HOOSIER KULTURKAMPF: ANGLO-GERMAN CULTURAL CONFLICTS IN FORT WAYNE, 1840-1920

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The realities of life for people living in the Old Northwest were measured by their membership in reasonably well-defined ethnic and cultural groups. Such is the case in northern Indiana's Fort Wayne where ethnic loyalties to national origins, language, and religion made up the flesh and blood of interpersonal contacts and defined the nature of social and political conflicts. The ebb and flow of ethnic encounters during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggests that the well-known Anglo-German antagonisms of the World War I years were but the culmination of a well-established pattern of conflicts waged to determine the cultural structure and values of America's towns and cities.

Early nineteenth century ethnic relations in Fort Wayne show relative cooperation in the 1820s and 1830s between the German and Anglo (English and Scottish) Protestants living within a population majority of Miami Indians and French and French-Canadian Roman Catholics. But splits developed by 1837 when separate ministers and buildings emerged for the Protestants—divided chiefly between German Lutherans and Anglo Presbyterians. Open friction was the case by the 1840s as each group staked out rival religious and social territories.

Incipient friction was fed by ethnic values of religious and cultural superiority, if not of confidence in an exclusive possession of the truth. Conservative German Lutherans would not allow their people to use the English language as it was believed to corrupt the purity of their theology, and they saw themselves as the redeeming influence in a corrupt English culture. To paraphrase Perry Miller, they understood themselves as a "German Errand into the Wilderness." The battle lines for northern Indiana were clearly drawn.

Fort Wayne evidence of the ensuing cultural combat is found by 1844 in the existence of three rival parochial school systems run by German Lutherans, German Catholics, and by Anglo Presbyterians. These school divisions and their cultural perpetuation were characterized by school-children fights after school which were carried on for well over a century. The parochial school divisions closely approximated the ethnic population balance in a community that would remain untill the 1890s composed of approximately one-third German Lutheran, one-third German Catholic, and one-third English and Scotch Protestants.

Critical ethnic divisions in Fort Wayne in the 1850s led to be the famous cultural and political conflict between the Know-Nothing Movement (the aggressively Anglo-assimilationist party) and the ethnic Democrats. Know-Nothing issues in Fort Wayne centered around advocacy of anti-Catholicism, public education, temperance, and restrictions on immigration and voting in order to restrain the "flying horde of Europe's vomit." Most German ethnics, as could be expected, resented such rhetoric and opposed politically such cultural objectives. Battlefield leadership in Fort Wayne was led for the Anglos by the Presbyterian editor of the *Fort Wayne Times* and Methodist ministers, while the German opponents were led by Lutherans and Catholics.

The cultural division was also a political party division: German Democrats versus Anglo Whigs—later many of the Whigs participated in the People's or Know-Nothing Party and then still later in the Republican Party. The conflict of the 1850s cemented Germans of Lutheran and Roman Catholic background into the Democratic Party for the next fifty to seventy years. Ironically, in many ways these conflicts of the 1850s created a "German" nationality in America where none had existed in Europe because of the various political and traditional divisions among the numerous German states. But now in America, immigrant perceptions of a common "English" cultural opposition and the lack of distinctions in the perceptions of Anglos created an inclusive "German" nationality.

One of the Know-Nothing issues which remained throughout the century in the center of Fort Wayne German-Anglo group controversies was the availability of alcohol. In the early 1840s the Presbyterians along with other Anglo-Protestants sponsored their own Separate Fourth of July celebration in Fort Wayne claiming that the public festivities were controlled by the Germans who only commemorated the liberty of drunkenness. When the 1855 Indiana legislature with strong Know-Nothing support passed state-wide prohibition, Fort Wayne saloonkeepers—heavily German—refused to abide by it until local Anglo-prohibitionists hired lawyers to force the state to prosecute.

In 1894, the German Democratic coalition temporarily split on the rocks of rival German Lutheran and Catholic mayoralty candidates allowing the Anglo temperance and American Protective League candidate to slip into the mayor's office. German Lutherans who switched party votes to elect a law-and-order anti-Catholic instead of the German-Catholic Democrat were dismayed to find that not only did the mayor seek to close the saloons on Sunday and at 11:00 p.m. on weeknights, but that his attempted city patronage against "anti-Protestants" included German Lutherans as well as Catholics. German Catholics counterattacked through a criminal libel suit brought by local Bishop Joseph Rademacher against the editor of the Fort Wayne A.P.A. *American Eagle* for an inflammatory article alleging sexual immortality by priests in the local Catholic orphanage.

Public education in Fort Wayne was also a continuing controversy for ethnic rivals for over a century. It was no accident that Fort Wayne was very slow in developing a public school system. While there were false starts in the 1850s, it was really not until the immediate post-Civil War period that fully tax-supported education came to Fort Wayne. Public education was supported by Anglo Protestants, especially Presbyterians, and opposed by German Lutherans and Catholics. In fact, during the early experiment with public schools in the 1850s, leading German families refused to pay a property tax to support public schools. This

issue, along with temperance, was crucial in holding together the Lutheran and Catholic Democratic coalition. The reasons German ethnics opposed public schools were, of course, their opposition to taxes for public education since they were already subsidizing parochial schools and their fear that public education would become ungodly, or, even worse and much more likely, it would become Anglo Protestant. It was no coincidence that the public school's first superintendent in Fort Wayne was an ordained Presbyterian minister and the former teacher-director of the local Presbyterian church school.

When compromises were finally worked out in the late 1860s for Fort Wayne public schools, four elementary schools were set aside for instruction in German. By the 1890s enrollment in these all-German schools had dropped, and the schools were reduced to two. Under a reorganization plan in 1901, German language instruction was given to more students—in five schools for all eight grades of each—but now it was taught for only one class hour a day by a special language teacher. This modified bilingual effort in a period of greater ethnic assimilation proved more successful, and with the stimulation of increased German cultural activities such language instruction spread to fourteen of the seventeen Fort Wayne elementary schools by 1916. When the public high school opened in 1868, a German language teacher was one of the highest paid instructors; German remained the only modern foreign language taught in the school. At the time World War I broke out, the high school was employing five teachers of German and eight of English in its language arts program. In the separate Lutheran and German Catholic parochial schools German was ordinarily the language of instruction, especially in the Lutheran schools; but by 1915 an increasing use of English was relegating German to the status of a foreign language and as the language for religious instruction.

Rivalry between parochial and public schools continued into the twentieth century based upon perceptions of religious exclusion. Older Anglo residents relate, for instance, that in the summers they played with German

parochial students, but when school commenced in the fall, Lutheran and Catholic parochial students would no longer play with them, the perceived reason being that parochial teachers taught that outsiders were religiously impure, would not go to heaven, and that their students should not become contaminated.

Basic characteristics of these ethnic divisions in the Fort Wayne population can be reconstructed from the 1880 census rolls. The census shows 9,632 first and second generation German-Americans in Fort Wayne, or about thirty-six percent of the total population. Assuming, conservatively, a German third generation roughly equal to the size of the second generation, the total percentage of German Americans in the late nineteenth century was nearly sixty percent of the Fort Wayne population. A representative group of one hundred first and second generation immigrations in Fort Wayne in 1880 shows seventy-five Germans, twelve Irish, four English, four French, three Scots, and two miscellaneous. In the rural areas of Allen County there was a smaller percentage of first and second generation Germans than in the city—twenty percent—but still the largest fraction of rural ethnics.

Of the first generation immigrants in Fort Wayne in 1880, nine out of ten Germans married either a first or second generation German, eight of ten Irish married first or second generation Irish, while only four of ten Anglos married a first or second generation Anglo spouse. The differential rate of ethnic assimilation is even more clearly seen in the 1880 census in the marital selection of second generation ethnics. At that stage one finds nine of ten Anglos had married at least third generation or native-stock spouses, six of ten Irish, but only four of ten Germans.

The cultural loyalties of many of these German families were to expressions of things German. Ernest Sihler, son of the patriarch of St. Paul's German Evangelical Lutheran Church, for instance, wrote of the superiority of the Lutheran parochial schools compared to the public schools, noting that the German classes provided the intellectual nourishment of Goethe, Schiller, and Luther instead

of the "infantile" English-language primers found in the public schools. Sihler also claimed that the German parochial teachers were "scholarly men, not half-baked products of the crude educational beginnings of the West. They had been trained at *German* gymnasia and had studied at *German* universities." German pride was amply evident.

By the 1900-1914 period increased cultural assimilation had occurred, for by then up to four generations of German-Americans had lived in Allen County. They and more recent arrivals were subject to powerful economic and social forces encouraging assimilation. Revealing examples of this cultural process include Charles Biederwolf, a second generation German who was the popular secretary of the town's Chamber of Commerce. Originally of a Democratic Lutheran background, by the time of his Chamber of Commerce position he was a Republican and a member of the First Presbyterian Church. Edward Hoffman, another second generation German, moved from the farm to law school and rose to the post of secretary of the Democratic National Committee; along the way he shifted denominationally to First Presbyterian. George Waldschmidt, a first generation German, kept his Lutheran affiliation, although belonging to a First Presbyterian Men's Club, but as one of the 1908 founders of the German-American Bank and Trust Company he became a prominent Republican Party leader. The pursuit of social respectability led into the Republican Party; and for those with shifting secular loyalties or a desire for Masonic membership prohibited by the Catholics and the Missouri Synod Lutherans, it led into Anglo-Protestant denominations.

While there was noticeable assimilation, there was also ethnic tenacity in this period. The National German-American Alliance served as an umbrella organization for numerous Fort Wayne German clubs and singing societies and the local German press. German newspapers in Fort Wayne dated back to the 1850s, and in 1914 one of only three German dailies in Indiana was located in Fort Wayne. The German community in Fort Wayne was held together by a leadership of Lutheran and Catholic clergy, press editors,

parochial teachers, and Democratic Party leaders among all of whom self-interest and personal beliefs coincided. New strength in the German community of 1900-1914 was shown by the establishment of the German-American Bank (which became the "Lincoln" National Bank when the United States entered the war in 1917) and by a newly annual "German Day" celebration held in Germania Park which was owned by the Berghoff Brewing Company. This celebration ceased with United States entry into World War I, and with it the park which was sold to the Elks.

In the 1914-1917 period, cultural conflicts moved from the second to the front page of the local press as the European war heightened the ethnic identity of Anglo-Americans and German-Americans alike. Both Germans and Anglos from Fort Wayne lobbied Congress over United States entry into the war. Each contributed money and letters to the press to support their respective European preferences. German-American businessmen in Fort Wayne lobbied Anglo banks to refrain from proposed loans to the British. German farmers and tradesmen attended pro-German plays in the local theaters where, by their contributions, they joined the Society of the Iron Cross. The two-party press in Fort Wayne, not anxious to antagonize German voters, provided surprisingly balanced coverage of the war up until January of 1917. Yet political shifts occured in 1916 as German Lutheran Democrats, always the softer element in the ethnic coalition, shifted to Republican national candidates in retaliation for Woodrow Wilson's increasing tilt to the British and for intervention.

The war years from 1917 to 1919 was the time for the Anglos to gain the upper hand in the long-term cultural clashes with the German ethnics. Now they could vield the added weight of patriotism to force Anglo-assimilation upon the only moderately meltable German ethnics. The new cultural power was dramatized in the issues of prohibition, women's suffrage, the use of the German language, and yet another offensive against parochial schools. Old and new organizations were used. The traditional ones were the Anglo-Protestant denominations; the new ones were the

County Council of Defense and the American Protective League. Importantly, the Anglos were now aided by assimilationist Germans—mainly German business and professional leaders.

The number and complexity of ethnic conflicts involving Germans and Anglos in Fort Wayne during World War I are more than can be dealt with here. A few examples, however, suggest the culmination of a pattern of cultural conflict that dated back three-quarters of a century. Early friction resulted from the federal government order for all un-naturalized German immigrants to file "Alien Enemy Registrations." The requirement and what it suggested about one's reputation was devastating for local German residents, while it gave further evidence to Anglo-assimilationists that they should use every device and government power to enforce Anglo conformity.

The persistent issue of the use of German language returned in the war with a vengeance. As a result of new political support to suppress those notoriously militaristic German verbs and sentence structures, the use of the language in Fort Wayne schools, churches, and public trolleys was prohibited by 1918. Some of the other cultural issues involved wartime prohibition and the battles fought between brewers and leaders of the women's suffrage movement over the relationship between men's liberty to drink beer and women's right to cast votes. Another conflict involving Anglos and Germans was fought out over the methods used in selling war bonds to local ethnics.

With the advantage of hindsight, it is easy to see the unnecessary pain, humiliation, and heartaches that the wartime climate of ethnic suspicion encouraged. The arrogance and naivete of the time is embarrassing to behold. Every consumer complaint, from ground glass in the peanut butter to a sick milk-cow, was blamed on one's German neighbors. A major irony was the circumstance that local Germans who enlisted with the first beat of the war drum and who marched off in step to defend the world from Prussian militarism were accorded patriotic cheers, while local German Anabaptists, who had left Germany in part to avoid military involvements,

became the target of vilification and personal abuse. Yet, it was also true, as contemporary critics pointed out, that Allen County Anabaptist farmers were happy to gain wartime profits from the high prices being paid for grain, hogs, and draft horses. Everyone was a casualty of wartime moral ambiguities.

Inner turmoil shook the foundations of local Germans. On the eve of America's entrance into the war, an elected county commissioner of German background had to fight for his good name, as well as his political life, after ordering county employees to remove flags from courthouse windows. The resulting attack upon his patriotism forced him to grovel before the electorate with apologies and solicited testimonials from Anglos in high standing. Elsewhere in town some parents refused to speak German in the presence of their children so that their offspring would not grow up with the accents that brought suspicion upon the father and mother. While no one went to the local courts to change their Germanic last names, a number of families unofficially altered spellings to Anglicize names ending with "meier" and "engel."

What were the results of this accelerated drive against German cultural characteristics during the World War I years? The evidence strongly suggests that German cultural traits and activities were driven from the public arena, although some would survive within the home or within private organizations. Overall, German ethnicity would never regain its pre-World War I strength in Fort Wayne. The broader anti-foreign movement of the 1920s, legislative restraints on new immigration, the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany in the early 1930s, and World War II did not provide a sufficient interval of time for any substantial public revival of ethnic pride in things German. The long-term raids against German culture had escalated into a military war against the Hun, and in Fort Wayne, U.S.A., the Anglo-assimilationist Kulturkampf was victorious.

NOTES

1. Studies that bear on the subject of this paper include Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York, 1964); Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture* (New York, 1970); Gerd Korman, *Industrialization, Immigrants, and Americanizers* (Madison, 1967); and Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (DeKalb, 1974).

2. Karl Detzer, *Myself When Young* (New York, 1968) reports on the late nineteenth century; interviews affirm similar fights well into the twentieth century.

3. Carl F. Brand, "The History of the Know Nothing Party in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History* 18 (1922), 47-81, 177-206, and *Fort Wayne Times,* May 31, 1854, p. 2.

4. *Fort Wayne Times,* July 11, 1850, p. 2.

5. Fort Wayne *Journal,* July 17, 1894, section A, p. 1; Fort Wayne *Weekly Journal,* May 3, 1894, pp. 1, 5.

6. Professor J. Randolph Kirby, IU-PU Fort Wayne, has generously shared with me his published research on "The Free School in Fort Wayne, 1853-1860."

7. *Annual Reports of the Fort Wayne City Government, 1894* (Fort Wayne, 1895), pp. 280-286; *Annual Reports of the Fort Wayne City Government, 1901* (Fort Wayne, 1902), pp. 432-477; Ernest W. Cook, "Fort Wayne School History," 1921, scrapbook; *Directory of Public Schools, 1916-1917* (Fort Wayne, 1916), n.p.

8. Testimony at a Fort Wayne First Presbyterian discussion group, April 1977.

9. The statistics which follow were tabulated by me from the 1880 Allen County census in the *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880.*

10. Ernest Sihler, *From Maumee to Thames and Tiber* (New York, 1930), pp. 20, 29.

11. B. J. Griswold, *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne* (Chicago, 1917), II, pp. 64, 295, 591.

12. Local ethnic foreign policy lobbying can be found in the *Journal-Gazette,* Aug. 4, 1914, p. 2; Aug. 6, p. 7; Aug. 13, p. 4: and Jan. 31, 1915, p. 7. Political repercussions from the United States drift towards participation are seen in the *Daily News,* Oct. 4, 1916, p. 14; Oct. 16, p. 1; and Oct. 21, 1916, p. 1.

13. See Clifford H. Scott, "Fort Wayne German-Americans in World War I: A Cultural Flu Epidemic," *Old Fort News* 40 (1977), 3-18.

14. Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette,* March 20, 1917, p. 1 and March 28, 1917, p. 1.

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