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## German Immigrants in Rural Southern Indiana: A Geographical View

In this essay, I examine German immigration and its role in shaping rural Knox County in southern Indiana, looking at the size, spatial distribution, regions of origin and socioeconomic structure of the population. I focus on characteristics of the immigrants like the clear inclination of Germans from the same regions of origin to settle together, their attitude towards land ownership, their persistence of settlement or the frequent founding of churches as an important symbol within the ethnic colony. The results presented here agree with other researchers' results concerning different rural regions of the United States as to the spatial peculiarities mentioned above.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the Germans in Indiana acted very similarly to the ones in other states, leading to the conclusion that these tendencies can be regarded as typical of this ethnic group.

Indiana's German-born population in 1850 was fourth largest in the Old Northwest, but Indiana had the highest proportion of German-born among the foreign-born (see table 1). For the entire United States, Indiana ranked seventh, reflecting relatively heavy settlement by this immigrant group. The foreign-born population of Indiana grew from 55,546 in 1850 to 120,439 in 1860 and 136,465 in 1870. The biggest wave of German immigration to Indiana took place in the 1850s when 37,325 persons immigrated. Their number reached its peak in 1890 with 84,900 (see figure 1). In the same year, the part of the German population in the category of "foreign-born" peaked with a share of 58.1 percent.

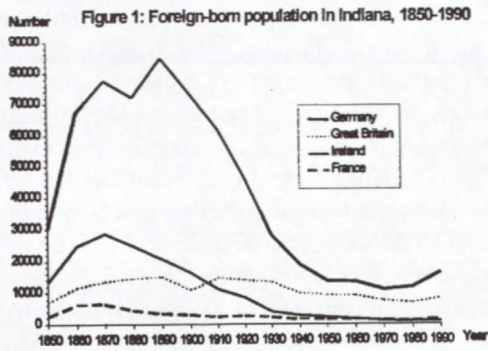
A decline in German immigration to the U. S. can be seen across the state after 1890. Despite this constant reduction, the German-born population outnumbered the rest of the foreign-born population between 1850 and 1990. In the period between 1850 and 1900, the German-born population represented more than 50 percent of the foreign-born population of Indiana.<sup>2</sup> In other words, more people emigrated to Indiana from Germany than from any other country. Because of the geographic origins of the first settlers, the timing of settlement and the nature of their early migration routes, Indiana's settlement extended from the south to the north. Pioneers ferried across the Ohio from Kentucky or ended their long down-river journey in one of the small towns on the Indiana side. From there they set off on trails and traces into the

Table 1: German-born population in the Old  
Northwest in 1850

*States of the Old Northwest*  
German-born population

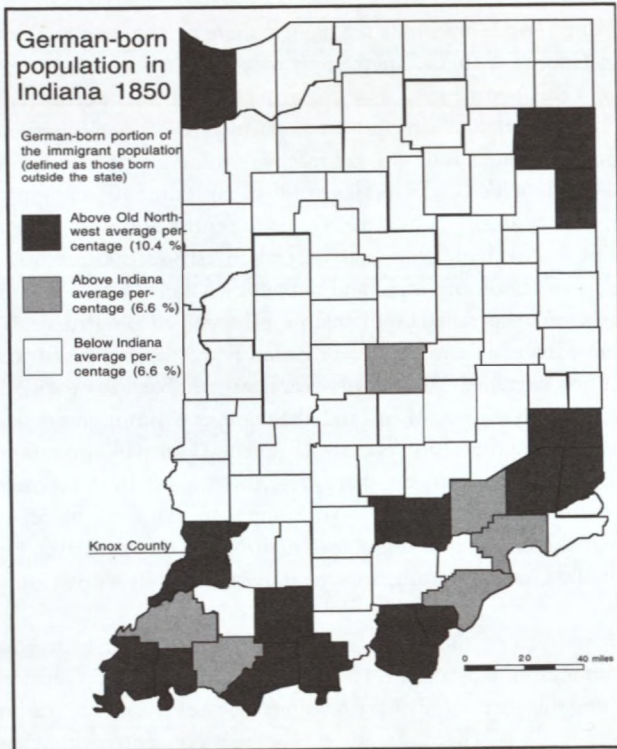
	Absolute <i>Share</i> <sup>1</sup>
Ohio	112,990 51.4 %
Illinois	39,681 35.3 %
Wisconsin	39,030 35.6 %
Indiana	30,398 53.4 %
Michigan	10,248 18.4 %
<b>Total ONW</b>	<b>232,247</b> <b>41.9 %</b>

<sup>1</sup> of the foreign-born population of the state  
Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1850



Source: U.S. Census of Population (1850-1990)

Map 1



Data based on Gregory S. Rose, "Indiana's Ethnicity," 621ff.  
Cartography: K. Dehne



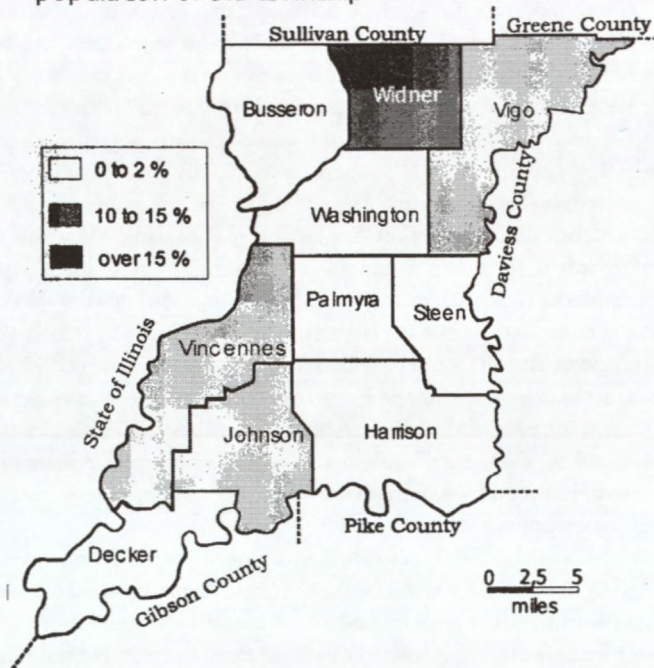
interior.<sup>3</sup> Topography also played a role, because the northern part of the state consisted of wetlands which were more difficult to farm. The majority of German immigrants also adopted this pattern.<sup>4</sup> German concentrations commonly appeared in the southern quarter of Indiana, particularly along the Ohio River. In 1850, Germans accounted for 6.6 percent of Indiana's immigrants. This is below the Old Northwest average of 10.4 percent, although many counties like Knox, which is located in southwestern Indiana, had considerably above average percentages (see map 1).<sup>5</sup> From 1850 to 1910 most immigrants to Knox County came from Germany, followed by Ireland, France and England. As shown in figure 1, the strongest German immigration occurred during the 1850s, when 546 Germans settled there (see figure 2). By 1870, 1,447 residents of Knox County had been born in Germany.<sup>6</sup> These numbers allow the conclusion that especially in the nineteenth century the Germans in Knox County appeared to have had some influence which was at least caused by their large number.

In order to find out how many immigrants had settled down in each of Knox County's townships the share of the foreign-born population of each one in relation to its entire population has to be examined. Looking at the distribution of the foreign-born population in the ten townships of Knox County one can see that in 1870 Widner Township was the favorite rural location for immigrants to settle (see map 2).

As Widner Township holds the highest share of the foreign-born population in rural Knox County with 15.7 percent, it makes sense to look at the German-born population in this township.<sup>7</sup> The German share of 98.1 percent in 1870 and 96.7 percent in 1880 among the foreign-born population in Widner Township is remarkable. These high percentages hint at a far reaching influence of German immigrants on Widner Township which was founded in 1804.<sup>8</sup> In 1860, 610 immigrants from Prussia formed the largest group with 50 percent of the entire German immigration to Knox County. The second highest share represented Germans who simply named "Germany" as a region of origin and did not give a more detailed answer. The high portion of these "unspecified Germans" probably came from Prussia. It is very unlikely that they came instead from Bavaria or Baden as the percentage of immigrants from these states was extremely low twenty years later on. Bavaria provided 100 people (8 percent) as a region of origin. In 1880, the number of immigrants from Prussia had increased to 841 and therefore its share of the total German immigration had risen to 63 percent. The second largest share were the "unspecified Germans." Again the third largest amount of immigrants had come from Bavaria with 55 immigrants, but their share of the German immigration had dropped to 4 percent.<sup>9</sup> Figure 3 shows a selection of the German immigrants' regions of origin in Knox County in 1860 and 1880.

A comparison of the years 1860 and 1880 in respect to regions of origin of German immigrants illustrates a change in the structure of German immigration. The increasing numbers of Prussians within the twenty years preceding 1880 can be regarded as a result of chain migration. The high concentration of the Prussians in Knox County and especially Widner Township results from the clearly recognizable tendency of Germans from the same regions of origin to settle down together. They followed their natural impulse of moving close to people they already knew or they

Map 2: Foreign-born population in Knox County, Indiana, by township, 1870, related to the total population of the township



Data based on U.S. Census of Population, 1870  
 Cartography: K. Dehne



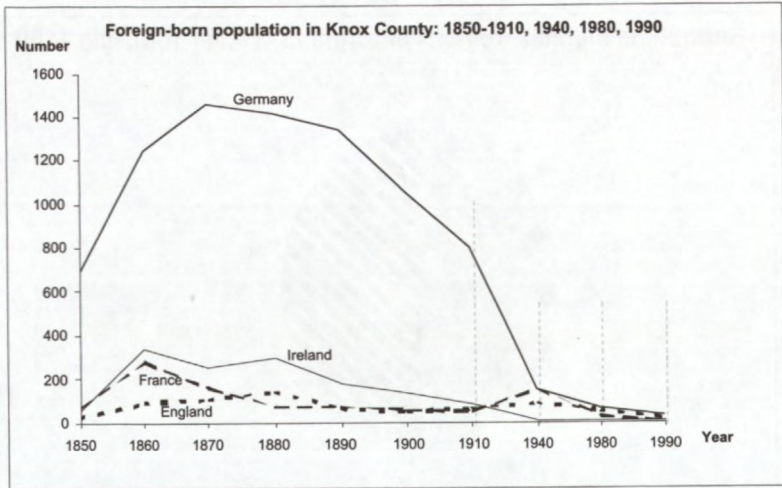
could talk to in their native language. This behavior had several advantages. The integration in the new country became much easier when no language barriers existed in the community, supporting neighborhood help.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the phenomenon of chain migration cannot be observed in connection with other German immigrants such as the Bavarians, though the Bavarians' emigration intensity into the United States was equal to that of the Prussians in 1870.<sup>11</sup>

There are several probable reasons behind the greater amount of chain migration to Knox County among the Prussians than Bavarians. First of all, the considerably higher number of the Prussians settling there had a more significant influence on the migration habits of the compatriots at home because of the larger number of emigrants' enthusiastic letters sent home: fewer immigrants from Bavaria also meant fewer letters home. Another reason could be seen in the Bavarian-born population's distribution throughout Knox County: In 1860, 4 percent of them lived in Widner Township where 17 percent of all Prussians were living. The share of Bavarians living in Vincennes City was 88 percent, compared to only 43 percent of Prussians.<sup>12</sup> Another motive for the chain migration of the Prussians was—as the examples of Widner Township and Vincennes City show—the different spatial distribution and density of Prussians in Knox County in contrast to that of the Bavarians. The dense concentration of Prussians in the countryside of Knox County provided the Germans with the chance to purchase a farm, which was impossible for the Bavarians within their urban agglomeration in Vincennes. As the increase of the Prussian population also in Widner Township shows (see figures 4 and 5), these rural settlements—which became “Prussian islands”—were consequently a necessary requirement for the chain migration of the immigrants' identical regions of origin.

Thus, Prussians did not only settle in Knox County in higher numbers, they also formed a denser concentration within rural areas compared to the Bavarians. An example of chain migration is described by Herman Froeschke (born in Berlin in 1845; died in Vincennes in 1920) who immigrated from Prussia: He had four brothers who had emigrated before him and had settled down in Knox County.<sup>13</sup> Gerhard Holscher (born in Coesfeld in 1823) who emigrated from Bremen to the U. S. and reached New Orleans on 15 May 1847, followed his brothers who had arrived there some months before.<sup>14</sup> This demonstrates that the way of the Germans bound for Knox County was often part of the “migration-chain” which was a kind of link between their homes and their destinations.

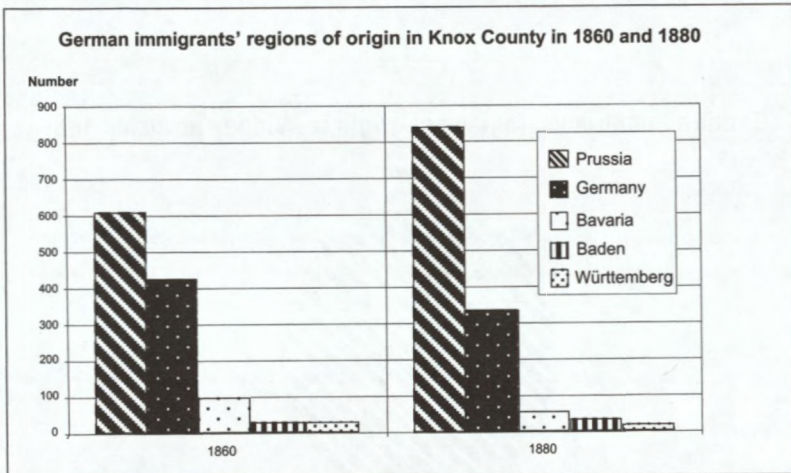
The generally higher percentage of male German emigrants to the United States<sup>15</sup> also applies to Widner Township. In the year 1880, 132 of a total of 236 Germans living in Widner Township were male. Thus, the percentage of male emigrants (56 percent) was 12 percent higher than that of females. The high frequency of identical surnames in Widner Township gives evidence of the large number of related families. On the one hand this is due to the fact that whole families immigrated, on the other, it is a result of the chain migration. The high number of relationships also was increased by the choice of the partner who almost exclusively was a person chosen from the German community. As the German immigrants preferred staying within their socio-ethnic neighborhood, the number of marriages outside their own ethnic community

Figure 2



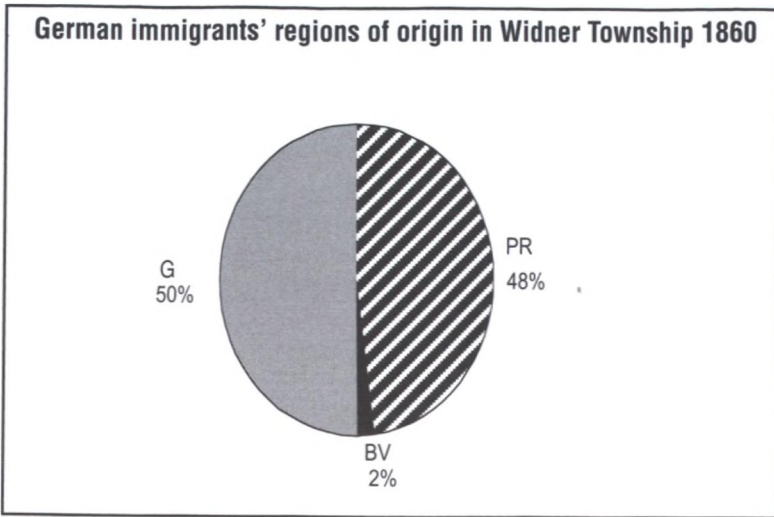
Source: For 1850 and 1860: Manuscript Schedules of the Census of Population; 1870 to 1910, 1940, 1980 and 1990: U.S. Census of Population

Figure 3



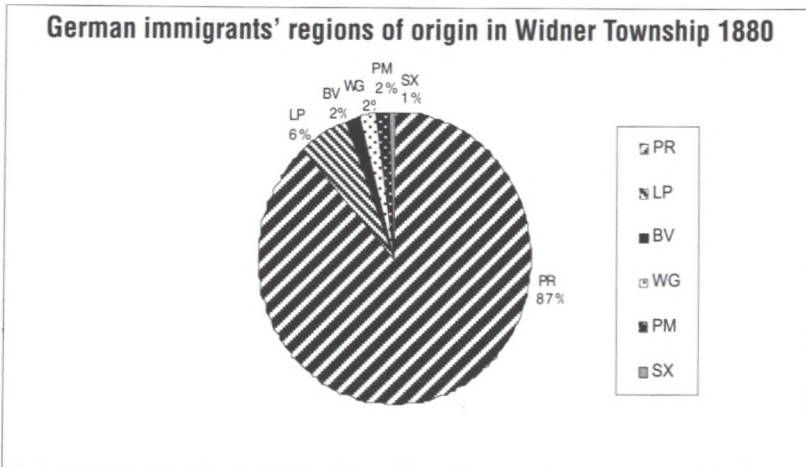
Source: Manuscript Schedules of the Census of Population, Eighth Census of the United States, Knox County, Indiana, 1860; for 1880: Connie A. McBirney and Robert M. Taylor, eds., *Peopling Indiana: The Ethnic Experience* (Indianapolis, 1996), 150f.

Figure 4



Source: Manuscript Schedule of the Census of Population, Eighth Census of the United States, Knox County, Indiana, 1860

Figure 5



Source: Manuscript Schedule of the Census of Population, Tenth Census of the United States, Knox County, Indiana, 1880 [Prussia (PR), Lippe (LP), Bavaria (BV), Württemberg (WG), Pommern (PM), Saxony (SX)]



remained very low, partly because of this social relationship and partly as a result of it. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century only 28 percent of American-born children with German fathers in the entire United States and 14 percent of those with German mothers came from "mixed marriages."<sup>16</sup> In the towns the number of marriages outside their own ethnic group was generally much higher than in the rural areas because of the fact that the population in the towns was much more heterogeneous.<sup>17</sup> In 1880, 81 percent of a total of 98 married German-born men were married to German-born brides. Furthermore, 16 percent of them had American-born wives, whose parents had both been born in Germany. Only 3 percent had married American-born women whose parents had also been born in the U. S. Thus, in the year 1880, 97 percent of the married men in Widner Township had married either German women or American-born women of German parents.

The "cultural baggage" of the German immigrants was most typical with regard to their attitude towards land ownership which was much more important for them than for those who considered America's land resources as unlimited: they knew the meaning of population pressure and lack of land.<sup>19</sup> Compared with other immigrant groups, they stayed where they had settled down and very rarely sold their land in order to make profit. On the contrary, they tried to buy adjacent land for brothers and sisters or for their children and worked it over generations as family enterprises. This is why German settlements in the country often grew in number as well as in size while many of the American neighbors eventually sold their land and moved westward. This fact led to "German islands" in remote areas of the Midwest into the twentieth century—at least in terms of conservative, family-orientated farmers' values and remembrances of Germany. In many cases immigrants from the rural underclass succeeded in becoming landowners.<sup>20</sup>

Examinations of land ownership in Widner Township confirm the assumption that land ownership was most important for the Germans. Although they represented just 13 percent of the population of Widner Township in 1880,<sup>21</sup> they owned almost one third of the land there (32 percent). The Americans—representing 87 percent of the total population—possessed 68 percent of the township area.<sup>22</sup>

The Germans had acquired their land together, mostly in the eastern part of the township. The reason for this was that only here was unsettled land available, as the western part had already been sold and settled on because of its better soil.<sup>23</sup> The increase in number and size of the land owned by German immigrants was a consequence of the inclination of Germans to settle as near as possible to their ethnic group. The surface of the area acquired by Germans and by their descendants increased from 1880 to 1903<sup>24</sup>—and apart from that up to 1978—with the Germans expanding into areas originally cultivated by settlers from other ethnic origins. About one hundred years later (1978), some plots were still owned by the same family who had owned them in 1880.<sup>25</sup> The land acquired by Germans in fact reserved a whole area for German settlers who came later as the area was described as potentially German. Moreover, non-Germans tended to move away from a certain area if Germans moved there in large numbers.<sup>26</sup> For example, an area owned by a Swiss man in 1880, became German property about twenty years later (1903).<sup>27</sup>

Widner Township has been an area of single farms since the second half of the nineteenth century up to the present day. There is only one major settlement: the village of Freelandville. In the year 1880, 374 people lived in this village, 68 of whom had been born in Germany.<sup>28</sup> In this year German immigrants owned more than half of Freelandville (69 percent), compared to 21 percent of land held by Americans, 3 percent owned by churches and 7 percent, where the owner could not be determined or the ownership could not be determined exactly.<sup>29</sup> German ownership of almost 70 percent of the total area of Freelandville is remarkable because of the fact that they represented only 18 percent of the total population of the village.<sup>30</sup> Thus, this settlement also clearly shows the attitude of German immigrants towards landownership. This result as well as the persistence and expansion of German settlements correlates well with Joseph Schafer's pioneering census-based studies on the Germans in Wisconsin: he shows that German communities persisted and even expanded over the years in contrast to higher levels of mobility among Yankees.<sup>31</sup> Examining the Germans in Minnesota, Hildegard B. Johnson found that most German settlements expanded over time caused by the fact that German newcomers took over farms of non-German owners.<sup>32</sup> Terry Jordan's research indicates similar trends among German immigrants to Texas.<sup>33</sup> Russel L. Gerlach's examinations of German settlements in Missouri agree with Schafer's and Jordan's results.<sup>34</sup> Obviously, the Germans in Indiana acted very similarly to the ones in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Texas and Missouri, leading to the conclusion that this tendency can be regarded as typical of this ethnic group.

The cultural heritage of the German immigrants to acquire adjacent land for their descendants in order to maintain the family enterprise has not vanished today. In contrast to their small percentage in the nineteenth century, German-Americans constitute the largest group involved in agriculture according to the 1980 census. Among the 5.6 million American farming population, one million described themselves as being of "pure" German descent and another million as being of "mixed" German descent, figures, that together equal more than one third of all American farmers.<sup>35</sup> In sum, Widner Township can be taken as a good example of the immobility and continuity of a German settlement once it had come into existence.

The acquisition of the numerous areas Germans had bought above all in Widner and Vigo townships but also in other Knox County areas required the necessary financial means of the German immigrants. The majority of the German emigrants came from the lower class or the lower middle class. These emigrants, however, lacked the necessary money to buy land, let alone the relatively high investment for the start of a stable or even profitable production of subsistence or market production in the United States. Those among them who inherited a certain fortune and those who married children from German-American farmer families or had a certain amount of money from the sale of their small properties had the chance of acquiring a small farm property which was limited in terms of expansion as a rule. The others had the choice of staying on the land they had immigrated to as agricultural workers—what they had been on the land they had emigrated from—or trying to save the financial means they needed for a desired agricultural existence by working in urban industries for a certain period of time.<sup>36</sup> The example of the Germans who worked for the canal construction companies



in Indiana shows that these jobs were not restricted to urban areas. Many others managed to provide the necessary amount of money by getting credits which became much more difficult from 1820 on.<sup>37</sup> The later immigrants could possibly count on financial help from relatives who had immigrated to the U. S. before them.

German immigrants to America did not necessarily come from a poor background, however their financial situation ranged from being rich landowners, who had sold their property and had had good farming land bought before even leaving for the Midwest, to poor agricultural workers who could not pay their family's fare for the journey and had to do menial jobs.<sup>38</sup> The official estimation of the value an emigrant from Bavaria brought to the U. S. between 1835 and 1855 is ninety-five dollars. Emigrants from the comparatively poor land of Baden brought about forty dollars during the same period. Thus, the German emigrants brought not only their working potential as well as their respective skills to America, but also money—which was more than necessary in their new home country.<sup>39</sup> One example of a German family in Knox County who may be regarded as part of the well-situated middle class (at least in comparison with most emigrants) is the Glass family. John Richard Glass had emigrated with his parents and his brother in 1833. He had been born in Bonn in 1830 and he arrived with his family in New Orleans at the age of three.<sup>40</sup> As his granddaughter Joy Thomas Decker (born 1 April 1898 in Vincennes, Indiana) told me, her great-grandfather had owned a house, a mill and a horse in his home country. The money he received from selling all this evidently did not only cover the costs for the journey but also the acquisition of land.<sup>41</sup>

In the year 1880, from a total of 429 working men in Widner Township almost 60 percent of all working people were Americans with the percentage of German immigrants as well as their first generation being a little above 40 percent.<sup>42</sup> In the following the percentage of the employees exclusively refers to the male workers there. As this was a rural area, it is quite logical that the people working in agriculture represented the highest percentage with 58 percent in the year 1880, 34 percent followed a trade and 8 percent worked in the commerce or service sector.

If one examines the percentage of the people employed in the different economic branches according to their ethnic membership, one will see that the ratio of the Germans in comparison with the Americans in the first two sectors is completely different. The employed people born in the United States with American parents were represented within their ethnic group with 57 percent in agriculture, 34 percent in the trades and 9 percent in commerce and in the service sector. As one might deduce from the landownership of the German immigrants in Widner Township, the Germans were highly represented in the primary sector within their ethnic group. With 67 percent of people working in agriculture they outnumbered the Americans by 10 percent. On the one hand, this high percentage can be explained by the high proportion of German immigrants, who were agriculturalists. On the other hand, immigrants simply may have been striving to fulfill the American dream of working one's own agricultural piece of land.

In the secondary sector, the German percentage of 25 percent was almost 10



percent less than that of the American one. A closer look at the producing and processing trades—with respect to their own ethnic group—shows that among the German workers in this field only 25 percent were unskilled workers, which means that a vast majority were craftsmen or skilled workers. In comparison, the percentage of unskilled Americans working in the producing and processing trades was 92 percent.<sup>43</sup> As to their concentration in the different trades and professions there is a very likely explanation: a large number of them had already acquired their respective skills and were able to find a job in their original trade.<sup>44</sup> In the field of service and trade the German percentage of 9 percent almost corresponds to the American one.

Being the largest group of immigrants, the Germans had a lot of influence on church, schooling, politics and the economy as well as on social life and cultural activities in Knox County. A typical sign of the German-Americans' cultural individuality was their endeavor to bring their mother tongue into public schools. Before 1880, the state of Indiana was in charge of the integration of German lessons into public elementary schools.<sup>45</sup> As soon as the population was large enough, immigrant settlements in rural areas could isolate themselves to a far extent from American society. The survival of the German language among the immigrants' grandchildren was two to five times higher in the countryside than in the big cities. During the author's interviews with Americans of German origin elderly individuals frequently would recite proudly German prayers or spell the German alphabet having been taught by their German grandparents. This was also a point where the low population density played a decisive role: American farms appeared to be secluded from the rest of the world—a fact that became evident even to those immigrants accustomed to the scattered settlements in the northwestern part of Germany, which contrasted sharply to the rather densely populated settlements in the south. Another crucial factor for the existence of a settlement was the question of whether German immigrants were able to establish a church community of their own. Institutional life on the countryside was quite often limited to activities around church and school which were closely connected with each other. Consequently, the important role the church played as a central institution within rural settlements cannot be left out of consideration.<sup>46</sup> According to vague estimates, approximately one-third of German immigrants were Catholics, while the other two-thirds were Lutherans or members of the Reformed Church. For many immigrants the church community became the focus of their social activities. The formation of German-speaking church communities was closely linked to the establishment of German schools. It was not until 1850 that denominational schools were rivaled by public schools which were regarded as "over-denominational."<sup>47</sup>

One of the consequences of World War I was that the German language vanished almost totally from public life. This development had an effect on school life, too. Before the beginning of World War I, German had by far been the most popular foreign language taught in American high schools. The number of students studying French had never exceeded 10 percent, but in 1915 every fourth student studied German. In 1922, nothing was left of the language's once prominent position: only 0.6 percent of the students still attended German classes. German remains largely unimportant in American classrooms even today. The rapid transformation of the

language spoken in church was closely connected with this development. Whereas German-Americans once had been a minority among the English-speaking church community, a large number of them had already become bilingual before the war. As for the purely German denominational groups, the process of language change was rather slow.<sup>48</sup> In the nineteenth century, Germans formed six churches in Knox County: two in Widner Township, one in Vigo Township and another three in Vincennes.

When the first German immigrants arrived at the eastern part of Widner Township during the 1840s, one of their first activities together was the establishment of a church. On 27 October 1847, twenty-one German families under the guidance of Reverend Heinrich Toelke founded a congregation now known as the "Bethel United Church of Christ." Within the following year, a wooden church was erected. The building, which was used also as a denominational school, existed until 1913. In 1857, the community joined the German Evangelical Synod of North America. Today's church building has existed since the year 1935.<sup>49</sup> In October 1997, the community, which consisted of more than 600 members,<sup>50</sup> celebrated the 150th anniversary of their church.

In 1878, a group of Germans lived around the area of Freelandville whose religious denomination was quite different from that of the members of the Evangelical Church. For this reason, they established a church of their own which they called the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. The foundation stone to the new church building was laid on 6 September. The church was officially opened on 21 December of the same year. At this point the community had forty-nine members. Today's church building has been in existence since 1925. After joining different denominations several times, the majority of the community members finally decided to call themselves the Otterbein United Methodist Church. The cemetery next to the church building, however, kept its old name. On 9 December 1979, the church celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary. Twelve years later, the congregation was dissolved. The last service took place on 10 November.<sup>51</sup> Twelve German families founded a church now known as the "Salem United Church of Christ" in Westphalia, Vigo Township, in 1850; the cemetery was built in 1862. Today's church building was erected in 1920.<sup>52</sup>

During the 1840s and 50s, a large number of German immigrants settled down around the vicinity of Vincennes. In order to practice their religion—as they were used to doing in their home country—sixty-nine heads of German families founded Vincennes' first church in 1847, the so-called St. John's Catholic Church.<sup>53</sup> In 1880, the church community consisted of 172 families.<sup>54</sup> Today it is the city's largest congregation with over 2,300 members.<sup>55</sup> The construction of today's church building was started in 1851 and finished only a year later.<sup>56</sup> Its ornamented glass windows were donated by church members and decorated with dedications written in German. In the summer of 1997, the community celebrated its 150th anniversary by remembering its German founders. The festival mass was said in German and the German salutation "Willkommen" was written on the plate next to the church entrance. In 1852, the congregation founded St. John's School, which offered instruction in both English and German.<sup>57</sup>



In 1849, a group of German immigrants decided to found a church community which they called the Evangelical Protestant Congregation. Some of the founding members were Lutherans, while others belonged to the German Evangelical Church. In 1854, they started the construction of their church building on Eighth and Scott Street, which was finished two years later. Since the community members could not come to agreement on how to name their church—Lutheran or Evangelical Church—they split up in 1859. The Lutherans kept the old church building; the Evangelicals erected a new one.<sup>58</sup> Today St. John's Lutheran Church has 500 members.<sup>59</sup> In 1862, the Evangelicals finished their new church building on Fifth and Hart Street. Today's building of St. John's German Evangelical Church was erected in 1886 along Fifth and Shelby Street in order to replace the old one.<sup>60</sup> This event was recorded in the inscription plate written in German posted over the entrance. At the present, St. John's Evangelical Church has 414 community members.<sup>61</sup>

The German-Americans' influence on schooling shows that they represented an important political factor. However, they could not exert the same strong influence as Irish immigrants, for they were divided by religious, social and regional differences which kept them from unanimous voting and they lacked the "privilege" of a common mother tongue such as English. Nevertheless, Germans did exert considerable influence in both state and local politics.<sup>62</sup> Many of them even gained very high political acknowledgement in Indiana. Since the Civil War, numerous Germans had been elected to important political positions: Dr. Max Hoffmann, who was secretary of state between 1869 and 1871, as well as the two treasurers J. A. Lemcke (1887-91) and Albert Hall (1891-95)—just to name a few. Frederick W. Viehe of Knox County was one of a great number of German state senators.<sup>63</sup>

During the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, German immigrants founded a large number of companies in Knox County. Only a few still exist today. On the one hand, this is due to changes on the business market that allow only economically viable enterprises to survive; on the other, many companies of German origin, which can no longer be recognized as such since World War I, brought fundamental changes in the management structure of most companies. The following will exemplify the development of a few German company foundations in Knox County some of which remain in business today.

In 1978 the Kixmiller's Store at Freelandville was included on the National Register of Historical Places. Founded in 1846 by the German immigrants John Ritterskamp and Chris Baker, the store has traded clothes as well as food ever since. It was taken over by Simon Kixmiller in 1890. In 1943 his son William Rhinehart Kixmiller, who signed the store over to his daughter in 1984, succeeded him. By 1997, the store however, which had been run by the Kixmiller family for over a century, was up for sale. Due to structural changes in Knox County and the rising economic pressure put on the competitive market by neighboring Vincennes, the store was no longer viable.

The insurance company German Mutual Fire Insurance Association was founded by German immigrants in Widner Township on 21 April 1883. In 1933, it combined with Widner Mutual Fire Insurance Association which is one of the oldest enterprises in Knox County. With its head office being located in Freelandville, it operates in



another four counties across southern Indiana. Before 1929, the minutes of business meetings were written in German.<sup>64</sup> In 1853, the Prussian immigrant Edward Bierhaus founded a small food store in Freelandville. In 1865, he moved to Vincennes and one year later his store was officially named "E. Bierhaus & Sons." The food wholesale company had been family property since its foundation. In the year 1990, the company had a turnover of 45 million dollars.<sup>65</sup> In August 1997 however, the company, which had been run in the fifth generation, was forced to declare bankruptcy.<sup>66</sup> During the fall of 1887, the German National Bank was founded in Vincennes. On 30 January 1888, Seleman Gimpel was voted chairman of the bank, Gerard Reiter became vice-chairman and Henry J. Boeckman employed as accountant. The name of the bank was meant to stand for the positive work ethics, integrity and efficiency of the German community in Vincennes. On 7 April 1888, the bank opened its doors for the first time. On 18 January 1918, the chairmen decided to change the bank's name, thus responding to the commonly held anti-German opinion among the American population at that time. Consequently, the name of the bank was changed to American National Bank.<sup>67</sup> Eagle Brewery was founded in 1859 by the German John Ebner and taken over by Eugene Hack and Anton Simon in 1877. As a consequence of Prohibition, however, the company had to cease production in 1918.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast to rural life on the countryside, big cities such as Indianapolis had developed a great variety of social activity groups which were organized in so-called "Vereine." The Germans founded these organizations through which they could express themselves and plan a course of action in challenging some of the existing ideas of their day.<sup>69</sup> In Vincennes only one such group was brought into being. It was called the "Harmonie Verein." In June 1888, the two Germans "Doc" Detterman and Louis A. Meyer together with twenty fellow countrymen talked about the idea of founding a society whose aim would be to put on musical gatherings and other activities. Above all, they planned to have "German coziness" as a motto for their gatherings. They wanted to offer some "ideal" place to the immigrants where "the German language could be spoken and traditional songs from their home country could be sung."<sup>70</sup> The organization was founded on 8 July 1888. As the American National Bank had already done before, the "Harmonie Verein" changed its name to Harmony Society in 1918. This again can be seen as a consequence of World War I. During a gathering on 6 May 1918, members decided to sever the connection with the German-American Alliance and change both its statutes and the "current conditions." The main objective of the "Harmonie Verein," "to particularly support and spread the musical and social culture in German language," was cancelled and replaced by the phrase "the propaganda of Americanism and Harmony." In May, the minutes were written in German for the last time. From the following meeting on, which took place on 3 June 1918, the minutes were written in English. When the date for the celebration of the society's thirtieth anniversary was fixed in July 1918, the name "Harmonie Verein" appeared for the very last time.<sup>71</sup> It is not surprising that not a single comment on the change from German to English can be found, although it must have been an extremely drastic change for its members. Most scholars postulate that any mentioning of the language change in situations such as these was deliberately left out in order to keep

the stimulus for public discussions on this precarious situation as low as possible. Today, the "Harmony Society" has 470 members, including another 120 honorary members.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the high esteem of "German qualities" among the American population, today no large American city shows any trace of strong German influence. Cultural phenomena such as the division and exploitation of land, agriculture, architecture, different forms of settling and infrastructure disappeared quickly in the New World. This was due to the immigrants' necessary assimilation to the new natural conditions as well as the ongoing social mixing processes. The facing of both the new limitations and new incentives culminated in the slow disappearance of the old familiar traditions. The survival of some of the old customs had much better prospects if the change was realized at a rather slow pace. All in all, the modern way of life as well as the newly adopted behavior have changed everything. Even those last elements of the Germans' national character that had managed to survive vanished quickly with the "rush" of progress.<sup>73</sup>

Due to centralized settling of ethnic groups within limited areas, some of the old traditions such as language and religion, customs and the architectural style of typical German houses and churches, were able to survive.<sup>74</sup> Knox County is now a rare example of an area where the influence brought by German immigrants can be recognized even today. In the city of Vincennes, however, masses said in German and the German names of many institutions could only survive up to World War I. Around the rural areas of Knox County, which showed some traces of a stronger influence, German characteristics could survive for a much longer period of time. This can be seen at the example of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ in Freelandville, where up to 1924 all services were said in German.<sup>75</sup>

In the Salem United Church of Christ in Westphalia all Sunday services were held in German until 1931.<sup>76</sup> The reason for this can be found in both the German-speaking community and the local isolation of the church and immigrant population. Furthermore, in Widner and Vigo Township there are plenty of gravestones to be found which are decorated with German epitaphs or words of farewell. Along the roads to Freelandville, all welcome signs are written in German. Other examples of the survival of the language are the adding of the word "Pflegeheim" to the name of the "Freelandville Community Home" founded in 1963 and the place-name sign for the village of Westphalia in Vigo Township, which was named by German settlers after their region of origin.

It is quite striking that the relics of German immigration can be found more frequently in the rural areas of Knox County than in the city of Vincennes itself. Yet, a big exception to this are the numerous foundations of German churches which give evidence of the "German past" within the city area. As for the question of assimilation, the difference between rural and city areas was already emphasized by Fritsch in 1896:

The German farmers living in the countryside together with their fellow countrymen tend to keep up their German individuality and mother tongue. Only seldom are they attracted by big city life, they rather stick to their old



German traditions. Yet a totally different situation can be found within the smaller cities, where a mixed population of Germans and Americans lives in close contact with each other. They approach each other through both immediate neighborhood as well as trading connections—a fact that results in a rather superficial familiarity which could be compared with the common quest for the “almighty dollar.” Furthermore, this development causes the German language to vanish.<sup>77</sup>

As the examples above illustrate, German was retained in the rural areas for a much longer period of time and so the assimilation process occurred much later in the rural areas than in the cities. On the whole, the German way of settling in the rural areas of the Midwest has adapted to the expectations of the American population. For this reason, scattered settlements can be found today throughout Knox County: the farms are typically located in the centers of their fenced-off estates. These settlements, which came into being in places offering good trading opportunities, are occasionally interspersed with smaller settlements such as Freelandville in Widner Township. Today, those churches established by German immigrants are the most visible signs of ethnic variety within the cultural diversity of Knox County. Even if “Harmony Park” of the “Harmony Society” in Vincennes has lost connection with its ethnic origins, it is still used as a place of sociability for many kinds of festivities—just like its German founders originally wanted it to be.<sup>78</sup> Its existence as well as that of the “Harmony Society” reminds us of the manifold social activities brought to Vincennes by Germans. Crucial demographic, economic and social developments in the United States, however, made it also more difficult for the people living in the rural areas of Knox County to keep up their traditional moral and behavioral qualities and reinforced the pressure to assimilate. Nevertheless, as can be seen from the examples above, there are still some strong traces of German immigration throughout Knox County.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Important studies on German immigrants in rural America include those by Joseph Schafer, “The Yankee and the Teuton in Wisconsin,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 6 (1922-23):126-45, 261-79, 386-402, 7: 3-19; Hildegard Binder Johnson, “Distribution of German Pioneer Population in Minnesota,” *Rural Sociology* 6 (1941): 16-34; and Hildegard Binder Johnson, “The Location of German Immigrants in the Middle West,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 41 (1951): 1-41; Arthur B. Cozzens, “Conservation in German Settlements of the Missouri Ozarks,” *Geographical Review* 33 (1943): 286-98; Terry G. Jordan, *German Seed in Texas Soil* (Austin, 1966); Russell L. Gerlach, *Immigrants in the Ozarks: A Study in Ethnic Geography* (Columbia, MO, 1976); Kathleen N. Conzen, “Peasant Pioneers: Generational Succession among German Farmers in Frontier Minnesota,” in Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation* (Chapel Hill, 1985); Helmut Schmahl, *Verpflanzte, aber nicht entwurzelt: Die Auswanderung aus Hessen Darmstadt (Provinz Rheinhessen) nach Wisconsin im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000). For a detailed review of rural German immigration see Kathleen N. Conzen, “Die deutsche Amerikaeinwanderung im ländlichen Kontext: Problemfelder und Forschungsergebnisse,” in Klaus J. Bade,



ed., *Auswanderer - Wanderarbeiter - Gastarbeiter: Bevölkerung, Arbeitsmarkt und Wanderung in Deutschland seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Ostfildern, 1984), 350-77.

<sup>2</sup> Connie McBirney and Robert Taylor, eds., *Peopling Indiana: The Ethnic Experience* (Indianapolis, 1996), 648ff.

<sup>3</sup> James H. Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1986), 60.

<sup>4</sup> Giles Hoyt, "Germans," in Connie A. McBirney and Robert M. Taylor, eds., *Peopling Indiana: The Ethnic Experience* (Indianapolis, 1996), 152.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory S. Rose, "Indiana's Ethnicity in the Context of Ethnicity in the Old Northwest in 1850," in McBirney and Taylor, *Peopling Indiana: The Ethnic Experience* (Indianapolis, 1996), 623.

<sup>6</sup> The 1850 and 1860 census lists of Knox County, Indiana, were searched for immigrants from Germany, Ireland, France and England. Manuscript census schedules for the Seventh and Eighth Census of the United States, 1850 and 1860. All other figures have been taken from the U.S. Census of Population, 1870 to 1910, 1940, 1980 and 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Based on calculation from the 1870 census of population. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census*, 1870 (Washington, DC, 1872), 126.

<sup>8</sup> Maxine Batman, ed., *Knox County History* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1988), 81.

<sup>9</sup> These and all subsequent population figures have been aggregated by the author from the microfilmed manuscript schedules for the Eighth and Tenth Census of the United States, 1860 and 1880.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed research about the process of chain migration see Walter D. Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri* (Princeton, 1987). Chain migrations have also been proved by Kate E. Levi, "Geographical Origin of German Immigration to Wisconsin," *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* 14 (1898): 341-93 and Joseph Scheben, *Untersuchungen zur Methodik und Technik der deutschamerikanischen Wanderungsforschungen an Hand eines Vergleichs der Volkszählungslisten der Township Westphalia, Clinton County, Michigan, vom Jahre 1860 mit Auswanderungsakten des Kreises Adenau (Rheinland)* (Bonn, 1939).

<sup>11</sup> Walter D. Kamphoefner, "300 Jahre Deutsche in den USA," *Geographische Rundschau* 35 (1983): 170.

<sup>12</sup> Manuscript Schedule of the Census of Population, Eighth Census of the United States, Knox County, Indiana, 1860.

<sup>13</sup> Martha Helderman, interview by author, tape recording, Vincennes, IN, 6 July 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Bub Holscher, interview by author, Knox County, IN, 7 July 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Jürgen Bähr, *Bevölkerungsgeographie* (Stuttgart, 1992), 311.

<sup>16</sup> Kamphoefner, "300 Jahre Deutsche," 173.

<sup>17</sup> Kamphoefner, "'Entwurzelung' oder 'verpflanzt'? Zur Bedeutung der Kettenwanderung für die Einwandererakkulturation in Amerika," in Bade, *Auswanderer*, 347.

<sup>18</sup> Manuscript Schedule of the Census of Population, Tenth Census of the United States, Knox County, Indiana, 1880.

<sup>19</sup> W. Helbich, W. D. Kamphoefner, and U. Sommer, *Briefe aus Amerika* (Munich, 1988), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Willi P. Adams, *Deutsche im Schmelztiegel der USA*, 3d ed. (Berlin, 1994), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Manuscript Schedule of the Census of Population, Tenth Census of the United States, Knox County, Indiana, 1880.

<sup>22</sup> These and all subsequent figures concerning land ownership base on a hand count from maps in different atlases. *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Knox County, Indiana* (Philadelphia: F. Bourquin, 1880), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Emil Rinsch, *The History of Bethel United Church of Christ, Freelandville, Indiana* (Tell City, IN, 1973), 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Historical Atlas of Knox County, Indiana* (Vincennes, IN, 1903), 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Plat Book of Knox County, Indiana* (La Porte, IN, 1978).

<sup>26</sup> Kathleen N. Conzen, "Die deutsche Amerikaeinwanderung im ländlichen Kontext: Problemfelder und Forschungsergebnisse," in Bade, *Auswanderer*, 369f.

<sup>27</sup> *Historical Atlas of Knox County, Indiana*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Manuscript Schedule of the Census of Population, Tenth Census of the United States, Knox County, Indiana, 1880.

<sup>29</sup> *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Knox County, Indiana* (Philadelphia: F. Bourquin, 1880), 13. Tax duplicates of Knox County, Indiana: 1877, 1878, 1879, 1880 and 1881.

<sup>30</sup> Manuscript Schedule of the Census of Population, Tenth Census of the United States, Knox County, Indiana, 1880.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Schafer, "The Yankee and the Teuton in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 6 (1922-

23):126-45, 261-79, 386-402, 7: 3-19.

<sup>32</sup> Hildegard B. Johnson: "Distribution of German Pioneer Population in Minnesota." *Rural Sociology* 6 (1941): 16-34.

<sup>33</sup> Terry G. Jordan, *German Seed in Texas Soil* (Austin, 1966).

<sup>34</sup> Russell L. Gerlach, *Immigrants in the Ozarks: A Study in Ethnic Geography* (Columbia, MO, 1976).

<sup>35</sup> Helbich, Kamphoefner, and Sommer, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Klaus Bade, "Die deutsche überseeische Massenauswanderung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Bestimmungsfaktoren und Entwicklungsbedingungen," in Bade, *Auswanderer*, 283.

<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Heideking, *Geschichte der USA* (Tübingen and Basel, 1996), 110.

<sup>38</sup> Adams, *Deutsche im Schmelztiegel*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Hoyt, "Germans," 152.

<sup>40</sup> *History of the Thomas Family* (Vincennes, n.d.).

<sup>41</sup> Joy Thomas Decker, interview by author, tape recording, Vincennes, 6 July 1996.

<sup>42</sup> Manuscript Schedule of the Census of Population, Tenth Census of the United States, Knox County, Indiana, 1880.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Helbich, Kamphoefner, and Sommer, 276.

<sup>45</sup> Kamphoefner, "300 Jahre Deutsche," 173.

<sup>46</sup> Helbich, Kamphoefner, and Sommer, 63.

<sup>47</sup> Adams, *Deutsche im Schmelztiegel*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Helbich, Kamphoefner, and Sommer, 63.

<sup>49</sup> Bethel United Church of Christ Historical Committee, ed., *The 1994 Calendar* (Freelandville, IN, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> Pastor's office of the Bethel United Church of Christ, telephone conversation with author, Vincennes, IN, 8 August 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Bethel United Church of Christ Historical Committee.

<sup>52</sup> Carolyn Smith, *Salem United Church of Christ* (Westphalia, IN, 1975), 6f.

<sup>53</sup> Donald K. Ackermann, ed., *St. John the Baptist Catholic Church* (Vincennes, 1990), 9.

<sup>54</sup> Francis Scheper, *A Brief History of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church* (Vincennes, 1947), 12.

<sup>55</sup> Donald K. Ackermann, interview by author, Vincennes, 13 August 1997.

<sup>56</sup> Joseph Erbacher, ed., *St. John the Baptist Catholic Church* (Vincennes, 1984), 6.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Day and Walter Rinderle, eds., *Two Hundred Years of Permanent Pastors and Catholic Education in Knox County, Indiana; 1792-1993* (Vincennes: Jostens, 1993), 36f.

<sup>58</sup> St. John's Lutheran Church, ed., *100 Years of Divine Blessings: 1859-1959* (Vincennes, 1959).

<sup>59</sup> John Duke, interview by author, Vincennes, 14 August 1997.

<sup>60</sup> St. John's Evangelical and Reformed Church, ed., *100th Anniversary* (Vincennes, 1949), 3ff.

<sup>61</sup> Priest's office of St. John's Evangelical Church, telephone conversation with author, Vincennes, 8 August 1997.

<sup>62</sup> Kamphoefner, "300 Jahre Deutsche," 173.

<sup>63</sup> William Fritsch, *Zur Geschichte des Deutschthums in Indiana* (New York: G. Steiger, 1896), 62f.

<sup>64</sup> Batman, 187, 198.

<sup>65</sup> E. Bierhaus & Sons, eds., *Spanning "Five Generations": The 125th Anniversary of E. Bierhaus & Sons* (Vincennes, 1991).

<sup>66</sup> Brent C. Bierhaus, interview by author, Vincennes, 9 August 1997.

<sup>67</sup> Robert R. Stevens, "The American National Bank," in Richard Day, *Vincennes* (St. Louis, 1994), 202ff.

<sup>68</sup> *Indiana German Heritage Society Calendar 1997* (Indianapolis, 1996).

<sup>69</sup> Theodore G. Probst, *The Germans in Indianapolis* (Indianapolis, 1989), 21.

<sup>70</sup> George Klein, interview by author, Vincennes, 2 August 1997.

<sup>71</sup> Minute Book of the Harmony Society, 1913-22, Harmony Society, Vincennes, Indiana.

<sup>72</sup> Dick Rider, telephone conversation with author, Vincennes, 3 August 1997.

<sup>73</sup> Michael P. Conzen, "Deutsche Spuren in der US-amerikanischen Kulturlandschaft," *Geographische Rundschau* 48 (1996): 221.

<sup>74</sup> Karl Lenz, *Auflösung und Zusammenhalt ethnischer Gruppen im ländlichen Raum des kanadischen und US-amerikanischen Westens*, Passauer Schriften zur Geographie, 7: Europäische Ethnien im ländlichen Raum der



Neuen Welt, ed. Klaus Rother (Passau, 1989), 10.

<sup>75</sup> Bethel United Church of Christ Historical Committee.

<sup>76</sup> Smith, *Salem United Church*, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Fritsch, *Geschichte des Deutschtums*, 57.

<sup>78</sup> George Klein, interview by author, Vincennes, 2 August 1997.