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Emigrant Letter Writers as Immigrant Regulation Agents: A Reconsideration of Epistolary Practices among 19th-Century German and Irish Americans

Migration scholars have long identified transatlantic correspondence as a vital resource for understanding the mass movement of people in the nineteenth century.[1] Emigrant letters offer myriad potential uses, including offering insight into shifting national and cultural identities, the politics of deference, and individual psychological adjustments.[2] Undoubtedly immigrant letters served these functions and more for many who considered going to the United States or who kept in touch with those back home, and they are multifaceted resources for scholars today. But they have perhaps most commonly been used to reveal how immigrants maintained connections with their former communities, and how they organized the subsequent emigration of family and friends. "Emigrant letters served not only to tie together families separated by the Atlantic and as important documents of social history," assert the editors of one collection of German emigrants' correspondence, but "they were also the decisive factor in triggering emigration, whether for economic or other reasons."[3] Charlotte Erickson similarly contends that "In the first place letters were written to arrange the migration of other members of the family who wanted to come to America."[4] Another scholar argues that "Letters allowed for the transmission of important practical information, especially concerning possibilities for employment in the United States. Letters were thus an important stimulus for emigration to the United States."[5] Appearing as a truism that immigrants' correspondence fostered migration, most analysis has turned on the question of how older immigrants facilitated further movement.

This article flips that perspective. Acknowledging that the historical record is replete with examples of settled immigrants encouraging many would-be newcomers, it also identifies some of the ways in which immigrant correspondents discouraged others. Nineteenth century immigrants in the United States had a vested interest in ensuring that only the "worthy" followed in their wake; after all, in the absence of a robust social safety network, they would likely be the ones depended on for support if "unworthy" neighbors moved in. In the absence, too, of a large federal immigration bureaucracy, there were few means by which to block the entry or secure the deportation of those who exhibited problematic behavior.[6] Established immigrants' attempts to protect their new communities from the "unworthy" – usually defined by a perceived unwillingness or inability to labor, deviation from gender or sexual norms, intemperance, or indulgence in other vices – thus began with telling some people not to come to the United States. In this regard, transatlantic correspondence functioned as a form of "pre-entry" or "remote" immigration control.[7] In the hands of settled immigrants who wanted to bar undesirable newcomers, their pens became informal regulatory instruments. As varied letter writers undertook their task, they both reinscribed the traits of "desirable" immigrants and asserted the authority of long-time immigrants to sift between those who should be allowed to come to the United States and those who should not. The stakes of their letters were high; as scholars readily recognize, direct communication from known friends and relatives was perhaps the most important factor in an individual's decision to migrate, with guidebooks, agents, boosters, and planned immigration schemes of comparatively marginal importance.[8]

Established immigrants' epistolary strategies were varied, and in many instances perhaps not even conscious. After all, telling a friend or relative that they were not cut out to emigrate because of a personal failing would be bound to cause some level of social discomfort for both parties. Consequently, most strategies for telling would-be immigrants not to move were implicit. This article begins by exploring several broad types of strategies that aimed to ensure only the "right" types of people came to the United States. It then examines how letters continued to function as part of a broader attempt to enforce proper behavior among newcomers after arrival. Believing that migrant letters are lenses through which modern scholars can see "the average immigrant as an active individual,"[9] it also agrees with David A. Gerber's contention that "immigrant letters are not principally about documenting the world, but instead about reconfiguring a personal relationship rendered vulnerable by long-distance, long-term separation."[10] It emphasizes, however, that in reconfiguring a long-distance relationship it was frequently neither necessary nor desirable to bring about physical reunification. The article

concludes by suggesting some ways to contextualize immigrant letter-writing in the broad context of community and nation building.

While overwhelmingly drawn from German-language letters in the *Deutsche Auswandererbriefesammlung* of the University of Erfurt's Gotha Research Library, this article also incorporates some limited material generated by Irish immigrants in the United States, as well as letters available in published volumes.[11] It does so first, to illustrate that literate German Americans' strategies were not significantly different than those of correspondents from other groups, and second, to suggest that German and Irish immigrants (the two largest immigrant groups in the nineteenth century United States), were able to exert a similar influence on subsequent developments in American immigration policy. It should be noted, too, that this study is subject to all the pitfalls of representality and interpretation common to all those that rely on immigrant letters.[12] It makes no effort at a quantitative analysis of the letters consulted. That is foremost because the author's broader impressionistic conclusions of the *Auswandererbriefesammlung* materials agree with the findings in the able studies by Wolfgang Helbich and Walter Kamphoefner and by Félix Krawatzek and Gwendolyn Sasse.[13] Then, too, as Cian McMahon explains of his similar (and with regards to the Irish experience, largely overlapping) source base, letters are "so remarkably variegated in their length, tone, and focus that they do not lend themselves to numerical scrutiny and comparison. If every document was of a similar length, it might be possible… but it would be futile to try to compare and contrast them in a systematic, quantitative way."[14] Instead, this article suggests an alternative approach to reading immigrant letters specifically and to interpreting settled immigrants' roles as gatekeepers generally.

Epistolary Gatekeeping

Immigrants regularly lobbied for specific friends and relatives to come to the United States. Most frequently this was because they viewed certain people as having economic skills, political leanings, or other traits that suited them for immigration. Expressions like those of Robert McCoy's were common, who wrote back to Ulster in 1848 that "If Porter Strain was here he would make more money in one year than ever he handled of his owne there is not one blue dyer in my knowing. If he comes I will give him a free house and help to set him up."[15] Shortly thereafter, a German New Yorker said that "it would be best if Johann came in the upcoming new year and didn't squander away his time in lousy old Germany."[16] Thinking of his brother and making plans for the future from a Union Army camp, Albert Krause "would have liked it if Aurelius came to me. In a year I hope that I'll have

a permanent position, well enough that I could find him a job."[17] Noting work opportunities for women, another German American believed that "if Pauline and Julie were here, they could make their fortune" as domestics, while "painters are well compensated here and if Julius came over he could make enough money in a summer that Mother and Wilhelmm could come afterwards."[18]

These are familiar tropes in the history and historiography of migration. Yet the picture becomes more complicated when one considers that not all would-be immigrants were extended explicit invitations to come to the United States; if only specific people were told to come, then by implication not everyone else should. Immigrants frequently hedged against encouraging others because they did not want to be blamed if things did not work out for the newcomer. In Charlotte Erickson's analysis, "The phrase 'I will not encourage anyone to come' was a *leit-motif* of the private letter, even when migrants declared themselves to be satisfied with their own decisions."[19] Similarly, among German immigrants "A straight answer to the question whether those at home should follow was quite rare – and with good reason… Immigrants may well have been overjoyed when their relatives came to join them, but new arrivals were also a great burden until they found jobs and places to live. And the last thing one needed was to be reproached for having painted too rosy a picture of life in the United States."[20]

Skirting the question was eminently reasonable for those who found themselves in precarious straits in the United States, or whose prolonged separation from kith and kin left them unsure of aspiring emigrants' skills, habits, and predilections. But the utility of this strategy to delicately imply that certain people should not come to the United States after all becomes clear when one realizes that German and Irish correspondents frequently said that they did not think it wise to encourage people to emigrate while naming other individuals as promising candidates, oftentimes in the same letter.[21] Wilhelm Stille might have given his family whiplash when he wrote that "I'm not in the position to tell any of my relatives to come here except Rudolph, he'd do all right," and proceeded to suggest that "it's best if Heinrich doesn't come here and tries to get married here."[22] Answering an acquaintance's request for advice on emigrating, another German American wrote that "It's very difficult to find the right answer to such a question, and without doubt for that reason it's unpleasant to try to share a correct opinion, you understand?" But while dodging the question with regards to one person, he also felt that "It would be nice for me to see Peter Schipper from Grashaus here. I well believe that America would suit him."[23] These instances, while not as common as blanket disavowals of giving any encouragement to aspiring immigrants, show that evasion was not always a neutral strategy.

In other cases, letter writers offered up their own or others' experiences as object lessons to illustrate the dangers of an "unworthy" immigrant coming to the United States. These were not always consciously drafted to dissuade subsequent emigrants, but they functioned to that end. An agonized Julius Stern related that as soon as he landed in New York, "I went to the Synagogue to thank the Almighty for my fortunate arrival. I believed that I would find a few among my coreligionists whom I could ask for advice. But I found a temple full of heartless people. Not one wanted to know anything about me, much less do something for me." Dejected, he proceeded to Albany, and then to Philadelphia, "But in vain were my efforts, in vain my letters of recommendation… I was received with the pronouncement 'you must see how you can help yourself.'" Eventually becoming a country peddler, Stern warned his relations back in Germany that "here one must do anything if he has no capital and doesn't want to die of starvation."[24] Julius's saga at least impacted Menko Stern's future, who after hearing the tale decided "my admittedly not fully conceived plan to go to America is foundering on account of the possibility to not carry out the journey as well as to advance myself."[25]

In Julius Stern's telling, he was blameless for his struggles. But other correspondents highlighted the real or perceived shortcomings of mutual acquaintances to admonish potential newcomers to proper behavior. From New York, R.D. Reinhold reported that "Innkeeper Kühl is still unemployed and it will be to his great astonishment that he long remains so, because old grayheads with whiskey faces aren't in demand here."[26] In a similar vein, another German New Yorker wrote home that "Old Kalsdorf from Rußdorf is doing quite badly, can't find work and can't be tolerated by his son or even worse by his daughter-in-law, and in general for such old people America isn't a country where they can feel comfortable if they have to earn their bread through work."[27] Another reported back with sympathy of a neighbor who "seems to be persecuted by fate," and would have been better off staying in East Frisia. In the writer's analysis, some of his struggles stemmed from his inability or unwillingness to exert himself. This "must evince the truth of the English saying," given in both languages, "<u>help yourself</u>, *helf <u>Dir</u> selbst*."[28] Taken together, these salutary struggles warned those in Europe of the dangers of going where one did not fit.

To that end, immigrant writers were also quick to clarify who *would* be suitable. The ubiquitous exhortation that one must be willing to work, and work hard, pervades the historical record to the extent that only a few examples need be cited here. One Milwaukee resident wrote that "America is a good country, it blossoms under the blessings of God, but it also has its thorns and thistles. For a man who works here, it is much better than over

there; one can earn his daily bread far better than in Germany," suggesting that rolling up one's sleeves was the way to avoid getting scratched.[29] Yet another emphasized to a prospective immigrant that "Should you resolve to come to America, should you perhaps decide that you want to establish a new existence in America, then do it only with the intention to want to work diligently, because without work one has nothing in America – even less than in Germany."[30] In a trend common among those who came from poorer backgrounds, a final German immigrant suggested "the only people who are really happy are those who were used to hard work in Germany and with toil and great pains could hardly even earn their daily bread, when people like that come here, even if they don't have any money, they can manage, they rent a room and the husband goes to work, earns his dollar a day and so he can live well and happily with a wife and children," linking the willingness to work with the desire and ability to maintain a nuclear family unit as head of household.[31]

Indeed, the vulnerability of prevailing family and gender roles were never far from German immigrants' minds when they wrote home. While often cautioning against the strains migration could place on traditional structures, immigrants tended to emphasize the importance of using migration as an opportunity to strengthen family units.[32] A German woman in Illinois accordingly wrote "Dear Brother, you can't do anything better for your children than to come to America, because they can be educated here. You don't have the opportunity in Germany, and I am of the opinion that applies not just for you, but for the welfare of your children."[33] Conversely, an abusive husband drew specific criticism after "he beat his wife for every little thing, and that's not done here, here a wife must be treated like a wife and not like a scrub rag like I saw in Germany so often that a man can do what he wants to with his wife. He who likes to beat his wife had better stay in Germany, it doesn't work here, or soon he'll not have a wife anymore, that's what happened to Carl Wihl."[34] Whether letter writers dreaded or embraced these transformations, they explicitly acknowledged that family structures could not simply be transplanted to the United States. This information could not help but factor into prospective immigrants' calculations.

On rare occasions, settled immigrants out-and-out told specific people not to come to the United States. That few examples survive should not be surprising. These were hardly the types of documents many recipients would have cherished, and Irish families in particular had a habit of not preserving (and oftentimes actively destroying) letters from abroad.[35] It also seems likely that relatively few were created in the first place, as the surviving examples usually carry with them a palpable awkwardness. Still, many experienced immigrants decided that they must be cruel if only to be kind. Louis Vagades

dispensed fraternal advice, explaining "America isn't Europe. The customs and mores are different… you haven't seen the world, Moritz – you're unacquainted with its pitfalls… you'll find it different in reality and you'll feel betrayed."[36] Another felt badly upon hearing that a hometown friend felt he had been treated "hard" in an earlier letter, but emphasized "I can't say anything contrary to the truth… but he doesn't fit this country, and won't go along with what I consider right and proper."[37] Anna Maria Klinger was the eldest sister of a large German family, and the first to emigrate to New York. While she sought to coordinate the departure of some of her other siblings, she also confided "dear parents, you wrote to me that Daniel has a desire to go to America and no money and that is frankly a mistake," especially given that, without a useful trade and caught between romantic interests, he could neither fulfill his role as a breadwinner nor establish a socially acceptable household.[38] Protracted discussions over whether to emigrate could cause simmering tension. Frustrated with his brother's vacillating, one Irishman eventually laid out his position unambiguously, declaring "I state once and for all not to do it for you would not get here until you would be homesick and everything would displease you so you would go home more fool than you left a poorer man I say again as brother never come to this country while you are undecided whether it would suit you better than Ireland for nobody prospers here that thinks he could do better at home."[39]

In the final analysis, it is difficult to determine exactly how effective letters were in persuading only the "right" types of immigrants to try their luck in the United States. The collections quoted above provide examples of many individuals whom German and Irish Americans attempted to recruit who decided to stay. Conversely, Daniel Klinger, whose sister emphatically told him over the course of several years that she would not aid his emigration and that he did not fit American conditions would eventually make his way over, joining other siblings whom Anna Maria had financed.[40] And dishonest American correspondents could further complicate the ways in which immigrant letters functioned as a regulatory tool to ensure fit immigrants would come over. Irish leader Thomas D'Arcy McGee, who originally settled in New York before eventually becoming a Canadian government official, fretted about the problem of misleading missives inducing naïve and unprepared emigration, complaining about "the erroneous impressions existing in Ireland alike as to Republican and British America," and that "it must be owned the main source is a want of downright candor on the part of the Irish on this side, in communications with their friends 'at home.'"[41] There was surely some truth to this. Later in life, Forty-Eighter and New York State Commissioner of Emigration Friedrich Kapp recalled of his childhood in the Prussian Rhineland that

> There came the first letters from the emigrants, which of course sounded so pleasant and propitious. 'Over the water is a free land, there one can do whatever he wants, and if he has to work hard, too, at least he knows for whom and why!' Or the poor neighbor boy who was already there for a few years sent his mother fifty Thalers and wrote her that he's now a made man… The countryman who does well over there writes such letters. But those who are doing badly also write… Indeed, the worse things are for the letter writer over there, the nicer his description of his supposed fortune and success will be… But true or untrue, the happy news grips the whole village.[42]

At the very least, however, McGee's and Kapp's complaints underscore the power that messages from the United States could have over the decisions of those who might one day consider emigrating. But (with the notable exception of the Famine years) there does not seem to be widespread evidence that Irish or Germans embarked on their journeys rashly as a result of news from the United States. Indeed, as Kapp also experienced firsthand, an Atlantic crossing was something "requiring more than ordinary courage. A person crossing the Atlantic, regularly made his last will and provided for his family. A passenger who safely returned was the wonder of his town; and when he came back from America, his neighbors called him the 'American.'"[43] And as Kamphoefner et al. note, while some writers certainly did embellish their successes and gloss over their failures, their responsibility for any people who emigrated at their urging "constrained letter-writers from yielding to the temptation of exaggerating their own success. Another deterrent was the fact that emigrants who did well were expected to send home money and presents. And a third can be seen in the brisk traffic back and forth between Germany and the United States: bluffs could be called all too easily."[44] As a scholar of British immigrants framed it, if a newcomer arrived to discover that his correspondent had exaggerated their success,

> the game would have been up, and he would have been revealed to be no better at managing his life in North American than he was in England. It was a situation that lent itself to truth-telling, whatever the precise variety of truth-telling, if only because one might have to bear the embarrassment of being caught in a lie. Most immigrants probably understood how vulnerable exaggerated claims and rank falsehoods were to some sort of detection.[45]

Taken altogether, then, established immigrants' self-interest militated against luring over friends and relatives with promises of instant success and

happiness. Self-interest also induced them to avoid inviting over erstwhile co-nationals who might eventually pose economic or social dangers to their new communities. That is not to say that correspondents who directly or indirectly dissuaded certain would-be migrants were callous, cruel, or neglectful of their kinship obligations. The stakes involved for all parties, the personal histories of the individuals, and a legitimate belief that certain people would be happier or healthier back in Europe all played into German and Irish Americans' decisions. But intent aside, this phenomenon illustrates that immigrant correspondents impacted the composition of subsequent migration streams negatively as well as positively – that is, in deciding who would not come, in addition to who would.

Long-Distance Social Control

Ongoing transatlantic correspondence could function to constrain behavior within the United States as well as migration to it. David A. Gerber has suggested that "gossip transmitted through the international mails now allowed those in European villages far across the ocean to continue to attempt to exert a degree of moral control on those who had emigrated."[46] This is certainly true, but this exchange of "social intelligence" to influence migrants in the United States worked both ways, investing particular authority in the words and actions of "respectable" settled immigrants who sought to regulate their friends and family among their wider circle. Their power to transmit a personally favorable version of social conflicts enhanced their standing among would-be migrants in Europe and strengthened their power vis-à-vis those they wanted to monitor in North America.

In *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History*, Daniel Kanstroom labels the United States government's continued monitoring of immigrant behavior after individuals' legal admission "post-entry social control."[47] Conceptualized as perpetual outsiders, particularly when members of a racial, sexual, or other minority, even long-established, documented migrants are vulnerable to deportation or diminution of rights within the United States. This state of affairs may seem at first blush to have little to do with the lived experience of nineteenth-century European immigrants, who despite facing ethnic prejudice were classified as white for the purposes of naturalization and legally disadvantaged relative to native-born citizens only in rare circumstances.[48] Furthermore, the incapacity of the federal government to create and maintain a large-scale bureaucracy to monitor and deport the foreign-born effectively neutralized the threat of legal removal after arrival, small-scale state-led deportation efforts in places like Massachusetts and New York notwithstanding.[49] Yet Irish and German immigrants did feel the

pressure of post-entry social control, albeit in different forms. Rather than an impersonal, legislated, and bureaucratized system, they faced one that was intimate, ad hoc, and drew its legitimacy from longstanding personal relationships. As a practical matter, the consequences of this system – which relied on transatlantic correspondence as one of its main tools – could be just as impactful as if so-called deviant immigrants felt the weight of the government against them.

This dynamic is clearest in well-documented, long-running conflicts. By the outbreak of the Civil War, Brunswick-born Emile Dupré was a well-connected man. After initially coming to New York and working as an agent for the Hamburg America Packet Line, he transitioned into a role for the Vanderbilt Line. Apparently at ease in both the Anglophone and Germanophone worlds, he believed he had both the resources and the familiarity with American culture to help his younger brother, Alexander, succeed. Alexander had been guilty of youthful indiscretions back in Germany, but Emile believed that "when he's gotten knowledgeable in his trade, particularly as a draughtsman, he'll make his way. The opportunities for that type of business are nowhere better than in New York and I'm quite sure that through my broadened social circle and local knowledge Alex will be able to immediately secure a position."[50] Their parents agreed, and in early 1861 Alexander began working as a draughtsman in New York on a probationary basis. "I'm right glad to see the boy here," Emile reported, "and I believe that he'll soon be able to get along well."[51]

Unfortunately, relations quickly soured. Alexander seemed unwilling to work and butted heads with Emile's wife, despite the older brother's attempts at mediation. "He causes me unending worry and costs me a lot of money," Emile complained, "however I hope to improve his behavior through reasonable conversation and if need be send him out to Philadelphia or some other place, so that he can be self-reliant."[52] To that end, Emile used his connections to secure Alexander a spot as a Naval Department draughtsman, contingent on him completing a competency exam. Shortly thereafter came the good news: Alexander reported that he had passed with flying colors. Unfortunately, though, he said that the navy did not have a position for him at the moment, and requested a loan to tide him over while he looked for temporary work in the war industries sprouting up around Philadelphia. Emile determined to do him one better, and secured an audience with the Secretary of the Navy to expedite Alexander's placement. "I explained Alex's story of the exam to the secretary," Emile related to their mother, "and he said he would gladly lend me a hand. He sent to the archive for the report of the Examinations Commission to read it himself, but didn't find Alex's name mentioned. In order to appease me he wrote to New York and received the answer that Alex utterly failed the exam."[53]

A mortified Emile tracked down Alexander and upbraided him, but was persuaded by a business associate to give the younger Dupré one last chance to earn his keep by working at their company. Unfortunately, Alexander mistreated Emile's other employees, and feted the officers of a German American regiment with champagne at the elder brother's expense. Hearing shortly afterwards that Alexander was ill, Emile dispatched a doctor, who concluded that Alexander suffered from nothing worse than a severe hangover. This was the final straw. "I pressingly beg you to recall him," Emile wrote their mother, his letter attempting to involve her in a transnational disciplinary resolution. "I have already paid over $100 for him and had much unpleasantness in return, but will gladly pay for his travel," because through his conduct the younger migrant "had unfortunately not conducted himself towards me as a brother and repaid all my kindness in the most outrageous manner." To Emile's mind, it was Alexander, not he, who had frayed the bonds of kinship. Threatening a clean break, Emile explained that "I felt myself compelled to present him with two alternatives, either to return to Europe at my expense or to no longer reckon on my support."[54] Faced with what amounted to the threat of private deportation, Alexander enlisted in a Union artillery battery, and died of disease shortly thereafter.

In Alexander's final days, Emile did come to his brother's aid again, paying for a private doctor to spare Alexander the sufferings of a military hospital. But as the elder brother's wife summarized the situation, his death was the unfortunate penalty for not heeding established immigrants' rules. With perhaps of hint of callousness, she wrote her own letter to the boys' mother, musing "If only he minded his brother and gone home, his life might have been saved… Emile was kind to him, tended to all his wants, in sickness and in health, but Alex did not thank him for his kindness but it was Emile's duty as a brother to protect him."[55] In response, Emile's mother absolved her older son of any wrongdoing, confirming her faith that he had acted appropriately, and perhaps rewriting history to close the breach that had opened between her children. "Alexander was a wild boy," she acknowledged, "he also created much worry for you both, but still his letters always expressed thankfulness and love for you."[56] It is impossible to know how widely the details of Alexander's story circulated among former acquaintances in Germany, or if, had he lived longer, he would have eventually reformed as Emile wished. But to the extent that this episode reveals anything about the process of nineteenth century migration and immigrant correspondence, it illustrates that the processes of both crafting the image of a "good" immigrant and attempting to police transgressors were potentially transatlantic endeavors.

Not all immigrants who had problems with family members exhibited such patience, nor do any regrets about their disagreements survive in the archives. Like Emile Dupré, Joseph Ignatz Scheuermann was also excited for his

younger brother to come to the United States. Like Dupré, too, Scheuermann grew frustrated when his sibling failed to abide by community rules, refusing to work and overindulging in alcohol. Brother Valtin successfully made it out to the family farm near Cincinnati, and "In the first year of his residence he was with me, but he was always malcontented, and at that frequently about me… I released him from my employment. Dear ones," Joseph explained to the remainder of their family in Germany, "I can't praise him, and as his brother I also don't want to disparage him." However, after Valtin's inability to adjust to expectations in the United States became apparent, the younger brother decided "he would prefer to go back to Germany, if I were to send him money." The elder Scheuermann was stretched for resources and could not do so, and instead held that "if he wanted to be obedient… and diligent, he would have a reliable position with me, and treated like a child in the house. There is time for him to apply himself to work and to learn proper behavior."[57] Instead, for more than a decade Valtin continued to associate with what Joseph considered bad company. In an effort to extricate him from that situation, Joseph supported a journey of Valtin's to New York, but he "came back from there in a few months with empty pockets and sought to take up quarters with me again." An exasperated Joseph refused and told him to make his way with his old associates in Cincinnati. In his final description to their family of the conflict, Joseph ended "Since then he's there today and gone tomorrow. I see him frequently in the city but I pay him no heed anymore."[58]

Valtin Scheuermann was not deported in any strict sense, and if Joseph's account is to be believed, at least at one point would have welcomed such a step. But his and Alexander Dupré's eventual forced estrangement from their families functionally accomplished many of the same ends. This reality remains true for migrants across time and space who have been cut out from often-tenuous community bonds in a new place. Ostracism does not necessarily bring with it the potential challenges of statelessness, prolonged incarceration, or inability to recross borders at a future date, but it does carry with it psychic and practical repercussions, and underscores the danger of deviating from mainstream community rules.

Surveillance within the Irish and German American communities functioned both locally and, through the use of letters, transnationally. That should not be surprising amid the mass movement of the era; as Irish Quaker Jacob Harvey noted of New York, "There are almost weekly arrivals from England & Ireland – which renders the distance between the two countries, nearly ideal – & a person often meets with friends and acquaintances, whom he knew at home."[59] From an individual immigrant's perspective, that could be either a blessing or a curse. Harvey went some way to protecting a friend's

reputation when he noted that "Joe [Beale] is not a desponding fellow in adversity – altho' he was almost naked, & with scarcely a cent in his pocket when he landed, yet soon after he found me out, he says 'I have no idea of starving in this City, I am able to work, & I have determined if nothing else turns up, to by a woodsaw & go about to the Friends here… & request that they will give me the preference of sawing their wood – this is all I ask, & with it, I shall not fear obtaining a livelihood." In contrast, in the same letter he passed on the gossip that "Mary Russell did not conduct herself altogether correctly while in this city – she was too fond of the drop – & not clear of other improprieties. I have not heard where she is at present, for certain, but am inclined to think it is somewhere near Pitsburg Pennsyl'a."[60] As this pairing makes clear, outward, avowed conformity to accepted community norms could be more important than other markers of success or respectability. Because Joe Beale was willing to work and, crucially, made himself seen among his neighbors as committed to Irish Quakers' conception of honest industry, he remained within the fold. Conversely, Mary Russell stood accused of violating the standards of appropriate alcohol consumption and womanly behavior. But because she had left New York, she found herself in a positive feedback loop of social isolation: perhaps departing for Pittsburgh because she felt marginalized, she also no longer had the opportunity to demonstrate that she was willing to adhere to the community's sense of proper comportment. With word spreading of her alleged misbehavior, she was not only ostracized from her adopted home in New York, but her original one in Ireland.

Immigrant Letters and Immigration Regulation

In the correspondence cited in this paper, immigrants undertook a twofold task. In suggesting who would succeed in the United States, they defined what a "good" immigrant looked like. They did so with remarkable consistency across class, confessional, and regional boundaries, at least in the surviving record. This was primarily on the basis of willingness to labor, adherence to gender and sexual norms, and freedom from addiction or vice. Though there was significant overlap in these preferences among German, Irish, and Anglo-American communities, there was not unanimity among them, as local and national conflicts over temperance, religious education, and local charitable policies make clear.[61] In contesting the definition of a "worthy" immigrant, German Americans would subsequently help set the ideological rules for future generations of German and non-German immigrants.

Secondly, the widespread immigrant investment in regulating migration flows through their correspondence should cue in scholars to other ways in

which they could enact formal and informal regulatory policy. Over the past decade and a half, scholars have examined immigrants' roles in policy formation largely as responses to state initiatives. Especially since the 2004 publication of Mae Ngai's *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, projects on American immigration have devoted significant attention to the development of the federal government's immigration control apparatus and migrants' efforts to subvert it.[62] The understandable emphasis on the struggle between immigrants and federal authority has unfortunately made it more difficult to note and analyze immigrants' ability to make state action work *for* them, however. A growing body of work on the New York Commissioners of Emigration, the body entrusted with administering the immigration system in the United States' primary port of entry from 1847 to 1891, offers a route to understanding this dynamic.[63] Consisting of the mayors of New York City and Brooklyn, the presidents of the German Society of New York and Irish Emigrant Aid Society, and six at-large members appointed by the governor (of whom more than half would be foreign-born over the course of the Commission's existence), the Commissioners of Emigration represented a historically unique instance of immigrant actors being given legal authority to create and administer immigration policy. The widespread attempts of immigrant letter writers to shape migration streams according to their preferences and to monitor newcomers after arrival should suggest that their efforts are of a regulatory piece with this formal institution.

German-born Commissioner Friedrich Kapp would eventually write that the Commissioners of Emigration's system acted as "a filter in which the stream of immigration is purified; what is good passes beyond; what is evil, for the most part, remains behind." The "evil" portion consisted of "the idle, the sickly, the destitute, the worthless, who would become a burden instead of a help to our people" without state regulation barring entry to the "unworthy," or state aid administered by largely foreign-born functionaries to those considered "worthy" but temporarily destitute or disabled.[64] Its success relied on the ideological and practical buy-in of countless German and Irish Americans, who through their letters home also sought to establish filters on the Elbe and the Mersey.

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[1] For the use of migrant letters over time, see Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke, eds., *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants* (New York: Springer, 2006), 1-27; Walter D. Kamphoefner, "The Uses of Immigrant Letters," *GHI Bulletin* 41 (Fall 2007): 137-140; Walter D. Kamphoefner, "Immigrant Epistolary and Epistemology: On the Motivators and Mentality of Nineteenth-Century German Immigrants," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28 no. 3 (Spring 2009), 34-54; and Marcelo J.

Borges and Sonia Cancian, "Reconsidering the Migrant Letter: from the Experience of Migrants to the Language of Migrants," *History of the Family* 21 no. 3 (2016): 281-290.

[2] See David A. Gerber, "'Yankeys Now?': Joseph and Rebecca Hartley's Circuitous Path to American Identity—A Case Study in the Use of Immigrant Letters as Social Documentation," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28 no. 3 (Spring 2009): 7-9.

[3] Walter D. Kamphoefner, Wolfgang Helbich, and Ulrike Sommer, eds., and Susan Carter Vogel, trans., *News from the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 29.

[4] Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: London School of Economics, 1971), 5.

[5] Daiva Markelis, "'Every Person Like a Letter': The Importance of Correspondence in Lithuanian Immigrant Life," in Elliott et al, eds., *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*. (New York: Springer, 2006), 112.

[6] Organized state-level deportation did exist in Massachusetts and New York in this period, but the numbers were trivial relative to annual arrivals. See appendices B-E, Hidetaka Hirota, *Expelling the Poor: Atlantic Seaboard States and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of American Immigration Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 215-220. These figures are also inflated because they do not distinguish between individuals sent to other US states and modern-day Canada at state expense for the purposes of family reunification, or because of temporary financial distress while still in their ports of arrival.

[7] On the concept of remote immigration control, see Aristide Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 99-117.

[8] Kamphoefner, "Immigrant Epistolary and Epistemology," 37-43.

[9] Samuel L. Baily and Franco Ramella, eds. and John Lenaghan, trans. *One Family, Two Worlds: An Italian Family's Correspondence Across the Atlantic, 1901-1922* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 2.

[10] David A. Gerber, "Epistolary Masquerades: Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters," in Elliott et al, eds., *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants* (New York: Springer, 2006), 143.

[11] The author consulted approximately three thousand letters at several institutions, primarily in the Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, and the National Library of Ireland. Letters were selected for their chronological situation as part of a larger project exploring German and Irish migration to the United States between 1815 and 1892. For that same reason, they exhibit a bias towards immigrants who either settled in or passed through New York City and those who settled in northern states.

[12] See Elliott et al, 2-4, and particularly Wolfgang Helbich and Walter Kamphoefner, "How Representative are Emigrant Letters? An Exploration of the German Case," in Elliott et al, eds., *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants* (New York: Springer, 2006), 29-55.

[13] Helbich and Kamphoefner, "How Representative are Emigrant Letters?"; Félix Krawatzek and Gwendolyn Sasse "Integration and Identities: The Effects of Time, Migrant Networks, and Political Crises on Germans in the United States," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60 no. 4 (2018):1029–1065.

[14] Cian T. McMahon, *The Coffin Ship: Life and Death at Sea during the Great Irish Famine* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 248.

[15] Robert McCoy to nephew, October 10, 1848, McCoy Family Papers, D1444/19b, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, United Kingdom.

[16] R.D. Reinhold to parents, November 10, 1850, Deutsche Auswandererbriefe Sammlung Braucht/Reinhold (hereafter DABS), Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany

[17] Albert Krause to his mother, August 19, 1863, DABS Krause/Krause, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[18] Friedrich Rogosch to his brother, July 16, 1865, DABS Gauss/Rogosch, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[19] Erickson, 5.

[20] Kamphoefner et. al., 28.

21 Walter Kamphoefner dubs this phenomenon "differentiated migration advice" in a brief discussion of this tactic in Kamphoefner, "Immigrant Epistolary and Epistemology," 43-45.

[22] Stille quoted in Kamphoefner et al, 68.

[23] J.F. Schipper to father, October 17, 1865, DABS Arndt/Schipper, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[24] Julius Stern to parents, October 30, 1834, DABS American Jewish Archives/Stern, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[25] Menko Stern to Julius Stern, March 24, 1836, DABS American Jewish Archives/Stern, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[26] R.D. Reinhold to his uncle, January 20, 1844, DABS Braucht/Reinhold, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[27] Otto Quellmalz to parents and siblings, January 12, 1873, DABS Fuhrmann/Quellmalz, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[28] J.F. Schipper to father, October 17, 1865, DABS Arndt/Schipper, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[29] Johann (Carl) Wilhelm Pritzlaff to mother and siblings, April 23, 1842, DABS Clemens/Pritzlaff, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Germany.

[30] John Dieden to Johann Jung, May 20, 1855, DABS Kamphoefner/Dieden, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[31] Wilhelm Stille quoted in Kamphoefner et al, 85.

[32] See particularly the defensiveness among many German Americans regarding gendered labor patterns. Jon Gjerde, "Prescriptions and Perceptions of Labor and Family among Ethnic Groups in the Nineteenth-Century American Middle West," in Wolfgang Helbich and Walter Kamphoefner, eds., *German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective* (Madison: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 2004), 117-137.

[33] Susanna Heidrik to brother, November 9, 1856, DABS Vedder/Niggemann, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[34] Christian Lenz quoted in Kamphoefner et al, 139.

[35] This practice, combined with lower levels of literacy relative to Protestant Irish and Germans of all backgrounds, accounts for the relative paucity of surviving Irish correspondence. Donald Akenson, *Ireland, Sweden, and the Great European Migration, 1815-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 239.

[36] Louis Vagedes to Moritz Vagedes, April 2, 1834, DABS Steinheim/Vagedes, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[37] Hamburg STA/Benecke, Alfred Benecke to Minna Benecke [?], June 29, 1845, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[38] Anna Maria Klinger to family, mid-1850, DABS Klinger/Schano, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany. Portions of this collection are also reproduced in Kamphoefner et al, *News from the Land of Freedom*. I diverge from translator Susan Carter Vogel's rendering of this line as "Dear parents, you wrote me that Daniel wants to come to America and doesn't have any money, and that is certainly a problem. Now I want to give you my opinion. I've often thought about what could be done…" (pg 538). The original text is "Liebe Eltern ihr habt mir geschrieben daß der Daniel lust hat nach Amerika u. kein Geld das ist freilich ein

fehler nun will ich euch meine Ansicht schreiben ich hab schon oft daran gedacht was zu machen wäre."

[39] William Porter to Robert L. Porter, March 25, 1872, Browne and Porter Papers D1152/3/24, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, United Kingdom.

[40] See the letters in the range of 1850-1854, DABS Klinger/Schano, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[41] Thomas D'Arcy McGee, *The Irish Position in British and Republican North America: A Letter to the Editors of the Irish Press Irrespective of Party* (Montreal: M. Longmore & Co. Printing House, 1866), 5.

[42] Friedrich Kapp, *Aus und über Amerika: Thatsachen und Erlebnisse*, bd. 1 (Berlin: J. Springer, 1876), 165.

[43] Friedrich Kapp, *Immigration and the Commissioners of Emigration of the State of New York* (New York: The Nation Press, 1870), 20.

[44] Kamphoefner et al., 29.

[45] Gerber, "Epistolary Masquerades," 148.

[46] Gerber, "Epistolary Masquerades", 150.

[47] Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 91-121.

[48] The most obvious legal disabilities that foreign-born citizens faced came from Know-Nothing era legislation, particularly laws such as Massachusetts's Two Years Amendment that prohibited naturalized citizens from voting until two years after they had gained citizenship, as well as the temperance movement and scattered state and local prohibitions on religious and foreign language instruction in public schools.

[49] On state-level deportation, see Hidetaka Hirota, *Expelling the Poor*, and context added in footnote 6 of this article.

[50] Emile Dupré to his mother, August 10, 1860, DABS Leiß/Dupré, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[51] Emile Dupré to his mother, February 1, 1861, DABS Leiß/Dupré, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[52] Emile Dupré to his mother, June 8, 1861, DABS Leiß/Dupré, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[53] Emile Dupré to his mother, August 18, 1861, DABS Leiß/Dupré, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[54] Emile Dupré to his mother, October 5, 1861, DABS Leiß/Dupré, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[55] Lottie Dupré to mother-in-law, October 6, 1861, DABS Leiß/Dupré, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[56] Fritze Dupré to Emile and Lottie Dupré, October, 1861, DABS Leiß/Dupré, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[57] Joseph Ignatz Scheuermann to parents and siblings, December 10, 1878, DABS Adams/Scheuermann, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[58] Joseph Ignatz Scheuermann to Franz Joseph Scheuermann, December 6, 1891, DABS Adams/Scheuermann, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Gotha, Germany.

[59] Jacob Harvey to father, March 9, 1819, Jacob Harvey Papers, Box 1 folder 7, New-York Historical Society, New York, New York.

[60] Jacob Harvey to father, March 10, 1817, Jacob Harvey Papers, Box 1 folder 7, New-York Historical Society, New York, New York.

[61] A discussion of these conflicts lies beyond the scope of this article, but is the subject of the author's forthcoming dissertation.

[62] Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[63] Hirota, *Expelling the Poor*; Brendan O'Malley, "Protecting the Stranger: The Origins of US Immigration Regulation in Nineteenth-Century New York" PhD diss., (City University of New York, 2015); Katherine Carper, "The Migration Business, 1824-1876," PhD diss., (Boston College, 2020); as well as the author's forthcoming dissertation.

[64] Friedrich Kapp, *Immigration and the Commissioners of Emigration of the State of New York* (New York: The Nation Press, 1870) 157-158. The exact nativity of the Commission's low-level functionaries is impossible to determine, as the Commission's records were destroyed by fire in 1897, but existing evidence suggests that it was significant.