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**The *Deutscher Literarischer Klub von Cincinnati*
and the German-American Elite**

It has become a truism in the field of German-American Studies that immigrants who settled in urban areas belonged to one of two groups: *Kirchendeutsche*, or Church Germans, and *Vereinsdeutsche*, or Club Germans. These categories continue to be widely accepted and repeated as a way of understanding the social dynamics of German-American communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and not without reason. The terms had found their way into scholarship at least as early as 1937, when Heinz Kloss published *Um die Einigung des Deutschamerikanertums: die Geschichte einer unvollendeten Volksgruppe*. Kloss does not carefully define his use of the words "kirchendeutsch" and "vereinsdeutsch," as though they were already a well-understood means of subdividing the German-Americans. Indeed, he refers to a speech at the 1933 German-American Congress in Philadelphia that addressed the relationship between the two groups.¹ Thus the divide between those who maintained their Germanic heritage via their church and those who did so through club membership was acknowledged at the time by the immigrants themselves, even if the contemporary nomenclature would not be developed until later.

This neat bipartite view of the German element has been challenged at times as a simplistic and ultimately unsatisfactory way of analyzing a large and complex community. For that reason, Frederick Luebke added a third category in his 1974 study *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I*. He called this group the German-American Elite, and defined it simply as "those persons who enjoyed noteworthy social and economic success."² Don Heinrich Tolzmann picked up Luebke's notion of an elite class among the German-Americans. He split the group into an economic elite (which corresponds to Luebke's definition) and an intellectual elite, which he defined as either "actively ethnic," "passively ethnic," or "marginally ethnic" according to the descriptions of intellectuals given by the social scientist Milton Gordon in his work *Assimilation in American Life*.³ The works by Luebke and Tolzmann recognized the need for a more nuanced understanding of the social divisions among urban German-Americans in the United States. However, the new category that they proposed remains vaguely defined at best. This study seeks to move beyond a mere implicit understanding of the German-American Elite through the explicit analysis of the history, demographics, and purpose of the *Deutscher Literarischer Klub von Cincinnati*.

The late nineteenth century was the Golden Age of society life in German-American communities throughout the United States. Cities with a sizeable German element boasted dozens of *Vereine* (clubs or societies), the best known of which were singing groups (*Chöre*) and the gymnastic societies known as the Turners. These clubs provided outlets for immigrants and their descendants to preserve what they considered

worthwhile aspects of their Germanic heritage. It follows, then, that the members of such societies are thought of as *Vereinsdeutsche*, defined by Luebke as those “whose bonds with German culture centered in secular societies.” Luebke goes on to say that “club Germans were oriented toward secular values and attitudes. Overwhelmingly urban in residence, they demonstrated a tendency to be liberal or even radical in their politics. Most significantly, they seemed to value, defend, and promote German language and culture as ends in themselves.”⁴ The Club Germans are thus distinguished from the Church Germans, whose primary ethnic anchor was their church. *Kirchendeutsche* are generally viewed as politically and socially conservative, and although they were divided along sectarian lines, they shared a commitment to the German language and to religious values.⁵

On the surface, the *Deutscher Literarischer Klub von Cincinnati* was a typical *Verein*: it served as a forum for its members to celebrate the great cultural achievements of the German-speaking world and to cultivate the life of the mind. As will be shown, however, its members were not typical *Vereinsdeutsche*. While they valued, defended, and promoted German language and culture as ends in themselves (per Luebke), they also exhibited a political and social conservatism that was more typical of the Church Germans, and in some cases they demonstrated a commitment to religious values that was eschewed by many—if not most—Club Germans. The members of the *Deutscher Literarischer Klub* blurred the distinction between Church Germans and Club Germans because they were neither of those things: they were the German-American Elite.

The Founding of the Club

The *Deutscher Literarischer Klub von Cincinnati* (hereafter: DLK) was founded by a group of men that included Heinrich A. Rattermann and Heinrich H. Fick, two of the most prominent figures in Cincinnati's German-American community. The purpose of the club, as stated in the first line of its original constitution, was “to cultivate and promote German literature within a small social circle.”⁶ This was not the first such club in Cincinnati. As early as 1839 a group called *Harmonie* offered a forum for lectures on poetry and music. This group faded after a few years and was succeeded by a *Deutscher Lese- und Bildungsverein*, which also did not last long. Other attempts were made by societies like the Masons and the Turners to form literary groups within the main organization, but since the cultivation and promotion of German literature was at best tangential to the goals of those societies, there remained a perceived need among some members of Cincinnati's German community for an organization dedicated exclusively to intellectual pursuits.⁷

The immediate inspiration for the DLK was actually an English-language group that called itself simply the “Literary Club.” On its roster were a number of German-American citizens of Cincinnati, notably Rattermann, Gustav Brühl, Wilhelm Mueller, and Thomas Vickers.⁸ These men desired to have a similar group in which German would be the *lingua franca*, and they joined with other members of the German-American community to make their idea a reality. On 28 November 1877, a group of seventeen founders met at Hoffman's wine tavern in the heart of the Over-the-Rhine district that marked the center of Germanic life in Cincinnati. Heinrich Rattermann led the meeting, during which the aforementioned mission statement was affirmed and some very basic by-laws were established. Key among those was the establishment of

lectures by members as the main activity of the club. An annually elected officer corps would establish a lecture schedule, and members were obliged to give their lectures in the established order. The founders left that meeting sensing that they had created an organization that would play an important role in German-American civic life in Cincinnati.⁹

Club Activities

In the beginning the group convened every two weeks. As membership grew, the club met weekly, usually on Wednesday evenings.¹⁰ In the 1700 club meetings between 1877 and 1927, members spoke on just about every subject that would capture the interest of human knowledge. Lectures given over a five-year period by Hermann Barnstorff, for example, illustrate the breadth of topics that were addressed:

Die Richtlinien der deutschen Lyrik
Theodore Dreiser
George Bernard Shaw
Anatole France und die Skeptik
Roman Rolland, ein guter Europäer
Frankreichs Reparationen nach 1870-71
Wall Street, die Geschichte einer Straße
Cecil Rhodes
Der Dollar, die Entwicklung der amerikanischen Währung
Brigham Young, der Moses der Mormonen¹¹

In his chronicle of the club's first fifty years, Barnstorff states that lectures of a polemical nature about religion and politics were not permitted.¹² Yet he himself presented on a religious topic (Brigham Young and the Mormons) and political issues (France's reparations after the Franco-Prussian war and Cecil Rhodes, the British imperialist for whom Rhodesia was named). He also addressed economic issues with his talks on Wall Street and the development of the American dollar. Presumably he was able to conform to established practice by discussing all of these topics in a non-controversial way. Barnstorff does reveal that religious discussions were accepted "as long as objectivity was maintained." Thus on at least two evenings the club discussed the notion of life after death "ohne das jemand merklichen Schaden an seiner Seele genommen hätte."¹³

The German-American press in Cincinnati covered the activities of many different *Vereine*, but the activities of the DLK received special attention. The tone of reportage in the *Tägliches Cincinnati Volksblatt* in particular seems to accord the DLK singular status among other organizations. One account begins: "Herr Ludwig Wojeczek, der fähige und taktvolle Präsident des Deutschen Litterarischen Klubs, war der Vortragende in der gestrigen Versammlung." Further in that same account, almost out of context, is the following line: "Es gibt in Cincinnati—und auch in vielen anderen amerikanischen Städten—keinen Verein, der dem Deutschen Litterarischen Klub von Cincinnati ebenbürtiges an die Seite stellen kann."¹⁴ There are no bylines for these small reports, so it is likely that they were written and submitted by the club secretary or some other member of the club. It also turns out that the local editor of the *Volksblatt* was Carl Pletz, who just happened to be a member of the DLK. Other accounts in the *Volksblatt*

give a good idea of what happened at club meetings. The following is a press report of one of the more mundane gatherings:

Der Deutsche Litterarische Klub lauschte gestern Abend einem philosophischen Vortrag des Dr. Geo. Fette, der sich als Thema "Das Kriterium der Gewißheit" gesetzt hatte. Die interessante Diskussion spielte auch auf das Gebiet der Geschichte über und hier war es Dr. Gotthard Deutsch, der einige der sogenannten Geschichtslügen festnagelte. In der folgenden Geschäftssitzung wurde Herr Heinrich Willig, einer unserer jüngeren deutschen Lehrer, einstimmig als Mitglied aufgenommen. Zwei Herren wurden zur Mitgliedschaft vorgeschlagen. Da die Wandgemälde des Clubs anfangen infolge von Ruß und Staub "Patina" anzusetzen, wurden sie zu einer durchgehenden Reinigung verurteilt, damit sie später wieder zu neuem Glanz erstehen können.¹⁵

Other newspaper accounts show that this was a typical format for the club's meetings: a lecture by one of the club members or by an honored guest, followed by discussion that used the lecture as a starting point, but sometimes crossed over to other topics. Official business was conducted in the form of recommending and confirming members, and plans were made for special ceremonies, such as *Gedenkfeiern*, as well as events to honor members of the club itself.

The press reports show that the club had strayed somewhat from its main purpose, which Rattermann had said was to "spur the members to literary activity and to elevate the form and the intellectual contents of their work through friendly discussions, critiques, and exchange of opinion."¹⁶ This suggests that the intended focus of the club was on the production of original literary works by its members, and to some extent this took place. But even Rattermann's extensive collected poetry dates mostly after 1899, and the published writers and poets among the membership remained in the minority. Club members did recite their own poetry at meetings and even published their literature and their research, although not systematically. Some of the members' lectures and poems found their way into newspapers and journals, and the DLK as an organization occasionally printed bound versions of lectures given during *Gedenkfeiern*. Publication in book form was rare. Rattermann himself, who was by far the most highly regarded and prolific writer in the club, was unable to find a publisher for his collected works, and this in spite of the fact that fellow club member Samuel Rosenthal was founder and president of a successful printing company in Cincinnati. Like Rattermann, Rosenthal was a rags-to-riches success story. One can only assume that he did not rise to prominence by making bad business decisions—it is thus telling that his press was not a reliable outlet for German-American literature by members of the DLK.

Club Demographics

Although the members of the DLK did not achieve much literary success, they still saw themselves as representatives of the intellectual elite. In his reflections on the ten-year anniversary of the club in 1887, Rattermann wrote of the founding members, "Alle waren Verteter des Geistesadels der deutschen Bevölkerung Cincinnati."¹⁷ Some thirty years after the DLK was founded, club president Dr. Otto Jüttner also claimed

a special role for the DLK and its members within the German-American community in Cincinnati:

Der Deutsche Litterarische Klub muß nicht zufrieden sein, sich für die geistige Elite des Cincinnatier Deutschthums zu halten und in selbstsüchtiger Weise ein geistiges Protzenthum zu verkörpern. Er muß, den Anforderungen der Zeit entsprechend, die geistige Führerrolle für die Deutschen Cincinnati's übernehmen.¹⁸

Jüttner's comments reveal how the club's members generally regarded their position within the Cincinnati German community. He perceives a kind of intellectual smugness among the members and makes it clear that they saw themselves as the intellectual elite.

Barnstorff's chronicle suggests that the DLK was envisioned as a complement to, if not opposite of, the Cincinnati *Turngemeinde*. While not openly disparaging the popular Turner societies, Barnstorff does imply that the DLK filled an intellectual void that could not be met by organizations that focused primarily on physical training, and it is probably with the Turners in mind that he describes the DLK as a group that "pursues intellectual sport."¹⁹ The distinct missions of these organizations are revealed by their membership profiles. The records of the DLK contain a number of inconsistencies, but enough verifiable information exists to give a good impression of the demographics of its members. Early records frequently included professional titles with member entries, but this information was sometimes omitted: for example, the diplomat Johann Bernhard Stallo is listed as one of four "Richter" (judges) in the record, but Judge A. K. Nippert carries no title. There are also several prominent medical doctors who are known to be members of the club, but who are not listed in the member registry. After 1899 no distinction is made in the records between medical doctors and PhDs, further complicating attempts to understand the club's membership profile. But for points of comparison with Turner membership the distinction between an MD and a PhD is of little importance: both groups belong to the well-educated upper class of German-American society. More than a quarter of the founding members were medical doctors, and over its first fifty years nearly 24% of club members carried the title of "Doctor" in one form or another.²⁰

Turner membership was quite different. The most accurate information about Turner occupations is from the years 1866, 1867, and 1869, which is slightly earlier than the founding years of the DLK, but which nevertheless reveals known membership trends among the American Turner societies. It would seem that the "sound mind, sound body" mission of the Turners would attract wholesale support from the medical and academic communities, and certainly there were representatives of these professions who were active in the Turners. But these "Gelehrter" account for an average of just 3.5% of membership during the years in question, compared with nearly 24% in the DLK. On the other end of the spectrum are the "Handwerker"—factory workers and skilled laborers who comprised 63% of Turner membership at that time.²¹ There is no evidence that this group was represented at all in the DLK, which seemed more inclined to admit factory owners than factory workers. The Turners, therefore, were much more

clearly an organization for the lower and middle classes, while the DLK was for the intellectual, social, and economic elite.

This elite status was maintained by the membership policy of the club. Admission was by invitation only. Prospective members had to be nominated by one current member and seconded by two others. After a waiting period, the vote was taken: a three-quarters majority was required for acceptance.²² With membership by invitation, it should come as no surprise that such a large percentage of the membership was doctors and academics, who presumably found prospects among professional colleagues. The record is silent on the personal qualities that led to acceptance into this inner circle, but it is logical to conclude that discussions of prospective members revolved around their academic, professional, and artistic qualities as well as their ability to contribute to the intellectual pursuits of the organization by lecturing on topics of interest to the general membership. Apparently there were plenty of men in Cincinnati who met these qualifications, for the club grew quickly. According to records, from its founding in 1877 to its 50-year anniversary in 1927, 361 members were accepted into the society. This averages out to about seven new members per year, but the actual enrollment patterns rose and fell over the years.²³

Women were not eligible for membership, and the club had no women's auxiliary, as did some other organizations at the time. The only access women had to the DLK was the occasional *Damenabend*, or ladies night. These were often connected to the *Gedenkfeiern*, special ceremonies to commemorate great figures of German art, letters, and music. Women were first invited to the *Gedenkfeier* on 15 February 1881, to mark 100 years since the death of Lessing. Other examples of *Damenabende* that coincided with *Gedenkfeiern* were the 200th birthday of Johann Sebastian Bach in 1885, a Brahms celebration in 1898, and a Heine celebration in 1906. For most of the club's history these *Damenabende* took place relatively frequently, but some club members were strictly opposed to the participation of women in their intellectual pursuits, and so there were periods when no *Damenabende* were offered in deference to that segment of the membership.²⁴

The Parameters of the German-American Elite

It is apparent from printed comments that the members of the DLK regarded themselves as the intellectual elite in Cincinnati's German community. Analysis of club demographics supports their position, at least to the extent that education and occupation can indicate cultural and intellectual sophistication. However, club leaders did not limit their claims of cultural hegemony to Cincinnati—they saw themselves as intellectual missionaries charged with bringing German culture to America. A steadfast belief in the primacy of all things German pervades the written record of the DLK. When considering the club's purpose, co-founder Wilhelm Mueller wrote: "Let our German traditions, our soul qualities, and our cultural heritage be used in giving our best efforts and our most earnest work for the enrichment of the life of the New World."²⁵ This world view is echoed in Otto Jüttner's 1910 address to club members:

Der Deutsche ist der vornehmste Träger der heutigen Kultur geworden. Er ist der Vorkämpfer einer Sache, die in ihren letzten Konsequenzen die Lösung aller Probleme moderner Humanität, sowohl auf dem Gebiete des Geistes

als auch des Herzens, in sich schließt. Jeder Deutsche ist ein Sproß jenes Volkes, welches heute an der Spitze der Menschheit marschirt. In diesem geistigen, kulturellen Sinne ein Deutscher zu sein, heißt an dem Vermächtnis theilzunehmen, welches uns die große Vergangenheit als kostbares Erbe hinterlassen hat zu unserer eigenen Veredlung und zu Nutz' und Frommen der ganzen Menschheit. Es ist der Adel des Blutes, die Vornehmheit des Geistes, die uns das Land unserer Geburt mit auf den Weg gegeben hat, uns, die wir auf fremdem Boden deutsche Kulturarbeit thun.²⁶

Jüttner's speech suggests a rigid adherence to Germanness that was both the strength and the weakness of the DLK: on the one hand it is only by virtue of their reverence for their German heritage that the club existed at all, but on the other hand it reveals a palpable *Besserwisserei* vis-à-vis American culture that would contribute to resentment and distrust of German-Americans during World War I.

The world view reflected in the remarks by Mueller and Jüttner calls to mind Milton Gordon's description of the "actively ethnic intellectual." In his effort to refine the definition of the German-American Elite, Tolzmann subdivided the group into an economic elite and an intellectual elite. He cited Luebke to define the former group and Gordon to define the latter. Intellectuals, according to Gordon, are "people for whom ideas, concepts, literature, music, painting, the dance have intrinsic meaning—are a part of the social-psychological atmosphere which one breathes."²⁷ These people are typically found among the professional ranks, including teachers, professors, journalists, lawyers, and doctors. Gordon identifies three "ideal types" of intellectual responses to the conflicting forces of ethnic heritage and cultural assimilation, the representatives of which he calls the "actively ethnic intellectual," the "passively ethnic intellectual," and the "marginally ethnic intellectual."²⁸ The first type emerges as the most relevant to this study:

The "actively ethnic intellectual" remains within his ethnic group and focuses his intellectual interests precisely on his ethnicity. He is the cultural historian of the group, the theologian, the communal leader, the apologist, the scholar of its art, its music, and its literature. While he maintains a respectable acquaintanceship with the broader ideological currents and events around him, his primary interests and passions are reserved for the racial, religious, or nationality background ethos in which he considers his roots to be firmly placed. His is a confident approach, and he appears to be spared many of the problems of marginality.²⁹

The personal qualities of the most vocal members of the DLK correspond closely to Gordon's description of this type. These men revered German music, art, and literature and they believed Germans had made the greatest contributions to world culture, particular when compared with the United States. By establishing themselves as disseminators of the German cultural legacy, the high esteem in which they held that culture fed their own self-esteem.

The DLK members who could be described as "actively ethnic intellectuals" may have been in the minority. In his 1910 speech, Jüttner complains that only about thirty percent of the membership regularly attended the weekly meetings, and he calls on

those who attend just one or two meetings per year to resign from the club. Whether they actually did so is unknown, but the observation by the club's president shows that a sizeable majority of members did not share his active commitment to the DLK and its mission.³⁰ The thirty percent who did participate fully in club activities can be thought of as actively ethnic intellectuals. Gordon surmises that of the three intellectual sub-groups, the actively ethnic type is the smallest within its ethnic group; this appears to hold true within the DLK as well.³¹

Gordon's second category, the "passively ethnic intellectual," finds it "easier, safer, or more in line with his personality style" to remain "within the subsocietal boundaries of his ethnic group and social class." Thus a passively ethnic German intellectual will associate primarily with other ethnic German intellectuals and is either not able or not willing to interact with intellectuals outside his ethnic group.³² It is likely that many DLK members were passively ethnic intellectuals in accordance with Gordon's typology. Indeed, the structure of the DLK made it almost inevitable that much of its membership would fit that description. Since potential members had to be admirers of Germanic culture and speak fluent German, the club was essentially limited to recruiting within Cincinnati's German-American community. This is supported by the fact that the membership roster for the club's first fifty years consists almost exclusively of German names. The members that Jüttner complains about may have been merely the typical rank and file that forms a substantial portion of almost any organization. At some point they had been engaged enough in the German-American intellectual community to have met the relatively strict membership standards of the DLK, but they lacked the devotion to cause of the active thirty percent.

It seems unlikely that many members of the DLK would have conformed to Gordon's third type, the "marginally ethnic intellectual":

As the appellation indicates, he wears his ethnicity lightly, if not in his own eyes at least in the eyes of the world. Whatever his social psychology, he finds ethnic community unsatisfactory and takes his friends, and probably even his spouse, where he finds them, so long as they share his fascination with Kafka and his passion for Heinrich Schuetz.³³

Gordon's study explores how people of different ethnic backgrounds assimilate into American life, so for him the marginally ethnic intellectuals are of greatest interest. They are the group that most easily sheds its ethnic identity in favor of established society. People who fall into this category would have lacked the reverence for German culture that was a prerequisite for admission to the DLK.

Luebke had defined the German-American Elite as "those persons who enjoyed noteworthy social and economic success," and by any objective standard this can be said of the active DLK membership. However, other comments by Luebke would seem to disqualify the DLK as representative of the Elite:

The German-American elite . . . found little in the vereins to attract them. While these better-educated and more richly talented persons would often retain memberships in some of the clubs, they rarely gave them leadership. As upwardly mobile persons, they were generally more interested in developing contacts with established society than in maintaining their bonds with a

disintegrating ethnic group. The result was that leadership positions often fell to persons who had recently immigrated, persons for whom German culture remained intensely important.³⁴

The members of the DLK were among the "better-educated and more richly talented" people in Cincinnati's German community, and it would not be misleading to describe them as upwardly mobile. Some, like Rattermann and Rosenthal, came from modest backgrounds and rose to economic prominence by founding successful businesses. Most of the DLK's most prominent figures, however, were not recent immigrants to the United States. Yet they also founded their own *Verein*, provided its leadership, and recruited members from within their ethnic group.

Luebke's definition conflicts with the evidence that the DLK formed an Elite subgroup within Cincinnati's German-American community. He bases his description on socio-economic factors rather than cultural and intellectual ones. In that sense Luebke's Elite corresponds closely to Gordon's marginally ethnic intellectual. But ethnicity is not necessarily the basis of identity for that type of person, and if they are so far removed from their ethnic identity, it ceases to become meaningful to describe them as "German-American" at all. Thus the marginally ethnic intellectual—and by extension Luebke's socio-economic elite—is not a useful way of describing the German-American Elite. It is perhaps in recognition of the shortcomings of Luebke's definition that Tolzmann expanded it to include an intellectual component. Tolzmann's refinement represented an improvement over Luebke, but in defining the intellectual elite he merely cites Gordon's three categories without comment on the relevance of each type to a discussion of ethnic heritage. As has been shown, not all are equally applicable to a definition of the German-American Elite.

Defining the German-American Elite

Luebke, Tolzmann, and other scholars have been careful not to speak in absolutes when defining the German-American subcommunities. As Luebke prudently observed:

It is possible to draw too sharp a line of distinction between the church Germans and the club Germans. Not all the societies, of course, were antipathetic to religious institutions. It was more often the other way around. A *verein* was unacceptable to the church Germans to the extent that it partook of the heritage of the Forty-eighters. That is to say, if the *vereins* were anticlerical, rationalist, politically active, liberal, or radical; if they tended to give precedence to cultural and social values over religious values; if they advocated German-language instruction in the public schools and opposed parochial schools; or if their leadership and constituency included large numbers of turners and lodge members, then the church Germans were likely to look elsewhere for their associations.³⁵

The line between these two established groups and the German-American Elite is similarly indistinct. Like *Vereinsdeutsche*, the members of the DLK celebrated their

cultural heritage via their club. As has been shown above, cultural values were preeminent in the DLK; indeed, they were the very reason for its existence. Further, one of the club's founders and its honorary president was Heinrich H. Fick, who was perhaps the strongest advocate for German instruction in the public school system in Cincinnati. Fick served as Supervisor of the German Department of Cincinnati Public Schools until the anti-German sentiment during the First World War put an end to German instruction. It would seem that this combination of factors would lead *Kirchendeutsche* to avoid associating with the DLK. However, unlike most *Vereine* the DLK roster included members who would usually be labeled Church Germans. At least eleven were pastors of Cincinnati churches, the most prominent among them being Hans Haupt, who became pastor at the United Protestant Evangelical St. Peter's Church in 1910, joined the DLK in 1913, and served as an officer in the club for many years, including as president.³⁶

The welcoming stance toward religion was not limited to Christians. One honored member of the club was Dr. Gotthard Deutsch, a prominent Jewish scholar and professor at Hebrew Union College. Judge Friedrich S. Spiegel, who presided over the court of common pleas in Cincinnati, was also Jewish.³⁷ Thus not only were people of other faiths admitted to the DLK, but given the club's admission policy they must have been actively recruited and approved by three-quarters of the members. The requirement in the constitution that club functions be governed by an air of political and religious neutrality seems to have been observed. Members like Pastor Hans Haupt show that religious persons could be looked to as leaders, and Deutsch and Spiegel reveal interfaith tolerance as a general club principle.

The fact that women were not eligible for membership suggests that the members of the DLK were socially conservative. There is also evidence that they were politically conservative as well. A newspaper account from 1917 gives some insight into the political bias of the active membership:

Der Deutsche Litterarische Klub hat sein reiches Vereinsjahr gestern mit dem üblichen Sommerfest beschlossen, das bei Phillipi in Westwood gefeiert wurde. Die Theilnahme war nicht sonderlich stark, aber die Getreuen des Klubs fehlten dennoch nicht, und der Abend verfloß in heiterer Weise. Nach erfolgter Labung . . . wurde zur Fidelitas übergegangen, die in muntern Reden und heiteren Liedern ihren Ausdruck fand. Herr S. Einstein hatte einen besondern lustigen Einfall, indem er einen Delegaten zur Stockholmer Sozialistenkonferenz ernannte. Da demselben jedoch die Pässe verweigert werden, ist nicht daran zu denken, daß aus der Sache etwas wird, obgleich der Klub seinen tüchtigsten Mann für den Posten ausgewählt hatte.³⁸

The notion that it would be especially funny for a member of the DLK to attend the Stockholm Socialists Conference suggests that their politics lay at the opposite end of the spectrum. If they had embraced the kind of political liberalism associated with Club Germans like the Turners, Sol Einstein's suggestion would have been met with a different kind of enthusiasm. The DLK appears to be the kind of politically and socially conservative *Verein* that was acceptable to Church Germans.

The DLK straddles the boundary between *vereinsdeutsch* and *kirchendeutsch*. It shares similarities with both groups, but is distinguished from them by the demographics

of its membership, its devotion to intellectual pursuits, and its self-appointed role as cultural arbiter. Its leadership was comprised of actively ethnic intellectuals, while the rank and file likely fell into the passively intellectual group as defined by Gordon. There must have been religious people who were Club Germans, and political radicals among the Church Germans. Certainly there were actively and passively ethnic intellectuals in all segments of German-American society. But it is the combination of all these factors—embodied by the *Deutscher Literarischer Klub von Cincinnati*—that defines the Elite.

In sum, the German-American Elite is a sub-community consisting largely of well-educated persons who shared a reverence for the language and the cultural achievements of German-speaking people. They regarded themselves as guardians and purveyors of the German cultural aesthetic. Because their identity was so closely tied to their Germanic heritage, the German-American Elite was composed by degrees of actively and passively ethnic intellectuals. They tended to come from the professional ranks of education, law, and medicine, but their devotion to the life of the mind was more important than economic status. Indeed, definitions of the elite that are based on socio-economic status are of questionable value since they correspond closely to Gordon's marginally ethnic intellectual. That group discarded its ethnicity so readily that it is disingenuous to think of it as German-American at all.

Epilogue

The *Deutscher Literarischer Klub von Cincinnati* no longer exists. The club had recovered from the anti-German hysteria of the first World War, and a newspaper account from 1937 suggests that the club was entering its seventh decade from a position of strength: "Der Klub scheint im letzten halben Jahr in eine neue Periode des Aufblühens geschritten zu sein, was aus vielen Neuanmeldungen und dem guten Besuch der Vorträge ersichtlich ist."³⁹ That the club nevertheless dissolved shortly thereafter is not remarkable—many German-American organizations ceased operations as a result of the conflicts with Germany. What is remarkable is that it survived as long as it did. Even without the world wars, it seems likely that a society like the DLK would have become increasingly marginalized as fewer and fewer Cincinnati German-Americans could claim a favorable bond with the old country, and also speak the language. With a membership that never numbered much more than 70 in any given year, the club was small compared to the Turner societies and the various singing groups. Yet among its members were many of the most influential shapers of German-American civic life in Cincinnati. That in itself is reason enough for the *Deutscher Literarischer Klub* to receive closer attention, but it also serves as a tangible example of the German-American Elite and provides a model for the study of similar groups.

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Notes

¹ Heinz Kloss, *Um die Einigung des Deutschamerikanertums: die Geschichte einer unvollendeten Volksgruppe* (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1937), 31-36.

² Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 44.

³ Don Heinrich Tolzmann, "The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1983), 38-39.

⁴ Luebke, 42.

⁵ Tolzmann, 34.

⁶ The first line of the club's constitution states: "Der 'Deutsche Literarische Club von Cincinnati' hat zum Zweck, die Deutsche Literatur im engen sozialen Kreise zu pflegen und zu fördern." From an 1881 pamphlet published by Mecklenborg and Rosenthal of Cincinnati. This is the earliest known print version of the club's constitution.

⁷ See the chronicle compiled by Hermann Barnstorff and published by the club, *Festschrift zum goldenen Jubiläum des Deutschen Literarischen Klubs von Cincinnati 1877-1927*, pp. 7-8. The narrative portion of Barnstorff's *Festschrift* was reprinted as a special insert in the *Cincinnati Freie Presse*, Nov. 6, 1927.

⁸ The Literary Club of Cincinnati still exists and claims to be the oldest literary club in the United States. See John Johnston, "Cincinnati's Literary Club quietly marks 150 years," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 25 October 1999. For membership information see their centennial publication *The Literary Club of Cincinnati 1849-1949*, pg. 13.

⁹ Barnstorff, 8-9.

¹⁰ Unlike its English-language counterpart, the DLK did not have its own building. Instead, rooms were rented over the years in various German taverns and lodge halls. The location changed frequently. See Barnstorff, pp. 13-17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19. Translation: "without anyone incurring noticeable damage to his soul."

¹⁴ *Tägliches Cincinnati Volksblatt*, April 12, 1917. Translation: "Mr. Ludwig Wojeczek, the capable and tactful president of the German Literary Club, was the lecturer at yesterday's meeting." And later: "There is in Cincinnati—and also in many other American cities—no club which can claim to be the equal of the German Literary Club of Cincinnati."

¹⁵ *Tägliches Cincinnati Volksblatt*, March 22, 1917. Translation: "The German Literary Club heard yesterday evening a philosophical lecture by Dr. Georg Fette, who discussed the topic 'The Criterion of Certainty.' The interesting discussion touched also on the topic of history, and here it was Dr. Gotthard Deutsch who nailed down some of the so-called historical falsehoods. In the following business meeting, Mr. Heinrich Willig, one of our young German teachers, was unanimously accepted as a member. Two gentlemen were recommended for membership. Since the murals of the club have begun to acquire a patina of soot and dust, they have been sentenced to a thorough cleaning so that they might regain their luster."

¹⁶ Barnstorff, 18. Rattermann's comments in German were: "die Mitglieder zu schriftstellerischer Tätigkeit anzuregen und durch Meinungsaustausch, freundliche Besprechungen und Kritiken die Form und den geistigen Inhalt ihrer Arbeit zu heben."

¹⁷ Dr. Karl G. Zwick, "Aerzte des Literarischen Klubs," "Sonderbeilage" of the *Cincinnati Freie Presse*, Nov. 6, 1927, p. 14. Zwick quotes Rattermann: "All of them were representatives of the intellectual aristocracy among the German population of Cincinnati."

¹⁸ Otto Jüttner, "Der Deutsche Literarische Klub von Cincinnati im Lichte seiner eigentlichen Bestimmung. Rede, gehalten vor dem Deutschen Literarischen Klub von Cincinnati während der Schlußversammlung des Vereinsjahres 1909-10, am 7. Dezember 1910," p. 8. Published as a pamphlet by the DLK. Translation: "The DLK must not be satisfied with regarding itself as the intellectual elite of Cincinnati's German community and in an egotistical way to embody intellectual showing off. It must, in accordance with the needs of the times, assume the intellectual leadership role for Cincinnati's Germans."

¹⁹ Describing precursors to the DLK, Barnstorff writes: "Die 'Tumgemeinde' versuchte an ihren geistigen Turntagen und Abenden dem Bedürfnis nach intellektueller Befriedigung entgegenzukommen. Doch konnte solches Bestreben nur stiefkindlich sich entwickeln und mußte sich dem Hauptziel der Turnerschaft, der körperlichen Ausbildung, unterordnen" (8). He then refers to his society as a "literarischer Klub, der geistigen Sport treiben will" (9).

²⁰ Zwick, 14-15. Additional membership statistics are compiled from the "Mitglieder-Verzeichnis" appended to the Barnstorff *Festschrift* (43-52) and supplemented by information in the 1881 program pamphlet (see note 6) and in articles published over two decades in the *Tägliches Cincinnati Volksblatt* and the *Cincinnati Freie Presse*.

²¹ See Dolores Hoyt, *A Strong Mind in a Strong Body: Libraries in the German-American Turner Movement* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 24.

²² Barnstorff, 9.

²³ Ten or more new members were admitted in 1877-1881, 1886, 1888, 1903, 1906-07, 1923, and 1926. Two or fewer members were admitted in 1894, 1896, 1898, 1901, 1917-1921, and 1927. The club did not meet at all from 1919 to 1921.

²⁴ Barnstorff, 21.

²⁵ Quoted in Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *German-American Literature* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1977), 216-17.

²⁶ Jüttner, 5. Translation: "The German is the most distinguished representative of contemporary culture. He is the champion of a cause which has as a final consequence the solution to all the problems of modern humanity, both in the realm of the intellect as well as the heart. Every German is a descendant of that folk, which marches at the head of humankind. To be a German in this intellectual, cultural sense means to take part in this legacy, which the great past left as a valuable inheritance for our own ennoblement and for the greater good of all humanity. It is the nobility of blood, the refinement of intellect, which the land of our birth has bequeathed to us, we who practice German cultural activities on foreign soil."

²⁷ Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 224.

²⁸ Gordon, 227-28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

³⁰ On page 4 of his 1910 talk, Jüttner says "Der regelmäßige Besuch der Versammlungen ist die erste, vornehmste und bedeutungsvollste Pflicht eines jeden Mitgliedes."

³¹ Gordon, 229.

³² *Ibid.*, 228.

³³ Gordon, 228-29.

³⁴ Luebke, 44.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁶ Other pastors included Erich Becker, Eugen Ernst, Ernst Guntrum, E. T. Henzel, Reinhold Köstlin, J. C. Kramer, Jakob Pister, W. L. Scheding, J. C. Scholz, and Eduard Votz.

³⁷ See Jonathan D. Sarna and Nancy H. Klein, *Jews of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati: Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience, 1989), pp. 73 and 108 for Deutsch and p. 101 for Spiegel. Several other members of the DLK bear the last names of known Jewish families of Cincinnati, but ties to those families could not be confirmed.

³⁸ *Tägliches Cincinnati Volksblatt*, June 28, 1917. Translation: "Yesterday the German Literary Club concluded a rich season of meetings with the customary summer festival, which was celebrated at Philippi in Westwood. Attendance was not especially strong, but the club faithful was not absent and the evening passed in a cheerful manner. After refreshments . . . came merriment in the form of lively discussion and cheerful songs. Herr S. Einstein had the especially funny idea of naming a delegate to the Stockholm Socialists Conference. Since that person had been denied travel documents it seems that nothing will come of the matter, although the club had chosen its most capable member for the post."

³⁹ *Cincinnati Freie Presse*, December 5, 1937. Translation: "The Club appears in the last half year to have entered into a new time of blossoming, which is evident from many new members and good attendance at the lectures."

