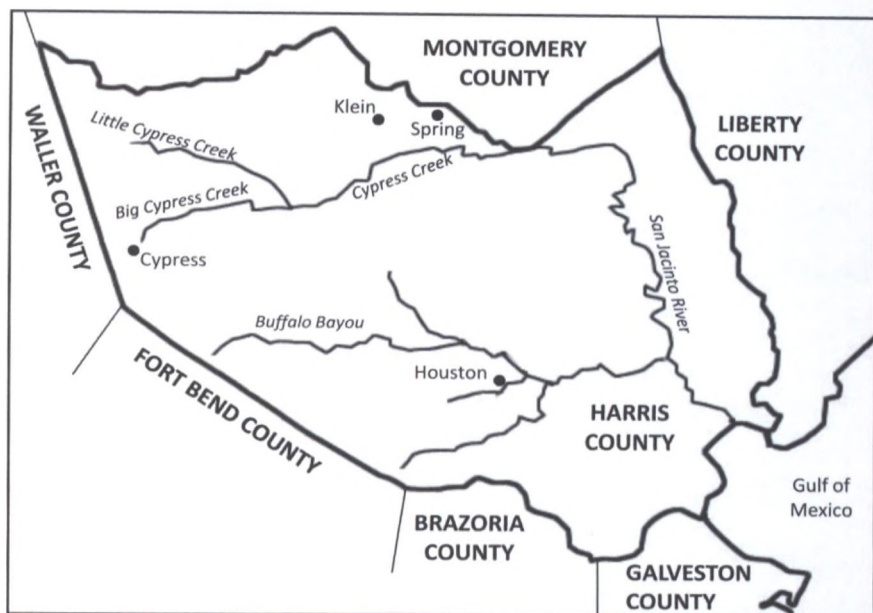


*Jared Donnelly*

## **Questioned Loyalties: Big Cypress German-Americans during World War I**

During World War I many “hyphenated” Americans faced complex questions of loyalty.<sup>1</sup> German-Americans undoubtedly had the most difficulty during this time. While many German-Americans had been part of their communities for generations, others had only been in the United States for the past few decades and others still were newly arrived in America. Some felt that their loyalty lay with the land of their heritage, and many still had family in Germany. However, a large portion no longer had activities with Germany and were thoroughly integrated into their communities. Regardless of how long they had been in America or where their loyalties lay, almost all German-Americans, at some time or another, faced questions about their loyalty and patriotism. This study seeks to determine what kinds of issues German-Americans in the predominantly German communities of Klein, Spring, and Cypress about 25 miles Northwest of Houston in Harris County, Texas, faced during World War I. It also attempts to establish to what extent these communities faced loyalty questions and, more important, how did they deal with them? To determine how the experiences of these communities differed from other German-American communities in Texas this study compares the Big Cypress to a previously studied German-American community in Fayette County.

The literature on German-Americans in the United States is substantial. German immigration to America has a long and multifaceted history that has been the subject of a number of books and articles. On the issue of German-American loyalty in the United States during World War I, Frederick Luebke's *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* provides a useful start. Luebke focused on German-American communities in larger cities such as Cincinnati and Philadelphia and presented an overview of German-American patriotism during the war as well as how the American population treated them. In addition Mark Sonntag's MA thesis “Hyphenated Texans:



**German-American communities of Klein, Spring and Cypress in Harris County, Texas.**

World War I and the German-Americans in Texas” contributes to our understanding German-Texans during World War I. Sonntag’s focus is on German-Americans in Texas during World War I with special emphasis on the German-American communities of the Hill Country of Texas. The most recent study of German-Americans during this period is Matthew Tippens *Turning Germans Into Texans*. Tippens looked at the assimilation of German culture in Texas from 1900-1930 and traced the effect of World War I had on the survival of German culture. Tippens’ work focused primarily on 10 counties in and around Central Texas where he found that the German-American communities faced considerable hostility and questions about their loyalty.<sup>2</sup> These studies, however, do not consider or account for the unique experiences of the large number of German-Americans in Harris County during World War I

The United States in 1910 had a significant population of German descent. In fact, more than 2.5 million people listed Germany as their birthplace, with more than 45,000 living in Texas.<sup>3</sup> Including their offspring, often first and second generation Americans, German-Americans in Texas numbered more than 170,000 in 1910 and over 8 million nationwide.<sup>4</sup> Harris County in 1910 was home to the second highest population of German-born residents of Texas at nearly 3,000 along with more than 4,000 first generation German-

Americans.<sup>5</sup> Many other Texas communities were home to hundreds of German Americans; in some cases the communities were exclusively German. These communities often maintained their heritage on a number of levels by conducting church services in German, celebrating German festivals such as Maifest and Oktoberfest, and often printing German language newspapers. Thus, these communities attracted a significant amount of attention from neighboring Anglos when the United States entered World War I against Germany and the Central Powers.<sup>6</sup>

German settlement in Texas has a rich history from 1831 to the early twentieth-century. A number of Germans who settled in Texas before the state gained independence fought in the revolution.<sup>7</sup> But it was not until 1844 that the first major effort of Germans to settle Texas came when the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas (*Verein zum Schutze deutscher Einwanderer in Texas*), also known as the Adelsverein or simply the Verein, began promoting the settlement of Texas.<sup>8</sup> The Verein obtained the rights to settle a large tract of land in west central Texas near present day Austin. The Verein then sought to attract German settlers by offering transportation, land, a house, and other benefits for the cost of \$120 for a single man and \$320 for a family. The Verein would keep one-half of the land in the colony for future sales in the hope that land values would increase as demand soared once the area was sufficiently settled. As many as 7,380 Germans accepted the Verein's seemingly generous offer between the years 1844-1846 and moved from Germany to Texas.<sup>9</sup>

Poor organization and inadequate funding resulted in the bankruptcy of the Verein in 1847. However, during its short existence thousands of Germans immigrated to Texas to settle the land. Most of the German settlers who had been brought to Texas by the Verein settled in west central Texas to the north of present day San Antonio.<sup>10</sup> Once settled the Germans wrote to their friends and families in Germany of the plentiful land and encouraged them to join them. In fact, it was said that in parts of Germany during the 1840s one often heard "*Geh mit ins Texas*" ("go with us to Texas"). Through the mid 1840s to the 1850s, German immigration increased and more Texan areas were settled as Germans spread out to the south along the Brazos and Colorado Rivers and west along the Guadalupe River. During this period the port of Galveston and the nearby city of Houston saw an influx of German settlers on an impressive scale. In the early 1850s it was estimated that nearly two-fifths of the Houston population and nearly one-third of the population in Galveston was German. Austin and San Antonio also saw a significant rise in their German populations during this period as well as many other smaller communities throughout southeast Texas and the Hill Country.<sup>11</sup>

German immigration to Texas continued at a steady rate until the outbreak

of the Civil War in 1861. With Confederate ports blockaded by Federal ships, immigration to Texas by sea was effectively brought to a standstill for the duration of the war. Following the Civil War, immigrants from Germany once again flowed into Texas. The second generation (first generation Americans) of German-Americans expanded the predominately German areas and, along with new immigrants, expanded along new railroads that were being built in Texas. By the turn to the twentieth-century, German-Americans could be found throughout Texas and while some completely integrated themselves with the local Anglo populations, many settled with their own kind in nearly exclusively German communities.<sup>12</sup>

Harris County was home to German-Americans. The communities of Spring, Klein, and Cypress are located in north Harris County. Situated in an area known as "Big Cypress" which stretched from the town of Spring, today located about twenty-five miles north of Houston on Interstate-45, west to the community of Cypress, located today on Highway 290 about twenty miles northwest of Houston. In the 1840s the area was very remote, as the city of Houston, which had been founded in 1836, was still relatively small. German immigrants were drawn to the area by the fertile soil and abundant water sources, which were ideal for immigrant farmers and many chose to raise their families in the area.<sup>13</sup>

After the Civil War the population boomed in the Big Cypress. Railroads were built and new economic opportunities developed in agriculture and in the lumber industry. The railroads, cotton gins, and sawmills attracted workers to the predominantly farming communities and as the population grew towns were founded in the area. The International and Great Northern Railroad Company established the town of Spring in 1873 when the railroad line connecting Houston to St. Louis was built through the area.<sup>14</sup> The communities of Klein and Cypress also grew as more farmers came to the area. In 1884, due to the growth in population over the preceding decades a U.S. Post Office was established in Klein as well as a gristmill and a cotton gin.<sup>15</sup> In Cypress, further to the west, a corn cracking mill, cotton gin, and sawmill were opened to support the local farmers and lumber industry.<sup>16</sup>

In 1904, oil was struck in nearby Humble, just to the east of Big Cypress. This attracted even more people to the area as the Gulf Coast oil boom created a flurry of activity. This economic windfall allowed many of the local farmers to sell off portions of their land for substantial profits. When World War I broke out in Europe the German-Americans of Big Cypress were adjusting to the recent and rapid growth in their communities.<sup>17</sup>

The families that settled the Big Cypress had immigrated from Prussian provinces such as Posen, and Pomerania as well as the German principalities of Württemberg, Saxony, and Mecklenburg in the 1840s and 1850s. The

Alvin Klein family, like many families in the area, primarily farmed cotton but they also grew subsistence crops such as corn and potatoes and raised hogs, cattle, and chickens. Some families harvested timber and processed it at Jacob Strack's sawmill just south of Klein. A number of the families in the Big Cypress also worked a trade. The Mittelstädt family farmed and ran a blacksmith shop in Klein while Henry Kaiser farmed and raised cattle but was also a carpenter who helped build the Trinity Lutheran Church. Many families also sent their sons to work as laborers at the rail yards and in the oil fields to earn extra money.<sup>18</sup>

The center of social life in the Big Cypress was Trinity Lutheran Church. The leading families of the Big Cypress: the Kleins, Kaisers, Klencks, Lemms, Wunderlichs, Stracks, and Theisses all joined together to organize the church.<sup>19</sup> Trinity Lutheran Church was not just the religious center for the community; it was also the center for education. The church educated the area children in German and provided religious as well as secular instruction.<sup>20</sup>

The German-American communities of Fayette County provide good examples of typical Central Texas German-Americans. The area was settled by Germans in the 1830s, even more were brought by the Verein during the 1840s and over the next fifty years the German-American population steadily increased. Much like the Big Cypress, the primary occupation of German-Americans in Fayette County centered on agriculture. The main crops were cotton and corn but they also grew cabbages, beans, and potatoes. Many families also raised livestock to supplement their diet and income.<sup>21</sup> In 1910 the size of the German-American population in Fayette County was also similar to that of the Big Cypress; 5,428 were born in Germany or were first generation.<sup>22</sup> The majority lived in the country but some lived in the County Seat, La Grange, and in the towns of Schulenburg and Fayetteville.

The United States declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917. This event changed the lives of German-Americans throughout the nation. Many German-Americans were torn over how to react to the news that America was at war with the land of their forefathers. Many were upset and some were outspoken in their anger, but once war was declared, the evidence suggests that the German-American population in Big Cypress supported their new homeland unflinchingly.

As preparations for war got underway state Councils of Defense were created in May 1917. Their primary purpose was mobilizing the economic resources of the state; a secondary purpose was to promote patriotism within the state. Then County Councils of Defense were created as the state council delegated the tasks prescribed by the national council.<sup>23</sup>

On 11 August 1917 the Harris County Council of Defense organized in Houston with Otis Hamblen as council secretary.<sup>24</sup> It apparently was not very

active, as the State council was required to send state organizers to reorganize the Harris County Council of Defense in 1918 almost exactly one year from the date that it was established.<sup>25</sup> For the most part, the Harris County Council of Defense only concerned itself with community organization and industrial mobilization.<sup>26</sup> The majority of its actions dealt with Red Cross donations, Liberty Bond drives, and Victory Gardens. In fact Harris County led the State in Victory Garden enrollments in the spring of 1918.<sup>27</sup> Other county councils of defense in Texas were much more active in rooting out disloyalty in their communities.

In a letter from the Texas Council of Defense in San Antonio to the County Councils of Defense on 11 August 1917, each County Council was asked a series of questions about their status. The questions focused primarily on Liberty Bond Drives, food production, and general war contributions. However, one of the questions dealt with loyalty: "Do you see any evidence of disloyalty in your community?" Each council was asked to deal with disloyalty issues within their county and report back to the state council if the issue could not be resolved. Often the most a county council could do was ask disloyal citizens to be more patriotic, unless they broke the law as prescribed in the Sedition Act of 1918. In some cases no actual crime had been committed but the actions of the "disloyal" citizen drew the attention of the council, such as speaking German in public or not portraying sufficient patriotic spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Unpatriotic or disloyal citizens were encouraged by other, more patriotic citizens to increase their support for the country in a number of ways. One of the most common methods was a patriotic essay published in the local newspaper. For example, in the *Denton Record-Chronicle*, an article was titled "Ask Yourself The Question 'Am I a Patriot or Traitor?' Loyal 'German-Americans,'" in which the author presented various ways for the "Loyal German-American" to be more patriotic by helping the Y.M.C.A. or contributing to the Red Cross.<sup>29</sup> The State Council of Defense sent many of these essays to Texas newspapers for publication throughout the state. Some of the essays were general appeals to patriotism such as an April 1918 essay titled "Are you for America or for Germany?"<sup>30</sup> Others were aimed at specific areas of Texas; for example in April 1918, a Mr. Hoopes wrote a letter to the Hill Country region about the attitudes of the German-Americans he had encountered. He wrote that they had been very patriotic, participating in Liberty Bond drives, Red Cross activities, and Y.M.C.A. functions. However, Hoopes pointed out some counties with significant German-American populations that fell short in meeting their Liberty Bond quotas and that these unpatriotic German-Americans should take notice and emulate their honorable brethren who had gladly participated.<sup>31</sup>

At times people resorted to violence or the threat of violence when attempting to curb unpatriotic, pro German sentiment. In Brenham, Texas, just fifty miles from the Big Cypress area, rioters attacked and flogged six German-American farmers for not joining the Red Cross.<sup>32</sup> Such violent intimidation could even have deadly consequences: the *Austin Wochenblatt* reported that a German-American farmer in Fayette County committed suicide when he could not buy the prescribed amount of Liberty Bonds because of the poor harvest.<sup>33</sup> In Fayette County some people were quite willing to root out disloyal German-Americans; one man wrote the Governor asking, "Give me the right to help our country run down the disloyalty among the German speaking people of Fayette County."<sup>34</sup>

In regard to Harris County, the Houston newspapers are some of the best sources for evidence of anti-German or pro-German sentiment in the area. The *Houston Post* on 4 January 1918 printed a story about a man who was attacked in Illinois for being a "Kaiser Lover." The headline of the article read "Kaiser Lover Beaten and Painted Yellow."<sup>35</sup> In a story a little closer to home, the *Houston Post* printed a story about a German-American in Brazoria County, Texas, who was beaten for unpatriotic statements; the title read "Black Eye Result of Unpatriotic Remarks."<sup>36</sup> In a letter to the Editor of the *Houston Chronicle* a man wrote that to ensure "democratic" voting in the upcoming primary Pro-Germans should not be allowed to vote. To enforce this he suggested that at each polling place a patriotic man should be stationed to question voters who were unsure about their loyalties.<sup>37</sup>

The *Houston Post* and the *Houston Chronicle* also reported arrests made for violations of the Sedition Act of 1918. In Fayetteville Mayor W. C. Langoltz and ten citizens were arrested by Federal officials for flying a German flag at the Germania Club and charged with committing espionage. They pled not guilty and said that the flag was flown by mistake. The news article noted that "with one exception, all are American-born citizens."<sup>38</sup> On 6 January 1918 O. M. Michaelis, a German citizen who was living and working in Houston, was accused of "Having Collected Data of Value to German Government." On 19 January 1918, Louis Ruffel, also a German citizen living in Houston, was held on a Federal charge, the *Houston Post* reported that he had been "Arrested Twice Within 3 Months for Unpatriotic Remarks."<sup>39</sup> The *Houston Chronicle* ran a story on 9 August 1918 about two men from Corrigan, Texas, who were charged with making "Disloyal Remarks" about the United States government.<sup>40</sup> The men in the two previous cases were German Aliens rather than German-American citizens. However, it is important to note that the Houston newspapers reported on these kinds of issues as this is evidence of their willingness to print stories about unpatriotic actions by people of German descent. Therefore, based on a close reading of the sources, there is

little evidence that any significant issue occurred with the German-American communities in Big Cypress. If there were issues, they do not seem to have been reported in the local newspapers.

Perhaps the most controversial element of testing German-American loyalties during World War I was the suppression of the German language. Like other immigrant communities the German-born settlers in Texas actively retained the use of their mother tongue. While many of the older German-born generation never mastered English their children often learned English as well as German. Thus, German was often heard in the streets in German communities throughout Texas. Advertisements of businesses were in German, too, and local children learned the German language in the parochial schools. German was also the language in the Lutheran churches in the communities. Many churches in the larger communities held German language services as well as services in English while smaller communities only offered services in German. This prevalence of the German language in Texas communities was an obvious target of "Americanization" efforts.<sup>41</sup>

In an undated letter to the County Councils of Defense the Texas State Council outlined its primary objectives. Number three on the list, following industrial mobilization and community organization, was "To curtail the use of the German language."<sup>42</sup> Many counties took steps to curb the use of the German language; some even went as far as to ban the public use of German.<sup>43</sup> Generally, the State Council of Defense advised the local councils simply to ask the German-Americans not to use German in public and specifically advised that violent enforcement was not an option.

In a letter to Judge J. F. Carl, the secretary of the Texas Council of Defense, the Castro County Council of Defense asked what could be done about German-Americans in the community speaking German in public. Their concern was that "Germans . . . are speaking German in [the town of] Dimmitt. Americans cannot understand what they are saying. What can be done?"<sup>44</sup> J. F. Carl responded to the Castro County council writing "The council may ask the Germans to stop speaking German in Dimmitt but cannot enforce it."<sup>45</sup> In Fayette County the County Council of Defense thought it would be best if the use of German were discontinued saying that it would "prove a boon to the children of the community . . . and lead to the thorough Americanization of our people."<sup>46</sup>

German language newspapers protested the removal of the German language from American society. The *Neu-Braunfelser Zeitung* argued that the knowledge of foreign languages helped to diversify a culture.<sup>47</sup> In Fayette County, the LaGrange newspaper *Lutherbote für Texas* argued against the banning of teaching German in schools saying that the result of such action would be damaging to education of the nation's youth.<sup>48</sup> The *La Grange*



*deutsche Zeitung* took exception to the assumption that everything spoken or written in German was disloyal.<sup>49</sup>

Use of the German language was also targeted in churches. While most members of churches that held services in German were German-American, the local Anglo communities frequently took offense and deemed the practice "unpatriotic" in a time of war with Germany. Many churches could not understand how a church service could be considered unpatriotic regardless of the language it was conducted in. The Austin German language newspaper the Austin *Das Wochenblatt* articulated its resentment of the attempt to Americanize the German church services in order to eradicate disloyalty within the German-American population. The paper pointed out that the United States military included "thousands of German Lutherans, Catholics, and Methodists, and thus far no traitor has been found among their number."<sup>50</sup> The Fayette County Council of Defense disagreed. In denying a request by the Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Round Top to hold German language services it stated "To permit the German language as a means of communication is opening the door wide for German propaganda, friction, disorder and disloyalty." It seemed that the Fayette County Council of Defense could not understand why the German-Americans wished to speak German, "Have they ever thought how it grates upon the ears of these neighbors when they hear this language, which they cannot understand, in these critical times?"<sup>51</sup>

In a letter from the State Council of Defense concerning an earlier letter from the pastor of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Waco about the elimination of German language services, the State council was fairly diplomatic in tone. The letter recognized the church's obvious good intentions and merely asked that it comply with the request to ban German for reasons of patriotism and public safety. Secretary Carl was careful to point out that the State council could not enforce such a ban and the ". . . request is not a command."<sup>52</sup> Remarkably, the letter reflected the State Council's concern of for the German-American worshippers, in fear of violence against them by the Anglo population due to the use of German in public.

The German-Americans of the Big Cypress were aware of the general feelings towards the German language. Due to such concerns, the Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Klein discontinued the use of the German language in 1918. The local parochial schools also terminated their German language instruction. There does not, however, seem to be any evidence suggesting that the local Anglo populations took steps to encourage this. Rather the sources appear to suggest that the German-Americans of Big Cypress took these steps on their own, owing to their judgment of the local and national sentiment.<sup>53</sup>

The reaction of the German-American community was varied. While some people were willing to stop using German in public and only speak German in private, others ardently opposed such measures. In response to the Americanization of his language the editor of *Das Wochenblatt* declared, "The demand that I shall not speak the language of my dear mother, thus honoring her, is persecution pure and simple."<sup>54</sup> The *LaGrange Zeitung* criticized school boards across the nation for eliminating German language classes, maintaining that their elimination would be detrimental to the United States.<sup>55</sup>

In many cases the German-Americans made efforts to support the nation by taking part in various patriotic activities. The actions of The Houston Sangerbund provide a good example of such German-American activity in Harris County during World War I. The Houston Sangerbund is a German singing society that has been in existence since the 1870s. The Sangerbund owned a building in Houston where members held dances and singing nights, which were regularly attended by a wide range of Houstonians. The group's records are detailed and informative as they describe the difficulties that they faced during World War I. In the annual report for 1919, the society secretary detailed the effects of the war on the Sangerbund,

My report for the outgoing year will mark the most trying experiences of "The Houston Sangerbund" since its 35 years of existence . . . Not only the world war, but also the various State Legislations, especially Prohibition have added to our discomforts. On account of the latter issue, many of our Members withdrew, however, the Sangerbund remains firm in all its endeavors and such Members resigning on "Beer Principles" alone, were especially noted.

He then went on to describe the actions of the Sangerbund during the war and their patriotic support,

The Sangerbund also lent very active service in all National undertakings, especially Liberty Loan Issues, War Savings Stamps and Red Cross Contributions, not forgetting a full quota of enlistments both U.S. Army and Navy. President Hellberg especially, was very active with all National calls and his efforts deserve all compliment.<sup>56</sup>

The Sangerbund is an excellent example of how some German-Americans attempted to preserve their heritage while at the same time wholeheartedly supporting the war effort with donations and military service. The Sangerbund records indicate that their membership included German-Americans residing beyond the city of Houston in Harris County. This suggests that the actions

of the Sangerbund can be used as a gauge of German-American sentiment throughout Harris County.<sup>57</sup>

Many German-Americans served in the U.S. military during World War I either “over there” in France or in the States at (military) installations scattered throughout the nation. Congress passed the Selective Service Law on 18 May 1917, which required all males ages twenty-one to thirty to register for the draft, including aliens residing in the United States.<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to see whom the U.S. military classified as “enemy aliens,” namely a non-U.S. citizen from Germany or any of the Central Power countries allied with Germany. The *Second Report of the Provost Marshal General* detailed the number of German citizens in the U.S. who registered for the draft as 158,809 in a total of nearly twenty-four million men that registered nation-wide.<sup>59</sup> It is not possible to discern how many of the total number of registrants were German-American, because the paperwork did not require information about one’s heritage, but it can be assumed that they registered just as the rest of the population as there was no report stating otherwise.

The *Second Report of the Provost Marshal General* also discussed the naturalization process to allow the enlistment of enemy aliens who wished to serve in the U.S. military, writing “The amendment to the naturalization law . . . [would permit] alien enemy subjects enrolled in the military or naval service to obtain speedy naturalization.”<sup>60</sup> The report spoke well of German aliens and German-Americans who served in the military, commenting that “The great and inspiring revelation here has been that men of foreign and of native origin alike responded to the call to arms with a patriotic devotion . . .” The report also related a portion from a captured diary of a German officer,

Only a few of the troops are of pure American origin; the majority are of German, Dutch and Italian parentage. But these semi-Americans—almost all of whom were born in America and never have been in Europe—fully feel themselves to be true-born sons of their country.<sup>61</sup>

German-Americans from the Big Cypress also answered the call to arms. The Kaiser family, who had settled in Klein in the 1860s, sent their sons to war. Gustav Henry Kaiser of Klein was a World War I veteran who served in France.<sup>62</sup> His brother Paul Kaiser also served in France and was killed in action on 9 November 1918, two days before the Armistice. Gustav and Paul’s Uncle Fred and younger brother John also did their duty and registered for the draft. Alvin Klein, whose grandfather first settled Klein in the 1850s, served with the 36th Division Headquarters in France where his fluency in German proved valuable to the unit.<sup>63</sup> William Wunsche, whose family was

one of the first to settle Spring, served with the 117th Headquarters supply train in France. Both of his brothers served as well. His brother James was stationed in San Antonio, Texas, for the duration of the war where he was classified as a chauffeur. The only combat that James Wunsche saw was with the hand cranks of the Model T's that he worked with; one broke his arm and another broke his nose. The third Wunsche brother, Earl, also served in France.<sup>64</sup> Nearly all of the men from the prominent families of the Big Cypress registered for the draft and at least six served in the Army during the war.<sup>65</sup>

In general the German-American populations of Big Cypress did not face the same level of anti-German sentiment from their neighboring communities as the German-Americans in Fayette County did. This is probably because of the composition of their respective counties. Fayette County was almost totally rural and the few towns were not very big. Harris County was both rural and urban, and the city of Houston was emerging as one of the largest cities in the state. To illustrate the difference, the total population of Fayette County was 29,796 in 1910 compared to 115,693 in Harris County. In Fayette County there was a larger population of German-American: 5,428 made up 18.2% of the total population. In Harris County the German-American population was 7,676 in 1910, just 6.63% of the total population.<sup>66</sup> These data lead us to the conclusion that while the socio-economic status of the German-Americans living in the Big Cypress and Fayette County was similar, the fact that the Big Cypress communities were in close proximity to the city of Houston and a much smaller portion of the population, allowed them to escape the hostility that the German-American communities in Fayette County experienced.

Matthew Tippens argued in his book *Turning Germans into Texans* that the large urban areas of Dallas, San Antonio, and Houston were anti-German but did not entail mob action. The urban areas took measures to increase nationalism though enforcing the law or in the public discourse of urban newspapers. He argues that most violence and organized intimidation occurred in the small towns and rural areas of Texas where the German-Americans were numerous.<sup>67</sup> This might explain the absence of hostility towards the German-Americans in the Big Cypress. They were a highly concentrated, mostly rural, population seemingly a perfect target for hostility and intimidation. However, since the German-Americans of the Big Cypress were only a small proportion of the very large population of Harris County, they did not warrant the concern of their neighbors. Another factor that probably contributed to this disparity between the two counties with significant numbers of German-Americans was the high numbers of new residents in Houston at this time. Over a twenty-year period from 1900 to 1920, the population of Harris County tripled from 63,788 to 186,677 residents. The population of Fayette

County, however, shrunk over the same time period from 36,542 to 29,965; further increasing the visibility of the German-American population.<sup>68</sup> As the German-Americans in the Big Cypress became an increasingly smaller proportion of the Harris County population, and consequently less visible, the German-Americans of Fayette County became more visible, and thus easier targets for anti-German hostility during World War I.

Furthermore, because of the age of the Big Cypress communities (Spring, Klein, and Cypress had been settled by Germans since at least the 1840s), by 1917 most of the German-Americans living there were second and third generation Americans.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, many felt they had closer ties to America than to Germany. Consequently, many German-Americans from the Big Cypress reported to their draft boards and some served in the military during World War I. Clearly they saw themselves as Americans first and therefore considered it their duty to answer America's call to arms. Thornwell Kelb, a descendant of German settlers in the area, put it best when he related a story from his youth:

There was this family [in the area] who had in their attic a picture of Kaiser Wilhelm . . . they had this picture in their living room until World War I came along, they took it and put it in the attic, way back in the attic because, after all we came to America to be Americans. Why try to keep alive somebody's heritage? Oh we think about it, and may be proud of it, but we're here to be Americans and so that picture was put back in the attic.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike other German-American communities in Texas and the United States, the loyalty of the German-Americans of Big Cypress does not seem to have been called into question. Given their proximity to the rapidly growing city of Houston, and the fact that their communities were tight-knit and nearly as old as Houston, they were able to escape the intimidation, hostility, and outright violence that many other German-Americans in Texas experienced.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Hyphenated Americans were naturalized immigrants and their children who preserved their ethnic traditions and/or maintained ties with family in their homeland. See Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*; Mark Sonntag, "Hyphenated Texans: World War I and the

German-Americans of Texas" (MA thesis, University of Texas, 1990); Matthew D. Tippens, *Turning Germans Into Texans: World War I and the Assimilation and Survival of German Culture in Texas, 1900-1930* ([U.S.]: Kleingarten Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> United States, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States*. The U.S. population at this time was just over 100 million. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, 1910 Census, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/36894832v1ch02.pdf> [accessed Nov. 10, 2008].

<sup>4</sup> Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 29-30; Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States*.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, The 1910 U.S. Census reports 2951 residents of Harris County who were born in Germany and 4,721 residents who were first generation Americans, there were also 876 born in Austria or first generation. Historical Census Browser, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php> [accessed Sept. 15, 2010].

<sup>6</sup> Sonntag, "Hyphenated Texans."

<sup>7</sup> Glen Lich, *The German Texans* (San Antonio: The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, 1981), 39.

<sup>8</sup> Terry Jordan, *German Seed in Texas Soil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 40-41. For more discussion of the Adelsverein see Glen Lich, *German Culture in Texas: A Free Earth; Essays from the 1978 Southwest Symposium* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980) and Walter Struve, *Germans and Texans: Commerce Migration and Culture in the Days of the Lone Star Republic* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Jordan, *German Seed in Texas Soil*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> This area is known as the Hill Country. Many of their communities still exist such as Fredericksburg and Comfort.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> American Association of University Women, *The Heritage of North Harris County* (North Harris County Branch, American Association of University Women, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> Theresa McGinley, *Just a Whistle Stop Away, the History of Old Town Spring* (Nacogdoches, TX: East Texas Historical Association, 2000), 5-6

<sup>15</sup> American Association of University Women, *The Heritage of North Harris County*, 71.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>18</sup> Diana Severance, *Deep Roots, Strong Branches*, (Tex: Published for the Klein, Texas Historical Foundation [by] Historical Pub. Network, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Polly M. Duke, "KLEIN, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hrk19>) [accessed April 28, 2011]. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>20</sup> Severance, *Deep Roots, Strong Branches*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Daphne Dalton Garrett, "FAYETTE COUNTY," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcf03>), accessed April 28, 2011. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>22</sup> Historical Census Browser, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php> [accessed Sept. 15, 2010].

<sup>23</sup> Sonntag, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Mr. Hamblen, 11 August 1917, State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J392 (Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; cited hereafter as CAH).

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<sup>25</sup> Defense Secretary J. F. Carl, 14 August 1918, State Council of Defense County Correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J392 (CAH).

<sup>26</sup> In fact there was no mention of any issue with the German-American population in Harris County in the State Council of Defense County correspondence records.

<sup>27</sup> B. F. Johnson, "Final Report of the Texas Food and Feed Production Campaign," State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J392 (CAH).

<sup>28</sup> The Sedition Act of 1918 was an amendment to the Espionage Act of 1917. The law forbade any disloyal utterances or writing against the United States Government, military, or any number of government actions. It also forbade any acts or deeds favoring any country at war with the United States, Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 278-79; Undated letter to County Councils of Defense, State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J355 (CAH).

<sup>29</sup> *Denton Record-Chronicle*, 30 November 1917.

<sup>30</sup> April 1918, State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J392 (CAH).

<sup>31</sup> Mr. Hoopes, April 1918, State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J392 (CAH).

<sup>32</sup> *The Dallas Morning News*, 27 December 1917.

<sup>33</sup> *Austin Wochenblatt*, 28 August 1918.

<sup>34</sup> Tippens, *Turning Germans Into Texans*, 117.

<sup>35</sup> *The Houston Post*, 4 January 1918.

<sup>36</sup> *The Houston Post*, 6 January 1918.

<sup>37</sup> *The Houston Chronicle*, 25 July 1918.

<sup>38</sup> *The Houston Chronicle*, 13 February 1918.

<sup>39</sup> *The Houston Post*, 6 January 1918, 19 January 1918.

<sup>40</sup> *The Houston Chronicle*, 9 August 1918.

<sup>41</sup> Tippens, *Turning Germans Into Texans*, 127.

<sup>42</sup> Undated letter to County Councils of Defense, State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J355 (CAH).

<sup>43</sup> *Austin American* to State Council of Defense, 24 August 1918, State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J394 (CAH).

<sup>44</sup> Mr. Fuqua, 30 August 1918, State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J394 (CAH).

<sup>45</sup> Defense Secretary J. F. Carl, 3 September 1918, State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J394 (CAH).

<sup>46</sup> Fayette County Council of Defense, 8 October, 1918, County Correspondence, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J388 (CAH).

<sup>47</sup> *Neu-Braunfelser Zeitung*, 23 August 1917.

<sup>48</sup> *Lutherbote für Texas*, 6 November 1918.

<sup>49</sup> *LaGrange Zeitung*, 27 June 1918.

<sup>50</sup> *Das Wochenblatt*, 19 June 1918.

<sup>51</sup> Fayette County Council of Defense to the Trustees of Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem Congregation, Round Top, Texas, 25 August, 1918, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J46 (CAH).

<sup>52</sup> Defense Secretary J. F. Carl, 21 June 1918, State Council of Defense correspondence with County Councils of Defense, Texas War Records Collection, box 2J394 (CAH).

<sup>53</sup> Diana Severance, *Deep Roots, Strong Branches* (TX: Published for the Klein, Texas Historical Foundation [by] Historical Pub. Network, 1999), 110; Thornwell Kelb, speech to Research Committee of Harris County Heritage Society, 7 October 1986, Houston Heritage Society special collection.

<sup>54</sup> *Das Wochenblatt*, 4 September 1918.

<sup>55</sup> *LaGrange Zeitung*, 27 June 1918.

<sup>56</sup> Annual Report, April 1919, Houston Sängerbund records, 1874-1985, courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, University of Houston Libraries.

<sup>57</sup> The Sängerbund records claim more than 600 members for the year 1918 (*ibid.*).

<sup>58</sup> The age range was increased to 18-45 in September 1918—two months before the war ended. United States, *Second Report of the Provost Marshal General to the Secretary of War on the Operations of the Selective Service System to December 20, 1918*, (Washington, [D.C.]: Govt. Print. Off, 1919), 88.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>62</sup> Severance, *Deep Roots, Strong Branches*, 109.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>64</sup> Of the 14,392 men that registered for the draft in Harris County, 1,493 were inducted into the military. It is not known how many of the men who served from Harris County were German-American. United States, *Second Report*, 588; The historical museums of Klein and Spring hold photos of these men in uniform and their descendants proudly tell stories of their war service. Luanne Schultz, Interview by author, Spring, Texas, 7 November 2008.

<sup>65</sup> World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 [searchable index & images on-line]. Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2005, www.ancestry.com.

<sup>66</sup> Historical Census Browser, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php> [accessed April 28, 2010].

<sup>67</sup> Tippens, *Turning Germans Into Texans*, 195-96.

<sup>68</sup> Historical Census Browser, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php> [accessed April 28, 2010].

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Thornwell Kelb, speech to Research Committee of Harris County Heritage Society, 1987. The family that he spoke about was the Wunsche family of Spring, Texas.

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