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Ethnic Loyalties of the Alsatians in Buffalo, 1829-1855

Historians agree that we know little about the principalities of central Europe in the early nineteenth century. But they disagree over whether an awareness of these distinctions should matter to the history of the United States. Though hundreds of thousands of immigrants came to America as subjects from lands such as Bavaria, Mecklenburg, and Württemberg, most historians stretch the term "German" to represent the central Europeans as a group. They assume that neighbors and co-workers from these provinces mixed freely in the New World, that regional loyalties were ephemeral.¹ But other authors contend that it is anachronistic to group the immigrants as "Germans"—especially before Germany became a nation in 1871. The immigrants of the early nineteenth century spoke regional dialects, and in many cases maintained the distinctive religious views and customs of their ancestral lands.²

Whether one sees Hessians and Hanoverians or Germans and even a German-American community before the Civil War hinges on assumptions about the character of provincial loyalties. This survey of the Alsatians in Buffalo from 1829 to 1855 provides a look at a group that had many incentives and precedents to retain a sense of clannishness, or at least maintain their independence from other Germans. Unlike the other immigrants from the provinces of central Europe, the Alsatians already were citizens of a nation-state, France, and several were familiar with the French language. These immigrants from the western bank of the Rhine were wealthier than their counterparts from the eastern lands. Conscious of their ties with France, their achievements in business, and a history which stretched back to Roman times, the Alsatians, it seems, easily could have maintained the distinctiveness of their own group, or have merged with the French-speakers and Americans. When nativists stereotyped the Germans as "Dutchmen" in the 1840s and 1850s, such an independent course could have been advantageous. But the Alsatians, rather than attaining recognition in the Americanized quarters of the city, achieved status as a group among newer immigrants. The wealthy Rhinelanders of early Buffalo counted themselves both as

"Germans" and "Alsations." The two loyalties were complementary as the sense of belonging to one group encouraged participation in the other.

The Alsations began to arrive in western New York after the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. Like their French-speaking compatriots, the Franco-Germans tended to seize the opportunities along the American frontier soon after they appeared. Buffalo in the 1830s had the possibilities of Alsace's Strasbourg: The canal was its Rhine, and as Strasbourg straddled France and Germany so did Buffalo lie near the boundary between Canada and the United States. Buffalo was the largest inland port along the New York waterway during the age of Jackson, an auspicious investment for the industrious sons of New England who settled there. Its grain elevators, transshipping wheat, corn, flour, and oats from the west, served as granaries for the east. As a halfway house between the canal barges and the ships on the Great Lakes, Buffalo provided lodging for the immigrants moving further west.

Buffalo was a lure for an adventurous craftsman, but the voyage from Europe to America was still hazardous enough in the early nineteenth century to discourage the weak of heart. Alsace, described by Erasmus during the Reformation as a bulwark of tolerance, and by Goethe later as nature's jewel in Europe, had its own advantages. But like other principalities of the Rhine in the early nineteenth century, restrictions had begun to outstrip opportunities. Strasbourg's merchants complained that France's Bourbon regime tended to overlook the economic interests of the eastern provinces. The textile industry of Great Britain and the Low Countries to the north had outmodernized the Alsatian businesses, and the fragmentation of central Europe limited the economic horizon to the east. German Rhinelanders already had exploited the promises of emigration to the New World in the eighteenth century, and it was a relatively simple matter to travel in the mode of textiles out to the sea. When friends could present a convincing case for the commercial benefits of the New World, the most stolid of burghers were willing to accept the odds. According to one story, two letters from Buffalo convinced an Alsatian businessman to sell his shop immediately and bundle his family for the long Atlantic passage. The Americans reported that the wood in Buffalo was not merely inexpensive but free. As a shoemaker of the Dutch school, the newcomer could have all the wood he wanted as well as a substantial group of Alsatian countrymen for a market.³

The size of that market is difficult to determine. The United States censuses of the nineteenth century cast a shadow over the Alsatian population, never identifying these immigrants as a group. Though one can determine the number of citizens from France with German surnames, it is impossible to pinpoint the Alsations. The Franco-German exodus also included many Lorrainians from a region west of Alsace, who spoke a quite different German dialect. Lorraine had persisted longer under the veil of French hegemony than Alsace, but its traditions

as a great medieval Duchy still lingered. In 1552, Henry II of France had seized the proud bishoprics of Metz, Toul, and Verdun. The incorporation of Alsace came later, most notably in 1679 when the ten largest cities of Alsace were forced to swear allegiance to the French king. Both Alsace and Lorraine had persisted on to the nineteenth century as a Switzerland without Alps, a meeting place between the explosive French empire, and the unstable principalities of central Europe.⁴

Even as one speaks about Alsatian influence in Buffalo, it is necessary to take count of the Lorrainians. The two groups cannot be classed together as their dialects and traditions were distinctive enough to spark antagonism when they mixed in America. But in the case of this study, the Alsatians appear to have outnumbered the Lorrainians by a wide margin. The Lorrainians tended to settle on farms north of the city and were rarely cited by contemporaries as a group. In one book on Buffalo's Germans which included extensive biographies on the city's more established Germans, fourteen had come from Alsace and two from Lorraine.⁵ The Alsatian presence in Buffalo, furthermore, received an institutional expression which cannot be said for the Lorrainians. The statistics on the French natives with German surnames in the census thus provides an outline, but not an exact configuration of the Alsatian population in Buffalo.

The Franco-German element deserves this consideration because it was an influential group that is systematically underrated in studies on the Germans in America. Alsace and Lorraine were the chief bases of emigration from France in the early nineteenth century, and in Buffalo there were two Franco-Germans for every French-surnamed compatriot in the 1855 census. The German-surnamed element from France also was larger than all the other groups listing provincial nativities except the Prussians and Bavarians. Because many of the immigrants from central Europe, however, were listed vaguely as "German" in origin, the extent of Württemberg or Bavarian influence is underrated. The Franco-German element similarly is underrated because many immigrants from "France" carried surnames which were Anglicized and vulgarized. When the bloc of uncertain surnames is divided evenly between the French-surnamed and the Alsace-Lorrainians, the Franco-German household total increases from 433 to 549. Meanwhile, if the "German" category is divided proportionately among the various provincial groups from central Europe, the number of families from Württemberg in Buffalo in 1855 jumps from 265 to 530 and the Bavarian count from 1,209 to 2,418. With this new enumeration, the Franco-German count remains significant with more families than the Württembergers, Mecklenburgers, Saxons, Hanoverians, and Swiss. But the number of Hessians and Badenese in Buffalo now appears greater than the Franco-German influx. The Prussians, also more numerous, do not qualify as a provincial group as they could have come from any one of the several lands held by the Prussian king in the middle of the nineteenth century (Table 1).

Table 1
Leading Nativity Groups in Buffalo's Population: 1855

Groups	Household Heads	
	Appearance in Census	Adjusted Frequency ^a
American-born	3,588	3,300
Irish	2,723	3,000
Bavarian	1,209	2,418
English-born	1,093	1,093
Prussian	522	1,044
Badenese	352	704
Hessian	348	696
FRANCO-GERMAN	433	549
Württemberg	265	530
Mecklenburg	147	294
French-surnamed	167	283
Scottish	263	263
Saxon	117	234
Hanoverian	112	224
Swiss	129	129

^a The raw enumerations were deficient on many levels and thus the "Adjusted Frequency" attempts to provide an informed estimate of the actual population sizes. The problems of the census involve: the failure to delineate in all cases between the German province and "Germany," the appearance of Irish surnames and German surnames in the "American-born" category, and the lack of distinction between the French and Franco-Germans.

Source: 1855 New York State manuscript census schedules.

The civic prominence of the Alsatians advanced as the group became more established. Though the earliest settlers of the city traced their past to New England, the average Franco-German householder in 1855 had resided in the city almost fifteen years, an impressive figure for a young city like Buffalo. The Franco-Germans had a higher rate of persistence than their French-surnamed compatriots (13.2), the American-born (12.5), the rest of the Germans (8.0), and the Irish-born (7.0). As an established clique, the Alsatians were also older and more rooted to the land by 1855. The average age of the Franco-German householder in Buffalo was 41, compared with 38 for the American-born, 37 for the rest of the Germans, and 36 for the Irish. Like the bulk of the German-born twenty years later, the Franco-Germans were also distinguished as homeowners. The Alsatians and Lorrainians had a much higher propensity to own homes than the American-born in 1855. Compared to other

German households, 38 percent of which owned land, 54 percent of the Franco-German household heads held real estate (Table 2).

Table 2
Age, Persistence in Buffalo, and Land
Ownership: Alsatians, French, Germans, Irish, Americans

Group	(N of Households)	Average Age	Persistence in Buffalo: Average Number of Years	Percent Owning Land
1855				
FRANCO-GERMAN	(433)	41.4	14.9	54
French-surnamed	(135)	41.1	13.2	50
American-born	(3,588)	38.5	12.5	43
German-born	(5,945)	37.3	8.0	38
Irish-born	(2,723)	36.2	7.0	23
1875				
German-born	(514) ^a	42.0	^b	54

^a A Sample

^b Not Coded

Source: 1855 and 1875 New York State manuscript census schedules.

As long-term residents, the Alsatians counted a few entrepreneurs and professionals among them. But most of their young men, as with the Germans from other provinces, tended to enter the skilled trades. Over half of the Franco-German household heads in 1855 worked in the artisanal occupations such as shoe-making and carpentry (Table 3). The Germans from France generally worked in less prestigious positions than the American-born, but they had a higher rate of employment. In distinction with other immigrant groups such as the Irish, the Alsatians had relatively few laborers and unskilled workingmen among them. Once again, a comparison with Buffalo's German community twenty years later is instructive. The Franco-Germans by 1855 already had attained what the bulk of the German immigrants would by 1875. In each case, as the degree of economic dislocation and unemployment dropped over time, there was a corresponding tendency for the group to concentrate in the skilled trades (Table 3).

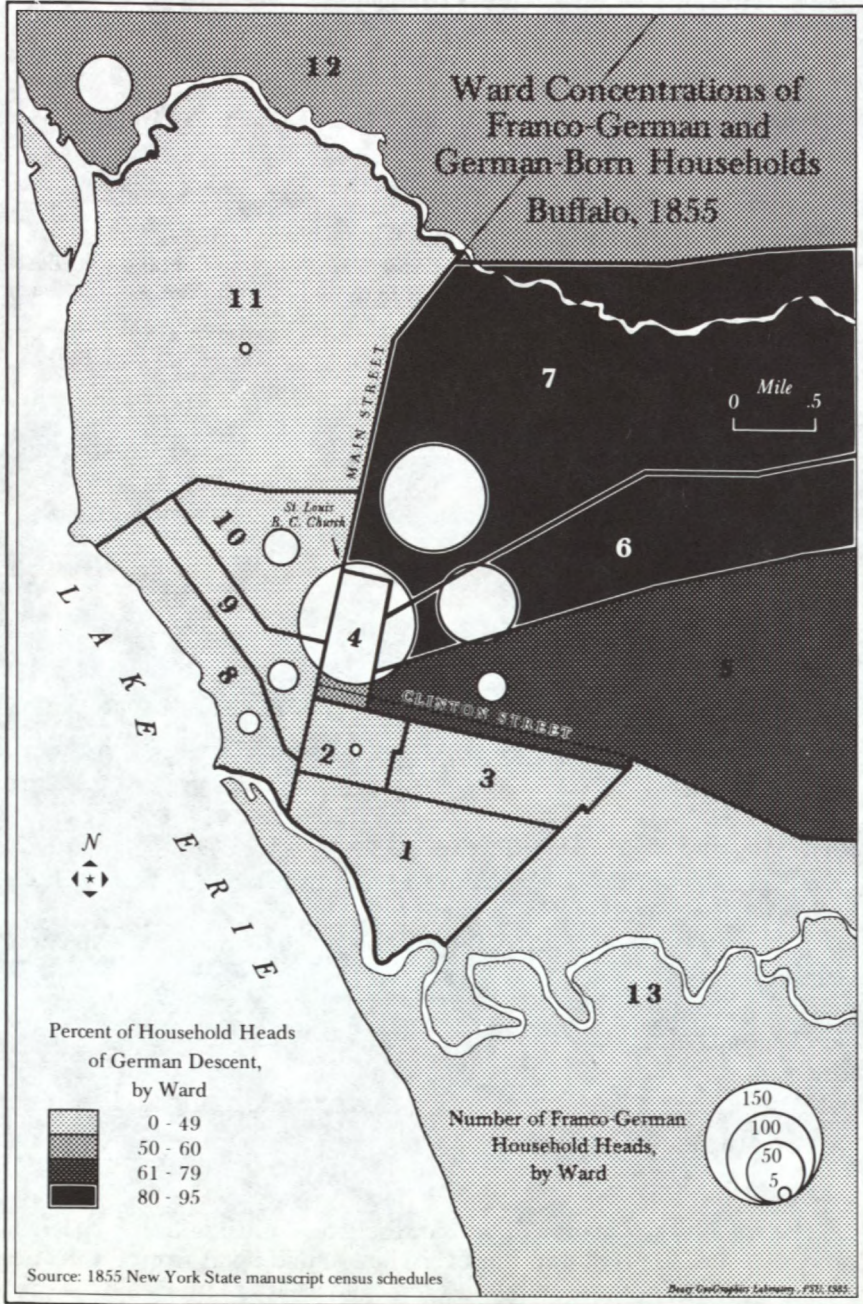
Table 3
Occupational Distributions: Alsatian, American, German,
and Irish Family Heads

Prestige Level	Percent of Group in Category				
	FRANCO-GERMAN 1855	American 1855	German 1855	Irish 1855	German 1875
I. Entrepreneurs, Owners and Professionals	2	6	1	1	1
II. Low White Collar: Clerks, Grocers . . .	19	27	8	6	17
III. Skilled Workers	52	22	37	16	42
IV. Semiskilled	9	9	7	9	6
V. Laborers	9	3	23	45	24
VI. No Occupation Listed	9	33	25	23	11
Total Percent	100	100	100	100	100
Sample Size	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Differences are significant at the .05 level of confidence.
Source: 1855 and 1875 ms. census schedules.

The Alsatians, more settled than the other immigrants in 1855, anticipated the German pattern of home ownership and the tendency to seek skilled work. They also lived within the bounds of Buffalo's eastside German community. Like 78 percent of the "German-born" households which resided east of Main Street and north of Clinton Street, 80 percent of the Franco-German element resided in wards four, five, six, and seven on the eastside (Figure 1). One might predict that the pioneer Alsatians would have settled alongside the Anglo-Americans to a greater extent than other Germans, but the index of dissimilarity scores shown in Table 4 illustrates that the Alsatians had little affinity for the Yankee neighborhoods. The dissimilarity index shows the extent of divergence in the residential selections made by two contrasting groups. A score of 0.0 would indicate complete integration between two groups, and a figure of 1.0, complete segregation. Because the dissimilarity score for the Franco-Germans and American-born is .70, and the score for the American-born and German-born is .57, it can be stated that the distribution of the Americans in the city by wards more closely resembled the German pattern than the Alsatian one. Meanwhile, because the dissimilarity score for the Franco-Germans and other Germans is

Figure 1



only .29, one can conclude that the Alsatians had much more contact with fellow Germans than with the American-born as a bloc (.70), the more established subset of Yankee families (.74), and the Irish (.77).

Table 4
Residential Concentrations of Buffalo's Nativity Groups by Wards: 1855

Wards	Percent of all:				
	FRANCO-GERMAN	German-born	American-born	New England-born (Yankee)	Irish-born
1	0	2	7	7	36
2	1	1	16	19	6
3	0	4	9	6	9
4	34	14	11	8	3
5	3	19	6	0	4
6	18	23	3	1	6
7	25	22	3	2	1
8	2	2	4	3	21
9	3	1	15	22	6
10	4	2	14	19	6
11	1	2	6	7	5
12	9	6	4	4	3
13	0	1	1	2	1
Total Percent	100	100	100	100	100
Total N of Families	433	5,945	3,588	976	2,723

Indices of Dissimilarity:

	FRANCO-GERMAN	German	American
German-born	.29		
American-born	.70	.57	
New England-born	.74	.70	.17
Irish-born	.77	.74	.45

Source: 1855 ms. census schedules.

The wealthiest Alsatians had the resources to reside in the spacious homes west of Main Street, but even they settled apart from the estates of the Yankees in wards nine and ten. Successful families such as the Georgers, Haberstros, Beyers, and Ottenots concentrated in and around the fourth ward, one of the more cosmopolitan areas in the city. This

rectangular area, east of Main Street, housed the city's wealthiest Germans and was living proof that money rather than the mere concentration of Germans spurred the impulse to create the German community. With many American, Irish, and English households, the fourth ward was the center of the German clubs and societies. The less prosperous Alsatian households, by contrast, tended to reside in wards six and seven, which were over 80 percent German and less developed. The reluctance of the Franco-German element to settle impoverished areas in wards one, three, and five accounts for the high dissimilarity scores between the Franco-Germans and other groups (Table 4 and Figure 1).

These statistics compiled from the 1855 New York State Census show that despite the economic discrepancies between the Alsatians and other Germans, there were still many cultural similarities between the two groups. The Alsatians carried more prestige in the 1850s, but the predilection towards land ownership, segregation, and skilled work was apparent in both groups. Economically superior but culturally sympathetic, it is not surprising therefore that the Alsatians would serve a pivotal role as founders of the German-American community. Primarily Catholic in religion,⁶ the Alsatians, nevertheless, financed the secular German clubs. As the leaders of the first Catholic church in Buffalo, the Alsatians became the vanguard of German Catholicism in the city.

There were few incorporated German organizations in the city by 1855 that were not in some way nursed along by the well-placed Rhinelanders. The German Young Men's Society, the most prestigious association of Germans in Buffalo flourished as a central meeting place for the Alsatian elite. Suggested by the Alsatian businessman, F. A. Georger, and launched by five Alsatians, one Lorrainian, and two Swabians in 1841, the society pledged to uphold the German language.⁷ The German Young Men's Society attained recognition in the city's newspapers as it became the forum for the German-American elite in Buffalo. The association sponsored lectures, debates, community-wide picnics, and concerts. Its members included the owners of the German press such as Francis Brunck of the *Demokrat* and Henry Bender of the *Telegraph*. Influential businessmen such as the grocer Phillip Becker, the tanning magnate Jacob Schoellkopf, and Jacob Beyer, an Alsatian who served twice as the society's president, also supported the association.⁸

The imprint of Franco-German influence was both deep and patterned along the lines of German nationalism. The *Thalia*, an exclusive German theater troupe on the eastside in the 1850s, counted the French-born Karl Becker and Anton Hofrichter among its founding members. German soldiers looked to Michael Wiedrich, an Alsatian commander who would later organize the only unit from Buffalo to begin and conclude the Civil War as a group. Two of the most recent and nationalistic of organizations, the *Turnverein*, and *Sängerbund*, also relied on Alsatian sponsors. Gustav Bachman, a wealthy fourth-ward Alsatian was one of the leading contributors of the fledgling *Turnverein* in 1853 even though the organization had begun in Prussia fifty years before as a front for military activity against the French. Another rock of Ger-

manism, the *Sängerbund*, relied on the services of August Datt, one of the club's first officers. Datt was a forty-seven year old singer of "French birth."⁹

One of the most notable boosters of the early German associations in Buffalo was Franz A. Georger, the first president of the German Society and a native of Lauterbach, Alsace. The future spokesman of *Deutschtum* arrived in the city alone as a seventeen-year-old in 1839. Georger at first befriended American youths, and he enrolled in a Yankee organization, the Young Men's Apprentice Society. But as he was unable to win friends or make an impression, the young apprentice skipped meetings and instead worked to create his own community. He introduced himself to newcomers and helped to model the infant German Society after the Yankee organization he had shunned. He opened a dry goods store and helped to finance the immigration of his brothers, Frank and Karl, as well as his parents, Johann and Mariana. With the support of his family, Georger became a pivotal leader in the German Society during the 1840s. He appeared during the evenings to organize the Society's library. He was instrumental in the formation of the German lodge, "Concordia," and a German singing society, "Orpheus." In 1864 along with August Paul, Georger drew up plans for the city's first German bank which opened in 1871. To the end, he persevered with Germanism on his shoulders. As a seventy-year-old, the Alsatian served his final term as president of the German Young Men's Society in 1891.¹⁰

Many Alsatians such as F. A. Georger and Jacob Beyer shunned the church, but others played important roles in the formation of the Protestant and Catholic congregations on the eastside. Jacob Reser and Charles Dreher were counted as two of the charter members of St. Paul's Evangelical Church, the first major pietist congregation in the city. George Vogt, an Alsatian, served as the pastor for the second major Evangelical church, St. Peter's in the seventh ward. Alsatians also were represented both in the conservative Lutheran parishes of the Buffalo Synod, and in the more Americanized Lutheran congregations of the New York Ministerium during the 1850s. They were also found in every major German Catholic parish in the city in 1855: St. Louis, St. Mary's, St. Michael's, St. Boniface's, and St. Francis Xavier.¹¹

Many Alsatians did not belong to formal organizations, and the secular clubs that existed before 1860 failed to organize along provincial lines. There was one institution, however, St. Louis Roman Catholic Church, that served as a material focus of Alsatian culture in Buffalo. The towering Main Street church included over one-fourth of the Alsatians in the city as members by 1855.¹² The parish had begun in 1829 when a visiting German priest had noted the poverty of the Catholic community in Buffalo and had persuaded an aristocratic émigré from the French Revolution, Louis LeCouteux, to donate the land for a church. Blessed by another French refugee, the Bishop Jean Dubois, an Alsatian minority joined with the French-speaking, American, Irish, and other Rhineland Catholics to form a parish. The Alsatian church thus began not as a provincial stronghold, but as the sole Catholic church in Buffalo, a frontier bastion for the faith.

It was within the bounds of this trans-ethnic parish that the story of the Alsatians in Buffalo reached a climax. The Germans from France helped to solve a problem which plagued St. Louis parish in its early years—a problem that suggested an amoral solution. American, French, and German speakers each wanted their own language to become the official tongue of the parish. The Irish wanted an Irish priest, and the French-speakers winked at Bishop Dubois for attention. The Alsatian-led Germans, however, were the largest group. In 1831, the parish received its first priest, Johannes Nicholas Mertz. Though the Germans treated the new father as a saint, to the Irish and the French, the priest was a distant star placed between themselves and God. It was said that though the reverend father had spent twenty years in America, he hardly could speak English. When Mertz attempted to give the Irish short sermons in English, the effort would “tax his mind greatly” and leave the strong priest weak and unsure.¹³

An apostle to the Alsatians, Mertz was a native of the eastern side of the Rhine. His accent, manner, and clothing were familiar symbols to Catholics from most of the German states. The priest wore a long black frock and a three-cornered hat in the manner of the Rhineland priests. His disposition was appropriate: “earnest, grave, and solemn.” Mertz’s presence favored German participation in the parish, and as early as 1833, several Rhinelanders cornered Bishop Dubois to ask whether they could serve as trustees for the church. Dubois refused, and Mertz’s church stayed relatively small, without the consolation of a heating system, an organ, or stained glass windows. But the Alsatians continued to crowd around Mertz. Several families who would later shine as a wealthy sub-society in Buffalo—the Diebolds, Gitteres, Haberstros, Mesmers, and Ottenots—grew up with the church in wealth and prestige in the 1830s.¹⁴

The years 1837 and 1838 proved a turning point for the St. Louis congregation. For a reason never made clear to the Alsatian vanguard, Mertz was removed from the parish. A new priest from Lorraine, John Pax, was installed. Meek and superstitious, Pax proved unable to impress the Germans as the proper successor to Mertz. The businessmen called him the “crying priest” as he proved unable to discipline the men of the church. The relationship was crucial because Pax had placed himself in charge of the effort to replace Mertz’s church with a much larger brick structure. With Pax as the resident expert on architecture, the Germans met behind his back and incorporated the church. This initiative left the control of the financial administration of the church to a board of trustees rather than the priest or bishop. The Franco-German influence in this maneuver was seen in the formation of the board of trustees in that year. Of the seven, at least four were Germans from France: Michael Wehrle, Joseph Berst, George Bangasser, and Francis Haendel.¹⁵

The 1838 incorporation served as a declaration of independence for the church’s Rhinelanders. They now could exploit their numerical predominance and direct affairs formally. The trustees could tap the wealth of the Alsatians with the assurance that the church would remain

theirs. The new arrangement transformed the church from a timid brick dream to one of the largest Catholic churches in the United States. The completed structure, colonial in design, rose above the grain elevators on the city's skyline. In 1843 it was consecrated as "St. Louis" after King Louis IX of France.

The exalted structure, the pride of the Alsatians, became a symbol of insubordination for the new bishop of the New York diocese, John Hughes. The Irish prelate saw American trusteeism as a weed that would infect the whole church if not thwarted at an early stage and isolated. In an open letter to his parishes in 1841, Hughes contrasted true Catholic piety with the wanton materialism of trusteeism and warned that lay control was bound to be temporary. Across New York State, church trustees sacrificed their sovereignty over the churches rather than face the inferred consequences of interdiction, the removal of priests, and excommunication. But the German fathers at St. Louis decided to cross the bishop. A stone flew through Pax's window, and an undiplomatic letter made its way to Hughes. Pax responded by leaving for Europe. In New York, Bishop Hughes read the letter "with surprise."¹⁶

The congregation no longer could expect favors from the bishop. Hughes withheld Pax's replacement, and in a series of promotional efforts, tried to lure the members of St. Louis into other frontier parishes of Buffalo. The Irish, claiming the Germans had "forced them out," had already set a precedent for moving away in 1841 when they opened St. Patrick's Church. The absence of priests at St. Louis created incentives for other pious Catholics to leave, and an emerging south German element provided the nucleus for the new St. Mary's Church in 1843, run by the Redemptorist order. The bishop's tactics thus funneled Catholics away from St. Louis parish, but the crisis helped to purify the ethnic character of the church. Henceforth the resistance was more fortified and more Alsatian than before. In an 1843 congregational vote, the one candidate who urged an end to lay control received only four votes while his opponents divided the remaining 284. Soon the congregation had compiled an anti-Hughes petition for the Vatican carrying the signatures of the congregation's laymen.¹⁷

St. Louis parish was becoming a seedbed of anticlericalism. But unwilling to risk New York in order to save Buffalo, Hughes claimed that the trustees had misunderstood his intentions. He gave the parish a new priest and waited patiently for a successor to reopen the dialogue with the trustees. The diocese had become too unwieldy for one bishop, and in 1847, John Timon inherited Hughes' problem. The American-born Timon, the first bishop of the Buffalo diocese, attempted to flatter the Alsatians and gradually turn the grand edifice into his cathedral. But when rooming with the church's new pastor, Francis Guth, upon his arrival in 1848, the local bishop was told flatly that the trustees did not value his presence. The Germans saw diocesan control as a threat to their autonomy, but for a pioneer bishop like Timon, the rebuff from St. Louis was treason. The other churches in the diocese were frame dwellings in the first stages of growth. Could a bishop run a diocese

from a barn rather than from a cathedral? The Irish church was dilapidated, and St. Mary's was known as the "bowling alley" because of its long and monotonous rectangular nave.¹⁸ After his evacuation, Timon's exasperation with St. Louis burned like the unquenchable flames on the makeshift altar at St. Patrick's.

Of all the nationality groups besides the Germans in the St. Louis parish, only the French remained by 1848. As the trustees kept their distance from Timon, they also began to meet behind the backs of both Father Guth and the French-speaking element. At this time, the French feared any further expansion of St. Louis as the German influx of the 1840s threatened to engulf them. Alphonse LeCouteux, the son of the deceased founder, expressed indignation that the Germans in Buffalo had taken over the church so successfully. The Alsatians, who also might have feared German designs, instead played the German card. Above French protests, the Alsatian trustees voted unanimously for expansion in 1848. Against the intentions and threats of Bishop Timon, the trustees added two expensive towers to their church. When their priest, Guth, began to support the bishop, he only alienated the Alsatians. Unable to serve as the shepherd of the larger flock, Guth led the French dissidents to the still waters of a new parish, St. Pierre's. Thus, the Rhinelanders were left with all of the property.¹⁹

By 1849, St. Louis was being financed with Alsatian money so that secular priests could reach German immigrants without interference from the Irish bishop. The Alsatians, rather than adopt their own church, aspired to have the grandest German parish in the United States. Their hopes were fortified by the increases in German immigration to Buffalo which by the late 1840s had reached unimagined heights. The "little German village" of the 1830s would grow to include 43 percent of the city's population by 1855. A bright European choir would enhance the celebration of the mass and a booming organ would replace the grinding silence of the old meeting house. At the same time, by ridding themselves of the oldtime French, the Alsatians had solidified their status as the founding fathers of the church, the money and brains behind the operation. Their leading fathers—Joseph Haberstro, Nicholas Ottenot, and Michael Mesmer—ruled the board without raising their voices. These same elders stood up to the bishop as the most determined opponents of clerical control.²⁰

A number of misunderstandings, served to widen the gap between the trustees and Timon. The bishop wanted to use the St. Louis Cemetery for all Catholics, but the trustees refused. The bishop proceeded to threaten the gravedigger, an old Alsatian named Andre Kehl. The trustees told Kehl not to heed the bishop. To suppress the spirit of rebellion, Timon had strict religious orders such as the Jesuits and Redemptorists visit St. Louis. The trustees countered that Timon was engaged in a conspiracy to take over the church. St. Louis parochial school became a source of contention. Timon wanted the "Sisters of Charity" to run the school, but the trustees wanted a male taskmaster responsible to the congregation. Timon forwarded temporary priests. The members of St. Louis complained about the substitutes, and importuned for a priest of Mertz's stature to run the parish.²¹

Timon knew one suitable pastor—himself. In a special address to the congregation in August of 1850, he called for a vote to censure the trustees. The proposal was greeted with shouts of "nein" from the back of the nave and confusion in the pews. The bishop stormed out of the service rather than give the sign of peace. The unblest trustees, pressed for an explanation, played on the fears of the congregation. They claimed that Timon intended to pry away St. Louis from the Germans in order to give the church to the Irish. In a letter of resolutions sent to the bishop on 27 April 1851, the trustees made their story public:

. . . the society of the St. Louis [Church] . . . refuse to give over to the Right Reverend Bishop Timon . . . their beautiful new church . . . so that he might, as the rumor has gone abroad, appropriate the same for the use of an Irish congregation.²²

The rumor was dynamite. If the ecclesiastical struggle over the future of the church in America was to be reduced to an Irish conspiracy, the trustees could win eastside German support and rip the diocese in two. Timon responded mightily:

May God have mercy on such deluded and deluding men who dare to say that I even thought of taking St. Louis Church from you to give to the Irish!²³

In response more to gossip and intrigue than to any specific act of insurgency, Timon interdicted the church in 1851. He helped the Jesuits begin the rival church of St. Michael's in the middle of the fourth ward, to draw the St. Louis faithful. When the trustees carried their campaign to the local newspapers, the New York state legislature, and finally to the Vatican, Timon responded with a cardinal insult of his own. He called them "Protestants" and excommunicated the trustees in 1854. The bishop called on the Alsatian insurgents to form their own church, but the trustees became even noisier. They picketed down Main Street and around diocesan headquarters with signs: "Down with Timon." They gossiped freely to tolerant ears about the bishop's lies and indiscretions.²⁴

During the years of insurgency from 1851 to 1855, the Alsations reached the peak of their influence in the parish. About half of the parish members were Alsatian as several Palatines, Hessians, and Bavarians had left to join St. Michael's. The most powerful men of the interdicted church were Alsations. Francis Kraft, a furniture magnate from Wangen, Alsace, though never a trustee, was regarded as the great financier of St. Louis. Of the eleven trustees who held office more than three years between 1848 and 1856 and whose nativities could be identified, seven were French-born Germans. Besides Haberstro, Ottenot, and Mesmer, there was Alois Allenbrandt, George Fischer, George Zimmerman, and Francis Haendel. Of the seven, Haendel succumbed to Timon's "hypnosis," but the others were championed by the secular German press for their intransigence. Michael Mesmer, a thirty-eight-year-old flour dealer, and Nicholas Ottenot, a thirty-five-year-old dry goods merchant, earned the greatest portion of Timon's

wrath for their insolence. Haberstro, the veteran, like Mesmer was accused by Timon of harboring memberships with secret societies.²⁵

These Alsatian leaders could have predominated simply due to their early arrival and eminence, but contemporaries reported a definite Alsatian stamp to the parish. Timon called it "pride"—the Alsatian clique scorned the poorer Germans who joined diocesan churches as "woodchoppers." But the German parishioners could pick out the Alsatian dialects which were employed freely at church picnics and gatherings. The Alsations maintained a respected in-group identity within the parish which revolved around their status as upper-class merchants and artisans. Entrenched in the dry goods business, the Alsatian men and women dressed as gentlemen and ladies: the men in "fancy coats" and ribbon ties, the women in cashmere shawls, bonnets, and satin dresses. The young Alsatian girls, when receiving their first communions did not merely don family heirlooms, but wore new calico dresses. And woe to the Irishman, who upon seeing these young maidens, desired a conversation.²⁶

Though the élan of the Alsations gave the congregation a degree of inner tensility in its confrontation with the bishop, these dry goods merchants and grocers appeared to the world as Americans and Germans, and only implicitly as Alsations. The identification with America and Germany conferred power: It lured new members to the church and customers to their shops. The parish was outwardly "German" in language and culture, "American" in style and administration. In the realm of architecture, St. Louis resembled Buffalo's First Presbyterian Church and had none of the Gothic ornaments that marked the famous Alsatian cathedral in Strasbourg or the churches in Hagenau and Zabern. Though the system of trustee control resembled the communal system of parish management found in the urban areas of Alsace, the trustees readily confused the issue. As politicians, they linked trusteeism both to the traditions of the "fatherland" and to American institutions. The provincial designation also was avoided when the members of St. Louis identified each other. Rather than imply that provincial designations conferred character, they used hometowns as nicknames. Thus Johann Schumacker and Henry Weber became "Werther" Schumacker and "Wasseler" Weber.²⁷

In order to have meaning, the Alsatian identity depended on the existence of the larger German-American community. Left alone, Alsace was a restrictive and uncertain variable. But within the context of Buffalo's eastside community, "Alsace" denoted not only a special dialect but a proud people living in brick houses with their stores and church on Main Street. To be an Alsatian on the eastside in the 1850s meant that one had shared the immigration experience with other Germans and could communicate freely with them. It also meant that one had a private tradition of special significance to other Germans. The Alsations were wealthy in the world of the eastside community, but not in the high society of Buffalo. They were pioneers, but only in relation to the Germans and not to the New Englanders. They also were the founding fathers of the holy Christian religion in Buffalo, not to the American Protestants nor Irish, but to the mass of eastside Catholics

who knew that every one of their parishes had stemmed from the same Alsatian root.

Thus the Alsatian identity flourished for a brief period in Buffalo not on the might of its own intrinsic distinctiveness, but because the Franco-German stamp meant something in relation to other Germans. The name conferred an identity within the community. Its meaning, by contrast, to the outside world was flimsy. When Alsatians eventually let their daughters go to the best suitor, or their sons to the best-dressed woman, they sought status, not cultural continuity. Marriages within the German community were legion—over 95 percent of the German spouses married other Germans—but the marriage records of St. Louis and the other eastside churches indicate that only a minority of second-generation Alsatians married other Alsatians. Joseph Haberstro's son went so far as to marry a Bavarian Lutheran, and a protected Sarah Goetz, a native of Brumath, Alsace, obtained the hand of Phillip Becker from Bavaria. Becker, who became the first of the two German-born mayors of Buffalo—Soloman Scheu, Lambert Haberstro's father-in-law, was the other—eventually would unseat opposing Alsatian Republicans such as Phillip Beyer and Franz A. Georger.

By 1855, the Alsatians of St. Louis parish counted the two secular German newspapers, the *Telegraph* and the *Demokrat*, on their side in the struggle with the bishop as well as most of the German community. Though orthodox German Catholics like the Lorrainian Stephen Bettinger, and even some Alsatians such as Lorenz Gebhard and Martin Zinns opposed the trustees, the St. Louis parishioners continued to press their German allies in the contest with Timon. When the Vatican Nuncio, Archbishop Bedini, visited the congregation, he reversed the hopes of the insurgents and compared St. Louis Germans unfavorably with atheists. Impressed and saddened by the Buffalo tangle which he failed to resolve, the nuncio wrote:

The German is too zealously nationalistic. He tries unfortunately to develop this national feeling as much as possible in a land where there are more Irishmen than Germans.²⁹

With the Alsatians poised as the founding fathers of the eastside community, Timon risked the unity of the diocese with every ill-tempered remark. But in 1854, the sudden victory of nativism in the politics of New York State inspired zealous Catholics to stand up for Timon and the one Roman church. Orthodox German Catholics, formerly impressed with the tenacity of the St. Louis Germans, became appalled when the anti-Catholic nativists in the city began to side with the Alsatian trustees. When the bishop could advertise the link between nativism and trusteeism, his hand was free. Timon proceeded to discourage orthodox Catholics from patronizing the Alsatian businesses. To bring the trustees to their knees, he persuaded Francis Weninger, the leading Jesuit revivalist of the day, to give a mission at St. Louis Church. The outreach of St. Louis parish to orthodox Germans, once a source of strength, now became a source of vulnerability.

The revivalist priest combined a counter-reformation mentality with flashy rhetoric and a genuine sympathy for German Catholics. Though

an Austrian by birth, Weninger captured the hearts of immigrants from all the German provinces during his crusades in the 1850s. The Jesuit firebrand knew how to use the transcendental overtones of the German language to pierce and disarm. When he gave his missions at St. Louis in 1855, "tears of repentance" began to flow from the eyes of orthodox Germans.³⁰ With a huge wooden cross placed in the chancel behind him, Weninger implored the trustees to submit to the bishop on all trivial matters. Only when the interdict was lifted could the trustees return to the saving embrace of Jesus Christ.³¹

A few trustees saw Weninger as an arm of Timon, but the loudest voices talked of a reunion. Weninger's mission lifted the congregation above the worldly conflicts to the spiritual terrain of the Church. The trustees, aware of the "spiritual sufferings" in a parish that had gone four years without a priest, agreed to meet Timon.³¹ The bishop, more interested in ending the conflict than administering a debt-ridden church, agreed to a compromise. The trustees gave the bishop the power to regulate the budget, and they signed a few documents to stiffen the requirements for becoming a trustee. But the Alsatians, shaken as they were by the conflict with its endless routine of meetings and missions, still controlled the church's property.

The controversy between Timon and the trustees had threatened to split the Alsatians from the more devout Catholics on the eastside, but the leaders of St. Louis attended the board meetings as before. The bonds of dependence between the Alsatians and other Germans persisted. Haberstro, Ottenot, and Mesmer returned to fill additional terms as trustees after 1855. As the Germans continued to support the former trustees, so did the more recent immigrants patronize their stores and work in their shops. The prestige, wealth, and experience of the Alsatians, in turn, made them attractive models for the mass of eastside Germans. As popular spokesmen, the Georgers, Beyers, and Haberstro were elected by German voters both to lead the German organizations, and represent the eastside wards in the city council.

Though the Alsatians were not singled out by the Americans for these attainments, the provincial identity remained implicit. Unannounced, the Alsatians at St. Louis had stuck together in extreme stands against both the Irish and French parishioners, and the Roman hierarchy. They signaled their unity in indirect fashion by the clothes they wore, the soft dialect they spoke, and by the nicknames they employed on social occasions. Outwardly, however, the Alsatians appeared as prominent, English-speaking Germans who were in a position to befriend other eastside immigrants. The loyalty to Germans of other provincial backgrounds extended into a whole network of instrumental transactions from the agreement to preserve German culture in the Young Men's Society to the impulse to look after a neighbor's house or propose to the sister of a friend. Able to relate to other Germans in these endeavors, and proud of their Alsatian heritage, the Rhinelanders from France flourished as the pioneers of the eastside community.

Notes

¹In a significant article on the relation between immigrant neighborhoods and ethnicity, Kathleen Conzen has attributed the emergence of German-American ethnicity to the formation of pan-German enclaves. See: "Immigrants, Immigrant Neighborhoods and Ethnic Identity: Historical Issues," *Journal of American History*, 66 (1979), 603-14. For the major historical surveys on the German-Americans, it has been especially convenient to ignore provincial distinctions. See: La Vern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), pp. 46-53; John A. Hawgood, *The Tragedy of German-America* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1950), p. xv.

²David A. Gerber, "Language Maintenance, Ethnic Group Formation, and Public Schools: Changing Patterns of German Concern, Buffalo, 1837-1874," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 4 (Fall 1984), 34-35; Lesley Ann Kawaguchi, "The Making of Philadelphia's German-America: Ethnic Group and Community Development, 1830-1883," Diss. University of California at Los Angeles 1983, p. 23; Stanley Nadel, "Kleindeutschland: New York City's Germans, 1845-1880," Diss. Columbia University 1981, p. 260; Walter D. Kamp-hoefner, "Transplanted Westphalians: Persistence and Transformation of Socioeconomic Patterns in the Northwest German Migration to Missouri," Diss. University of Missouri at Columbia 1978, pp. 128-45.

³Ruth Putnam, *Alsace and Lorraine: From Caesar to Kaiser* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), pp. 43, 83; Daniel P. Silverman, *Reluctant Union: Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany 1871-1918* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Pr., 1972), p. 14; *St. Louis Bazar*, 24 October 1888.

⁴Putnam, *Alsace and Lorraine*, pp. 67-72, 163-75; Frederick C. Luebke, "Alsations," *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephan Thernstrom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 29-30.

⁵"Biographischer Theil," *Geschichte der Deutschen in Buffalo und Erie County* (Buffalo: Reinecke und Zesch, 1898), pp. 2-120.

⁶A census of Alsace in 1904 classified three-fourths of the population as Roman Catholics. Coleman Phillipson, *Alsace-Lorraine* (London: T. Fisher, 1918), p. 40.

⁷Ismar S. Ellison, "The Germans of Buffalo," *Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society* (Buffalo: Bigelow Bros., 1880), II, 134.

⁸"Biographischer Theil," *Geschichte der Deutschen*, pp. 92-108.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 146-56, 159; 1855 New York State manuscript census schedules.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 36; Die Deutsche Jungmaenner Gesellschaft, *Festschrift zur Feier ihres funfzigjaehrigen Stiftungsfestes* (Buffalo: n.p., 1891), pp. 9-12.

¹¹St. Paul's United Evangelical Church, *Seventy-fifth Anniversary* (Buffalo: n.p., 1918), pp. 32-39; *Buffalo Demokrat*, 4 February 1878; 31 January 1885; Edgar W. Krauch, *One Century for Christ: The History of Evangelical St. John's Church* (Buffalo: n.p., 1933), pp. 2-15; Parish records at First Trinity Lutheran, and Trinity Old Lutheran Churches, Tonawanda, New York; Records of St. Mary's, St. Michael's, and St. Boniface Roman Catholic Churches, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library; Records at St. Francis Xavier R.C. Church, Buffalo; Glen R. Atwell and Ronald E. Batt, *The Chapel* (Buffalo: The Holling Press, 1979), pp. 3-18; 1855 ms. census schedules.

¹²The 1855 New York State manuscript census schedules list St. Louis Church with 800 members. In a recent article, David Gerber has estimated that about 42 percent of the members were Alsations. As Table 1 indicates that there were about 550 Franco-German families in Buffalo in 1855, it can be assumed that over one-fourth of the Alsations were members of St. Louis. A few intervening variables such as the average number of Alsatian family members who attended St. Louis, and the number of Lorrainians compared with Alsations, remain unknown. See David Gerber, "Modernity in the Service of Tradition: Catholic Lay Trustees at Buffalo's St. Louis Church," unpublished paper presented at the Organization of American Historians Conference, Detroit, May 1981.

¹³*St. Louis Bazar*, 23, 31 October 1888.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Thomas Donohue, *History of the Catholic Church in Western New York* (Buffalo: Buffalo Catholic Publication Co., 1904), p. 141.

¹⁵*St. Louis Bazar*, 1 November 1888; "Copy of the Act of Incorporation of the Roman Catholic Church of St. Louis in the City of Buffalo," 2 December 1838, Diocesan Archives of Buffalo; St. Louis Dramatic Circle, "A Brief History of the Four Churches of St. Louis," Diocesan Archives. Many recent works have focused on the struggles between the lay-

trustees and the Catholic hierarchy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some accounts have viewed the trustees as operating from an ideological context which stressed the American ideals of democracy and voluntarism. See: Patrick Carey, "The Laity's Understanding of the Trustee System 1785-1855," *Catholic Historical Review*, 64 (July 1978), 357-76; Daniel Callahan, *The Mind of the Catholic Laymen* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 17-23. For opposing views which emphasize the weight of traditions or ethnicity as a force behind trusteeism see: David A. Gerber, "Modernity in the Service of Tradition: Catholic Lay Trustees at Buffalo's St. Louis Church and the Transformation of European Communal Traditions, 1829-1855," *Journal of Social History*, 15 (Summer 1982): 655-85; Peter Guilday, "Trusteeism," *Catholic Historical Records and Studies*, 18 (1928), 7-13.

¹⁶ Donohue, *Catholic Church in Western New York*, pp. 142-43; *Buffalo Gazette*, 27 March 1843; Robert F. McNamara, *The Diocese of Rochester 1868-1968* (Rochester: Christopher Press, 1968), pp. 72-73.

¹⁷ *Gazette*, 19 October 1843; Donohue, *Catholic Church in Western New York*, pp. 245-60. ¹⁸ *The Centenary of St. Mary's Church* (Buffalo: n.p., 1944), p. 17; "Documents Concerning St. Michael's Church," Diocesan Archives, p. 6.

¹⁹ "Documents and History of the Affairs of St. Louis Church," Diocesan Archives, p. 3; Donohue, *Catholic Church in Western New York*, p. 166.

²⁰ "Biographischer Theil," *Geschichte der Deutschen*, p. 15; Bishop Timon to Propaganda Fide, 22 September 1853, Microfilm Collection of Letters to Propaganda Fide, Archives of Christ the King Seminary, East Aurora, New York; Andrew Yox, "Decline of the German-American Community in Buffalo, 1855-1925," Diss. University of Chicago 1983, p. 384.

²¹ "Documents of St. Louis Church," p. 3.

²² Donohue, *Catholic Church of Western New York*, pp. 159-60; *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, 20 September 1850.

²³ Donohue, *Catholic Church of Western New York*, pp. 160-61.

²⁴ *Buffalo Courier*, 27 August 1853; Charles G. Deuther, *The Life and Times of the Rt. Rev. John Timon* (Buffalo: n.p., 1870), p. 211; *Commercial*, 26 May 1855.

²⁵ Gerber, "Transformation of European Communal Traditions," p. 666; "Biographischer Theil," *Geschichte der Deutschen*, p. 22; *Commercial Advertiser Directory for the City of Buffalo* (Buffalo: Jewett, Thomas and Co., 1848-1856); Timon to Propaganda Fide, 22 September 1853, 19 March 1854, Microfilm Collection of Letters to Propaganda Fide.

²⁶ *St. Louis Bazar*, 30 October 1888.

²⁷ *St. Louis Bazar*, 25 October 1888.

²⁸ "Biographischer Theil" *Geschichte der Deutschen*, pp. 15, 108; Marriage Records of St. Louis Church, Buffalo Historical Society; Yox, "Decline of the German-American Community," p. 36.

²⁹ James F. Connelly, *The Visit of Archbishop Gaetano Bedini to the United States of America* (Rome: Liberia Editrice Dell Universita Gregoriana, 1960), p. 241.

³⁰ *Aurora*, 1 June 1855.

³¹ *Aurora*, 1 June 1855; "Father Francis Xavier Weninger: A Sketch of His Life and Labors," Diocesan Archives.

