claim to Danzig was accepted as a result of historical evidence.

Reporting of events on the national front began with the inception of the paper. The Civil War thoroughly occupied it

in the 1860's. Even though news remained essentially objective, an enthusiastic pro-Union viewpoint permeated all editions. These same years witnessed the undertaking of great railroad expansion and the *California Demokrat*, caught up in the spirit of manifest destiny, vividly noted these developments and their great impact upon the economic and cultural growth of the West Coast.

A special edition on April 16, 1865, printed on black paper employing white print, mourned President Lincoln. Accounts of government transactions in Washington were prevalent as was political news from every section of the nation. Events such as a fire in Portland, Oregon, a Turnfest in St. Louis, the collapse of an hotel in Long Beach, California, a robbery in New York readily found their way into these columns.

Occurrences on the international horizon, however, dominated the issues up to World War I and national news stories tended to be secondary. Local affairs, i.e. California and particularly the San Francisco Bay area, merited attention throughout the existence of the *California Demokrat*. They consisted of business transacted in the state capital and in the city as well as announcements and reports of elections, break-ins, robberies, sale of real estate, fires, ship sinkings etc. A novel feature, a type of travel section, also came into being. Particularly beautiful areas in the proximity were recommended for weekend outings or longer sojourns. A sports section did not exist until the 1960's during the attempted revival of this journal.

The most prominent local news features pertain to the many German organizations which abounded in the San Francisco area. In California as a whole "Before the outbreak of the first World War the Lutheran Church alone had seventy German-American congregations and numerous schools and higher institutions of learning. German-American organizations in 1916: 9 cultural, 27 trade and professional, 49 musical, 13 social, 5 military, 34 Landmannschaftliche Vereine, 12 rifle clubs, 6 athletic clubs, 17 Turner, 46 mutual aid and burial, 18 educational and political, 116 lodges and branches."<sup>10</sup> The

column "Aus dem Vereinsleben" became a standard feature and published reports and events from such varied groups as Hessen Gesang Verein, Turnschwwestern Verein, Verein Österreich, Grütli Verein, Zither Club, Gesang Verein Walhalla, Gesang Verein Harmonie.

Social reporting remained quite limited and consisted of short notifications of marriages, of deaths, and of births; after 1910 only obituaries continued to appear. Marriage announcements note the name of the couple and of the officiating clergyman; obituaries give the name and dates of the deceased. The notification of Germans who had just become naturalized citizens of the United States in San Francisco was prominently featured.

Also announced are market prices for flour, wheat, barley, fruits, and vegetables, meats and fowl, thus providing evidence of the agricultural economy bordering the city. Stock quotations and shipping reports reveal a growing economic and commercial center.

The life-style of San Francisco's German community can be more readily understood by taking cognizance of the types of advertisements the newspaper carried. A study of the ads which appeared in the *California Demokrat* since its inception furnishes clear evidence of the affluence of German-Americans in San Francisco. In the early editions of the paper one finds ads for dry good stores, French cashmere shawls, cigars, furniture, bakeries, hotels and saloons, dance halls, seaside resorts, lessons in the English language, music schools, knife sharpeners, hats, watches, and insurance. Also, veterinarians, physicians, pharmacists, and lawyers offered their services. The lack of any ads for the sale of books is surprising. Later, however, we find large ads for art dealers. Toward the end of the century. The paper's issues abound in photographs accompanied by ads and feature stories, e.g. on the Goethe-Schiller monument, architecture of San Francisco, the beauty of the Sierras, and passage on the North German Lloyd.

The *California Demokrat* also contains many fictional and semi-fictional stories which frequently appeared in serial

form and deal with a multiplicity of themes such as travel, home life, love, and detectives.

Infrequently, literature of a moralizing nature appeared in the paper's columns, but usually only in holiday issues, generally only Easter or Christmas.

Very little poetry appeared in the *California Demokrat*. A five-verse poem, which appeared on March 16, 1913, begins:

DER KRIEG

Zieht gleich grimmer Schreckgestalt  
 Fremder Reiter durch die Gauen,  
 Hohl und knöchern, starr und kalt  
 Ist sein Antlitz anzuschauen;  
 Pestilenz und Hungersnot,  
 Mord und Flammen blutigrot  
 Streuen um ihr her das Grauen.

Another poem (published at the outbreak of World War I) warns: "Deutscher sei Wach! Wehr deine Sach, lass nicht den Bismarck sterben in dir!" Two weeks later, the paper published six verses enlisting the support of German-Americans for a just German cause. Entitled "An die Deutschen in Amerika," the poem begins:

Ihr Deutschen, die im neuen  
 Der Freiheit Land, Ihr lebt—  
 Lasst schwarze Wolken dräuen,  
 Doch hoch das Haupt erhebt:  
 Gedenket Eurer Ahnen,  
 Auch Ihr seid noch Germanen!

Although lacking major literary interest, the *California Demokrat* faithfully followed events of the German-language stage in San Francisco by noting the works being presented and commenting upon the actors and the directors. From these reports it is apparent that San Francisco's Germans enjoyed an active German-language stage.

San Francisco and its German community can be proud of having supported this outstanding newspaper for a century, which today serves as a wellspring for the investigator of the German heritage of San Francisco and of California.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Edwin G. Gudde, *German Pioneers in Early California* (Hoboken, N. J., 1927).

Charles E. Chapman, *The Founding of Spanish California* (New York, 1916), p. 18ff.

<sup>2</sup>Chamisso, who was not only a renowned author but also a discerning botanist, discovered and named the golden poppy which became the state flower of California.

<sup>3</sup>See Henry A. Pochmann and Arthur R. Schultz, *Bibliography of German Culture in America to 1940* (Madison, Wisc., 1953), p. 475.

<sup>4</sup>See Albert B. Faust, *The German Element In The United States*, (New York, 1927), II, 443-4.

<sup>5</sup>Karl J. R. Arndt and May E. Olson, *German-American Newspapers and Periodicals 1732-1955 History and Bibliography* (Heidelberg 1961), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup>See Edward C. Kemble, and Helen H. Bretnor, *A History of California Newspapers 1846-1858* (Los Gatos., 1962).

Anne Loftis, *California—Where the Twain Did Meet* (New York, London, 1973).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Emerson Daggett, *History of Journalism in San Francisco*, WPA Project 10008 (1939), pp. 21-24.

Karl J. R. Arndt, May E. Olson, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup>Exceptions: after September 15, 1912 "...only German newspaper on the Pacific Coast that guarantees and proves its circulation" although this could hardly be considered a motto; after the resumption of publication on March 7, 1961 "An American Newspaper Printed in the German Language" appeared in the title and was embellished by two American flags.

<sup>9</sup>See Carl Wittke, *The German Language Press in America* (Lexington, Ky., 1957), pp. 235-278.

Wittke discusses the plight of the press at this time.

<sup>10</sup>Karl J. R. Arndt, May E. Olson, op. cit.