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### **Germans in Pennsylvania 1800, 1850 and 1880: A Spatial Perspective**

According to the literature on the spatial distribution of ethnic groups in early Pennsylvania, writers repeatedly refer to the Germans, Scotch-Irish, and English as being dominant.<sup>1</sup> The focus of this study is on one of those ethnic groups, the Germans. If one were to survey people on the street as to where the Germans are found in Pennsylvania, the most likely answer would be Lancaster County, yet scholars know that Germans are not now, nor have they been in the past, limited to Lancaster County. What was or is the spatial distribution of Germans in Pennsylvania? Since the determination of the distribution of Germans in Pennsylvania today would be a difficult and time-consuming task, we need to revert to the past to provide us with clues to the distribution both then and now.

German ethnic identity for this study was based upon a classification of surnames. It was necessary to find a source of surnames according to townships and boroughs to provide the basis for mapping the distribution of Germans in the state. The sources of data meeting the requirements were the manuscript census schedules. When this study was begun, the only available manuscript census schedules were those from 1790 to 1890. Three census dates—1800, 1850, and 1880—were chosen from that time period. The year 1800 was picked to provide an early dimension to the study, 1850 was selected because this census is the first in which place of birth for heads of household was recorded, and 1880 became the final census because it was the latest date for which the manuscript census schedules were accessible. Most of the 1890 manuscript census schedules had been destroyed by fire and those from 1900 forward were each sealed by law for seventy years.

The use of surnames as a method of determining ethnic affiliation is supported by numerous writers. Buck and Buck argue that one can determine approximately the number of people in a particular ethnic group by using surnames, and Fairchild states that surnames are indicators of national origin and the error in their use is slight. Assisting



in the classification of surnames are sources such as Smith's *Dictionary of American Family Names*, and studies by Garland and Barker.<sup>2</sup> This study deals strictly with those names that were determined definitely to be German. Admittedly this eliminates some German names such as Mueller, Schmidt, and Braun that were translated to Miller, Smith, and Brown, and it is noteworthy that very few people named Mueller, Schmidt, and Braun were listed in the manuscript census schedules used in this study. The term "German" as used here also includes those people with German surnames that came from Switzerland and Austria.

With data selected from the three time periods and a procedure for determining who was German, it became apparent very quickly that to classify all the surnames on the manuscript census schedules for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania would be an overwhelming task. I decided that a random sample would be taken for each minor civil division within each county. The sample size was large enough to give results with an accuracy of 95 percent with a range of plus or minus 3 percent. Random number tables were used to select the surnames to be classified within each minor civil division, since most of the census enumerators had numbered consecutively the surnames for the heads of household in their census district. For those manuscript census schedules not so ordered, numbers were assigned to the surname for each head of household.

Most surnames, handwritten by census enumerators, were quite legible and presented no problems. There were, however, a few that were very difficult to decipher, but the study was not greatly affected by poor surname legibility, and the surnames of one ethnic group were not rendered illegible more often than others. Furthermore, the diligence and conscientiousness of census enumerators is not questioned although, as in all federal census taking, some people were missed. Their numbers were, however, statistically unimportant.

What distributional patterns did surnames produce for the years 1800, 1850, and 1880 respecting Germans in Pennsylvania? The table below shows the percentage of Germans for the three census periods for each county existing in those specific years with the exceptions of Potter and Susquehanna counties where, because of later settlement, no 1800 or 1810 material exists; the 1830 and 1820 censuses respectively were substituted in order to give as early a view as possible of the distribution of Germans in the remote northern and northeastern sections of the state. According to the table, the core of German settlement was in the southeastern and south central part of the commonwealth. As one moves away in all directions from this densest German settlement region, the percentage of Germans in the population declines (see maps 1, 2, and 3) except for Somerset County. This trend reflects the diffusion principle of time-distance decay; that is, the farther one moves from the hearth area (core) in both time and distance, the fewer the people from the hearth area. This pattern is also related to a migration principle which holds that most people move short distances.<sup>3</sup>

The table also reveals a tendency for the percentage of Germans to increase through time in those counties farthest from the core area,

**Table**  
**Percentage of Germans in Pennsylvania Counties**

| County               | 1800            | 1850 | 1880 | County                   | 1800 | 1850 | 1880 |
|----------------------|-----------------|------|------|--------------------------|------|------|------|
| Adams                | 28              | 49   | 44   | Juniata                  | --   | 33   | 36   |
| Allegheny            | 5               | 12   | 28   | Lackawanna               | --   | --   | 14   |
| Armstrong            | 6               | 24   | 25   | Lancaster <sup>c</sup>   | 46   | 45   | 51   |
| Beaver               | 2               | 16   | 18   | Lawrence                 | --   | 11   | 13   |
| Bedford              | 21              | 33   | 32   | Lebanon                  | --   | 63   | 62   |
| Berks <sup>c</sup>   | 52              | 60   | 61   | Lehigh                   | --   | 69   | 62   |
| Blair                | -- <sup>d</sup> | 34   | 33   | Luzerne                  | 8    | 17   | 18   |
| Bradford             | --              | 5    | 7    | Lycoming                 | 11   | 32   | 33   |
| Bucks                | 17              | 29   | 32   | McKean                   | --   | 3    | 10   |
| Butler               | 3               | 22   | 25   | Mercer                   | 3    | 12   | 16   |
| Cambria              | --              | 30   | 36   | Mifflin                  | 10   | 30   | 33   |
| Cameron              | --              | --   | 12   | Monroe                   | --   | 44   | 41   |
| Carbon               | --              | 31   | 41   | Montgomery               | 40   | 39   | 33   |
| Centre               | 16              | 30   | 31   | Montour                  | --   | 33   | 34   |
| Chester              | 7               | 12   | 14   | Northampton <sup>c</sup> | 67   | 52   | 50   |
| Clarion              | --              | 27   | 28   | Northumberland           | 22   | 40   | 40   |
| Clearfield           | --              | 20   | 20   | Perry                    | --   | 38   | 40   |
| Clinton              | --              | 27   | 33   | Philadelphia             | 12   | 16   | 22   |
| Columbia             | --              | 37   | 36   | Pike                     | --   | 16   | 25   |
| Crawford             | 4               | 8    | 12   | Potter <sup>a</sup>      | 1    | 4    | 16   |
| Cumberland           | 18              | 37   | 38   | Schuylkill               | --   | 36   | 37   |
| Dauphin <sup>c</sup> | 54              | 48   | 47   | Snyder                   | --   | --   | 61   |
| Delaware             | 4               | 4    | 4    | Somerset                 | 46   | 48   | 49   |
| Elk                  | --              | 41   | 33   | Sullivan                 | --   | 21   | 25   |
| Erie                 | 3               | 11   | 21   | Susquehanna <sup>b</sup> | 2    | 2    | 3    |
| Fayette              | 7               | 14   | 14   | Tioga                    | --   | 7    | 8    |
| Forest               | --              | --   | 22   | Union                    | --   | 55   | 49   |
| Franklin             | 11              | 39   | 41   | Venango                  | 3    | 12   | 14   |
| Fulton               | --              | 30   | 28   | Warren                   | 7    | 3    | 9    |
| Greene               | 4               | 9    | 12   | Washington               | 6    | 7    | 7    |
| Huntingdon           | 17              | 24   | 24   | Wayne                    | 12   | 10   | 17   |
| Indiana              | --              | 18   | 18   | Westmoreland             | 14   | 25   | 24   |
| Jefferson            | --              | 20   | 24   | Wyoming                  | --   | 9    | 11   |
|                      |                 |      |      | York <sup>c</sup>        | 50   | 52   | 51   |

<sup>a</sup> Data from the 1830 census.

<sup>b</sup> Data from the 1820 census.

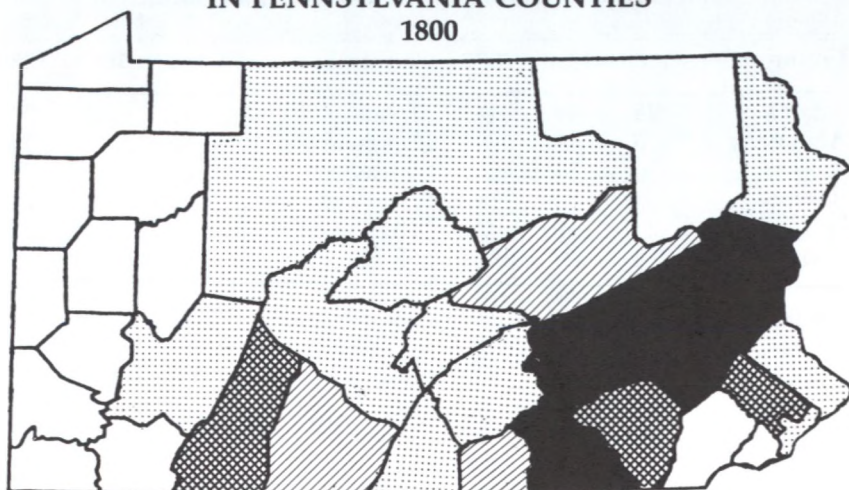
<sup>c</sup> A county in the original hearth area of German settlement.

<sup>d</sup> County did not exist as a separate entity on that date.

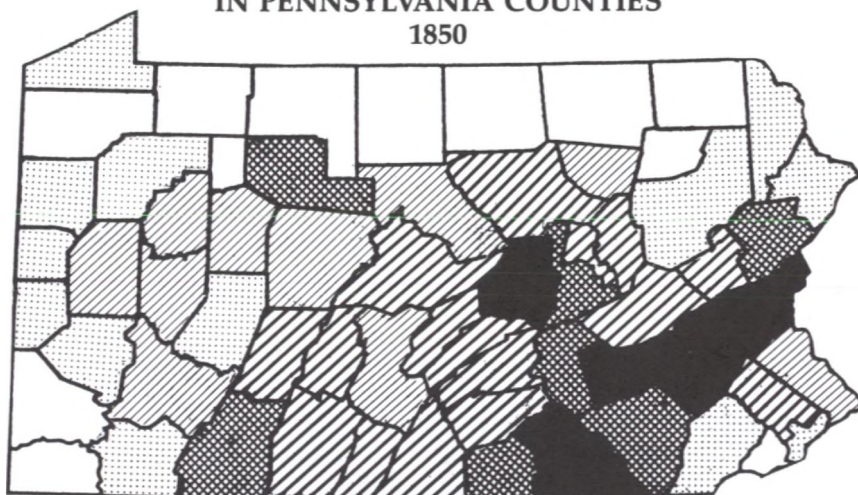
while a few counties within or adjacent to the hearth area tend to decline. This readjustment is probably due to movement of new groups such as the Irish and some from Eastern and Southern Europe into the core and the consequent migration of Germans into counties farther from it.



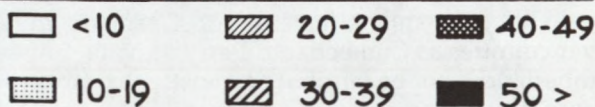
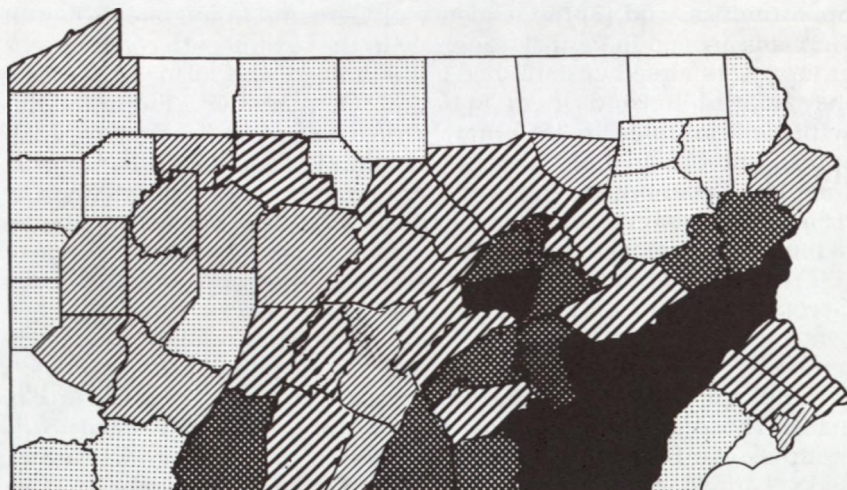
PERCENTAGE OF GERMANS  
IN PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES  
1800



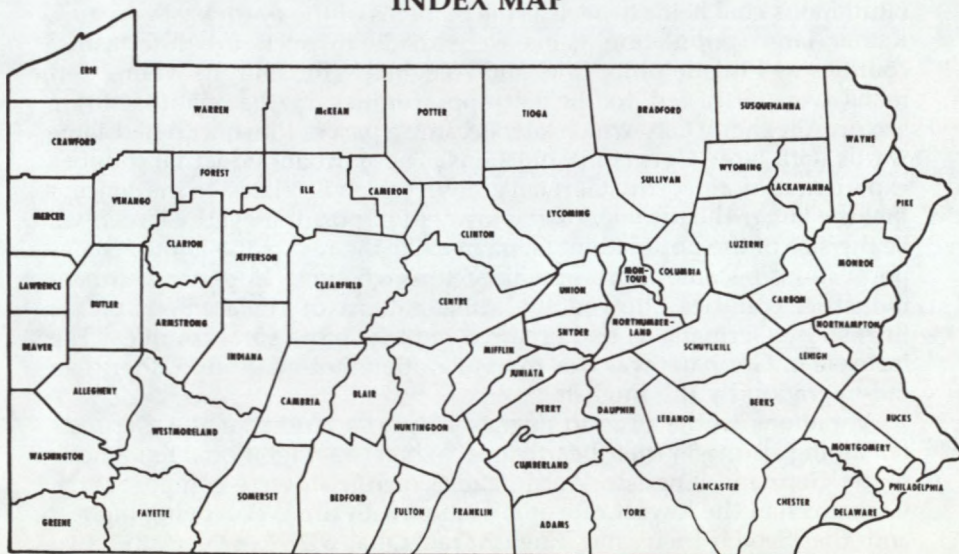
PERCENTAGE OF GERMANS  
IN PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES  
1850



# PERCENTAGE OF GERMANS IN PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES 1880



## COUNTIES OF PENNSYLVANIA INDEX MAP





Three factors appear to have had major influence on the dispersal of Germans within Pennsylvania: (1) their time of arrival and their original area of settlement, (2) their attraction to certain areas by employment opportunities, and (3) the tendency of Germans to migrate. When the Germans arrived in Pennsylvania late in the seventeenth century, other groups were already established in the immediate Philadelphia area so they moved beyond them to found Germantown. From the first settlement founded in 1683, now part of Philadelphia, they gradually spread into the area of the present counties of Lancaster, Berks, York, Dauphin, Lebanon, Lehigh, and Northampton which became the German hearth region from where Germans eventually spread into the rest of the state. As movement into new areas was taking place, the Germans still remained dominant in that core area as they apparently do today. Germans were steadily immigrating to Pennsylvania with large numbers coming in the mid-1800s following spasms of European social unrest.

Employment opportunities influenced the spatial location of Germans. Those areas in the state suitable for farming appealed to the group as can be seen by their concentration first in counties such as Berks, Lancaster, Lebanon, York, Adams, Lehigh, Northumberland and Northampton. The subsequent increase of Germans in such Susquehanna River counties as Cumberland, Perry, Juniata, Snyder, Union, and Northumberland can be attributed mostly to an expansion of agriculture from the adjacent southeast into these fertile lowlands. Farming, however, was not the only occupation of the Germans. Prior to the arrival of Eastern and Southern Europeans, the Germans were an important element in the mining labor force in both the anthracite and bituminous coal fields as well as the oil fields of the northwest counties. Rather large population gains were made in such urban-industrial counties as Philadelphia, Erie, and Allegheny (Pittsburgh) where Germans were attracted to the job opportunities in the manufacturing sector. Allegheny City which later became a part of Pittsburgh had some wards with large German populations. These urban-industrial counties experienced noteworthy German growth which is related to the concept that the larger the number of employment opportunities, the larger will be the size of the population. Germans, like the rest of the United States population, became more urbanized through time. In general, urban-industrial counties showed the same pattern of replacement of the English by Germans as had occurred in other more rural counties. The increase in Germans was due to in-migration by that group rather than out-migration by the English.

Variations in the urge to migrate help to account for the Germans remaining strong in their hearth area. When the migrational tendencies of the Germans, English, Welsh, and Scotch-Irish were compared, the Germans had the lowest rate of migration with the Welsh being highest and the Scotch-Irish and English rates halfway between the two extremes. Migration of Germans needs to be examined much more carefully to determine whether the growth of the German population outside the hearth area was due to migration directly from Germany,



from other states, or from within Pennsylvania. Certainly, not all the growth in counties beyond the hearth area can be accounted for by natural increase.

Generally, the German population gains tended to be highest in locations known as areas dominated by English settlement such as across the northern tier, the southwest, and southeastern Pennsylvania. In Lancaster County, for example, Germans, notably Amish and Mennonites, had lived among the English since their arrival in the early 1700s.

Comparing all three maps it is apparent that the original core not only remains intact but gradually expands to the north. Some of the original core counties do decrease in the percentage of Germans they contain but still they retain high percentages of this particular ethnic group. One must, however, be careful for some of these changes have resulted from a division of the original counties. One such example is Union County which in 1850 was 55 percent German; in 1855 the southern half was separated as Snyder County and it was this section that evidently was strongly German.<sup>4</sup> In 1880, Snyder County was 61 percent German but in what remained of the original Union County the percentage slid to forty-nine, likely about what it had been in 1850 since the average percentage of the two counties in 1880 was fifty-five. Certainty is possible only with data from the 1860 and 1870 censuses.

One must also bear in mind that this is a generalized pattern. If the data here were mapped at the township rather than the county level, a more exact distributional pattern would emerge. In Lancaster County, for example, the southeastern and southern townships were more Scotch-Irish than German but the maps imply that in each of the county's forty-odd townships and boroughs the Germans comprised 40 percent or more thus obscuring the ethnic variations that actually occurred. These ethnic variations meant that there were differences in cultural traits (language, religion, and food preferences, for instance) between Germans and Scotch-Irish.

The German distributional pattern in Pennsylvania is partially explained in this study but much remains to be done for a fuller understanding. Among research topics for the future are: an analysis of the source areas for German migrants that came to Pennsylvania, investigation of when Germans became the dominant ethnic group within a county, the mapping of Germans at the township and city ward level, the current status of the hearth area, and the distribution of Germans after 1880. The 1900 manuscript census schedules are now available (the 1910 will be shortly). An analysis of these materials should provide additional insight into the distributional pattern of Germans in Pennsylvania.

Once the distributional pattern is mapped on a minor civil division basis, the location of Germans could be compared, for example, with detailed maps of voting patterns, population characteristics, and religious affiliations to see what relationships, if any, exist among these. Because there are differences in the migrational propensity of ethnic groups can one then assume that there are other differences as well?

Since Pennsylvania is one of three major cultural hearth areas within the United States, such analysis of cultural diversities might be most revealing in explaining how Pennsylvania's cultural characteristics—such as the German—influenced the development of the nation.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Wayland F. Dunaway, *The Scotch-Irish of Colonial Pennsylvania* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 3; Stevenson W. Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life 1640-1840* (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1950), 1:40; Paul A. W. Wallace, *Pennsylvania: Seed of a Nation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Solon L. Buck and Elizabeth H. Buck, *The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1939), 152; Henry P. Fairchild, *Immigration: A World Movement and Its American Significance*, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 56; Elsdon C. Smith, *Dictionary of American Family Names* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956); Robert Garland, "The Scotch-Irish in Western Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 6 (1923): 65-105; Howard F. Barker, "National Stocks in the Populating of the United States as Indicated by Surnames in the Census of 1790," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1931 (1932) 1:107-407.

<sup>3</sup> Mark A. Hornberger, "The Spatial Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Selected Counties in Pennsylvania—1800-1880: A Geographic Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1974), 207-31.

<sup>4</sup> Others include Dauphin-Lebanon and Northampton-Lehigh. John H. Long, ed., *Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries, 1788-1980*, vol. 1 (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1984).