NOT BY BREAD ALONE:

GERMAN IMMIGRANT CHURCHES IN DONIPHAN COUNTY, KANSAS
AS ARCHETYPES IN PRESERVING GERMAN CULTURE

A THESIS PRESENTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, HUMANITIES, PHILOSOPHY
AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

By
BRANDON J. BENITZ

NORTHWEST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY
MARYVILLE, MISSOURI
AUGUST 2008

NOT BY BREAD ALONE:

GERMAN IMMIGRANT CHURCHES IN DONIPHAN COUNTY, KANSAS AS ARCHETYPES IN PRESERVING GERMAN CULTURE

Brandon J. Benitz

Northwest Missouri State University

Thesis Advisor	Date
Second Reader	Date
Third Reader	Date
Dean of the Graduate School	Date

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not be complete without the tremendous support given to me over these long years as I toiled putting it together.

First, I would like to thank my family, who without their support (both now and those in the generations past), I could never had the material or the support to complete this thesis. Mom and Dad, thanks, you truly are the greatest. To my beloved Grandparents, I am eternally grateful for giving me the heritage to start this study and the encouragement to finish it.

Secondly, there are innumerable people who have given so selflessly of their time, effort, and knowledge of the subject matter – Ronnie and Linda Benitz, Phillip Benitz, Reverend Bryan Jones, Reverend Dan Michaux, Reverend Craig Niemeier, Glendon Hartman, countless college librarians and church secretaries across the Midwest who listened to a strange request yet sent me all the information they could, and especially to Brent and Michelle Newkirk for all the free stays and great comfort foods. It is because of each of your efforts on my behalf that this study finally came together and that I can bring this chapter of my life to a close.

Next, the faculty and staff in the History Department and Graduate Office at Northwest Missouri State University—Robert Frizzell, Dr. Mike Steiner, Dr. Janice Brandon-Falcone, Dr. Joel Benson, and especially, Nina Nickerson. Bless each of you for putting up with me when I would call and/or show up out of the blue with an idea or just trying to give it "one last try". You all truly exemplify the best of a great Culture of Quality.

Finally, to my Lord and Savior who has given me so much and stuck with me through every step of this journey. Thank you for the people who came before me who left a legacy that I could study and for the people who came along side me who gave me the grace and encouragement to keep plugging along.

I love and deeply appreciate each and every one of you all.

Brandon

Abstract

Throughout the Midwest, the Germanic peoples who immigrated to the United States in the nineteenth century viewed the establishment and continuation of their local church as one of the most important entities in their lives. Germans reconstructed their own enclaves of their former society in America by using the local church as the centerpiece of their new society.

Using two churches in Doniphan County, Kansas, founded by the author's ancestors, as detailed case studies, this thesis chronicles the history of select German immigrant churches, church organizations, and pockets of German immigrants throughout the Midwest as archetype factors for the preservation of Germanic culture. Specifically, four functions are examined to provide evidence of the importance of the local church as the centerpiece of the immigrants' new society—the establishment and continuation of the church itself, the establishment of a church-sponsored school, the longitudinal persistence of the German language in the church's activities, and the establishment of a church cemetery.

Using each of these four functions, German immigrants throughout the Midwest, particularly those in Doniphan County, were able to preserve their culture for decades after their immigration. For them, their church was the centerpiece of their society for a number of reasons but most importantly, it served as the best medium for preserving their German culture and gave them their very identity.

1883 Map of Doniphan County, Kansas,
with location of school houses identified,
including the Smith Creek Church's "German School"
and the Christ Lutheran Church's Christian Day School.
As seen in William G. Cutler's *History of the State of Kansas*.
Image Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.

Chapter 1—Introduction

The process of immigration can often be the most traumatic experience a person ever faces. Between the totalities of the motives that drive people to leave their native lands, coupled with the journey itself, and then culminating with the attempt to settle in a new and foreign land; immigration from the known to the unknown was often the most difficult journey anyone could ever take. Yet the Germans of the nineteenth century were largely able to overcome this trauma by reconstructing their own enclaves of their former society in America using the local church as the center of their new society.

In the 1890 census, Germans were by far the largest immigrant ethnic group in the United States, representing nearly one-third of all immigrants for that year. Germans had been coming in great numbers since the early and middle part of the nineteenth century and kept coming in great numbers for the remainder of the century. In fact, their numbers were much greater than the totals for the next two immigrant countries, Ireland and England, combined.[1] When these German immigrants arrived, they were faced with a mental and spiritual journey that was often fraught with more uncertainties than the geographic journey they had just completed. Language barriers; cultural, ethnic, and traditional differences; theological and doctrinal differences, as well as a

[1] Frederick C. Leubke, *European Immigrants in the American West: Community Histories*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), x.

long and exhausting geographic and mental voyage, all combined to make the immigration and assimilation experience a very difficult one.

However, through their trials of many kinds in their journey to the United States, then establishing themselves in their new country, one constant they could count as all joy remained for them—their religion. Primarily expressed through the establishment and continuation of a local church, German immigrants found their religion to be a means for perpetuating their culture, for decades following their immigration, and by extension, establishing their own identity in their new country. The local church, as an institution, played the most significant role in the organization and development of community in nineteenth century immigrant settlements, especially in the Midwest.[2]

Yet, religious motives alone were not the only reason these German immigrants held such a close association with their local churches. Until the mid-twentieth century, specifically the onset of World War II, church dinners, meetings, and gatherings were significant social, as well as religious events. People would mark their calendars up to a year or more in advance of a planned mission, festival, congregational dinner, or church celebration, believing that the church association was of greater importance than any other associational entity in their lives primarily because the church provided a sense of belonging and

---

[2] Robert C. Ostergren, *The Immigrant Church as a Symbol of Community and Place in the Upper Midwest*, Great Plains Quarterly, Volume 1, Number 4, Fall 1981 (Lincoln, NE: Center for Great Plains Studies, 1981), 225.

community leadership.[3] Furthermore, it could be argued that these social functions were the main purpose of the immigrant church's gatherings, even more so than doing the church's religious work.

Regardless of the ethnicity, denomination, or location, of German immigrants throughout the Midwest, the local church served as the center of activity for nearly every aspect of life—economic, political, religious, social, cultural, or otherwise. This is particularly true for two special churches in Doniphan County, Kansas, which will be the focal point of this study—the United Methodist Church and the Christ Lutheran Church, both located in Wathena.

Whether Methodist, Lutheran, Catholic, Baptist, or virtually any other denomination, the establishment and continuation of a local church was central to the lives, and often livelihood, of the vast majority of German immigrants who came to America in the nineteenth and/or twentieth centuries. Sharing the same need to transplant their religion as a primary means of continuing and preserving their culture, German immigrants of nearly every denomination, particularly in rural areas throughout the Midwest, quickly formalized their religious beliefs into the establishment of a local church as soon as they settled. In lieu of a dedicated church building and/or formal setting, in their early days, these churches often started in the living room of the homes of the founding

---

[3] Ostergren, *The Immigrant Church as a Symbol of Community and Place in the Upper Midwest*, 227.

members.[4] This unique quality created a more intimate environment for the church service in the beginning and a stronger connection to the church organization as it grew.

This 'early and often' model of church establishment was common to nearly all German immigrant Christian denominations (both Catholics and Protestants) throughout the Midwest as their religion was a vital part of their lives in their homelands and became even more vital when they immigrated to the middle of the American continent as a means to continue a significant aspect of the life they left behind. Finding themselves thousands of miles from their homeland and often lost in a strange and sometimes hostile environment, an immigrant would frequently rediscover religion as he or she struggled to preserve something of their old and familiar ways.[5]

The motive behind this religious rediscovery was provoked more by the need to alleviate the extreme sense of loss, loneliness, and isolation felt by the immigrants through the church's social, cultural, and economic interaction, more so than to experience a 'soul saving' spiritual or religious enlightening. Therefore, many churches saw a boost in their attendance numbers, not because of any sort of a religious 'Great Awakening' per se, but more due to the ancillary social functions that churches provided—close interaction with fellow

---

[4] "History of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church—Wathena, Kansas" in *Rejoice in the Lord Always and Again, I Say Rejoice: A Centennial Church Directory of Christ Lutheran Church* (St. Joseph, MO: Olan Mills, 1984), 6.

[5] Frederick C. Leubke, *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans in Nebraska, 1880 – 1900* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 28.

immigrants who were culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and often politically similar to one another.

Historian Oscar Handlin noted that, "loneliness, separation from the community of the village, and despair at the insignificance of their own human abilities, these were the elements that, in America, colored the peasant's view of their world."[6] Despite being so colored, so insignificant, so separated, and so lonely, the newly arrived German immigrants often found a way to selectively break out of their isolationism in the form of the bond of fellowship that emerged by way of their local church.

Churches were also a source of personal comfort for the immigrants as individuals, families, and communities. "The Church was familiar to the peasant's day-to-day existence. Its outward forms and ceremonies were established in the round of the year . . . each festival had a seasonal connotation . . . all the acts of worship were embedded in a setting, in which the landscape, the weather, and the sight of the heavens all were aspects."[7]

Handlin also observed that religion became a way of life for the immigrant peasants who had to make the transition from the old system, in which the church represented 'the Establishment,' to the new system, in which church membership was based on voluntary choice. Thus, their choice manifested itself in the form of a religious life which grew more rigid and they

---

6 Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1951), 108.

7 Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 120-121.

became much more conservative than those of their fellow countrymen who had remained in Europe.[8] At least in one denomination, this hypothesis holds true, as by its own admission, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod of the early 1920s was essentially the same Synod it was in 1865.[9]

Despite being a primary factor for religious rediscovery, social functions, and personal comfort, there was a significant drawback to the establishment a local immigrant church. In rural, often self-isolated, homogenous, and increasingly conservative areas in which these immigrants settled, their church was the most significant aspect of their culture they brought with them or that they could establish once they arrived.[10] While using the church helped the immigrant cling to the culture they left behind, it also inhibited their Americanization process, especially where the English language and other cultures were concerned.

Another aspect to these rural, isolated, homogenous, and conservative communities centered around the church was the self-sufficiency these communities maintained.[11] In the rural, immigrant, German settlements throughout the Midwest, a church often had a magnetic effect. It would either be built in the geographic center of the community that the particular church was

---

8 Ibid., 142.

9 Everette Meier and Herbert T. Mayer, "The Process of Americanization," in Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Reading in the History of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 344-345.

10 Leubke, *Immigrants and Politics*, 28.

11 Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 260.

meant to serve, or the members would construct their homes in the vicinity of an already-existing church. Thus, the establishment of the local church played a large role in encouraging the concentration of a number of immigrants who formed an entire community capable of supporting nearly all the needs of the other members of both the community and congregation largely negating the need for regular contact with outsiders.

With a few notable exceptions, this self-isolationist concentration phenomenon was not formally conducted as the direct result of some third-party organization which was overseeing the immigration process for religious reasons or via church-sponsored colonization projects. Most often, the process was less official, that is to say it was organized by the individuals and families of immigrants themselves.[12]

Close geographic concentration of immigrants not only served to insulate as well as to isolate them from the outside world, but also served to increase the importance of the social, ethnic, cultural, economic, and sometimes political activities that grew out of the local church. Such gatherings of like-minded immigrants, in largely rural areas, who were directly controlling their own church, and isolating themselves from outsiders as a means to perpetuate their culture, meant that their own assimilation into the larger society was often difficult and delayed.

---

[12] Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Historical Approaches to the Study of Rural Ethnic Communities," in Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 7.

However, isolation does not mean inactivity.[13] Isolated immigrants easily reconstructed or created their sense of religion from scratch once they arrived and there were often a number of like-minded immigrants who needed the comforting aspects of the church to help them deal with the difficulties and assimilation of the immigration process.

These concentrated settlement patterns, and accompanying myopic views, were propagated by the local churches themselves, where Germans (in many geographic areas throughout the Midwest) looked first to their church as a way to acclimate themselves into their immediate surroundings and then secondly to assimilate into the larger American fabric. This, too, was often an inhibitor for the immigrants' Americanization process. As the church and the surrounding communities because more isolated and homogenous, the resistance to outside ideas, like language and customs, grew.

The local church was also something that the immigrants could directly control. Given the separation from the Federal, state, and even local governments, the immigrant often had little or no control over the factors, entities, or processes, governing their lives. But within the confines of the local church, each member could have a direct and controlling interest in every aspect of the church's daily life, particularly the men in governing matters and the women in social matters.

---

[13] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 758.

Largely, these churches remained under this direct, local control by the individuals who started them, until such time as they called a pastor, drafted formal articles of incorporation (often written by themselves) and then became official members. Many times, local churches would take the next step by banding together and forming a larger association or synod. Even then, the synod they joined (most often the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, for Lutherans) was created in America by German immigrants, not by Germans still living abroad.

Again, another inhibition to the Americanization process arises. Given the direct control the immigrants had in the churches they created and the intimate stake they had in the success of those churches, they were often reluctant to change key aspects of the church—language being chief among them.

Theological and doctrinal differences were sometimes of secondary importance to the fact that there was a church established in the first place. Although Catholics generally preferred to stay within the Catholic Church and Protestants generally preferred to stay within their own particular denomination, immigrants would, from time to time, overlook particular theological and doctrinal differences within the closest local church in order to become a part of that local church. By doing so, the immigrants showed how they placed a

greater importance on the church as the social, ethnic, economic, and political center of their lives, more so than the church as religious center.[14]

Ostensibly, the local church was founded to be a place of worship and religious comfort. However, the local German church (of whatever particular denomination) occupied a more central role in the life of the community than does the non-German church.[15] Religious resources were readily at hand, as the church body/congregation served as the nucleus for social, ethnic, economic, and political interaction, while the church building itself was often a center of activity, serving as a town meeting hall and even voting precinct.

One might question why the study of Germans using local churches as a primary vehicle for the perpetuation of their culture. The answer to this is as much personal as it is academic.

When looking at this personally on the micro level, the author is connected with each of the Doniphan County churches that will be closely studied herein. One of the author's great-great-great grandfathers was a founding member of one of the five churches comprising the history of the United Methodist Church in Wathena. In addition, another great-great-great-grandfather, who is the patriarch of the family name in America, was one of the founding members of the Christ Lutheran Church in Wathena.

---

14 Leubke, *Immigrants and Politics*, 28.

15 Russell Gerlach, *Immigrants in the Ozarks*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1976), 118.

From a macro level, the Methodists and Lutherans are important to study in terms of the sheer numbers they constitute. In 1910, Methodists and Lutherans represented the first and third largest Protestant denominational groups, with Baptists being second.[16]

Beyond the personal connection, that the local church became the central focal point in the lives of German immigrants is not at all hard to deduce. Scholars, historians, and academicians insist, that the church was the only Old World formal institution that could survive the process of transplantation.[17] Religion is often the most personal, intimate portion of a person's life and to bring that along with an immigrant, seems natural.

Religion does not require any extra baggage on the crossing, except perhaps a Bible, so it is highly portable. Also, since it is deeply woven into the psyche of the immigrant, it is something that could not get lost, stolen, or taken from them on the crossing to the United States. Furthermore, religion contains so many different constructs of culture—social activities, structure, values, mores, language, education, and etc. that even non-believers would gather with the church as a means of comfort and familiarity in a time and place of high uncertainty.

---

16 Hudson, *Religion in America*, 260.

17 Kathleen Neils Conzen, "German Catholic Immigrants Who Make Their Own America," in Jon Gjerde ed., *Major Problems in American Immigrations and Ethnic History*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 130.

Churches offered a certain formality, structure, and organization to the immigrants' lives which could be offered in no better way.[18] Little wonder, then, that that religion would be the primary means of persistence in the thoughts, institutions, and practices of immigrants thereby penetrating nearly every aspect of the lives of the newly-settled immigrants.[19]

Few other entities are as all-encompassing and touch a person on so many levels as their faith. Going to church not only offered an inner peace but so too did it offer an outer realization, a visible and tangible proof that the immigrant was not alone in whatever storms would come their way.

Perhaps most importantly, churches offered a strong sense of identity. Often, a new immigrant would identify themselves by their hometown in their former country. On the other hand, an established immigrant who was part of a congregation would often identify themselves by their local church affiliation, with greater importance than they would use their current local town or even their surname as an identifier. This sense of identity offered by local churches, then in turn transitively imparted to the individual members, cannot be overemphasized.

The church was a single, yet all-encompassing, entity to establish connections with others. Specifically, two types of connections were established via the church—the connection to a Higher Power (essentially 'faith') and the

---

18 Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 118.

19 Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 453.

connections within their own communities (social events, safety in numbers, commerce, education, and housing).

The journey to America began long before the immigrant ever left their mother country. Decades of economic strife accumulated to push great numbers of Germans out of their ancestral homelands. When that person, or group of people, actually left, they had already undergone no small amount of trauma which led them to the momentous decision to leave behind what they had known and start over in a strange, new land. Replacing every familiar aspect of their lives with the challenges of a new land produced a huge amount of uncertainty for many to bear. Since the immigration process often took months, or even years, some immigrants found themselves without a sense of identity for a prolonged period of time.[20] Therefore, when a local church was created, an immigrant was highly motivated to join that church as a means to establish a sense of identity.

Once the immigrant arrived, it was no easy task to re-invent themselves, and re-establish their identity in the new country. An entirely new set of circumstances, customs, languages, mores, laws, and beliefs now lay before them, which left the immigrant in a state of crisis.[21] Added to that journey were the dangers of settling a new homestead, re-establishing every characteristic of their lives, and often working alone or in small groups; it was natural for

---

20 Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 4-6.

21 Ibid., 6.

immigrants to band together in like-minded, tightly-knit communities for self and psychological preservation, in addition to religious preservation.

These tightly-knit communities were figuratively and literally centered around the local church which perpetuated numerous common core values that historians and social scientists are able to attribute only to ethnic and religious origins.[22] The importance of the local church for these communities cannot be overstated for it encompassed every aspect of their culture which they hoped to hold on to and continue in their new homeland.

In addition to religious expression, the churches created and maintained by these German immigrants helped to preserve major cultural aspects such as language, societal customs, social isolationism, continuation of familial lineage through intermarriage, and other aspects such as food, clothes, financial interests, political affiliations, and even dancing styles.

Coming to America demonstrated a unique power shift for the immigrant. In a time where the immigrant had little or no control over their lives, they could control the churches that they themselves created. No longer were churches sponsored, or to some degree controlled, by the nation or local state. Rather, the voluntary nature of religion afforded the immigrant choice and control in their lives—where and how they worshipped, where their children went to school, the language they spoke, and where they were buried.

---

[22] Conzen in Gjerde ed., *Major Problems in American Immigrations and Ethnic History*, 125.

The local church also provided a locus of control in the life of an immigrant. He or she had to endure decades of unrest in their mother country and then survive a perilous journey to America, when little of the immigration process was under their control. The primary expression of this locus of control was the perpetuation of their culture through a large number of functions held in, or around, the churches which they created.

Specifically, four key functions which demonstrate this locus of control will be examined as the basis of this study, which represent key factors for the perpetuation of the German culture within the church: the establishment of the church congregation itself, church-sponsored school establishment, longitudinal persistence of the German language, and cemetery establishment.

First and foremost among these functions, was the establishment of a formalized church congregation primarily as a means to bring other German immigrants within their faith, and within their local geographic area, into their church, as well as to spiritually nurture those already there. Newcomers into the church congregation were just as likely to be new immigrants from the villages that members of the congregation immigrated from, as they were to be already-established immigrants from the villages in the local surrounding area.

When looking at the establishment of the church, the history of each congregation reveals the religious as well as social and cultural reasons the church was formed in the first place. Some churches were 'extrinsically' formed as a result of a missionary outreach from other congregations. Others were

'intrinsically' formed, that is by a group of charter members who started Bible studies, worship services, and schools in their living rooms and then a church congregation sprouted from those embryonic meetings.

It is the 'intrinsically' formed churches that merit special attention, as one of the two Doniphan County churches was not created by outside entities for the local population; rather it created by the local population itself. Initially born out of a need for spiritual fellowship, these churches ultimately served as the principal entity for the continuation and perpetuation of culture.

Once a church congregation was established, a by-product of that congregation was the creation of a ready-made network of perpetuating their religion whereby the transitional process for the newest immigrants was greatly eased. This significantly assisted the immigrant's accommodation and assimilation process into the American society. Indeed, a tremendous pull factor had been created. In fact, immigrant churches often had a vested institutional interest in maintaining a steady flow of new arrivals from Germany into their communities and would often recruit family and friends from their home villages in order to help financially support the local community and the church.[23]

The second function in examining the importance of the local church to the immigrant society is the school that many of these churches created and the

---

[23] August de Belmont Hollingshead, "The Life Cycle of Nebraska Rural Churches," *Rural Sociology*, II (June 1937), 182, in Leubke, *Immigrants and Politics*, 28.

activities which grew from that school. Church-sponsored schools were popular among rural German churches, as they not only imparted knowledge but also piety, morality, customs, and traditions.[24] Their importance, particularly the elementary education of its members, to the synod, to the local church, and especially to the local community cannot be understated.[25]

Second only to the church itself, the school was the most important factor in maintaining the Germanic heritage of its members. This importance grew out of the cyclical supporting effect that the church and school had for each other. The church supported the school while the school supported the church. As children grew up in the church, they also grew up in the school, whose pedagogies rarely strayed far (figuratively or literally) from the Bible.

The children represented the next generation of the church, as well as of their community, and they attended the local church on Sunday returned during the weekday where they learned the language, customs, stories, holidays, and other cultural entities of the church and surrounding community. Children grew up in the schools learning not only the static knowledge ('dates and dead Presidents') contained in the curriculum, but also the dynamic knowledge ('how to learn') of that particular community.

Having a church-sponsored school was hardly a new phenomenon, even during the time of the German immigrants were settling in Doniphan County.

---

[24] William A. Clebsch, *From Sacred to Profane America: The Role of Religion in American History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 106.

[25] Carol K. Coburn, *Life at Four Corners: Religion, Gender, and Education in a German Lutheran Community, 1868 – 1945* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 60.

To illustrate the point of early church involvement in any level of education, one needs only to think of such well-established colleges such Harvard, Yale, Princeton, William and Mary, and Columbia. However, the key aspect for this study is the focus of the local church-sponsored school, wherein the school became a strong secondary conduit by which to maintain heritage.

Lutherans, in particular, viewed it as a basic obligation for the church to formally educate their children. Lutheran schools became a primary gatekeeper of Germanic culture to the point that other Germans, whether affiliated with the denomination because of theological, geographic, or cultural proximity, or otherwise, attended these schools as a way to strengthen, if not at least maintain, their culture.[26]

These church-sponsored schools served a number of vital purposes for the German immigrant. One was to impart a sense of *reine Lehre* "pure doctrine," or conservative, German, local church indoctrination, into their children.[27] Church-sponsored schools also provided a sense of moral education to their students, which was another aspect of local culture, in addition to the necessary ties to language and ethnicity. In this component, local values and mores were established and continued as a way to perpetuate the ideology of the local church.

---

[26] Carl S. Meyer, "Early Growth of the Missouri Synod," in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, 208.

[27] Carl S. Meyer, "The Missouri Synod and Other Lutherans Before 1918," in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, 247.

Most importantly, schools obviously provided the best avenue for the children to maintain their German heritage and culture through the continuation of nearly every single aspect of their heritage and culture—particularly their language, which was often the only language spoken in these schools.[28] These schools were little microcosms of Germany located within the United States. Essentially, the parochial school was a German school and became an important modality for preserving many cultural and theological characteristics of both the church congregation and local community.[29]

Taken in sum, the realization of each of these purposes caused an extra 'R' to be added to the traditional curriculum of the three R's of education. Along with reading, writing, and arithmetic; religion was a key component of teaching and learning and was at least as important, and for many schools, more important, than the other three combined.

Finally, church-sponsored schools were created for the simplest reason of all—necessity. Given the scarce governmental involvement and resources allocated to rural immigrant groups, rural, frontier, and local churches (immigrant or otherwise) started their own schools because the government had not yet started one, or if it did, that school was of a questionable quality and/or not within close proximity. In fact, almost every educational institution in the state of Kansas during the early years owed its beginning to the efforts of some

---

[28] Coburn, *Life at Four Corners*, 60-61.

[29] Meier and Mayer in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, 344.

religious pioneer or some denominational organization including such Universities as Baker and Kansas State, founded by Methodists, and Doniphan County's own Highland University (now Highland Community College), founded by the Kansas Synod of Presbyterians.[30]

The third key function of this study is the persistence of the German language in either regular church services and/or the schools. Language is a unique function in that, for Germans, it has a strong religious connection. Many of the German churches throughout the Midwest clung almost exclusively to the German language until World War I, and even then had difficulties in letting it go, as they thought it would be as much of a theological and doctrinal separation from God as it was a cultural separation from their heritage.

Yet until World War I, (and for some, far longer) these immigrants, through their churches and schools, were able to preserve strong vestiges of their culture for a number of generations after leaving Germany, expressed primarily through the continuation of their language.[31] In such cases where the German language was predominant, the impetus to learn English was of little concern to those communities due to their highly concentrated nature. Being closely-knit and living in adjacent proximity, immigrants could worship, speak in their

---

[30] Don W. Holter, *Fire on the Prairie: Methodism in the History of Kansas* (Published by the Editorial Board of the Kansas Methodist History. Printed by the Methodist Publishing House, 1969), 87, and *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas. Illustrated* (Chicago: J.S. Bird, 1882), 24.

[31] *Christ Lutheran Church: A Brief History of the Congregation – 1884-1934* (Wathena, KS, 1934), 3.

native language, and maintain their culture as they chose without the outside world knowing about it and consequently interfering with it.

Given the fact that the German language was spoken Monday through Friday at school, then Sunday at church, the first two factors in this study (the establishment of a church and school) combined to continue the language factor through the first several decades of the church's existence. Indeed, many of these churches were conducting some form of regular service in German up until the 1940s, and in some cases, far beyond.

The fourth key function a church performed for its congregation was the establishment of a cemetery for its members—usually located near the church building. In terms of chronology of events, a cemetery vied with the school as being either the second or third entity created by the church, after the establishment of the church congregation itself. In effect, this meant that even in death, its members were never far from the church—figuratively or literally.

The history of a number of German immigrant churches throughout the Midwest, particularly the churches in Doniphan County, and the communities and enclaves they sustained, are interwoven and interdependent. An excellent example of the faith of the Doniphan County settlers can be found in the selection of the crops they chose to plant soon after their arrival.

Upon their arrival, many settlers throughout the Midwest planted subsistence crops on their claims to immediately feed their families. By contrast, when Germans arrived in great number in Doniphan County, they planted fruit

trees, vineyards, and berry bushes despite the fact that these plants took seven to ten years to mature and bear fruit.[32] The longevity of crop maturity suggests that these settlers believed they would be on their ground for a long time. Their faith sustained in them the idea that the Lord would provide.

By 1882, the first surpluses were reported. In the Fall of 1886 the export amounted to 27,000 barrels of apples in 1893 the apple crop numbered 40 railroad boxcars and in 1914, the surplus amounted to 1,685 boxcars of apples put on the railroad for train shipment east.[33] The fruit business continues today as a commercial enterprise for the descendants of those initial settlers.

Whether conscious of it at the time or not, these German immigrants had such faith in their future that they were living by the conviction that "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."[34] This is a significant quote because in its most famous application, found in Matthew 4:4, Jesus refused to succumb to Satan's temptation and act independently of his Father's power. Rather, He chose to rely on God's Word—essentially having faith that enduring short-term suffering would yield long-term blessing.

---

[32] Sharon Groh and Georgia Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of Wathena, Kansas – 1858-1983*, xiv.

[33] *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas*, 17-18; Henry J. Calnan, ed., *Illustrated Doniphan County: A Supplement to "The Weekly Kansas Chief" 1837 – 1916* (Troy, KS: The Weekly Kansas Chief, 1916), 5; Patrick L. Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History: A Record of the Happenings of Half a Hundred Years* (Bendena, KS: The Roycroft Press, 1905), 64; and Groh and Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of Wathena, Kansas*, 4.

[34] *Christ Lutheran Church: A Brief History of the Congregation*, 1 and Sharon Groh and Georgia Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of Wathena, Kansas – 1858-1983*, xiv.

That Word was originally found in Deuteronomy 8, where Moses in his later years, gives a series of sermons to the Israelites as they are about to conduct their own immigrant journey into the Promised Land. Here, Moses encourages his followers to remember the Lord's promises, to maintain hope for the future, and then reminds them about their hardships of the past. Indeed, Moses points out, it was those hardships that led them to trust God more and more.

It is this exact same issue of immigration, promise, hope, and hardship that led the German immigrants into Doniphan County. After fleeing their homeland and establishing themselves in their own realized version of the Promised Land, these immigrants were left with little else but the promise of a better future, and hope for safety and success, all while knowing the hardships they would endure.

Inherently, these immigrants understood, to some deep level within themselves, that their success in their new homeland was not going to be solely through their own exertions, with them acting independently of their Father's power. Rather, success would only be theirs when they too relied on God's Word—essentially having faith that enduring their own short-term suffering would yield their Father's long-term manna blessing.

Chapter 2—Conditions Within Germany Which Resulted in Push Factors

Anytime any demographic group migrates anywhere, problems arise for the land being emigrated from and the land being immigrated to. The phenomenon of Germans migrating to America presents a number of unique characteristics. On a large scale, the United States was able to turn these characteristics into its very identity as it became the new homeland for thousands fleeing their old homelands. On a small scale, the motivations that caused the immigrants' near panic to migrate out of their old homeland were the same motivations that forged the extremely strong bonds of church, community, and culture here in America.

In the late nineteenth century, the United States was the recipient of the largest mass movement of people in world history and no one single country contributed more to this mass movement, than did Germany. Indeed, after a decline in numbers for obvious reasons during the Civil War, German immigration into the United States went from a trickle in the middle part of the century to near flood-like proportion in the latter part.[35]

The origins of the German exodus in general, and German immigrants, specifically within Doniphan County, necessarily go back hundreds of years. Indeed, the establishment of churches and the continuation of their culture through their local churches once they arrived in America were but the manifestation and the continuation of a set of beliefs handed down to them from

---

35 Leubke, *Immigrants and Politics*, 17.

previous generations and were even born out of the reasons they left Germany in the first place.

The history of Germany is deeply intertwined with the progress of the Christian religion and faith, as some of the most crucial events in Christian history occurred within German borders and were advanced by Germanic peoples. In the time between 1850 and 1870, after a half century of reactionary politics and the failure of their own native democratic government, 1,700,000 people fled the Germanic states amid social discriminations and religious persecution.[36]

Before proceeding, it is necessary to establish a basic understanding of one of the key terms that the author will use throughout this thesis. For the term "German" itself is a bit vague and often troubling to assess and define because its use could refer to any combination of a number of separate factors, chief among which are language, culture, and geography.

When talking about what a 'German' is, one could be referring to the German language and/or culture and/or geography, or any possible combination of the three where one or more might be present, with or without any of the other two.[37] Essentially, one could refer to one or more of those three factors while leaving out any one or more of the other two while describing who

---

[36] John A. Hawgood, *The Tragedy of German-America: The Germans in the U.S.A. During the Nineteenth Century and After* (New York: Arno Press, 1940), 57-58.

[37] Patricia I. Reaves, *A German Genealogical Primer* (Brookfield, IL: Published by the author, 1997), 2.

a 'German' was. Indeed, Germans as a demographic group are among the most difficult Europeans to define and fathom.[38]

In attempting to classify Germans linguistically, significant issues arise in the variations of the Germanic languages and dialects spoken throughout Europe. In a study done on the 1920 census, for example, 86% of Luxembergers, 82% of the Swiss, 35% of Austrians, 19% of Hungarians, 14% of French-born immigrants, and 8% of Romanians listed German as their native language.[39]

Further complicating a linguistic classification is the fact that there are the significant variations found within the German language itself. Primary among these variations is the difference between Low and High German. Low German, or as native speakers called it, *Plattdüütsch*, refers to any of the regional varieties of the West Germanic languages spoken mainly in Northern Germany and in eastern parts of the Netherlands. The word 'Low' originally started as a simple geographic denotation because it referred to the flat sea coasts and plains of north Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. However, that term began to carry a bit of double entendre with it as 'low' soon became the widely used description for social status as well.

By contrast, High German, more often found in the mountainous areas of central and southern Germany and in the Alps, was viewed to be the 'higher' language both in terms of altitude and social status. High Germans often

---

[38] Steven Ozment, *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 2.

[39] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Immigrants and Their Children 1920* prepared by Niles Carpenter (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1927), 341.

figuratively and literally looked down upon their Low German brethren as uncivilized, uncultured, and most often, uneducated. Once they came to America, often it was Low German spoken in the rural, isolated, farming areas while High German often became the language of the educated. For example, High German was the language of the founders of the Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St. Louis and was the only version of the German language spoken there until its decades-long conversion to English began in 1890 and was completed in 1933.[40]

This difference caused a number of difficulties and more than one argument among local German churches here in America. Often, the newly-minted pastor would be speaking High German while the congregation only spoke Low German. The result was either one of two options, either the Pastor and the congregation went their separate ways, or there was a compromise union, resulting in a hybridization of the two significant dialects.

Culturally speaking, people linked to Germanic customs and heritage were some of the most diverse on the planet. An Alsatian German, for example, or a Hanoverian, Hessian, Holsteiner, Pomeranian, Prussian, Rhinelander, Saxon, or Wurttemberger would likely have little, if anything, culturally tangible in common with any of their other Germanic cousins.[41]

---

[40] Carl S. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower: Concordia Seminary During 125 Years Toward a More Excellent Ministry, 1839-1964* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 115-116, 142-143.

[41] Leubke, *Immigrants and Politics*, 8-9.

The United States Census Bureau attempted to resolve this issue by declaring that the German-ness of a person was a matter of birth—making it a matter of nationality, a geo-political construct, in essence. All people would be considered "German" if they were born within the geographic boundaries of the German Empire at the time a particular census was taken. However, this solution was not without its own problems, as there were also pockets of distinctly German people throughout Europe and Asia, in places like Russia, Hungary, Romania, and even Iran.[42]

Even more, a geographic definition presented further problems, given the dynamic fluidity of the European, and especially German, map over the centuries. The map of Germany was drawn and redrawn so often in the early 1500s through mid-1900's that it makes it nearly impossible to identify a German based upon a geographical construct. In fact, modern day Germany represents but a tiny portion of the historically German-speaking lands.

From 1512 to 1806, when it was replaced by the German Confederation, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation consisted of 10 imperial districts encompassing 314 sovereign territorial states, as well as the lands of over 1,400 independent knights.[43] However, this supposed designation did not automatically make each person living within its borders inherently 'German.' An extremely diverse collection of other cultures, such as Czechs, Danes, Dutch,

---

42 Ibid., 9.

43 Holger H. Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil? Modern Germany 1648 – Present* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co, 1994), 2.

Flemish, Swedes, Swiss, Walloons (Belgians), not to mention religious factions such as French Huguenots and Swiss Mennonites were all living within its borders at some point. Following a significant reconfiguration, just after Napoleon's reign, the number of German territories dropped to 39, and today's unified Federal Republic of Germany consists of a mere 16 states, or Lander.[44]

Prior to Prussia defeating France in 1871, and the establishment of the German Empire, Germans were never united into a single cohesive nation-state known as "Germany." Before that, a 'German' was anyone who likely lived in one of the small towns, villages, duchies, free cities, or principalities, which made up the conglomerate of German-speaking lands.[45]

Given this continued change even into the mid-twentieth century, a German might have been born within the borders of the German Empire but then that land was later controlled by another country, or vice versa. In some cases, it is likely that the map of Germany was redrawn soon after the immigrant left, that within his or her own lifetime, he or she might not know that they were no longer 'German'—geographically speaking. For example, one German family emigrated in 1875 from the village of Zemmen, in Kries Butow (Butow County), Pomerania, in extreme Eastern Prussia; but before that family was in its second generation in America, the map had shifted such that their village was now located in northwestern Poland.[46]

---

44 Reaves, *A German Genealogical Primer*, 2.
45 Ibid.
46 "Petition for Naturalization," United States Government, April 5, 1922.

In many cases, this led to the acceleration of the Americanization process for many immigrants. With the European map so often redrawn, this left many of the new immigrants were essentially 'homelandless'—as their home villages were still able to be located on a map, but were no longer a part of their original, identifying, home country. Accordingly, these immigrants turned myopically inward and began to seek their identity through their local church, thinking more and more of their local churches and new hometowns in America as their 'step-Fatherland' as it was a stabilizing force in their psyche and a place they could say they were 'from.'

This close identification with a local home town or village is not uncommon. Centuries before, when the first Germanic settlers arrived in what became Pomerania, after it became part of the German Empire in 1181, they often settled in places that had largely Slavic names. At this point, many Germanic families had not yet taken a family surname, so they often took the name, or at least some variant, of the town or village from whence they came and/or to where they ultimately settled. Hence the large number of both German towns and surnames that end in "co . . . en . . . in . . . ke . . . ko . . . ow . . . and tz".[47]

Given the totality of the circumstances that lie within the possibilities of determining a Germany by linguistic, cultural, or geographic standards, even noted historians have debated how to ultimately define who a German is. For

---

[47] LeRoy Boehlke, Untitled Article. Reprinted in *Pomeranian Culture and Genealogy* (Germantown, WI: Pommerscher Verein Freistadt, 1997), 35.

the purposes that lie herein, a proper definition must rest with the people themselves. Those immigrants who (for whatever reason) *perceived* themselves as Germans through some claim of ancestral right, language, culture, ethnic, or geographic affiliation, regardless of whatever amount of German-ness (or lack thereof) they actually possessed, will be considered German for this study.

Because a large number of the German immigrants who settled in Doniphan County, particularly those who founded the United Methodist and Christ Lutheran Churches, were from the Pomerania (Pomernn) area of Prussia, special focus will be given to that distinct region, while fully acknowledging that even the terms Pomerania and Prussia present their own vagaries. Although officially dissolved on March 1, 1947, by the Allied Control Council in charge of occupied post-World War II Germany, Prussia had, for the two centuries prior, controlled any number of territories and municipalities throughout the German-speaking lands of Europe.[48]

However taxing it may be to define German nationality, that particular question is comparatively simple when weighed against the intricate and complicated question of why these Germanic people uprooted their families, left their ancestral homelands, and started their lives over in America. People do not merely uproot their entire family on a whim, which suggests that the massive flood of Germans in the latter half of the nineteenth century had to have been spawned by some significant motivations.

---

[48] Reaves, *A German Genealogical Primer*, 13.

The sheer numbers of people flocking out of Germany indicate that something was amiss with the poor and working class that spurred this mass emigration of millions. Migration was the end result of years of a cultural and social degradation that fall into three key areas. When taken in their totality, these three factors demonstrate how these people felt forced to leave their homelands: economic uncertainties, political unrest, and (in the first half of the nineteenth century) religious persecution.

The plight of the poverty-stricken Germans in the mid-to-late nineteenth century was rooted in the dynamics of German society at the time. The Germanic lands, with their relatively small middle class, recognized four distinct social castes: Clergy, nobility, burghers, and peasants.[49] In 1800, the clergy was the smallest representative proportion, comprising just under one percent of the Prussian population; the nobility, which included the landowning Junkers, (comprised of the higher nobles—the rulers, princes, counts, and dukes as well as the lower nobles—hereditary and recently patented nobles, sword and robe, urban and rural) encompassed slightly more than 1%; the largely urban burghers (the supposed middle class) made up about 25%; which left the peasants to make up the remaining 73% of the population.[50] It was this last group which comprised the bulk of the emigrants who left German lands in the latter part of the nineteenth century, for it was they, more than any other group, who suffered

---

49 Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil?*, 12.

50 Ibid., 12-20.

from the internal dynamics of Germany at the time, largely imposed by the other three groups.

In Pomerania, especially, the Church reigned supreme. It held influence and took precedence over the courts and when the common lands were redistributed in the early nineteenth century, the church's portion was always determined first.[51] There was a true schism in society where less than one percent of the population either directly or indirectly controlled the vast majority of wealth, resources, and social and political power.

Life, particularly for this large peasant class, was far from a utopian yeomanry of agrarian farmership. Poverty was extremely widespread and caused by a number of factors, including the current social order (*grundherrschaft* and *gutsherrschaft*), disruption and devastation of numerous European wars, shortages of basic supplies, high prices for goods, nearly universal illiteracy, a series of brutal winters, influenza epidemics, famine, and governmental oppression in the form of high taxation. Each of these factors snowballed into a vicious cycle of inflation and served as motivating factors for these emigrants to flee their homeland.[52]

The chances of a poor farming family pulling themselves out of this perpetual cycle of poverty were slim—not only due to economic factors, but social and political customs of the time. Traditionally, in western Germanic

---

[51] Helen Ohm, Audrey Boehlke, and LeRoy Boehlke, Untitled Article. *Pomeranian Culture and Genealogy* (Germantown, WI: Pommerscher Verein Freistadt, 1997), 30, 31.

[52] S. Chris Anderson and Ernest Thode, *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Germanic Ancestors* (Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, 2002), 66.

states, the manorial system of *grundherrschaft* delineated legal and social land ownership. *Grundherrschaft* was a form of social contract whereby the village and the local peasants constituted a manor in the care of a neighboring lord. The peasants worked in the lord's fields and provided him with a hefty percentage (often between one-fifth and one-third) of their gross product. In exchange, this lord provided protection from outsiders, local police authority, and patrimonial justice among insiders.[53] Although not a system of slavery per se, the *grundherrschaft* system effectively kept local peasants tied to the land, and dependant upon the local lord as seven out of every ten farmers struggled to maintain a subsistence level of existence.[54]

For the eastern Germanic peasants, such as those in Prussia, the *gutsherrschaft*, by contrast was the dominant form of social control. Early in this system, local lords dictated the peasants' movement, marriage, and servitude of their children, as well as demanded special labor (anywhere from 100—200 days per year), and imposed arbitrary taxes such as the head tax, death tax, and/or marriage tax, in addition to the obligatory tax on goods produced.

The constant system of poverty worsened throughout the mid-nineteenth century as one series of disasters after another struck the peasant class. First was England's excessive grain tariff in the 1830s which pushed the price of rye (the primary cash crop of the lesser Germanic states like Pomerania) down, thereby

---

[53] Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1648-1840* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 406.

[54] Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil?*, 20.

reducing what little income the peasants had. Next, a potato blight struck in the middle part of Europe in the 1840s (similar to the one that attacked Ireland); then extremely harsh winters set in from 1853—1856. Finally, a 'Great Depression,' of sorts which started in the winter of 1873-74 and lasted until 1896, combined with the rapid industrialization and militarization of Prussia, caused many farmers to leave their lands, the effect of which was that the price of land subsequently bottomed out.

With land prices plummeting, the local wealthy lord, seeing his equity slip away, subsequently raised demands on the local peasants by asking for more production with the same, or less, compensation. What little capital the peasants had built, or what specie they had managed to scrimp to save, was now considerably devalued because of the shift in price structure. With not only their cash crops but also the lands on which they raised them devalued, plus the lack of specie, the value of their work was no longer evident. Even though the land itself was still agriculturally productive, it was not economically so.

Added to that, was the fundamental shift in Germany's economy from an agrarian-based to an industrial-based market. Beginning around the time of the Congress of Vienna (late 1814 to mid-1815), Germany's economy changed from a farming-first philosophy to one of industrial capitalism, forcing many off their farms to look for jobs in cities, as well as altering the basic psyche of the nation. Essentially, the German nation that went to war in 1914 looked nothing like the nation that the Congress of Vienna had helped to create a century earlier.

Throughout history, education has been one of the most reliable methods of achieving upward social mobility, but throughout most of German history, this path was closed to many across their society. For women in Germany, it was especially difficult. It was 1896 before women were allowed to take a test equivalent to high school graduation and collegiate entrance; and it was not until 1900 that they were allowed admission into German universities.[55] What little schooling could be found was reserved for the children of the clergy, nobles, and burghers. These schools consisted of one-room schoolhouses where untrained and underpaid teachers taught their students Christianity, reading, writing, and arithmetic using the Bible, hymnals, and Lutheran catechism, which linked religion with educational matters at an early age and across a number of aspects of society.[56]

However, the largest societal failure was in the area of economics, particularly the failure of the middle class to take hold as a viable part of the society and the economy when democracy first began to rise. Following the Royal Edict of October 9, 1807, peasants were no longer directly tied to their lords by means of serfdom, but beyond that, little gains were realized. Even though the traditional castes were supplanted by the ability to join a higher class based on economic capacity, practically speaking, it was nearly impossible to do so.[57]

---

55 Ibid., 149.
56 Ibid., 45.
57 Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1648-1840*, 405-406.

The burghers of the middle class did not attain or replace the landed-gentry status of the Junkers of the upper class to become a dominant force in society—something essential for the rise of democracy. Instead, they became more upwardly aligned with the Junkers, who themselves had no desire to enter the bourgeois.[58] Essentially Germany was not ready to become a democracy because "New Germany" could not break the grip of "Old Germany."[59]

When the failure of the middle class to take hold became apparent, many thousands of families of the lower classes, who were dependent upon the coattails of the burghers for the possibility of their own upward social mobility, left Germany for the better start they believed awaited them in America. After 1850, the vast majority of the thousands of Pomeranians who left for America did so for economic reasons.[60]

Even earlier than that, the German people were long growing more and more dissatisfied with the deteriorating economic conditions and the lack of possible upward social advancement, such that by the 1840s when harvests declined and businesses failed, causing many to become hungry and out of work, the social conditions deteriorated even further. To make matters worse for large families, the tradition of male primogeniture was still in effect whereby farms and familial possessions were handed down to the eldest son thus creating more hard feelings and hardships for larger families.

---

58 Ibid., 406.
59 Ozment, *A Mighty Fortress*, 5.
60 Ohm, Boehlke, and Boehlke, *Pomeranian Culture and Genealogy*, 96.

The totality of these circumstances was that the New World, America in particular, became increasingly enticing. The abundance of land, work, food, and opportunity, combined with the lack of societal constraints such as economic restrictions and primogeniture, created the ideal image of a better life for the emigrant that was unavailable in the Fatherland.

Another significant reason for the mass exodus of Germanic people was the on-going political strife that affected not only Prussia, but also the Prussian province of Pomerania as well—a strife that had been boiling for centuries. From the death of Frederick William I of Prussia in 1740 to the restructuring of Europe in mid-1815 by the Congress of Vienna, (which replaced the Peace of Westphalia at the end of the Thirty Years War) Europe, in particular Germany, was in a nearly constant state of war and geographic upheaval.

In the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, the Germanic states were a near-constant battleground and because of this, Germany was in many ways less advanced than the other Western European countries in which the Industrial Revolution was in full swing. Commerce and manufacturing were limited as Germany was still largely an agrarian society that was struggling to industrialize.

The seeds of disorder which transitioned the masses from being dissatisfied with, to actually leaving, their homelands were sewn centuries before, during Frederick William I's reign, as he realized two things: Germany's unique geographical location and the buildup of his first love, the military.

Being centrally located on the European continent, with ready access to the ocean, and enclosed on two sides by potentially hostile neighbors, Prussia could be either predator or prey, depending on the point of view taken by the leaders within and without. Realizing this, Frederick William I decided to go on the offensive and assume the role of predator, requiring all those who surrounded him to recognize Prussia's (i.e. his) authority.

To do this, Frederick William I relentlessly devoted Prussia's efforts to rapid military industrialization and within a decade, though Prussia ranked tenth among European countries in land size and twelfth in population, it garnered the fourth largest military, thereby putting a tremendous economic and manpower strain on the population who was already expected to meet their farm production quotas for their local lords.[61]

Because of the high demands placed upon them by the *grundherrschaft* and *gutsherrschaft* systems, coupled with the frequent wars which moved across their lands, the local peasants preferred to stay at home in the name of both protection and production. However, this problem of military and manorial service was forcibly resolved after Prussia's rise to power in the 1860s when Prime Minister-cum-Chancellor Otto von Bismarck-Schonhausen instituted laws mandating that every male serve in the Prussian army.[62]

---

61 Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil?*, 42.

62 Anderson and Thode, *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Germanic Ancestors*, 69.

This impressment came to a head when Bismarck justified his newly restructured Prussian military system by ending the Austro-Prussian dualism when he instigated the Austro-Prussian (Seven Weeks) War of 1866, then selectively doctored the Ems Dispatch to initiate the Franco-Prussian War of 1870—1871. While the Seven Weeks War had been a short war which was politically motivated, waged largely by his cabinet, and pitted one dynasty and royal army against another; the Franco-Prussian War was much different. It was a people's war, pitting society against society and waged with all the passion and animosity that such struggles can entail.[63]

In order to replenish his deep and costly losses, Bismarck continued his mandate of military service, but now extending it into the newly-acquired territories. As a result, more and more young men were pressed into military service at a time that they were needed at home. Now, more than ever, the families of those men who left were struggling through tough economic conditions and could not afford to have their primary breadwinners off fighting someone else's war somewhere else.

This process of building up the military also had a secondary, negative effect. Given the swelling numbers in the military, the soldiers had to be quartered somewhere which meant they often lived in the private homes of the townsfolk in or near the garrison town. Although it worked generally well, there were still a large number of incidents between the householders and the billeted

---

63 Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil?*, 125.

servicemen.[64] This had a tremendous effect on the German psyche. In addition to being impressed to serve, there was the distinct possibility of having to quarter troops that never wanted to be in the military in the first place.

Essentially, the wars, then subsequent recovery and constant preparations for the possible next one, proved so costly in terms of lives and political hard-feelings that its ramifications were felt well into the next century. Chief among these ramifications were the desire to leave behind the deteriorating economic situation, the beleaguered politics, and the military conscription.

Other revolutionary movements, like those in 1830 and particularly the March Revolution of 1848, also pushed Germans out of Germany. It was the latter of these which had the most significant impact on the United States which was experiencing an internal migration of his own. As Americans were moving, or about to move, westward in the gold rushes of 1848-49, and for other opportunities that presented themselves in the west, a void was created which was largely filled by various immigrant groups, Germans in particular.

Given each of these motivations to leave Germany and settle in America, and despite their continued hold on their religion as a continuation of their culture once they arrived, the least urgent reason for these immigrants to flee Germany was, oddly enough, an effort to escape the religious unrest of the day. While "Old Germany" saw a large number of citizens leave because of religious

---

64 Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 151.

reasons, few if any historians look at religious issues as motivation for the exodus from "New Germany", especially after 1840.

No matter when they left, however, religion was one of the most central, deeply felt, and focusing factors of German life. Statistically speaking, local German churches played a very significant role in the German Empire. Of its almost 50 million subjects, 31 million were Evangelical (mostly Lutheran, though smaller denominations were included]), 17.7 million were Catholics, 570,000 were Jews, and about 150,000 were members of other smaller Christian sects.[65]

The primary basis for the early, "Old Germany", religious unrest was twofold. First, the overall shift of focus of religion had changed from being esoteric, where revelation and interpretation was only allowed to a few well-educated priests, to a more exoteric approach where the interpretation was individualized, then passed down, and allowed to flourish and become transformed, in the hands of the individual, common man. It was this shift that served the generation of Germans who migrated to America so well because they were the ones who would have to rely on their own knowledge and interpretation of the Bible before a local church was established and even into its early years before a pastor could reliably serve the church.

The second basis for unrest lay in the religious persecution that German citizens were experiencing prior to the 1840s. Part of this was fueled by a

---

65 Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil?*, 144.

conceptual shift that several populations were experiencing all at once, while the other part was unique to the German, and especially Pomeranian, citizenry.

This shift of religious study from esoteric to exoteric had its roots back in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church house door on All Hallows Eve. Shortly after making this landmark proclamation, his intentions began to shift, as his intended reforms of the Catholic Church morphed into its own denomination entirely. His new ideas, and denomination, swept the German lowlands like wildfire and by 1535, much of Prussia, including Pomerania, was Lutheran.

Luther's actions also had another ramification. As Holger Herwig points out, "In religion, the first half of the nineteenth century saw a weakening of the ideals of the Enlightenment, a return of orthodoxy, and, finally, a Pietist revival. Once more, worshippers turned to the Scriptures rather than the official churches for spiritual guidance."[66] Many of the Pietists then left the Lutheran church and refused service in the military, thereby incurring a double persecution.

Breaking from the church and turning toward the scriptures for guidance was key. Given that the message, teaching, and organization of the church had fractured and decentralized, thereby putting more spiritual power directly into the hands of the people, they were now better prepared to start their own church, whenever such a situation arouse.

---

[66] Ibid., 88.

In 1618, when the Thirty Years War broke out between Lutherans and Catholics, Pomerania often found itself in the thick of things, as the rich agrarian tradition and resources it provided made it a viable target for both sides. In fact, Pomerania ended up feeding both sides of the conflict, first the Catholic armies, then the Swedish Lutheran army under King Gustavus Adolphus. At the end of the Thirty Years War, the landscape, both in terms of topography and demographics had markedly changed. Approximately two-thirds of the population had been killed, forcibly removed, or voluntarily relocated while huge tracts of land were torn up, burned down, or otherwise made unsuitable for continued agricultural use.

Another consequence of the Thirty Years War was the increased political influence and economic affluence of the upper class. As a result of the war, more and more lands were removed from the peasants and fell into the hands of the upper class, thereby solidifying their control and allowing their exploitation over those who lived on and around their lands. Prior to 1808, those who lived on the lands controlled by the aristocracy were peasants, who were required to work three to four days per week for their local Junker who either through *grundherrschaft* or *gutsherrschaft*, controlled their daily lives.

The religious persecution that German citizens were experiencing in the first decades of the nineteenth century had its origins in 1817. That year, things began to change for the worse for those Lutherans living in Pomerania, as many Lutheran churches converted to State churches, thus beginning a timeline of

events with regards to the restriction of, and government hostility towards, certain religious sects Lutheranism, in particular. This also had the unintended consequence of laying the foundation for mistrust of the government involving itself in religious matters, which made their decedents all the more likely to create a church (and its accompanying programs, like schools) completely independent of the state.

The second major anti-Lutheran step came in 1831 when Friedrich Wilhelm I made it illegal for his subjects to either be a Lutheran and/or to attend Lutheran services. The result was that Lutherans were jailed, fined, or had their property confiscated by the government. By 1837 Friedrich Wilhelm III had combined the Lutheran and Calvinist churches to the point that neither religion was happy with their place of worship, and in 1839, after a considerable and widespread underground church movement, Wilhelm merged the Lutheran and Reformed churches into a new *Unierte*, or united church, as a way to control and then phase out the Lutheran religion. Some of the Lutherans in Prussia did not agree to the gradual elimination of the church and decided to leave their homeland.[67]

Accordingly, Pomerania saw mass emigrations occur in 1837, 1839, and again in 1843—largely in conjunction with these unpopular measures. The mass emigration which took place in 1839 is of particular note for two reasons. It was the first highly-organized mass exodus where Pomeranians left en masse with a

---

67 Ohm, Boehlke, and Boehlke, *Pomeranian Culture and Genealogy*, 96.

focused idea of where they wanted to go once they left home and how they were going to get there. The second reason for noting this unique emigration was that the forced merger of the Lutheran and Reformed churches into a new united church was an extremely unpopular move, far more so than the others. In this significant emigration, approximately six hundred Pomeranians left for the United States, settling mostly in Wisconsin following the trail of a few who had left in 1837.

Intertwined within these events in the east were events in western Germany which fueled other emigrations. The year 1819 saw a number of Germans flee after the assassination of August von Kotzebue and the subsequent government crackdown on the *burschenschaften* (ideological fraternities based out of the Universities of the day). This crackdown led to the fleeing of several hundred of Germany's best and brightest young students to America, as they wanted to rid themselves completely of the hassles and terrors of the Old World.[68]

As the nineteenth century progressed, more harsh feelings arose as a result of other demographic groups being singled out for persecution within the Germanic population. Whereas in the first half of the century, specific religious denominations were targeted for persecution, in the second half other segments

---

[68] Ernest Bruncken, *German Political Refugees in the United States during the period from 1815 – 1860*, special print from "Deutsch-Amerikanische Geschichtsblatter," (1904) (San Francisco, CA: R and E Research Associates), 1970, 13.

of the population were targeted, particularly at the hands of Chancellor Bismarck.

Overall, the nineteenth century was a tough time for the German population. Germany came late to industrialization and then when it industrialized, modernization brought even more changes in the internal political and economic structure of the country. Industrialization and urbanization had essentially frightened many Germans off their land; the *Kulterkampf* against the Catholics had upset previously established religious beliefs and threatened to spread to other denominations; formerly aristocratic landowners became more and more impoverished, blue collar workers were threatened with growing unemployment, and the artisans were endangered by new industrial plants.[69]

Given the totality of the economic, political, and religious circumstances within Germany, combined with a strengthening faith in their local church, while enduring a diminishing faith in their country, many Germans reassessed their future. Thousands decided that the best way for them to better their current position in society was to leave their current society.

Therefore, a large number of Germans, especially a great number of Pomeranians, looked at their children and decided that their lives should be better than the one their parents had and America offered such an opportunity.

---

[69] Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil?*, 144.

They put their faith in their future and believed that at least things in America could not be worse than they were in Germany.

Many of those who packed up their families in those years made their way to the Midwest, including Doniphan County, Kansas. When they arrived, they found an area suitable for starting over their lives with a viable economic and agricultural base, a suitable and welcoming (or at least indifferent) political climate, and an open religious tolerance (or, again, at least indifference) which would allow them to realize their faith and future by recreating the best parts of their Fatherland though they were thousands of miles away.

Chapter 3—Conditions Within Kansas and Doniphan County Which Resulted in Pull Factors

The histories of both the state of Kansas and Doniphan County have been intertwined with the three great forces that prompted the immigrant Germans to make their exodus out of Germany – economic, politics, and religion. However, there is one addition to that equation which spurred outside interests to pay attention to both the state and county, thereby allowing an infrastructure to be in place by the time those immigrants arrived, the Indians.

For centuries, the Indians had free-reign and control over the area now known as Kansas where they played the more significant role in earlier Kansas and Doniphan County history, whereas economics, politics, and religion played the more significant role in the recent history. It was the Indians who first inhabited Kansas; it was the Indians who bear the origin of its name (from the Kansa Indian tribe which means "People of the South Wind"); and it was the goal of religious conversion of those Indians that first brought whites into Kansas and into Doniphan County in particular. With the establishment of Indian religious outreach ministries, those ministries became the sustaining base of permanency that kept Kansas flourishing during its troubled and sometimes dubious progression first as a territory, then as a state.

The history of Doniphan County, while its inception and formation was not marked with the same violence as that of the rest of the state, is no less compelling in its awe and complexity. Originally dominated by an endless sea of

wild grasses and a sporadic tree, it remained relatively untouched by man. Only the occasional nomadic band of Indians altered the land in any significant way. In fact, it was these bands of Indians who not only first gave Doniphan County its first human footprint but also the impetus for its first taste of European religion.

The first non-Indians to set foot into Kansas came in the Fall and Winter of 1541 when Francisco Vasquez de Coronado led his grand expedition up from what is now Mexico and trekked through Kansas, through such present-day towns as Liberal, Hayne, Meade, Ford, and Lyons.[70] However, there is some debate as to how far northeast Coronado came in that expedition.

Most historians generally agree that Coronado's northeastern-most reach was his encampment at a place on the Kansas River near present-day Salina. Yet, there is certain evidence that he had actually reached much further northeast, all the way up into Doniphan County. In his letter reporting to the King of Spain, Coronado indicates that his expedition arrived at "the province they call Quivera" (the local Indian tribe that is today known as the Wichita), that their village is "on a very large river", and "is in the fortieth degree."[71] If that is true, then he would not seem to be talking about camping near Salina.

In fact, since the Kansas River has never been very large, it would stand to reason that the "very large river" he referred to was the Missouri. Also, if the

---

70 *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County*, 8, and Holter, *Fire on the Prairie*, 3.

71 Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, Report to the King of Spain, sent from Tiguex on October 20, 1541, accessed from http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/one/corona9.htm on April 18, 2008.

"fortieth degree" was the 40th parallel of latitude, Coronado would have seemed to have camped, and placed his large symbolic cross in the ground to mark the occasion, near the present-day town of White Cloud, in Doniphan County.[72]

Regardless of the debate, what is without question is that religion was an integral part of the journey. Not only was Coronado's letter report filled with religious overtones but one of Coronado's close companions on the expedition was Father Juan DePadilla. Father DePadilla was so devoted to his cause as missionary that he returned a few years later with a few other companions to spread the word of God, and love of Jesus, to the "untutored savage."[73]

In 1803, the area that comprises what is now both Missouri and Kansas became part of the United States as a result of the Louisiana Purchase. Soon after, great names like Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Zebulon Pike, and Stephen H. Long made their great exploratory treks in, or across, the state. Before, during, and for the next few decades thereafter, fur trading was the dominant commercial enterprise and it was the fur traders who founded the first settlement in Missouri, St. Genevieve in 1735, the major gateway city of St. Louis in 1764, and then the principal city directly across the Missouri River from Doniphan County, St. Joseph, in 1826 (though it would be a quarter century more before it received its official charter).

---

72 Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History*, 97-101.
73 Calnan, ed., *Illustrated Doniphan County*, 76.

After the southern-most portion of the Louisiana Purchase was partitioned off and granted its own statehood in 1812, Congress renamed the remainder of the territory 'Missouri.' Following the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the state of Missouri was partitioned off and became the 24th state on August 10, 1821. However, it was not until the Platte Purchase was negotiated from the Indians living in that area in 1836—1837 that Missouri gained its distinctive triangular northwestern corner contained within six counties which opened up the excellent farmland in and around the area of St. Joseph—directly across the Missouri River from Doniphan County.

This access to the outstanding river frontage at St. Joseph proved invaluable to the growth of Doniphan County. A number of families from the area, including some contained in this study, and thousands of other immigrants as well, arrived in New Orleans then steamboated up the Mississippi River, or arrived in New York and travelled overland to a port on the Ohio River, down to the Mississippi, then up the Mississippi to the Missouri, in order to reach St. Joseph, where they then crossed to their ultimate destination in Doniphan County.

Before any of this happened, however, one issue needed to be addressed—what to do with the native peoples already inhabiting the lands which the United States had recently purchased and was in the process of occupying. Initial attempts to deal with the natives included offers of right-of-way access, land purchases, or trades, similar to what happened with the Osages.

The Osage Indians gave the right-of-way for the Santa Fe Trail (500 of the 800 miles of which travelled through Kansas) to the Federal government pursuant to a treaty signed at Council Grove, Kansas, in 1825.[74] Though both the Santa Fe and the Oregon Trails started in Independence, Missouri, they truly became 'The Gateway to the West' by demonstrating that it truly was the journey and not so much the destination that mattered—at least as far as Kansas was concerned. For it was not the trails themselves that were the primary importance to the development of the state, but the towns and forts that sprang up along the way that were placed to protect travelers as they passed. One such town became Leavenworth, which was established as a military outpost in 1827 to protect wagon trains along the Santa Fe Trail, making it the first permanent white settlement in the state.

Yet, this land had been occupied for nearly ten thousand years before the terms 'permanent' or 'white' were used in describing the population there. At least four separate Indian tribes, the Kansa, Osage, Pawnee, and Wichita, each lived in eastern Kansas where they hunted buffalo while also raising beans, corn, and squash. In addition to these tribes, between 1825 and 1842, no fewer than thirty tribes gave up their lands east of the Mississippi and settled on the newly established reservations in the Kansas region—including the Chippewa,

---

[74] Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (New York, 1960), 422.

Delaware, Kickapoo, Iowa, Sac and Fox, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Sauk, Shawnee, and Wyandot.

Three of these tribes (the Kickapoo, Iowa, and Sac and Fox) are of particular interest as they were closest in proximity (and the purpose for) the site of the first permanent white settlement in Doniphan County. It was the establishment of the Indian reservations throughout Kansas, and especially the four within Doniphan County, that first brought organized European religion to the area.

While their own religion was important for the Indians, it was also important for men like Coronado and Father DePadilla to convert the Indians to their own form of religion. Yet it was 290 years after Coronado's journey that the first permanent European religious institution was established in Kansas with the goal of converting the Indians.

Isaac McCoy was a Scots-Irish Baptist missionary at the Baptist Indian Mission station at Carey, Michigan Territory, in 1831 when he was called to set up a mission in Kansas.[75] Titled the Baptist Shawnee Mission, McCoy's mission was founded to bring a sense of religion, civilization, and culture to the Indians living there at the time.[76] Evidently judged to be a success, the Methodists sent their own missionaries to Kansas one year later.[77]

---

75 Holter, *Fire on the Prairie*, 11.
76 *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas*, 8.
77 Ibid.

Even in the earliest recorded days of Doniphan County, immigration played a key role. At that point in time, the Kickapoos and Pawnees were the dominant native tribes in the land but as the years passed, they were supplanted by the Iowas, and Sac and Fox, as each of these last two groups were recent immigrants themselves. The Platte Purchase, negotiated by William Clark, then Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the United States, was completed in 1837, which meant that these two nations sold their lands and were uprooted by the Federal government from their northwestern Missouri homelands to northeastern Kansas.

In exchange for money, and the promise to build houses for them, each tribe was granted a cession of land out of the public domain for the area, which was a euphemistic way of saying 'reservation'. No fewer than four such Indian 'reservations' occupied Doniphan County—the Kickapoo reserve, established under treaty back in 1833 and then the Iowa, and Sac and Fox, tribes of Missouri in 1837.[78]

The reason for this cession of land for the Kickapoo, Iowa, and Sac and Fox, and other Indian nations was really quite simple. Following the Baptist and the Methodist presence in the state, the first permanent white settlement had just recently been established in Doniphan County, in the form of a Presbyterian Mission. It would not look good for the Federal, territorial, or soon-to-be-

[78] Anna Heloise Abel, "Indian Reservations in Kansas and the Extinguishment of Their Title," Kansas Historical Collections, Vol. 8, 88; produced as a map in Holter, *Fire on the Prairie*, 3.

established local governments to have dead preachers and parishioners scattered around the countryside. The government thought it best to contain the Indian nations through a series of land cessions rather than to deal with them on the open range.

Established on April 10, 1837,* by the Reverend Father Samuel M. Irvin, Reverend A. Ballard, and their wives, with Reverend William Hamilton joining them later that year, and located about two miles east of present-day Highland, this Presbyterian Mission very closely follows many of the factors this study.[79] Father Irvin's mission was a two-building dwelling, which was initially meant to serve as both house and church, also served as a schoolhouse for the local Iowa and Sac and Fox tribes.

This mission, known as the "Missouri Farm", was started twenty-one years before the first white school began and was funded and supported by the American Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church. Originally from Pennsylvania, and having most recently established missionary outposts in Missouri, Father Irvin was no stranger to the task he was undertaking. In addition to Rev. Irvin, Rev. Ballard, Rev. Hamilton, and their families, the Missouri Farm was staffed by missionaries sent east soon after the acquisition of

* There is some historical debate as to the date of this first permanent settlement in Doniphan County. Some claim it to be this date while others (*Doniphan County, Kansas, History and Directory for 1868 – 1869*) maintain that it was established earlier, in either 1835 or 1836.

the Platte Purchase to set up "institutions of civilization" among the tribes of Indians who were recently pushed westward off their native grounds.[80]

At one point, the Mission served not only as an evangelical Christian outreach, but as a business, and a rather prosperous enterprise at that. Not only witnessing to the Indians through their religion but also to other white settlers through their pocketbooks, the Missouri Farm mission doubled as an outfitter and reported steady profits over the years. In fact, it reported approximately four thousand wagons traveling westward from its location in 1848 and 1849 as people clamored westward in search of gold.[81]

The first immigrant settlers with an eye towards permanency to come to Doniphan County were Americans from the Eastern and Southern states—places like Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, the New England states (New York in particular), Louisiana, and of course, Missouri. The first and most significant international immigrant group to migrate to this area were the Germans who came beginning in the 1850s and continued in significant numbers through the early twentieth century.[82]

The early part of the 1840s saw a rapid succession of growth within Doniphan County. Peter Cadue, a Frenchman who had gone into the Indian fur trade, married a young Indian girl, and became a well-known interpreter for the

---

80 *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas,* 18 and Calnan, ed., *Illustrated Doniphan County*, 9, 25.

81 R.F. Smith, ed., *Doniphan County, Kansas, History and Directory for 1868 – 1869*. (Troy, KS: Smith, Vaughan, and Co., 1968), 276 and 292.

82 *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County*, 19.

Kickapoo, established a trading post at the location near the present-day town of Wathena in 1844. In 1852, two more trading posts were established, one near Cadue's post and the second was prospector Henry Thompson' post at Bellemont (now Whitehead).

Later that fall, Thompson built his second trading post on the west bank of the Missouri River and then began operating the first successful ferry business back and forth to St. Joseph. Thompson held the monopoly on the river-crossing traffic until 1855 when Joshua Taylor put him out of business by bringing up a newer and faster steamboat ferry from Wellsville, Ohio.[83]

With the rise in immigrant population, whether foreign or American born, and especially the economic expansion of the county, it was almost inevitable that the 1837 land session to the Indians would be short-lived. The Kansas-Nebraska Act opened the door for several sets of circumstances to occur that would significantly impact the future of both the state of Kansas as well as Doniphan County. Organizing territorial Kansas would re-organize Indian-held lands as well.

When the Kansas-Nebraska Act establish the Territory of Kansas as a separate entity, it allowed settlers within that territory to choose for themselves whether or not to permit slavery within its borders, thereby opening the floodgates for a decade's worth of violence and bloodshed in the region. Part of

---

[83] Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History*, 23 and 36.

this bloodshed was caused by people who were already living in the state, while thousands more flocked to the area to support a particular side.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act also provided for another important component for immigrant settlement, that being the commissioning of a survey for the land to be legally plotted which included the solidification of the border between the two states. The process began soon after Congressional passage of the Act, when the first survey line was begun in northern Doniphan County, culminating on May 8, 1855, when Charles Manners set a cast iron marker in the west bank of the Missouri River to mark the boundary between Kansas and Nebraska, at exactly the 40th parallel.

Over the next year and a half, he and his team charted the boundary line between the states ending at a point 108 miles to the west, thereby establishing the baseline and marking the endpoint with a red sandstone marker at the 6th principal meridian. This endpoint marker, which still to this day lies underneath a manhole cover in the middle of an otherwise unremarkable and deserted road along the Kansas-Nebraska border, near the middle of the east-west axes of the two states, is the basis point for all the surveying reference points, and land ownership records throughout Kansas and Nebraska, as well as parts of Colorado, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Interestingly enough, assisting in this

endeavor was none other than a young officer in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Captain Robert E. Lee.[84]

Opening the territory to mass (mostly white) settlement also meant that something had to be done about the Indians who were already inhabiting the land, whether by tradition or by recent displacement as a result of the Platte Purchase. Therefore Congress also signed two treaties with local tribes in 1854 – one with the Kickapoo tribe at Doniphan and another with the Iowa, and Sac and Fox tribes, at the Highland Mission. According to the "mutually beneficial" terms of these treaties, all lands held by those Indian nations were relinquished back to the Federal government and subsequently annexed by the Territory of Kansas.[85]

Had this treaty been forced upon the Indian tribes decades earlier, they might have been in a better position to oppose the terms and/or defend their lands. However, along with the white man's contact, came the white man's diseases. By 1850, each of the Indian tribes in Doniphan County had experienced an epidemic of smallpox which significantly reduced their numbers, only to be struck a year later by an outbreak of cholera.

As a result of their reduced numbers and the consequent reduced political and military capabilities, the Indians were forced to agree to the terms of the treaties and a large number of Indians were sent to various reservations in

---

84 Ibid., 85.

85 Smith, ed., *Doniphan County, Kansas, History and Directory*, 40.

Oklahoma and other states. Meanwhile, town sites had been laid out all throughout Doniphan County, especially along the Missouri River from Iowa Point to Doniphan using former Indian lodging sites for towns while converted game and migration trails served as ready-made roads for the newly-arrived whites.

Immediately after these treaties, a large number of settlers began taking advantage of a Congressional settlement act passed the decade before. In 1841, the Log Cabin Bill enabled a settler to claim 160 acres of land in the public domain before it was offered for sale and then later pay $1.25 an acre for it. This was a fantastic opportunity, the likes of which immigrants (especially Germans) had no concept. For two-hundred dollars, which was to be paid after the land was settled; a farmer could economically and logistically support his entire family.

Under the terms of settlement, known as 'preemption', any person of lawful age could claim their acreage by laying out four poles in the form of a square onto which they inscribed their names. The settler then had thirty days to 'prove up' the land by making a dwelling, so long as one settler's cabin was at least one mile apart from another. Looking around, the settler had an abundance of natural resources with which to build his cabin—timber and limestone were in ready supply. Until the house was completed and the farm was operational to the point of producing at least a subsistence level of food for his family, the settler was entirely dependent for food upon his hunting skills, what food they

might have brought with them, as well as supplies he could purchase from the local trading posts.

In addition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the subsequent treaties with the Indians, the year 1854 contained a number of other significant events in the growth of Doniphan County, some large and some small. In that year alone, no less than five more trading posts opened in the county, including posts in Elwood, Doniphan, and at least three others, while the first permanent dwelling was constructed in Wathena—Milton E. Bryan's three-room log cabin.[86] Additionally, the first steps toward organized government occurred when Bryan opened the first post office and then the first county elections were held on November 24.[87]

This economic, geographic, and agricultural interest in Doniphan County was understandable. Located in the northeastern-most corner of Kansas, Doniphan County is 25 miles wide (east-west) at its widest point by 27 miles long (north-south), encompassing 379 square miles (242,569 acres) of land.[88] It is bordered by the Missouri River to the northeast and East, by Atchison County to the south, by Brown County to the west, and for a stretch of 1.5 miles, Nebraska to the north.[89] Even though the early explorer Stephen H. Long (and some modern historians) had labeled this region 'The Great American Desert,' this

---

86 Ibid., 292.

87 Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History*, 25, and Smith, ed., *Doniphan County, Kansas, History and Directory*, 276-277.

88 Smith, ed., *Doniphan County, Kansas, History and Directory*, 272.

89 Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History*, 94.

particular county more closely resembled (and could be more accurately called) the revisited Garden of Eden to those who settled there.

The low-lying prairie lands which make up the entirety of Doniphan County enjoyed (and continue to enjoy) plentiful rainfall, tall grasses, and a loamy top soil which extends down five feet or more, with a clay sub-soil which was generally free of rocks beneath that, making it well adapted to many of the agricultural products able to be planted in the temperate zone.[90] The composition of its soil, combined with the generally agreeable climate of Kansas, also resulted in a fine native pasture ground, which lead to a high density of livestock per acre.

As a result, Doniphan County quickly became known for its abundant ease of growth for row crops, subsequent bountiful harvests, and productive livestock herds largely because twenty-five percent of the entire county was comprised of rich fertile bottomland along its ninety-two miles of Missouri River shoreline. Another sixteen percent of the county was forestland, which included native trees like black walnuts, oaks, hickory, and cottonwoods, as well as the capability to grow other trees for commercial use.

In addition to the standard staple of cash crops such as corn, wheat, and soybeans commonly found in the general region, the extremely fertile land within Doniphan County also proved viable for vineyards and orchards. Along

---

[90] Smith, ed., *Doniphan County, Kansas, History and Directory*, 40, and Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History*, 86, 93.

with the naturally occurring trees, some areas would be planted with trees such as apple and pear. So successful was the commercial planting and harvesting of apples that it became (and continues to be) one of the principle cash crops in the county. Additionally, speculators also discovered a wealth of mineral deposits, rock quarries, wild game herds, and flocks of waterfowl.

The climate was also generally, though not completely, agreeable. Located at the very southern edge of the High Plains Region, Doniphan County falls within the Humid Continental climate region, with an average of 36 – 38 inches of annual rainfall, which is most favorable for establishing and sustaining a viable agrarian base for either row crops and/or livestock.

Yet, there was always the potential for natural disaster. In addition to the many thunderstorms that regularly swept through the area, so too was the early concern of the flooding of the Missouri River. After major recorded floods came in 1844, 1855, 1867, 1881, 1902, and 1951, significant flooding thereafter has not been such a problem, since a channel was dredged for the river in 1952 allowing for a more direct flowing route as opposed to the horseshoe shape it had previously.

The result was the creation of Browning Lake, which had been the river itself, and now serves as a reservoir and spillway, significantly cutting down on the probability of suffering another major flood. Conversely, Doniphan County suffered through immense droughts in 1860 and 1901, and oddly enough, has

even endured at least four recorded earthquakes—in September 1865, April 1867, September 1871, and October 1896.[91]

Despite these few and far flung obstacles, the local farmland that provided farmers with such steady bounty quickly became a major selling point for those looking to populate the county. Accordingly, many flocked to Doniphan County to take advantage of the natural bounty of the land. Others came as a result of the clever advertisement of its citizens wanting to populate the county for their own vested interests, be they economic, political, religious, or otherwise.[92] In fact, one description of Kansas, which originated within Doniphan County itself, read more like a shameless marketing ploy than realistic description of the landscape:

> Kansas, with her broad prairies and wooded bottom-lands, contains an area of 80,000 square miles and is as large as the whole of New England and offers facilities for the emigrant and settler that cannot be found in any State in the Union; and with her additional advantages for the very low price at which lands can be procured for farming and mining purposes. None are so poor but that by a little energy and industry they could not gain a good competency, and within many years amass fortunes to which they have never before aspired.[93]

This kind of marketing was commonplace throughout the Midwest and Western states with descriptions such as this ending up in tracts throughout the

---

91 Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History*, 182, 188.

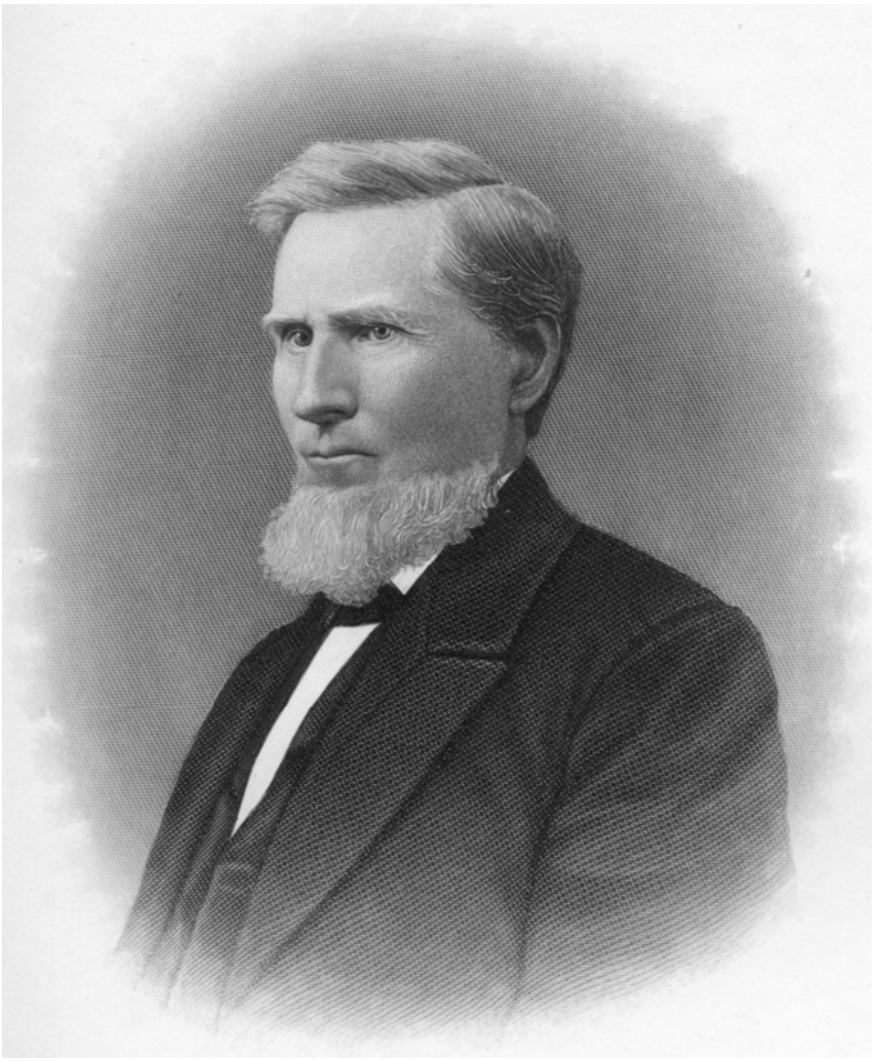
92 Smith, ed., *Doniphan County, Kansas, History and Directory*, 273 and *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County*, 19.

93 Smith, ed., *Doniphan County, Kansas, History and Directory*, 273 and *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County*, 19.

East coast and especially in Europe. Such advertisements spoke directly to the heart of the beleaguered German (Pomeranian or otherwise) emigrants and offered a tantalizing opportunity to begin a new life right where the old one left off—minus the economic, political, and religious oppression, of course.

This made sense. Immigrants often tried to re-establish themselves in areas that resembled lands they had just left. As they poured out of Germany, a large number of emigrants continued with the only occupation they had ever known—farming. In turn, they found suitable and familiar-looking ground in Doniphan County along the Missouri River. This fertile and abundant farm ground, combined with the temperate climate bore close resemblance to their Fatherland, thus giving them a certain familiar comfort by retaining a distant connection.

This access to relatively cheap land (even by 1850s standards), coupled with the potential for high return on a relatively small investment, opened up Kansas, and especially Doniphan County, to people who had never before considered living west of the Missouri River and settlers began crossing it in droves. This rapid growth, through both the agricultural and economic realms, brought with it the necessary formal governmental structures needed to organize such an expansion as well as to provide for further development.



Picture of Alexander William Doniphan
Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives

Established on August 25 and then officially organized on September 15, 1855, with its county seat in Troy, Doniphan County was named after General Alexander William Doniphan. A Kentuckian by birth and a lawyer by trade, Doniphan was a three-term member of the Missouri legislature, then Missouri militia Colonel, and later U.S. Army General. Doniphan was best known before

the Civil War for mustering the Missouri state militia to drive out the Mormon population.[94]

Though he never lived in his namesake county, Doniphan had quite the following during and after his lifetime, which led the settlers of Doniphan County to feel no small measure of pride. His lineage descended from the first Jamestown settlers, he won an impressive battle during the Mexican War at Chihuahua, against superior forces after being out numbered nearly 5:1, and most importantly for the people naming the county after him, Doniphan was a true gentlemen. He was the type of man who, after receiving the surrender of Joseph Smith during his quest to rid Missouri of the Mormons, risked his own life to defend the safety of the Mormons, and was then later retained by Smith to attend to their legal affairs just prior to them leaving the state for Illinois.

After its formal organization, Doniphan County's population, economic expansion, and infrastructure continued to grow at a steady pace. As early as 1843, Father Irvin and Rev. Hamilton acquired the first printing press to be established west of the Missouri River and by the time the county was formally organized, they county also had its first newspaper. Founded by the pro-slavery Democrat, Thomas J. Key, "The Constitutionalist" was Doniphan County's first newspaper, and apparently started something of a trend in the area.[95] From the

---

94 *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County*, 17.

95 Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History*, 13.

period of 1855—1905, Doniphan County gave rise to no less than forty-five newspapers.[96]

Another special year of tremendous growth for the county, as well as Wathena in particular, was 1856, when Thompson Kemper built the county's first general store in the town in the early part of the year.[97] Later in the spring, the Wathena Town Company, consisting of Morse, W. Ritenbaugh, and Milton E. Bryan, laid off 160 acres for the original town site, paid for it with $750 in gold, and then gave it its official name.[98]

Named after the local Kickapoo Chief Wah-the-nah, which means "sun shining on moose horns", Wathena, the municipality, eventually became one of the countless towns on the railroad lines between Chicago and Denver that showed little imagination in urban planning, growth, and development in its infancy. Laid out in a simple grid pattern, Wathena's city planning was in essence a duplication of the sectional system used to survey and lay out land claims.

Other institutions began to rise as the first public school district was established in the county in 1858 by Benjamin Harding and in March 1860, the first railroad tracks in Kansas were laid when the first four miles of railway into Doniphan County was completed—the Roseport and Palmetto line which

---

96 Robert I. Vexler and William F. Swindler eds. *Chronology and Documentary Handbook of the State of Kansas* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1978), 6.

97 Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History*, 81.

98 "Wathena Gazette", Thursday, August 22, 1889, Volume 3, Number 8, 3 and *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County*, 23.

included a direct run from St. Joseph to Wathena. By the time Kansas achieved statehood in 1861, that railroad line had been completed throughout the state and the first telegraph line was erected later that year.[99] In 1863, the first drug store was opened in Wathena by August Miller, whose family kept the business well into the 1980's.

Kansas' first commercial highway was completed in Doniphan County and opened for business on June 4, 1866. The toll was $.25 on a rock road from Elwood to Wathena, and was only put into use when the public-access dirt road next to it became impassable during the rain. Additionally, the first bridge in the area that spanned the Missouri River was completed and dedicated on May 31, 1873.[100] Prior to that, ferry river traffic was the only viable means of transportation across the river.

Other important societal components, those more closely related to this study, were eventually put in place. By 1882, Doniphan County had no fewer than 29 small towns (though some put that number as high as 41), with populations ranging from 25 to 1000, scattered throughout the county, 34 separate church congregations (at least 7 of which specifically catered to particular demographic groups as evidenced by their official names), and 67 separate public school districts, not counting those sponsored and supported by local churches.[101]

---

99 *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County*, 23.
100 Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History*, 149.
101 *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County*, 19-20, 24-28, 31.

Thus, the stage was set. German immigrants, who were naturally looking for a familiar environment in which to settle, were leaving their rural, agrarian, river-based, and temperate Fatherland and coming to the rural, agrarian, river-based, and temperate step-Fatherland in Doniphan County.[102] Doniphan County was a growing agricultural area along a major river with abundant and productive farm ground whose population exploded in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In fact, its population from 1870—1900 was much higher than it was from 1970—2000.

As a result of the factors which pushed Germans out of their ancestral homelands meeting the pull factors attracting more and more settlers to Doniphan County; they coalesced into a new dynamic. Not only was a new home created for people, a new demographic emerged for the county, but also a representative archetype materialized for the way rural German immigrant churches were to be established and maintained in small towns throughout the Midwest.

---

102 Ostergren, *The Immigrant Church as a Symbol of Community and Place in the Upper Midwest*, 227.

Chapter 4—Representative Archetype Churches and Organizations in the Midwest

Ironically, it was events in Germany, more so than any American event, that spurred the Americanization process of the emigrants and their families. One of the reasons that Germans assimilated relatively easily into the American fabric, but clung so earnestly to their local religious influences, was not only the result of the economic, political, and religious structures that began in Germany as discussed in Chapter 2, but also the addition of one more key factor – which the immigrants recreated here.

Driven by the early waves of the mass exodus out of the country, and realizing that many of its citizens were fleeing Germany for America and other places in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Prussian government attempted to stop the emigration by trying to codify the resettlement of its citizens along religious lines. In 1845, Karl Friedrich von Eichhorn, Prussian Minister of Religious and Educational Affairs, proposed that it should be the duty of all Prussian consuls to ensure that peasants were resettled in contiguous bodies and that those bodies establish churches and schools within their borders.[103] When this proposal came to fruition, however, it was not the consuls responsible for the result, it was the peasants themselves. On their own accord,

---

[103] Ernest Bruncken, *German Political Refugees in the United States during the period from 1815 – 1860*, special print from "Deutsch-Amerikanische Geschichtsblatter," (1904) (San Francisco, CA: R and E Research Associates), 1970, 15-16.

they began to form together in great numbers—both in terms of the number of congregations formed and the numbers of people forming those congregations.

For Germans still living in their native lands, they established contiguous settlements and formed their own churches, schools, and other societal constructs (if only for protection and a sense of comfort); better than the government could have done for them. For Germans who were leaving their native lands and coming to America, this pattern of contiguous resettlement along religious lines, with the formation of churches, schools, and other societal constructs (again for protection and comfort), was duplicated countless times across the country.

In fact, it was the side effect of religion, so to speak, that spurred the masses to action. For the Germanic people, religion was more than a mere reservoir for language and political discourse; it was a powerful means for action in its own right.[104] Indeed, it is often difficult to separate political movements and ideologies during these times from religious and social tensions.[105] The strength of religion as an intertwining social force was incredibly powerful in the first half of the nineteenth century and only grew over the course of the second half.[106]

This then became a self-fulfilling model. The immigrants took the model of settlement the German government had given them in their Fatherland, gave

---

104 Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 412.
105 Bruncken, *German Political Refugees*, 3.
106 Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 412.

it their own spin in their step-Fatherland, infused it with a healthy dose of religious zeal, and realized a sense of protection and comfort. Believing themselves to be 'right' to form like-minded congregations and communities in America, they found their own success and prosperity in those congregations and communities, which then showed themselves how right they were.

In her numerous studies of German Catholic immigrants in Minnesota, historian Kathleen Neils Conzen writes that certain aspects of those German communities' ethnic and religious origins were intertwined at the start of their immigration process. Conzen reveals key insights as to the general importances of the church while also chronicling specific qualities by which each person was judged, including such things as how much the men supported the church, how pious the women were, and how much the family as a whole tithed to the local church.[107] Clearly, the involvement in the church was as much of a social construct, and a matter of social significance, as it was a measure of the person's inner faith.

Conzen also comments on how deeply enmeshed the immigrants became in their religion and what a central role that symbiotic relationship played in their lives. To the German Catholics in Minnesota, their religion was as much about cultural continuity as it was religious relationship. In fact, the churches' "rituals marked the major stages of the family life cycle and its teaching mission

---

107 Conzen in Gjerde ed., *Major Problems in American Immigrations and Ethnic History*, 126.

helped embed the values of culture in the next generation."[108] To them, like the Doniphan County Germans (both the Methodist and Lutherans focused in this study), it was nearly impossible to separate their faith from their farm. Conzen writes that:

> The habits and beliefs of most Sterns County Germans must be read largely through their actions . . . Its prime initial concerns seem to have been the perpetuation of the intertwined unit of the family and the farm, and inseparable from it, the salvation of the souls of its members. The farm, after all, insured the dedication of the time and resources that religious practice required, while the religion provided the farm and its family with protection from God's seasonal wrath, moral, an educational support for the perpetuation of its life-style, the main source of status roles and communal festivity, and the grace that led to heaven.[109]

Across the Midwest, clusters of like-minded families, groups, denominations, and cultures often banded together to form a church for the preservation of their cultural heritage, as well as their faith. Many times, rural immigrants started their congregations in living rooms. Others, who may have had access to additional resources, used the local schoolhouse as a church, or conversely, the local church as a schoolhouse, depending on the situation.

After these fledgling congregations formed, they would often attract others from various Protestant denominations, even a few Catholics, and others who may not have held common theological beliefs but who held common social

---

108 Ibid., 129.

109 Ibid., 127.

beliefs—at least the belief that socialization, protection, comfort were necessary. Such common beliefs helped to form and sustain bonds of affection and community. Indeed, religion was the greatest ally of the pioneers in the formation of western communities.[110]

Another phenomenon must also be kept in mind when understanding the deep and long-lasting importances of German immigrant churches. Many German immigrants, particularly those in Doniphan County, often settled on lands which were well behind the frontier line.

As the frontier line was pushed continually westward, there was a void, a vacuum or sorts, created immediately after the newest wave of settlers left their current lands for the West. Into this vacuum came large numbers of German immigrants who would create their own autonomous communities. In that context of a vacuum where the governmental outreach of the nineteenth century was weak at best, the lay-dominated church was able to fill that void by extending its reach into a large number of areas of secular life.[111]

Rarely were the newly-arrived immigrants the very first to settle lands on the edge of the frontier, where a large portion of the federal government's time, effort, and monies were focused on such issues as building railroads, fighting Indians, and establishing commercial outlets. With the government focused on

---

110 "Distribution of Immigrants, 1850—1900," *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, U.S. Senate Document #756, 61st Congress, 3rd Session, 41 volumes (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 3:444-447.

111 Conzen in Gjerde ed., *Major Problems in American Immigrations and Ethnic History*, 130.

westward expansion, an opportunity was created for immigrants to come in behind the frontier line and establish their own micro-societies.

Neither of the two primary churches in this study, the United Methodist Church nor the Christ Lutheran Church in Wathena, Kansas, are unique in their formation or the causes for which they were founded. Rather, they are excellent representative examples of the accumulation of evidence that suggests that churches remained the central aspect within the societal infrastructure for German immigrants for years after the first wave of immigrants came and was the sustaining base of their cultural heritage for generations afterward.

While other Midwest church examples differ in a number of necessary ways, they all share a core concern—to give their members a medium by which to cling to their Germanic culture. This medium found expression through an accumulation of evidence from similar church congregations across the Midwest which are studied herein. Each seem in some way to support four primary functions as key factors that local churches played in perpetuating German culture—the establishment of the church congregation itself; the establishment of a school that was sponsored and maintained by that church; the longitudinal persistence of the German language in both the church and school over the years; and the establishment and continuation of a cemetery directly connected (and often immediately adjacent) to that church. Though miles and years may have separated them from the Fatherland, Germans throughout the Midwest seemed to have been able to create, and re-create, those same four functions no matter

the location or the time, even though that vehicle took different forms and substance.

A number of parallel examples readily emerge from a study of German churches throughout the Midwest. There is the church from east Texas whose history eerily mirrors that of Christ Lutheran.[112] A church from south-central Nebraska, though the youngest congregation in the study, still exhibits each of the four functions of this study.[113] Another church in central Nebraska not only exhibits each of the functions but whose town's namesake has the greatest historical legacy of any other church in this study.[114] One more church's history that mirrors Christ Lutheran comes from an extensive study of German immigrants just south of Doniphan County, whose congregational history shares a number of commonalities—including one pastor, a set of brothers who pastored each church, as well as the titles of the congregations.[115]

Other settlers and individual leaders within separate congregations also exhibit key supporting points to the four identified functions. A church near St. Louis best points out the need for, and importance of, the pastor as both the leader of the church, the de-facto leader of the community, and the purveyor of

---

112 Dorothy Kuehl and Karen Meyer, *Friedens Au: A Centennial History of the Trinity Lutheran Church of Riesel, Texas – 1883-1983* (Riesel, TX: Trinity Lutheran Church/Riesel Rustler, 1983).

113 *Blessed for 75 Years, 1913-1988 – The History of the Zion Lutheran Church of Kearney, Nebraska* (Kearney, NE: Zimmerman Printing Co., 1988).

114 *The Lord Loves the Gates of Zion: The 125th Anniversary of the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Worms, Nebraska – 1874-1999* (Grand Island, NE).

115 Coburn, *Life at Four Corners.*

the German heritage itself.[116] Another example comes from one of the early founders of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod whose zeal led to the planting of a large number of churches and theocratically-driven communities throughout eastern Michigan.[117] The letters of a young German couple who immigrated to that same area in Michigan and their comments on the social aspects within those theocratically-driven communities are particularly relevant.[118]

Even a brief survey of the history of the Missouri Synod points out a number of factors that served to perpetuate German culture through the churches for decades after its founding. Finally, there is the memoir of the German-speaking, Swiss-immigrant, girl who attended one of those early Doniphan County churches and schools, and whose comments on the importance of the church (both for the new, and long-established, immigrant) are the most direct and compelling of all.[119]

Probably the closest Midwestern German immigrant church example, in terms of expression of each of the four factors, would be found in the case of the Trinity Lutheran Church in Riesel, Texas. From the time, place, and manner of

---

116 Friedrich Bunger, account in *Der Lutheraner, III* (June 15, 1847) and Carl S. Meyer, "Early Growth of the Missouri Synod," in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*.

117 Johannes Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, "Etwas von unsern ungelehrten Pedigren in Amerika," *Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und uber Nord-Amerika*, 1843, No. 9, Col. 4, 5, in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*; Johannes Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, "Community Constitution of the Frankenmuth Community," in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*; Johannes Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, "Uber die Wichtigkeit der englischen Sprache fur die lutherische Kirche Nordamerikas," *Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und uber Nord-Amerika*, 1846, No. 4-5, Col. 38.

118 William Seyffardt, 1851 letter to his parents and 1852 letter to his father, and William Seyffardt, 1860 letter to his parents, brothers, and sisters, in Dublin, ed., *Immigrant Voices*.

119 Elise Dubach Isely, *Sunbonnet Days*, as told to her son, Bliss Isely (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd, 1935).

its founding, to the heritage it preserved through its adherence to the German language, the school it founded and maintained for its members' children, and its evolution as a church, Trinity Lutheran Church contains a number of very similar parallels which mirror the Doniphan County churches.

The earliest origins of the Trinity Lutheran Church date back to the 1820's when Texas, then part of Mexico, was settled by colonists at the behest of speculators (then called *empresarios*) who, if they could populate their claim with one-hundred families, would receive twenty thousand acres of land for their efforts. This proved successful enough that soon thousands of immigrants from central and Western Europe (including Prussia and Pomerania) were flocking to this new land.

After a time, they felt the need for a religious connection to their new land, and with each other, and said as much in their correspondence back across the Atlantic. One such letter ended up in the hands of Christian Spittler who was working for the St. Chrischona Pilgrim's Mission Institute in Basil, Switzerland, which then adopted parts of Texas as a foreign missions field.[120]

Out of those missions sprang the Texas Synod in 1851. In later years, they would meld into the Iowa Synod, and then ultimately into the Missouri Synod by 1860. It was the Southern District of the Missouri Synod that sent missionaries out from the already-established churches in the area to form new church-plant congregations. One of those new congregations became the Trinity

120 Kuehl and Meyer, *Friedens Au*, 4.

Lutheran Church. From its living room origins in Gottfried (George) Ebner's home in early December 1882, Trinity's history developed in many similar ways to the Doniphan County churches.

Founded in a single living room with over fifty initial parishioners in attendance Trinity was initially led by the Reverend John J. Trinklein. A full-time pastor with his own congregation, Rev. Trinklein supplemented his income by earning an additional monthly stipend, plus traveling expenses, by serving as a part-time pastor to Trinity, visiting the congregation once a month—though he only took a portion of the monthly allowance and ended up in bankruptcy as a result.[121]

Given the initial outreach of Rev. Trinklein and the rest of the congregation, Trinity quickly pulled together local German-speaking immigrants (Lutheran or otherwise) who likewise wanted to share in the fellowship afforded by a local church. Originally titled the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church at Friedens Au or commonly referred to as "Friedens Au" (Prairie of Peace) for short, Trinity Lutheran grew steadily over the next few decades while clinging to the Germanic heritage, and given moniker, of its initial group of charter members. By June 1883, Trinity had shown a fifty percent increase in membership, established a Financial Committee and a Building Committee,

---

121 Pastor Emeritus John J. Trinklein, "Memoirs," May 15, 1943, in Kuehl and Meyer, *Friedens Au*, 6 and 14.

adopted a constitution, and moved to its first permanent building, a yellow-pine chapel, located on a four-acre plot.[122]

Another small, yet vital entity was established a month later when Gottlieb Fenske died. As one of the original living room congregants, he was considered vital to the genesis of the church and, at his family's wishes, was buried on a plot of land adjacent to the new church building. As a result, the Trinity Church Cemetery was established and remains active to this day.

When Rev. Trinklein left in September 1884, its congregation numbered 157 baptized, with another ninety communicant members, thus Trinity was able to afford its first full time pastor, Reverend F. Wunderlich.[123] During his first few months in the pastorate, Rev. Wunderlich initiated a key component in demonstrating Trinity's importance to the local community—he established a Christian Day School.

Serving as its only instructor, Rev. Wunderlich's leadership of both the church and the Christian Day School proved so effective that its students soon occupied the entire building on a daily basis and, in fact, it became the only activity going on in that building, once another church building was erected adjacent to it in 1891. Not long after he left, both entities continued to pull in such great numbers that the school was able to hire its own full time teacher, with the new Pastor serving as the teaching assistant.

---

122 Ibid., 7-13 and 30.

123 Ibid., 17.

As the school grew over the years (partially due to growth in local church membership and in reputational quality from non-members), it was able to open a second Christian Day School in the early 1930s. Located six miles north of its current location, this school (in an interesting reversal of traditional church-school establishment) was intended to precede the establishment of a church-plant in that same location.

Both schools flourished and by 1942 the original Christian Day School built a new school building, complete with a second upper story, a front-porch which doubled as a stage, and was accredited from the Texas State Board of Education.[124] During its peak attendance years, during the 1940s and 1950s, the staff of the original Christian Day School consisted of a Principal, another teacher, part-time and/or student teachers, a lunch program, and the purchase of several busses.[125] Eventually, though, both the school and the church fell upon tough times and with the departure of both the principal and a teacher in the waning weeks of the Summer of 1965, Trinity voted to close its school after eighty-one years.

Another function of this study is the issue of languages in the churches. From its earliest beginnings, Trinity conducted its Sunday morning services exclusively in German and then gradually began holding identical services in English at night. As time progressed, the issue of which language to speak at

---

124 Ibid., 32.

125 Ibid., 27 and 44.

particular services became a bit of a thorny issue with the members, primarily due to the outbreak of World War I.

The bilingual issue emerged at one of the moments of great celebration for the church. On December 19, 1937, former Trinity pastor and then-President of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Reverend E.A. Heckmann conducted the dedication sermon for the newly constructed building in German and then the English service at 3:00 that afternoon.[126] This issue came to a head during a regular business meeting months later when it was agreed that the English service would follow the German service in the morning.

Like the longevity of the Christian Day School, Trinity clung to its Germanic background far longer than either of its two Doniphan County counterparts. It was not until 1951, with the installation of Reverend Louis Boriak, and months of discussion, that the church requested that its constitution be translated from German into English and it was the year after that, when the church decided via secret ballot to reduce the German-language services to only twice per month.[127] Eventually, the German services were phased out altogether, with the notable exception of the German-language service as part of both the 75th Anniversary celebration in 1958 and the 90th Anniversary celebration in 1973.[128] The church took particular pride in conducting both of these services in

126 Ibid., 31-32.
127 Ibid., 43-44.
128 Ibid., 26.

German, as they did not need to 'import' a speaker from Germany to speak at either of the services.

Zion Lutheran Church in Kearney, Nebraska, though the youngest congregation in this study, still demonstrates each of the four functions. However, Zion stands out not only because of its strong past, where it embraced technology and pioneered outreach programs in the community, but also because of its present, where it still actively holds to three of the four studied functions, as German is no longer spoken in its services.

Zion Lutheran's earliest origins trace back to the winter of 1889-1890 when Reverend Henry Schabacker, serving under the direction of the pastor of the Trinity Lutheran Church in Grand Island (also a German Lutheran church), left his home where he had established a pioneer mission of his own in the now-defunct town of Luce to make the twenty-mile trip to Kearney. When he could, Rev. Schabacker left on Saturdays, held services in a private home in Kearney where he spent the night, travelled another twenty miles to hold another service in another home, then returned to Luce to teach at the church school there.[129]

From that home-based beginning, Zion's first regular services were held in November 1911, when a small group of Lutherans in the Kearney area sought the Reverend A.C. Baumann from Poole, Nebraska, to hold consistent services in their living rooms. Within two weeks, Rev. Baumann met with Herman Meyer and Herman Peterson in the home of Otto Wiederaenders to consider a long-

129 *Blessed for 75 Years, 1913-1988*, 3.

term missionary outreach to Kearney. It was decided that Rev. Baumann would move to Kearney and establish a missionary church in the area.[130]

The first organized services were held in German at the Swedish Lutheran Church on the morning of December 3, 1911, with thirteen people in attendance.[131] However, that evening, their first English service was held, which would set a standard for Zion. Until the German language was removed altogether in 1944, Zion Lutheran would hold regular separate services in German and English and have identical hymnals in both languages.

In 1912, the early Zion congregation was asked to leave the Swedish Church building, as the Swiss felt that it was losing members to Zion. Subsequently, the congregation moved to the Congregational Church building, where they held services for the next year.

The following year was one of the most significant for the life of the church. Not only did Zion start its Sunday School program in 1913, with thirteen initial members, but it was also formally organized.[132] On September 14, five men signed the church's first constitution officially designating their congregation the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church. Although since its constitution was in German, its literally-translated title was "Evangelical Lutheran Zion Church," a minor discrepancy that remained until the constitution was amended in 1957.

---

130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.

Later in 1913, Zion had to move again, this time because its regular use of the German language for its services was deemed threatening by the Congregational Church, so they sought their own permanent location. Situated at the prominent corner of 25th Street and Avenue C in Kearney, Zion bought the former Christian Church, for $1,317.50, and currently remains at this location.[133]

Extensive renovations were made to the building before occupancy, as running water, modern lights, a coal furnace in the basement, new pews, a pulpit, an altar, and an organ were all added within a few weeks. By the time the church building was formally dedicated on November 15, 1914, with a German service in the morning, the congregation numbered 120 baptized, fifty confirmed, and five voting members.[134] By the time Zion became a member of the Missouri Synod in 1921, it numbered 150 baptized, 89 confirmed, and 20 voting members.[135]

Along with the new building came a new vision and in 1915, Rev. Bauman started a *Germeinde Schule* (Community School), though intended for Zion members, with classes conducted in his home and fifteen students in attendance.[136] This not only planted the seeds for Zion's church-sponsored school, but also led to a desire for a parsonage, which was acquired in 1920. By 1927, there was a strong desire to have school age children attend a Saturday instruction school for two years prior to confirmation. On April 13, 1930, Zion

133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid., 5.
136 Ibid., 3.

voted to open its own elementary school, calling it a "Christian Day School" and called a recent Concordia Teacher's College graduate from Seward to teach the classes.[137] The school continued to grow to the point that the congregation built the school its own separate building, despite the Great Depression and dedicated it on September 17, 1933.

Zion not only wanted to preserve its Germanic cultural heritage and history through education, it was also very progressive in its embrace of technology and community outreach programs. On Thanksgiving Day 1931, Zion began broadcasting both its German and English services on KGFW, Kearney's local AM radio station, an outreach that continues to this day on sister-station KRNY.

Zion's solution to solving its German/English language conflict was unique in that the church leadership did not make the decision for the congregation (as was the case in many churches); rather the congregation made the decision for the church leadership. Traditionally, Zion held two English services on Sunday morning and a German service in the afternoon, but by 1944, the German service was dropped due to poor attendance numbers.

At the time of the current church building's dedication in 1951, both the congregation and the school had grown to need more than one pastor and more than one teacher and in 1963 Zion's growth necessitated the formation of its first "Parent-Teacher League". Zion's school continues to flourish today as it

137 Ibid., 5.

currently offers classes in grades one through eight, with twelve full-time faculty, five additional staff members, and 120 students enrolled.

Another example from central Nebraska is the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Worms. Although the name of the church is fairly common, the name of the town is a bit unusual. However, its name is certainly the most significant moniker of any other town studied herein.

Located in the southwest portion of Germany, along the Rhine River, the city of Worms is best known for its large cathedral, the Concord of Worms in 1122, and especially for the legacy Martin Luther himself left there. After nailing his ninety-five theses to the door of the church on All Hallows Eve 1517, he was condemned a heretic and in April 1521, called to the Imperial Diet (Edict) of Worms to account for himself, answer for his teaching, and either abdicate or affirm his reformational views.

His response was clear, "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything for to go against my conscience is neither right nor safe."[138] Given this now-famous response and its effect on growing his ministry as well as his legacy, Worms, Germany's, place in history, especially Lutheran history, was assured.

---

138 Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Meridian/Penguin Books, 1995), 144.

The Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Worms, Nebraska, traces its earliest origins to January 1874 when Reverend C.W. Baumhoefener of Columbus heard there were German settlers in the area north of Grand Island and began holding services in living rooms and schoolhouses throughout the area, and even the courthouse in Grand Island. After a series of organizational meetings throughout that year where they called together other interested German Lutheran settlers and then installed their first full-time pastor, Reverend August Leuthaeuser, the congregation was officially organized on September 17, 1874, under the name of "Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Prairie Creek Township" with seventeen initial families.[139]

The congregation continued to meet in various schoolhouses, the Grand Island courthouse, and even a make-shift sod building, until George C. Tillman donated five acres of land on November 28, 1877, and the congregation built its first permanent church building, and adjacent parsonage, soon thereafter on the southern half of the plot while establishing its cemetery on the northern half.[140] Zion thus exhibits one of the most interesting phenomena of any of the churches of this study because the town of Worms did not exist prior to the establishment of the church on this plot of ground. So central was the church to the lives of these immigrants that they found a location for their church, then began to build

139 *The Lord Loves the Gates of Zion*, 3, 10.
140 Ibid., 3, 31.

their homes around that church, and then in 1896 named their newly-formed town after the town in Germany with the likewise symbolic name of Worms.[141]

Due to the low numbers and struggling economic and agricultural conditions of the times, it was difficult for the members of the congregation to provide for themselves, let alone a pastor, yet they endured, provided what they could for Rev. Leuthaeuser and his successor, Reverend F.H. Jahn, and continued to grow. By its 25th anniversary, Zion counted fifty-five voting members, 207 communicant members, and 397 baptized members and in 1902, added a wing to the east side of their building.[142]

Just two years after its inception, Zion began its own school by offering educational classes beyond confirmation.[143] In 1893, when it constructed a new church building, the original church was converted into a formal Christian Day School with the pastor also serving as the full-time teacher. Despite continued tough times, the congregation was able to call its first full-time teacher, Mr. H. Hartman in 1898. In 1910, with enrollment nearing ninety, Zion was able to build another, larger schoolhouse and a teacherage as well, both of which are still in use.[144]

With the onset of World War I, Zion, like many other German churches, began to struggle with the issue of language in its services. Until that time, its services (church, school, and otherwise) were entirely in German. In 1919, the

141 Ibid., 3.
142 Ibid., 10.
143 Ibid., 68.
144 Ibid.

Concordia Publishing House worked to satisfy both sides of the issue by printing a catechism with English on one side and German on the other.[145] Soon after, Confirmation classes were taught in both languages and by 1922, English was the only language spoken in confirmation classes.

Zion's cemetery, located on the northern half of its original plot of ground, was already technically serving as a cemetery before it served as church ground. With at least two documented burials there prior to the church's acquisition of the ground, it seemed the most logical place for the congregation to place its church and adjacent cemetery. To this day, the northern half of the original plot of ground serves as Zion's active cemetery.

Near Zion's 85th anniversary, on September 27, 1959, a cornerstone was laid for the construction of their current church building, which was completed and dedicated on February 21, 1960.[146] The former building had been demolished for the sake of this new facility, which was constructed on the exact location of its predecessor.

Given the small size of the congregation and the town in which it is located, Zion still continues to prosper. It was able to pay off the mortgage of the new building within eleven years, build a new parsonage in 1991, and in 2004 completed construction of a new gymnasium for its school. The school offers classes in pre-school through eighth grade, currently employs a staff of four full-

145 Ibid., 11.
146 Ibid., 12.

time faculty, one part-time staff member (with the remainder of the work done by volunteers), and has 42 students enrolled, while the church itself averages 140 in attendance.

Another parallel example to the Christ Lutheran Church comes from another Kansas congregation, known as the Trinity Lutheran Church. This church is located in Block, is about one hundred miles due south of Wathena. Trinity Lutheran and Christ Lutheran share a number of similar points in their histories, including one pastor who served one congregation, then the other, and then brothers who each served one congregation. However, it is the similarity in the history and growth of these two churches that they truly show themselves to be centerpieces of their respective communities.

In 1863, the Missouri Synod established a mission station in Block and within five years it had evolved into a formal church body, complete with a written constitution signed by the adult men in the congregation.[147] Initially holding services in the living rooms of the early charter members, Trinity Lutheran called Reverend W. Zschoche as its first pastor, the man who would also serve as the first pastor of the Christ Lutheran Church in Wathena.

Its first building, constructed and dedicated in 1870, served as both church and school, and also included a two-room apartment for the pastor. As the church grew, additional acreage was purchased south of Block Corners, a separate parsonage was constructed in 1870 and a larger, frame church building

147 Coburn, *Life at Four Corners*, 31.

with a seating capacity of four hundred was erected and dedicated in 1884.[148] By then, the old church building had been moved south to the site of the new church to serve as the schoolhouse, a cemetery was opened for its congregation, and it had joined the Missouri Synod. By 1895, membership had steadily grown to 330 members, one-third of which were children, and at its peak in 1912, Trinity counted 485 members, 99 voters, about 160 children, and a regular school attendance of 72.[149]

The language issue was also a major concern in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century. Sometime after 1900, conversations began taking place about which language to use and until World War I, German remained the predominant language. Over time, especially by the end of World War II, German had faded from regular usage.

Another concern for the congregation was the education of its children. Like many other churches throughout this time, Trinity started and maintained its own school throughout its early years.

The circumstances surrounding the early days of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Melle, Missouri, not only indicate many of the conditions already identified for a church's importance within the local community but also to what was important to the church itself. This German

148 Ibid.
149 Ibid., 32.

church was an excellent example of the importance of the pastor in the life and sustenance of both the church and community.

Out of this example, comes a transitive property for setting up the pastor to be a local civic leader as well. Since the church was the central entity in the community, and the pastor was the central entity of the church, then the pastor often became the central figure in the community itself. Not only was the pastor charged with preaching on Sundays and filling the spiritual needs of the church, but he was also the 'social director' organizing various activities hosted in and by the church. In addition, he served as the teacher of the church-sponsored school, gatekeeper for linguistic perpetuation, and even caretaker of the local cemetery.

The German Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Melle was a congregation located 45 miles northwest of St. Louis that was founded in 1839 by two young immigrants from Hanover and settled by German Lutherans who originally hailed from the villages of Buer and Melle, hence the name of "New Melle". By 1847, the congregation had grown to the point where they had 60 families in regular attendance, had constructed a large 20' by 30' two-story blockhouse which served as church in the upper story and school and pastor's quarters on the lower, and established a cemetery directly behind the blockhouse.[150]

Initially without a permanent pastor, the congregation placed a public advertisement in January 1847, which was answered by Carl J.H. Fick, a young

---

150 Bunger, account in *Der Lutheraner, III,* 83, 84, in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, 200-201.

man whose trip to America had been subsidized by Lutherans in Germany. Due to the extreme shortage of German Lutheran pastors in America, the Missouri Synod initiated the practice of recruiting ministerial students, and even some secular college students with interest in the ministry, from Germany as a reliable source for pastors. These men were given a perfunctory pastoral education and then sent to America with the expectation of serving as full-time pastors.[151]

Pastor Fick was one such man. He had studied at the University of Gottingen in Germany and then left for America as his "love for the neglected Lutherans in North America and the desire to help here in the extension of our church" compelled him to come to America.[152] Fick had only arrived from Hanover a few weeks before he preached his first sermon on Good Friday 1847. Given either his talents and/or the absolute need for a permanent pastor, he was installed and ordained at the church in New Melle a few weeks later, on Trinity Sunday.

Fick's desire for coming to America, and the need that drove that desire, were not at all unusual. Even though he was college educated, he was not necessarily theologically educated, as his original intention for coming to St. Louis was to attend the theological seminary there. However, the distressing call from the New Melle church compelled him to sacrifice formal training in lieu of on-the-job training where his fellow Germans could be served.

---

151 Meyer, "Early Growth of the Missouri Synod," in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, 221.

152 Bunger, *Der Lutheraner, III*, 83, 84. in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, 200-201.

This sacrificial example is representative of churches, Lutheran or otherwise, throughout the Midwest as the demand for pastors far outweighed the supply. When compared to other cultural aspects, one of the first to be overlooked for the common good was the qualifications (or lack thereof) required of a pastor.

Catholics had problems with this also as noted by Conzen. Throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in the 1880s, there was a perennial shortage of priests nationwide. Most priests were young, often unfamiliar with America, overworked—with several parishes frequently sharing one priest—and frequently moved at the behest of their hierarchy of the church. Indeed, three years was an exceptionally long tenure for one pastor to lead a church throughout this period.[153]

When the Reverend Johannes K.W. Loehe realized the mass (largely peasant) emigration from Germany, he immediately recognized this shortage of qualified pastors in the local churches that would result. He commented that:

> The distressing situation of emigrant Germans is so great that even the scanty education of their preachers is not at all noticeable to them. In one important city, a preacher is serving the Lutheran congregation laudably and honorably, although in Germany he had been a cobbler and soldier, and in America, he was at first a fencing master.[154]

---

153 Conzen in Gjerde ed., *Major Problems in American Immigrations and Ethnic History*, 129.

154 Loehe, "Etwas von unsern ungelehrten Pedigren in Amerika," *Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und uber Nord-Amerika*, in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, 98.

An ironic paradox thus emerged in that the one person who was certainly the most important person in the church, and one of the most important in the entire community, was sometimes the least qualified to be in that particular profession. Farmers grew up being farmers, tradesmen apprenticed with others before striking out on their own, women had years of sewing practice at home before working on their own clothes, yet often times pastors were 'converts' from other professions with little or no background or formal training in the profession in which they were embarking upon.

Rev. Loehe strove to combat this shortage by creating a ready-made system whereby any new pastor (either new to the community or new to the pastorate) could come in and take charge of both a church and the community within a relatively short period of time. In doing this, young, new pastors were able to duplicate Loehe's church/community model by establishing entire towns which contained such a theocracy that nearly every intimate aspect of the town was controlled by, and through, the local church.

The most radical example of Loehe's ready-made church/community creation system which melded the adhesive properties the church into daily community life was the establishment of both the town and congregations within Frankenmuth, Michigan. Not only were the usual obligations expected of community members (tithing, church attendance, etc.) but so too were such minute and expansive details of daily life that it was nearly impossible to escape the church's reach.

Codified in the "Community Constitution of the Frankenmuth Community," Loehe regulated such behavior as who had to work for the church and who was exempted (Article III), where roads were to be placed and how lands were to be ceded to the community government for that purpose and how wide they would be (Article IV), the exact specifications and method of construction for fences which divided property (Article V), how damage to livestock is to be dealt with (Article VI), how property damage and disputes are to be dealt with (Article VII), exactly how much a monthly tithe should be and that a landowner cannot sell land until the prospective buyer is a tithe-paying member of the community (Article XII), and the post-amble put to rest any doubts as to membership within the church and/or community by stating, "For no one can be a member of our community who does not subscribe to the Lutheran Confession or is under excommunication."[155]

As Loehe planted other church/communities in the area, he not only stuck with a standardized system of naming those communities (Frankenmuth, Frankentrost, Frankenlust, etc.), he also stuck with the same principles of the theocratic state. Each of his new communities all shared the same model constitution (with very few variances), whose primary motivation was the preservation of the German language and culture. It must have worked to some

155 Loehe, "Community Constitution of the Frankenmuth Community," in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, 106-109.

large degree because even to this day, the town of Frankenmuth carries the nickname "Little Bavaria".

Loehe was adamant about maintaining German language and culture through the church. "The more strongly the language of the Yankees gains ground," he wrote, "the more the mother tongue is forgotten and the more necessary to have German Lutheran congregations and institutions of learning in America to be the bearers of German theology."[156]

Ultimately his model constitution was like Frankenmuth's Community Constitution, but even more detailed, encompassing eighty-eight individually number paragraphs, with more specifics about daily life. The most relevant to this study is paragraph eighty-six, in which he writes "It is our earnest resolve to instruct our children ourselves" essentially demanding that churches create their own schools.[157]

Loehe's examples are important to consider, as they were codified manifestations of the church's importance to the community. In most instances, the church was important to the local populace because the congregation wanted the church to be important. In Rev. Loehe's cases, the church was important because it HAD to be—the local municipal government constitutionally demanded it.

---

156 Loehe, "Uber die Wichtigkeit der englischen Sprache fur die lutherische Kirche Nordamerikas," *Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und uber Nord-Amerika*, in Ibid., 109-110.

157 Ibid.

Another case study, this one 14 miles down the road from Loehe's Frankenmuth, explores another unique aspect of the cultural importance of the Doniphan County churches, and is found in the letters of William and Sophie [Frank] Seyffardt. Having immigrated separately, Sophie with her two sisters in 1850 and William in 1851, they married on June 26, 1852, raised three children (one of whom would die in early childhood), lived for a while in Titibawassee, Michigan, and then relocated to Saginaw where they spent the remainder of their lives.

Generally, their letters illustrate their Americanization process (William's more so, as he is regularly exposed to the wider world, whereas Sophie mostly stayed home) and the early development of German-American networks in the area.[158] Specifically, however, their letters demonstrate the issue of how important the church was in the social lives of the German immigrants and what role(s), that a church played in their lives.

On two separate occasions, William refers to the Loehe-church's Sunday services as "social gatherings" or "get togethers," rather than mentioning their religious purposes.[159] He frequently details the events on Sunday afternoons that happen in, around, or as a result of, the church services, while barely mentioning (if at all) the worship service itself.

---

158 Thomas Dublin, ed., *Immigrant Voices: New Lives in America, 1773-1986* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 89.

159 William Seyffardt, 1851 letter to his parents and 1852 letter to his father, in Dublin, ed., *Immigrant Voices*, 89-90.

Eventually, his socializing paid off, because when his gristmill burned down on December 20, 1860, it was his friends at church and those he met in his district that helped him rebuild within six weeks.[160] The rebuild was not enough to keep them in the area, however, and by May 1862 the Seyffardt's had moved to Saginaw where William opened a hardware store that he operated until his death.

Often, especially in rural settings, settlers across a number of ethnic and demographic groups and across various individual denominations would overlook the doctrinal issues and theological beliefs of the local church in order to be a part of it. However, for the German Lutherans in particular, it remained important to them to be both German and Lutheran.

With its founding in Chicago, IL, on April 26, 1847, and counting Loehe as an early member, the "German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States," commonly referred to simply as the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, or sometimes just Missouri Synod, was clear about both its heritage and its future. From the beginning, it first busied itself with establishing new churches, schools within those churches, or at the minimum, integrating existing churches and schools throughout the Midwest and eastern United States into their philosophy of church mission and organization. Especially, it was

160 William Seyffardt, 1860 letter to his parents, brothers, and sisters, in Dublin, ed., *Immigrant Voices*, 105-106.

important for the Missouri Synod to maintain the Germanic heritage of its churches and its members.

Its first constitution was written in German and had the term "German" as part of its name. The members who founded and continued the Synod were Germans who were proud of their past and clear about their future, as they intended to hold on to as much of their Germanic culture, particularly expressed through their religion, as long as they could.

They were also Lutherans. Believing that their pastors must be "properly called" (*rite vocatus*), their shortage of trained pastors led to a number of various approaches in providing spiritual care for these congregations of immigrants.[161] Some of those approaches followed Loehe's more extreme theocratic and authoritarian dictates, while others abided by the various series of instructions the Missouri Synod issued to others that it associated with, such as visitors to their congregations and to colporteurs who sold the books of their church. However, the majority of other churches simply chose to use either local missionaries as outreach partners or to follow the Methodist example of establishing *reiseprediger*, their own 'circuit riders' of sorts whereby a local pastor would minister to several churches throughout the week.

The most compelling study emerges from a former resident of Doniphan County itself. Entitled *Sunbonnet Days*, Mrs. Elise Dubach Isely's published memoirs of her early life in Switzerland, her immigrant experience, her life in

---

161 Meyer, "Early Growth," in Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, 202.

Doniphan County before the Civil War, marriage, then life in Brown County (directly to the west of Doniphan County) after the Civil War, bring to light a number of factors common to immigrants. Her details and personal insights of how and why churches were so central to the immigrant experience, German or otherwise, as they settled throughout the Midwest, is generally rich and compelling as well specifically relevant to this study.

Isely was born in Courrendlin, Canton Bern, Switzerland, on June 21, 1842, and immigrated with her family, which included her mother, father, and two brothers, through the port in New Orleans on April 9, 1855. Her account is important to be understood for a number of different reasons.

First, she lived in the area which is the primary focus of this study where she even attended the Smith Creek Church's "German School." Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, she remembers the various churches she attended (particularly those in Doniphan and Brown Counties) as the center of her family's and community's lives. Finally, she offers valuable insight about what factors were important about the churches and what factors were not at all important.

Interspersed throughout her memoir are recollections on the importance of churches. For instance, early in her settlement account of Doniphan County, she comments on her family's spiritual and social connection to the church and how important it was in their lives.

Daguerreotype of Mrs. Elise Dubach Isely
Courtesy of the Isely Information Project

In this passage, she also mentions the importance of the Smith Creek Church's "German School":

> Social life in Doniphan County centered in the school and the church. Aside from the neighborhood sewings and quiltings, I attended no gatherings except those connected with the school and church. Several churches were organized in the county, among them a German Methodist church [the Smith Creek Church] for the accommodation of German families in our community. It had services in the schoolhouse until such time as the congregation could erect a building.[162]

---

162 Isely, *Sunbonnet Days*, 87.

Later in her recollections of Doniphan County, she explained why Germans (and other immigrant groups) so vociferously clung to the church as a mainstay of their society. As stated, churches were often a way for members to maintain their culture through language, which was exactly the case for her father.

> We attended the German church, because Father could understand the language. In one way the organization of that church hindered him. Since he could attend a German church and trade with German storekeepers, he was not compelled to learn English, and consequently never did acquire proficiency in English.[163]

After the Civil War, Isely married, relocated a number of times, had children, and eventually moved to a farmstead near Fairview, in Brown County. Even as an adult, she still talked about the importance of establishing churches and why they were so central to their lives.

> We formed a variety of organizations to bring people together. As soon as possible we formed a church. There was no church except an occasional service conducted at the schoolhouse by circuit-riding ministers.[164]

One scene in particular demonstrated how much people were willing to overlook certain theological and doctrinal concerns for the sake of creating a church they felt they needed. Many times, newcomers to various portions of the

---

163 Ibid., 88-90.

164 Ibid., 180-181.

county would band together because of the need of spiritual and/or social connection, while letting minor, and sometimes major, points of religion slide for the sake of the benefits wrought by being affiliated with the church.

> Two missionaries gave us some excellent sermons, but the people wanted a church of their own with a regular pastor. As a first step, they organized a community Sunday School which met at the Fairview schoolhouse. But when we tried to form a church, we found the people could not agree on the denomination. In our community Baptists and Methodists were most numerous, but they disagreed decidedly over the form of baptism.
>
> Our brothers, Henry and Fred, were members of the Reformed Church. Mr. Joss had been brought up in the Reformed Church, and for that matter so had my husband [Christian] and I, for the Reformed Church was the church of Switzerland. In Doniphan County, I had been a Methodist, and in St. Joseph, Christian and I had been Presbyterians. It looked for a while as though we might be unable to organize any sort of church because of sectarianism, for our community was too poor to think of supporting two ministers and two churches at that time.[165]

While this last scene offers an excellent look at a few of the general issues faced by many rural immigrant churches, this next scene offers a specific example of how compromises had to be made in order to keep the congregation together. Many families believed in certain theological and doctrinal issues, yet were unable to find, or fund, a church that was an exact fit for each of their likings and beliefs. The formal hierarchy and structure of the congregation and

---

165 Ibid., 181-182.

the sacrament of baptism were often two delicate points in particular. Therefore, compromises had to be made.

For example, in this scene, the organizational structure of the church and the difference in belief of sprinkling, versus immersion, led to a completely new sort of congregation, and denomination, altogether:

> One day at the close of Sunday School, Andrew Carothers, who lived in the far eastern end of the township, arose from the desk at which he had been seated, to advocate a compromise. "We cannot all have the denomination we would prefer," he said. "So let us decide on a second choice. I have in mind a denomination on which we can all agree. None of us are members of that church, but it is a very tolerant one. It allows each member to decide all doctrinal questions for himself. If we organize that denomination we can then elect to be baptized either by sprinkling or immersion. In that church we can all join and worship together, respecting each other's doctrinal views and adhering to our own. That church has no bishops, no presiding elders, no synods; it elects its own officers, chooses its own pastors and makes its own rules by vote of the congregation. The only connection each individual church has with other churches of the same denomination is through membership in a state or district association to which it can send its delegates.
>
> As explained by Mr. Carothers it looked as though the Congregational Church was created to fit our needs. By vote of those present, it was decided to form a "Congregational Church".[166]

Despite the Missouri Synod's rigid beliefs in such lofty ideals as *rite vocatus* or *reine Lehre*, this example of forming a non/multi-denominational

---

166 Ibid., 182-183.

"Congregational Church" was far more practical and fairly common for newcomers in small, rural, immigrant churches. General and traditionally important points, like theology and doctrine, and even specific points like structure of the congregation and methods of baptism, sometimes took a backseat when compared to the needs of community and societal structure which the local churches afforded. When considered all in all, the church's social importance often trumped its religious importance.

In describing the social importances of the church, Mrs. Isely offers more details and then a particular insight which must be considered:

> I like to recall our meetings there and the friendships made. Besides being a house of worship, our church had socials and entertainments. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter and Children's Day were outstanding dates when the children sang and spoke their pieces. If we could avoid it, none of our family ever missed attendance; if it rained we put up an umbrella; if it snowed we wrapped up in blankets and comforts; if it was so icy that the horses could not travel the three and a half miles, Christian and the older children walked. Part of our punctuality was from a sense of duty, but beyond that, we were happy in being there. We no more thought of missing church than of missing our meals.
>
> City people, surfeited [sic] with close daily contact with others, and distracted by golf and parties, can hardly understand the hunger for church that pioneer families had. Our Fairview church not only ministered to our spiritual needs, but it also fed our social hunger. Out of our desire for company as well as out of our need for spiritual development, we

> dressed our children in their best clothing, and journeyed to Fairview.[167]

Many studies have commented on the social aspect of churches because of the cultural values it perpetuated. Yet, Mrs. Isely adds one other into the mix here—the rural-factor. Being isolated from others, and without the ease of quick, long-distance transportation, Mrs. Isely points to this factor as a key point as to why the German immigrant churches throughout the Midwest (particularly those in Doniphan County) were so important. Since they essentially had no other social networks, due to long traveling distances from town to town, and even farmstead to farmstead, neighbors did not often mingle and socialize, except when called together because of a church-related or church school-related event.

Thus, churches from across the Midwest were facing many of the same issues in their attempts to provide for the needs of their congregations. Their origins were often the same, largely due to the fact that they were founded by the same groups of people for similar purposes. Their history and growth were often the same as the same needs emerged from their congregants. Finally, their functions were the same in that many of them established schools, kept their culture intact through prolonged and continued use of the German language, and even their cemeteries were part of their history. For the United Methodist Church and the Christ Lutheran Church, both located in Wathena, Kansas, each

---

167 Ibid., 185-186.

of these functions were present, as they too ministered to both the spiritual and social needs of their members.

Chapter 5—Archetype Churches Within Doniphan County

Germans were among the first and largest mass ethnic immigrant arrivals in Doniphan County and they brought their most important societal component with them. Along with what few earthly possessions they could bring with them on their journey, these immigrants brought something more heavenly—their religion.

In order to fully understand the breadth and the depth of the religiosity of the German communities within Doniphan County, it is first necessary to understand the history behind the churches they built and the reasons they built them. Westward expansion of the United States and its territories was a continuous dynamic process as families sought, bought, and fought for new lands, freedoms, identities, and beginnings.

Doniphan County saw a large number of churches spring up throughout the nineteenth century after Father Irvin and Reverend Ballard successfully established their Presbyterian Mission in 1837. Some, like Father Irvin's church, were extrinsic, that is they were created as missions by outsiders who came in to minister to the local population. Others, however, were intrinsic, that is they sprang up from within the population already living there.

The major influx of Germans came into Doniphan County beginning in the late 1850s. In fact, the brunt of the large Germanic immigration into Doniphan County did not start in earnest until after the Civil War when large numbers of Germans begin to settle west of the Missouri River—in Kansas,

Nebraska, Colorado, and beyond.[168] Once the initial group of immigrants established themselves, great numbers of immigrants continued to arrive throughout the early twentieth century, when the county was settled by a large number of first and second-generation Americans.

However, it is two particular groups of German immigrants, and the churches they founded, that exhibit those same qualities as other German immigrant churches throughout the Midwest. Just as Coburn's study of the Trinity Lutheran Church in Block accomplished, it is necessary to explain in detail the development and history of both of these churches, if one is to fully grasp the importance of these two local churches in the lives and societies of its members.[169]

Unknowingly, the Germans of Doniphan County were continuing a trend of settlement and religious sustainability that other ethnic groups and other denominations were also exhibiting as they settled in their own enclaves throughout the Midwest. It is the exhibition of this same pattern of sustainability, combined with the level of detail in their records, the legacy they formed, and the longevity of their success that make them truly worthy of increased study.

The history of the churches now known as the United Methodist Church and Christ Lutheran Church, both now located in Wathena, bring to light a

---

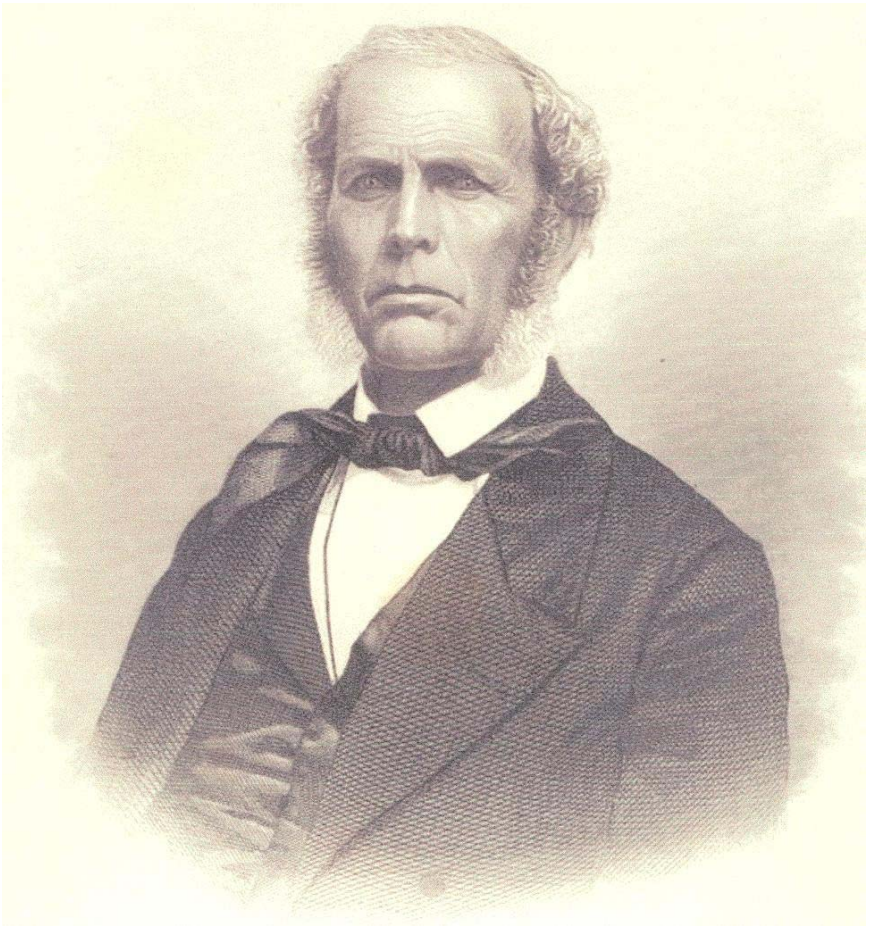
168 Hawgood, *The Tragedy of German-America*, 78.
169 Coburn, *Life at Four Corners*, 31.

number of peculiar aspects that when viewed both individually as well as taken in their totality, paint a representative picture of what life was like for great numbers of German immigrants who created their own churches throughout the Midwest.

Out of the study of these two churches comes a representative example of life in the church as well as the communities they served as a means to perpetuate the culture of the Germans who founded them. Both of their histories contain each of the four factors presented at the beginning of this study—establishment of a local church, a church-sponsored school, continuation of the German language, and an adjacent cemetery.

The history of the United Methodist Church is a multi-faceted one, encompassing five separate churches. For three of these five churches, there is the most relevance and the most resources to draw upon, and will consequently be studied more intently. They are the [English] Methodist Episcopal Church in Wathena (so called not because of an Anglo ethnic background of the members, but simply because of the language spoken within the church), the Smith Creek German Society Methodist Episcopal Church, and the German Methodist Episcopal Church in Wathena. Little detail is known about the two other churches, the Bellemont (Whitehead) Methodist Episcopal Church and the Palermo German Methodist Episcopal Church, but what is clear is that these five churches eventually combined (like the nationwide Methodist church itself) to form one large congregation.

The [English] Methodist Church traces its earliest origins back to the very first Methodist service ever held in Doniphan County. Conducted on July 4, 1854, by the presiding elder and district superintendent of the Kansas Methodist District, Reverend William H. Goode, this service would open the door for the Methodist presence in the area and set the stage for the large and continued Methodist outreach to come.[170]



Picture of Reverend William H. Goode
Courtesy of the Baker University Archives

170 Groh and Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of Wathena*, 1.

Originally from Indiana, Goode had risen to become a prominent leader within the Methodist ranks and was appointed by the presiding Bishop, E.R. Armes, on June 3 to tour the region and to bring back a report on the locals' needs—spiritual and otherwise.[171] Goode left a mere five days after his appointment and did much more than report on the region or preach in Doniphan County. In his tour, he served both as missionary and ambassador by working with the local conferences of both the Northern and Southern Methodists—who were then split (like much of the rest of the country) over the issue of slavery.

This tour was yet another example of the enormous nationwide Methodist outreach undertaken in the mid-nineteenth century, which saw Methodists become the fastest growing denomination in the United States. From a population of less than one thousand members at the time of the Revolutionary War, the Methodist ranks exploded throughout the early part of the nineteenth century to count well over one million members by the outbreak of the Civil War.[172]

The Doniphan County service fulfilled both its national as well as local mission and was held on the banks of Peter's Creek (named after early settler, Peter Cadue) in the bark wigwam of Chief Wah-the-nah himself, and yet, it was not considered much of a 'service' at the time. Rev. Goode only records it as "an

171 Holter, *Fire on the Prairie*, 68.
172 Ibid., 11.

interesting meeting" and spends more time talking about the makeup of the geography, physical surroundings, and on the Indians themselves, rather than his attempt to bring Christianity to them.[173] Regardless of the feeling at the time, Rev. Goode's first visit was enough of a toe-in-the-water experience that it led the way for others, including himself, to return.

Early in 1855, the first Southern Methodist service was held by the Reverend Davis. Later that year, Reverend Goode returned and, along with another Northern Methodist pastor, Reverend Hiram Burch, founded the first permanent, organized, Methodist church in Doniphan County at Smithton, just north of present day Wathena on August 1, 1855.[174] Although worship services were initially held in the living rooms of early members, the congregation grew rapidly until services needed to be held in local schoolhouses. Shortly thereafter, a location and funding were secured for a permanent church building to be erected in Wathena in late 1856.

This combined effort of both the Northern and Southern Methodists proved fruitful, at least numerically. In the General Methodist Conference of 1856, Doniphan County reported ninety-five members in a number of individual churches throughout the county; second most of any in the state.[175]

A deliberate point of outreach of that Conference became the Wathena English Methodist Episcopal Church, as it was then titled. This church was

---

173 Reverend William H. Goode, *Outposts of Zion: With Limnings of Mission Life* (Cincinnati, OH: Poe and Hitchcock, 1863), 262.

174 Groh and Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of Wathena*, 1.

175 Holter, *Fire on the Prairie*, 69-70.

organized and dedicated on June 12, 1858, with the Reverend T.K. McMunhall presiding over the ceremony and Reverend D.H. May installed as the first pastor.[176] Since the Wathena Baptist church was not officially organized and dedicated until the very next day, the Wathena Methodist Church holds the distinction of being the town's oldest. Pastor May only stayed for five months and, after transferring at his own request, was replaced by Reverend Blake who, likewise, only stayed a few months—thereby setting a pattern of seemingly revolving short-term pastors throughout its early years. Indeed, in its first twenty years, the Wathena Methodist Church was served by no less than fourteen separate pastors.[177]

This kind of pastoral turnover was not unique to the Wathena Methodist Church and the phenomenon was recognized on a regional scale. The Methodist hierarchy realized early on the need for quality, stable ministers for the German immigrant population in Kansas as evidenced by their appointments during their Illinois Conference in 1859. Out of this conference, five separate ministers were placed in various Kansas towns: Wyandot, Lawrence, Fort Riley, Leavenworth, and Columbus (which is located in Doniphan County).[178] It was also from the Illinois Conference that the first full-time German ministers came and within two years, those ministers had grown their congregations to the point

176 Groh and Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of* Wathena, 2.
177 Ibid., 12-14.
178 Holter, *Fire on the Prairie*, 85.

that they were listed under their own 'Kansas German District' of the Kansas Conference.

The late 1850's were certainly a time of unrest throughout the country as the issues of slavery and states' rights threatened to tear the country apart. Incidentally, Doniphan County also stands as an interesting representative example of this conflict as well, as exemplified by the courage of Wathena Methodist Church's fourth pastor, Reverend O.B. Gardner.

On the morning of May 1, 1861, Rev. Gardner found a symbolic act of vandalism done to a large sycamore tree in his front yard. Rev. Gardner lived in Elwood, which put him directly across the river from St. Joseph with its large pro-slavery contingent, whereas Doniphan County was mostly anti-slavery. When he awoke, he found a pro-slavery/secessionist flag (likely the Confederate Stars and Bars) waving from the limbs of his tree while on the trunk was nailed a sign proclaiming that anyone who removed the flag or the sign would surely die.

Declaring that he was ready to die for the cause of righteousness, even going so far as to leave word of his preferences for his funeral arrangements, Rev. Gardner removed the sign, climbed the tree, removed, and then ripped apart the flag. Throughout this incident, he no doubt recalled the symbolic meaning and irony of his situation, given that the sycamore was a Biblically significant tree with an ultimately-rewarding story.

When he returned to the ground, five secessionists had gathered around the Rev. Gardner to enforce the sign's warning, only to be well outnumbered by

a local group of pro-Unionists standing behind them. The five secessionists were then escorted in a most un-Christ-like manner the two hundred yards to the Missouri River and warned never to return to Doniphan County again.[179]

During the late 1850's, the English Methodist Church records indicate that their pastors performed hundreds of weddings as lonely settlers sought companionship and looked to establish permanent homes.[180] Like many rural pastors, the Methodist church pastors rode a circuit of smaller churches to bring the Word. For the Wathena pastors, their circuit included the additional towns of Troy, White Cloud, Doniphan, Geary, and Mount Airy—although the latter two were disbanded in the mid-1870s due to poor attendance.

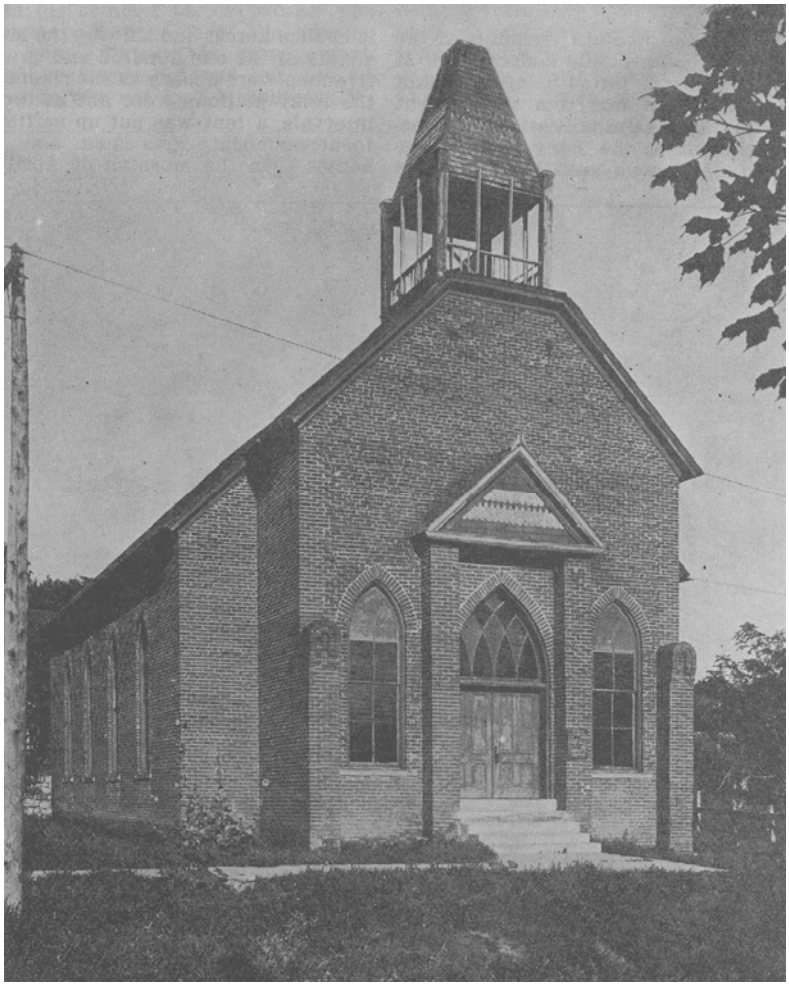
By 1866, the church had grown to the point where Articles of Incorporation were adopted on May 28 and construction began on a new 40' by 60' building on September 8, as they had outgrown their existing church building in terms of both structural organization and physical meeting space. The new building, located on land donated by the Brazelton family and built under the construction of early Wathena-area settler Alfred Larzelere, was dedicated on February 18, 1867.[181]

Like many others in this study, one sees a strong church-community connection here. This new church building quickly became a source of congregational as well as municipal pride, as it served the city as an all-purpose

---

179 Calnan, ed., *Illustrated Doniphan County*, 232.
180 Groh and Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of* Wathena, 4.
181 Ibid.

building. In addition to housing the congregations weekly services and social events, it also functioned as the local public schoolhouse and town hall. It would later combine two of those primary functions on Sunday mornings when, in 1886, the church began its Sunday School program by holding its classes directly before the regular church service.



Picture of first [English] Methodist Episcopal Church Building
Courtesy of the Wathena United Methodist Church Archives

By 1866, the majority of the congregation was settlers who had come to the region and then founded and supported the church. Their descendents then,

in turn, became settlers in other regions further west, resulting in a local population drain. Despite such departures, and the seeming competition from other churches emerging from within the county, the English Methodist Church continued to grow. In 1919, building plans were reinvigorated after being dropped at the onset of World War I and the existing building was razed, and a new brick building (which is the current church building today) was constructed and dedicated on December 15, 1920, for a total cost of $35,000.[182]

In addition to the traditional fundraising activities, both the building and parsonage from the Wathena German Church were sold when the churches combined and the monies used to assist in the construction project. Chief among the major purchases for the new church building was the massive Drosselmeier-Marolf pipe organ. Named after the families who contributed the final donations to the fund, this organ remains the working centerpiece of the church's sanctuary to this day.

While the [English] Methodist Church was steadily growing, there was another Methodist church, this one exclusively German, which had also formed the same year as the English church. However, by the time of the English church's new building in 1920, the German church knew that it needed to make a geographic (as well as linguistic) shift. Like their English counterpart, this German church enjoyed a steady growth over the latter half of the nineteenth

---

[182] German Methodist Episcopal Church, "New Records: 1890—1919," translated by Mrs. Edward Tolmie in 1983.

century but with a significant difference—its importance was as much cultural as it was theological.

Originally known as the "Columbus Mission," the Smith Creek German Society Methodist Episcopal Church was the first exclusively German church in Doniphan County and was another deliberate outreach of the General Methodist Conference of 1856.[183] It was organized in 1858 about a mile and a half south from the now-defunct town of Columbus [City], and about a half mile south of the also now-defunct town of Smithton, which was about six miles north of Wathena.

The extended name of the church is of interesting note as the Germans who founded the church were not originally Methodist. They were a smattering of various denominations who happened to live in close proximity to the Smith Creek locale where the mission was planted at the behest of the afore mentioned General Methodist Conference of 1856. Essentially, they were local Germans who wanted a church, so they became Methodists due to the Methodist outreach, not German Methodists who picked up where they left off in Germany.

The first pastor called to minister to these Germans was the Reverend Heinrich M. Meyer (who also founded at least two other German Methodist churches in the county) and prior to their first building, services which included worship services, social gatherings, and even school activities, were held in the

[183] German Methodist Episcopal Church, "Old Records: 1858—1891," translated by Mrs. Edward Tolmie in 1983.

homes of its early members—the Gummig's, Hauz's, Ozenberger's, Ramseier's,° Rapp's, and Schuler's.[184]

Picture of Smith Creek German Society Methodist Episcopal Church
Courtesy of the Wathena United Methodist Church Archives

The Schuler family was not only one of the charter members of the Smith Creek Church but in March 1879, George Schuler Jr. also donated one acre of land for the construction of a 24' by 32' by 12' new frame church. Under the direction of Henry Wagenknecht, and with the assistance of Samuel Lehmann Sr., the new building was erected for four hundred dollars.[185] Completed that Summer, with the bulk of the construction efforts coming from the congregation, including Rev. Meyer, the building was dedicated on June 2. It was at this church where a "German School," as it was called throughout the county, was held for the next ten-plus years.

° The Ramseiers are the patriarchal family of the author's Great Grandmother.

184 Groh and Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of* Wathena, 27.

185 Reverend Charles Ott, German Methodist Episcopal Church, "Old Records: 1858—1890," translated by Mrs. Edward Tolmie in 1983.

This "German School" was like other church-sponsored schools throughout the Midwest. Students not only attended the school because it was close, but also because their families attended the church (though not necessarily followed the denomination), or at the minimum, spoke the language of the church. In fact, many students attended the "German School" if for no other reason than to learn German itself and never attended any of the public schools in the county. This "German School," where, like many other church-sponsored schools, the Pastor was also the teacher, was the same school which was vividly recounted in the memoirs of Mrs. Isely.

The Methodist zeal for planting church-sponsored schools was not limited to only elementary and secondary schools. Baker University, located in Baldwin City, 45 miles southwest of Kansas City, was the first college in Kansas and was chartered in 1858, opening its doors on November 22, as a Methodist College. Even Kansas State University, in Manhattan, owes its origins to Methodist leaders in the state trying to establish a local college.

From its living room origins in 1858 until 1911, German was the exclusive language of the Smith Creek Church. From 1911, until the point when the church merged with the other Methodist congregations and permanently relocated to Wathena in 1922, the English language became increasingly prevalent in its church services to the point that German was largely, though not completely, dropped altogether by the time the churches combined.

The earliest origins of the Wathena German Society Methodist Episcopal Church (as it was officially called) trace back to the same group that initially established the Smith Creek Church, though with the help from some new arrivals. When they immigrated from Rheingoenheim, Bavaria, in April 1843, Christoph Groh, along with his son Peter, helped to organize the St. Peter's German Episcopal Church in Parkville, Missouri. Shortly after Christoph's death in 1856, Peter relocated to Wathena where he began to worship with other Germans and even some German-speaking Swiss Methodists. Mrs. Isely's family was among them, attending church services here, even though she went to the Smith Creek "German School."[186]

In 1858, those same missionaries began assembling other German immigrants from other parts of the county into a separate congregation. By 1860, the congregation had grown to the point they were able to construct their first church building near Palermo (which was the first permanent German-church building in Doniphan County) about a mile and a half south of Wathena on Pottawatomie Road. Four other structures, and a number of itinerate pastors later, this church finally established itself within the city limits of Wathena, where it truly found its niche.

By October 1867, the Wathena German Church was formally organized under the leadership of Reverend Heinrich M. Meniger, who had also had a hand in probably organizing, or at the very least chronicling, the Smith Creek

---

186 Groh and Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of* Wathena, 6.

Church and soon thereafter began holding services in the Cordonier School Building. The term "formally organized" here carries with it a bit of a double meaning in this case.

On the surface, it was 'officially' organized, meaning that the congregation itself took on a codified form of governance which included a constitution, hierarchical structure, organizing documents, record keeping, and etc. However, there was also an 'unofficial' organization to each of their meetings—including Sunday worship services. Up until the mid-twentieth century, it was customary during meetings and services for the men to sit on one side of the church and the women to sit on another. Though never codified, this practice was firmly in place and strictly enforced for the first several decades of the church's existence.[187]

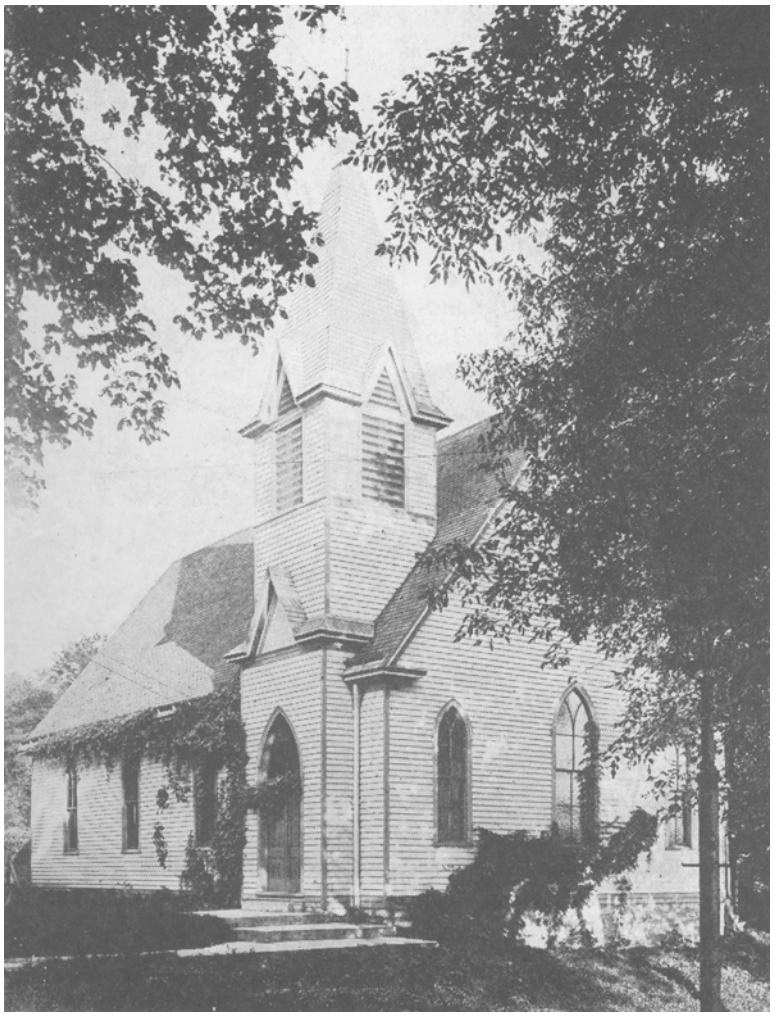
With circuit locations still in its former building near Palermo and another near Burr Oak, the Wathena German Church enjoyed a steady growth over the years. From a membership of 64 parishioners (along with 19 probationary members) in 1872, numbers increased to 90 members in 1882 and to 134 in 1891.[188] By 1872, it was flourishing enough to provide its Pastor with a parsonage, purchased for $1,500 and then, in the summer of 1878, it bought a church building from the Campbellite Organization (Christian Disciples of Christ

---

187 Coburn noted the same phenomenon in her study of Trinity Lutheran in Block. See picture and explanation in *Life at Four Corners*, page 38.

188 German Methodist Episcopal Church, "Old Records: 1858—1891," translated by Mrs. Edward Tolmie in 1983.

Church) in Wathena for the sum of $1,100 and moved the church onto North 2nd Street in Wathena.[189]



Picture of Wathena German Methodist Episcopal Church
Courtesy of the Wathena United Methodist Church Archives

This Wathena German Church often conducted services and other functions along with its in-town English counterpart, up to and including placing advertisements together. Often times, readers of the *Wathena Weekly Star* would see concurrently running advertisements placed by both churches, with the

189 Ibid.

German church publishing their weekly calendar right next to the English church, though with one notable difference. The English language advertisements always included, at the behest of the Pastor, the disclaimer that "all German speaking people are cordially invited" to come to Sunday afternoon services.[190]

Along with the growth in members, came a growth in church-wide programming. The Sunday School program became permanent in 1886 with 40 members and by 1914 showed 23 teachers with 160 students enrolled.[191] It also attracted the attention of its regional colleagues as it played host to the 24 members and Presiding Elder of the West District German Methodist Conference from April 19-28, 1899.

The aftermath of World War I hit the Wathena German Church hard, as it would hit other German churches throughout the Midwest hard. Not only did the church have to abandon plans for a brand new $10,000 church building in 1917, after the initial money to begin construction had already been raised, but they began, in earnest, to give up their native tongue.

Whether one looks at Doniphan County churches, or any number of other churches throughout the Midwest, several general reasons can often be attributed to this transition away from the German language: a desire to distance themselves from Germany, usually as a result of anti-German sentiment brought

190 *The Wathena Weekly Star*, October 28, 1898.

191 German Methodist Episcopal Church, "Old Records: 1858—1891," translated by Mrs. Edward Tolmie in 1983 and German Methodist Episcopal Church, "New Records: 1890 - 1919," translated by Mrs. Edward Tolmie in 1983.

about during World War I, or later, the rebirth of Germany under Hitler and then World War II; marriage into non-German speaking families; or the transition into public school systems where English was the only language spoken.

For the Wathena German Church, this transition was aided in no small degree by the emergence of bilingual Bibles. Beginning in the late-nineteenth century and growing in popularity in the early-twentieth century, members began carrying Bibles which had German printed on one side (usually the left, as the book was opened) and the word-for-word English translation printed on the other, facing page.

However, specifically, for the Wathena German Church, there was a more practical reason for no longer speaking German in their services. It officially merged with both the Smith Creek German Methodist Church and also with the Wathena English Methodist Episcopal Church to form one church body. This newly integrated congregation held their first collective service on Sunday, September 3, 1922.

Of the seventy-five cumulative members from the three churches (now one congregation) who were in attendance for the service that day, the vast majority were from either of the two German churches. Immediately following this first joint service, the newly combined congregation enjoyed the obligatory

church-wide potluck dinner with, interestingly enough, over two hundred mouths to feed.[192]

Few details remain regarding the other two churches which comprise the foundation of the United Methodist Church—the Bellemont Methodist Episcopal Church and the Palermo German Methodist Episcopal Church. Early county records indicate that the Bellemont Church, like the Methodist churches at Charleston, Mount Vernon, and Lafayette, declined in numbers as the towns they were located in or near dissolved, and the members joined the Wathena churches.[193] Similarly, the Palermo German Church began in 1855 and served a number of local congregants until it too disbanded due to low attendance in 1870, where its members folded back into the Smith Creek Church, as it had been using their former building and been served by their pastor for a number of years.

After 1922, English became the only language for Wathena Methodist Church services and for church documentation as the newly joined members outwardly tried to distance themselves from their German past. Yet, the German language was not done away with altogether. Up until the late 1950s, church goers were treated to the carol *Stille Nacht, Heiliege Nacht* at the annual children's Christmas program by Mrs. Gummig—a descendent of the Smith Creek Church founders.[194]

---

192 *The Wathena Times*, Volume 21, Number 17, 1.
193 *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County*, 26.
194 Groh and Groh, *History of the United Methodist Church of* Wathena, 31.

Combining their congregations and their languages was not the only entities coming together at the time. Just after each of their respective foundings, each church also found a plot of land to bury their own dead. For the Smith Creek Church, it was immediately adjacent to the church building itself. The Wathena English Methodist church buried its members in the western section of the current-day Catholic Cemetery in Wathena. For the Wathena German Church, they used the Bellemont Cemetery right after the town of Bellemont itself dissolved and became known as Whitehead. The Wathena German Church was able to stake its claim on this particular cemetery early in its existence when the first person buried in its new cemetery was Peter Groh, interred in August 1881.[195]

As world events continued to cast an unfavorable light on the German population in America, first and second generation Germans within the newly combined congregation reacted accordingly. On August 27, 1939, just twenty-six days after Germany's invasion of Poland, the church again changed its name in an effort to further distance themselves from any possible connection to the Europe. The church officially dropped the terms "German" and "Episcopal" from its title, including any written reference to either of those potentially value-laden terms and emerging with the new simple name of the Wathena Methodist Church. Many years later, in April 1968, when the Wathena Methodist Church became part of the larger national United Methodist Church fellowship, and

---

195 Ibid., 56.

joined the United Brethren of Evangelical Churches, it underwent a name change again, this time to its current name—the United Methodist Church of Wathena, Kansas.

Picture of current Wathena United Methodist Church Building
Courtesy of the Wathena United Methodist Church Archives

Along with the combination of congregations, languages, cemeteries, and numerous name changes, came other significant events in the life of the church. The first choir robes were purchased in 1937, more and larger Sunday School classrooms were added to the building in the 1950s, extensive improvements and refurbishments were made to the pipe organ and it was rededicated on October 6, 1968, then three months later, construction on the current parsonage was completed and the house was dedicated in January 1969. More improvements were made to the church in 1971 with the installation of air conditioning throughout the facility. 1997 and 1998 were busy years for the church as

significant renovations to the building were conducted to the point that the congregation had to relocate to a church St. Joseph while construction was completed.

These new updates were deemed the "Reconstruction Celebration" and were marked along with the church's 140th Anniversary on June 8, 1998. Currently, the church is completely remodeling and updating their basement to provide more updated amenities, up to and including ADA compliant doorways and bathrooms, and is preparing to celebrate their 150th Anniversary in June 2008.

The history of the United Methodist Church parallels another church, also started by German immigrants in Doniphan County. The church now known as Christ Lutheran Church shares a similar history (including its earliest living room origins all the way through various name changes), similar focus on community, similar perpetuation of culture, and similar fulfillment of spiritual and social needs as that of the United Methodist Church. It also shares some of the same names and faces as the Trinity Lutheran Church in Block. Collectively, these two churches stand to form a representative example of immigrant German churches that can be found throughout the Midwest.

The earliest origins of the Christ Lutheran Church date back to 1881 when several immigrant German Lutheran families in the Troy and Wathena area felt the need to again hear the Word of God and contacted Lutheran pastors in the Atchison, Kansas, and St. Joseph, Missouri, areas to come and minister to them in

their living rooms. Like with anything new, this was no small feat for either the immigrants or the pastors to undertake. As previously discussed, the Lutherans in particular had a difficult time in acquiring a proper pastor as the number of German-speaking Lutheran pastors, like many other resources at the time, was in scarce supply.

For the next two years, Reverend W. Zschoche, who had earlier served as the first pastor at the Trinity Lutheran Church in Block, Kansas, rode out, or more often was picked up and then returned, once a month from his home in Atchison, to preach in various living rooms of the early members. Reverend Zschoche was certainly energetic to take on another congregation, as he was already the full-time pastor for the Trinity Lutheran Church in Atchison, nearly 20 miles away.

Five families are considered the charter members of the church and it was in their living rooms that the church, originally known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Marion Township, got its start. The patriarchs, or at least some descendant of each of those members' families: Albert Benitz, W.F. Kiehnhoff, Frank Loroff, Ludwig Nimtz, and August Ruhnke were part of the Building Committee who later supervised the construction of the first church building and at least one descendent from each of those families is still represented on the church's membership roll to this day.*

* Albert Benitz, one of the members of the Building Committee, is the author's Great-Great-Great Grand Uncle.

Within a few years, believing that merely hearing the Word in their homes to be insufficient because they believed that Christian consciousness must also express itself by means of Christian congregation, the congregation decided to move away from the cycle of living room services and began holding their earliest formal services in the Cordonier School building (the same building in which the Wathena German Church once held services). [196]

Picture of Heinrich Benitz's four sons shortly after emigrating from Germany
From left: William, Albert, Emil, and Fredrich Benitz
Courtesy of the Benitz Family Archives

196 *Christ Lutheran Church: A Brief History of the Congregation – 1884-1934* (Wathena, KS, 1934), 2.

Like the Wathena English Methodist Church, Christ Lutheran saw a number of different pastors in its early years. However, unlike the Methodists, they were without the benefit of an organized denominational circuit from which to regularly acquire replacement pastors, or even an immediate interim. In fact, reliable pastoral connections were often tenuous in the early years of the congregation.

For example, Rev. Zschoche was only able to come out once a month and when he left Trinity, his replacement, Reverend C. Vetter, also came up from Atchison once a month. However, this arrangement did not last long, as the congregation there demanded that he terminate the arrangement to devote himself entirely to their congregation, which may have helped better serve Trinity but left Christ Lutheran without a pastor.

The situation with Christ Lutheran's third pastor was even more fragile, as Reverend M. Grosse had to come from St. Joseph, as his regular position was as the head of St. Paul's Lutheran Church. Given his tenuous travel schedule which included the fact that much of his thirty-mile journey was over rough country roads, coupled with his limited availability due to his duty to his full-time job, reliable and regular services were not always assured.

Like its Methodist counterparts, Christ Lutheran grew steadily throughout the 1880s. When it was formally dedicated on January 1, 1884, the original record showed 56 families, and 305 members, and an average of over 34 people

took communion.[197] In 1885, an average of over 21 people took communion, while in 1886, an average of over 23 people took communion.[198]

From that year, which is when the Church's official records were first kept, until December 30, 1890, Christ Lutheran's continuous growth was meticulously documented. Sixty-six adults were baptized, sixty-five babies were born and subsequently baptized into the congregation, ten couples were married in the church, and eight more people were confirmed.[199] By its 50th anniversary celebration, in 1934, the Christ Lutheran had baptized an accumulative total of 576 people, confirmed 360 others, married 111 couples, and conducted 115 funerals.[200]

Over the years, a number of factors motivated the congregation to find a better, more permanent, meeting place. A noteworthy growth in people, as well as the long-term stability of the congregation signaled the future strength of the church. A significant step towards that assurance was the establishment of its own Christian Day School in 1890. Given the early interest of the School and the relatively high attendance numbers, the congregation decided that the church needed to move from the Cordonier School building into a permanent church location of its own.

Thereafter, quality building ground was quickly identified for a suitable, permanent location. In 1894, the necessary acreage was acquired from local

---

197 Christ Lutheran Church, "Original Records: 1884—1927"
198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
200 *Christ Lutheran Church: A Brief History of the Congregation,* 7.

farmer Fred Snike and then A.J. Profe was awarded the construction bid at a cost of approximately $2,400.[201] Thus, their first permanent building was erected on a county road about six miles southwest of Wathena and eight miles southeast of Troy, and it was the springboard they needed.

Within one year of its completion and dedication, they were able to call their first permanent pastor, the Reverend Martin Senne. Rev. Senne was a young pastor, fresh out of St. Louis' Concordia Seminary, and coincidently was the brother of Block's Trinity Lutheran Church's, Rev. H.C. Senne, who had come to that church in 1890. Rev. Martin Senne was installed at Christ Lutheran on August 10, 1895, and the congregation agreed to build him a 28' by 28' by 10' personage on the grounds directly east of the church building, complete with a cistern for fresh water—all of which was paid off within a year.[202]

Christ Lutheran's "Christian Day School" initially opened in 1890 with fifty students in attendance and would grow larger over the next twenty-plus years. Although called the Christian Day School, by its members, the school was commonly referred to as the "Lutheran Day School" by others outside the church and is the common name remembered by nearly everyone today.

It was, like the Smith Creek "German School", another of those aspects and extensions of the church that Christ Lutheran used to perpetuate their

---

201 Calnan, ed., *Illustrated Doniphan County*, 222.

202 "Original Records", 8.

culture. Classes were held exclusively in German, taught by the pastor, supported by the congregation, and initially housed in the church building.

First opened in 1890, it was the primary schooling agent for the children of Christ Lutheran's members for the next forty years and was very successful in its early years. As its growth continued, it was deemed necessary that the school be given its own building. Therefore, in 1908 a 26' by 38' addition was built onto the back (North) side of the church for an additional construction cost of $1,198.50.[203]

Picture of Christ Lutheran Church's Original Building with Parsonage at left Courtesy of Christ Lutheran Church Archives

Eventually however, the perceived need and interest in the school diminished and the attendance numbers dropped accordingly. In 1928, with the

203 "History of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church", 8.

pastor still teaching classes, enrollment numbered only twelve.[204] With this decline in numbers, the rise of the local public school system, as well as the increasing desire to integrate their students into the local culture, the Lutheran Day School permanently closed in 1930. Though attempts were often made over the next several years to revive it, it never did re-open in its original form.

By 1896, a mere two years after the construction of their building, the church was able to draft and adopt Articles of Incorporation and in the Summer of 1897 joined the Missouri Synod, where the current name of Christ [Evangelical] Lutheran Church was officially adopted.[205] Two years after joining the Missouri Synod, Christ Lutheran established a cemetery on the grounds one-half mile west of the church building—a cemetery that remains active for members and their families to this day.

Like the Methodists, the Christ Lutheran Church's schooling and church services were held exclusively in German through the end of the nineteenth century and only began to infuse the occasional English-speaking services in the early twentieth century. In fact, it was 1901 before the first services were conducted in English, but even then, it was only one English service a month, as compared to the customary two services each Sunday in German.[206] By 1915, at the behest of the outgoing pastor and with the blessing of the newly-installed

---

204 Doniphan County School Directory—1927-1928, 33.

205 At the time, and continuing today, the official name of the church includes the word "Evangelical," though many of its historical records, common verbal references of then and now, and even the name posted on the sign in front of the church do not reflect this.

206 "History of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church", 7.

young pastor, Christ Lutheran began holding it's a second service in English every other Sunday and, for the first time, the Christmas services were conducted in both languages.[207]

By the late 1920s, English had become more and more predominant in the worship services, to the point where the language being spoke in services were transposed. English became the primary language for both Sunday services with German-speaking services only being held once every other Sunday. Then, on March 2, 1941, Christ Lutheran held its last regular worship service in German. From then on, only a special-occasion service, or portion of a service, would retain any linguistic German connection.

Worship services were not the only areas of the church experiencing a shift in language use at the time. Until 1921, when the long-time church secretary stepped down, the minutes of all the congregational meetings had been recorded exclusively in German. With the installation of a new secretary came a change to recording the minutes only in English and by 1929, the church's constitution had been translated into English.[208]

Not all was well with the Christ Lutheran Church, however. Even though Missouri Synod pastors would have cringed at the thought of their actions being labeled as self-righteous, pious, or Calvinistic, early pastors throughout the

---

207 Ibid., 8-9.

208 "Original Records", 31.

synod, including Christ Lutheran's, began following Loehe's model and setting, expecting, and even codifying rigid standards for behavior.[209]

Beginning in 1915, and continuing well into the 1930s, the church began a policy and practice of excommunicating members for such offenses as: lack of attendance, failure to support the church (either through monetary or physical means), involvement in illegal activities (sometimes only allegedly), refusal to settle grudges with fellow members, calling the pastor a false prophet, and breaking or failure to fulfill the vows of marriage.[210]

Christ Lutheran was able to weather all manner of linguistic transitions and man-made storms, even if it found itself reeling after a God-made storm. On June 3, 1925, the steeple of the church, the congregation's first permanent building, was struck by lightning during a thunderstorm. The ensuing fire completely destroyed the church and the adjoining Lutheran Day School. Undeterred by this setback, Christ Lutheran once again temporarily held services in the Cordonier School Building and was able to build a new structure on the same site and held services in the new building within a year.

Dedicated on April 18, 1926, the new building very closely resembled the original structure and would be the home of Christ Lutheran for the next forty-six years. Desiring to continue with the Lutheran Day School as well, classes were also held in the Cordonier School Building, and then held in the basement

---

209 Coburn, *Life at Four Corners*, 35-36.

210 "History of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church," 9.

of the new church, once it was completed, though the school was discontinued in 1930.

Picture of Christ Lutheran Church's Second Building
with outcropping of Christian Day School building visible at left
Courtesy of Christ Lutheran Church Archives

On May 18, 1969, just over four decades after dedicating their second church building, Christ Lutheran resolved to re-locate their congregation to a site that they felt was more advantageous to the growth and work of their church,

thereby beginning the quest to find suitable land to meet that resolution.[211] By March 1970, the congregation had decided to make Wathena part of its geographic location, and not just its title, by purchasing a plot of land on what was then the western edge of the town.

They constructed their current building on the prominent location of the corner of Highway 36 (essentially Main Street) and Kirschbaum Avenue and it opened for its first service on Easter Sunday, 1972.[212] However, the congregation did not totally abandon the legacy of their former buildings. A number of the artifacts from their second building were removed and are currently hanging in the sanctuary or are on display in their entryway.

Picture of Christ Lutheran Church's current building
Courtesy of Christ Lutheran Church Archives

211 Christ Lutheran Church dedication pamphlet, April 1972, 1.
212 Ibid.

Years after establishing their new home, Christ Lutheran was able to bring back a significant part of its legacy. Driven by the same desire as their ancestors, to educate its next generation of church members, and despite having been closed for nearly eighty years, it was able to re-open its school, though in a different form.

In 1991, Christ Lutheran opened a pre-school housed within their current church building. Originally, conceived as a ministry for its members, it too was purposely opened with the idea of perpetuating culture. Though not necessarily ethnic culture, per se, with German as the primary language, this pre-school initially served to inculcate the culture of the time, including the values, mores, and teachings of the church into the next generation of its members.

In the ensuing years however, the pre-school has grown beyond a service to the congregation and has opened up to the community as a whole. In fact, today the Christ Lutheran Pre-School's numbers are strong, and getting stronger. Not only because of the values it instills in its students but (realistically speaking) because it is the only licensed pre-school currently operating in Doniphan County.

Between these two churches, the United Methodist Church and the Christ Lutheran Church, souls were nurtured and cultures were maintained for well over a century. And it was as much the religious, spiritual, and social fulfillment that parishioners sought and ultimately found, as their own cultural and ethnic fulfillment.

The families who started weekly Bible studies and worship services in their living rooms could have little imagined the impact their accomplishments would ultimately have on their demographic communities. Yet given the prevalence of numerous other churches throughout the Midwest, it is conceivable that they could have imagined that their actions would be similar to those of other German communities throughout the Midwest.

Chapter 6—Conclusion

America has long been a nation of immigrants. From the founding of the first colonies in Virginia, the demographics of immigration showed that mostly young single men from England and Ireland accounted for the most immigrants, with over two-thirds of all newcomers.[213] However, as the nineteenth century progressed, demographics began to change.

No longer was it mostly single men, nor was it predominantly English and/or Irish stock coming into the country. Beginning in the 1840s, the majority of immigrants came as a family—either with individual members coming together, or with entire families coming as individual clans and/or sequentially.[214] So too did the origins of those immigrants change. Immigrants now began coming from the mainland European continent, predominantly from Germany.

Between 1840 and 1860, nearly 1.4 million German immigrants entered the country, making up nearly one-third of all immigrants during that time. Continuing until 1954, millions more fled Germany, most of them settling in the Midwestern United States.[215] When these emigrants left Germany, they often had an identity crisis of sorts. Whether it was a linguistic, cultural, or geographical association, it was no easy task to categorize German immigrants

---

213 Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*, 3rd Ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 206-207.
214 Dublin, ed., *Immigrant Voices*, 69.
215 Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil?*, 109.

(particularly of the late nineteenth century) into any real and meaningful categories, nor was it easy for Germans to categorize themselves.

Yet Germans had their own real and meaningful solution to this problem, which was as unique as the communities they created. Indeed, the solution was found in the communities they created and an interesting phenomenon exists with respect to the identity and settlement of these millions of German immigrants into the United States. Though Reverend Loehe's Franken-communities come close with their names, there is no area known as "New Germany." Cities, wards, or areas with names like New Spain, New France, New Netherlands, New Sweden, and of course, Nova Scotia and New England, and even Chinatown and Little Tokyo, and have all existed at one point, with varying degrees of success. Yet there has never really been a "New Germany", so called.[216]

A primary reason for this non-categorizational phenomenon is that the sheer magnitude and numbers with which Germans came into the country, did not instill in them the belief that they all had to settle in one place. Additionally, many of them wanted to cast off the troubles of their homeland and wanted to start over without recreating the political turmoil that might have accompanied keeping German-sounding titles or names.

Over time, Germans consciously worked to move away from German-sounding surnames by editing the spelling and/or pronunciation of their names,

---

216 Hawgood, *The Tragedy of German-America*, 93.

predominantly by removing the umlaut and replacing it with a more Anglo equivalent. By the mid-twentieth century, first names like Gottfried became George and surnames like Schmidt had become Smith, Schröder became Schroeder, and even Bönitz transitioned to Benitz.

However, the greatest reason there is no "New Germany" lies in the fact that German immigrants often did not feel the need to do in name what they had already done in actuality. As far flung as each pocket of especially rural German settlements became, there was no one single, highly-focused, or centralized vicinity of Germanic settlements in America. Whereas some ethnic groups chose to stay in one or two predominant areas, Germans settled throughout the American landscape. From New York to Colorado, from Wisconsin to Texas, and beyond, it is possible to find areas of Germanic settlers dotted throughout the United States.

While each settlement was often separated from another, they still found a way to bond—primarily through the establishment of a local church. They came to America with little more than the clothes on their back, their families in tow, a perhaps Bible at their side, and a deeply abiding faith that told them the future would somehow be better than the past.

They believed they were doing the right thing, and would be blessed, by leaving their homeland and uprooting their family to America. The best way to receive that blessing, they knew, was to gather where two or more were present in the name of their faith. By establishing a formal church congregation, a

church-sponsored school for their children, continuing their language in both the church and the school, and then establishing a cemetery, German immigrants were able to construct something greater than the sum of their established parts. They built their very identity.

When Germans settled in the United States, they wanted to recreate as much of their old lifestyle as possible in their new country. They accomplished this through the establishment of their local church. What Germans lost in their Fatherland, they were able to establish in spades in their new step-Fatherland through their local church.

It was the church that they would start in the intimacy of their own living rooms, it was the church that they constructed with their own hands and paid for with their own money, it was the church that would educate their children which helped embed the values of the culture in the next generation, it was the church whose rituals marked the major stages of the family life cycle, it was the church that allowed them to freely maintain their culture (primarily through the continuation of their native tongue) for generations after immigrating, and it was the church that they were buried next to when their life had ended.[217]

In turn, the church gave something back to them—a sense of belonging they could not have had otherwise. They belonged to the church and the church belonged to them, identifying them as belonging to something greater than

---

217 Conzen in Gjerde ed., *Major Problems in American Immigrations and Ethnic History*, 129.

themselves. It was the church that was the center of their individual lives, collective society, and, most importantly, gave them their identity.

Whether it was as a source of community and solidarity or even at times their biggest source of argument and conflict, the influence of religion and the establishment of churches was indelibly interwoven into the innermost fabric of the lives of German immigrants. While Christians all, the many complexities and nuances of their faith not only drew the new immigrants together, but also helped them to maintain their culture for many decades and even generations after their settlement in America.

Rural, immigrant German settlers all shared one commonality, the need for communion—though not necessarily the communion using bread and wine, for it was not bread alone that met their most intimate needs. Their need was for a type of social communion offered through their church, evidenced by their own works, driven by their faith in the future, underlined by their faith in God, and expressed by creating churches to sustain their faith, their culture, their legacy, and their identity for generations to come.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Bunger, Friedrich. Account in *Der Lutheraner, III.* June 15, 1847. In *Moving Frontiers: Reading in the History of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. Carl S. Meyer, ed. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. 1964.

Calnan, Henry J. ed. *Illustrated Doniphan County: A Supplement to "The Weekly Kansas Chief" 1837 – 1916*. Troy, KS. 1916.

Christ Lutheran Church dedication pamphlet. April 1972.

Christ Lutheran Church. "Original Records: 1884 – 1927"

de Coronado, Francisco Vázquez. "Report to the King of Spain, sent from Tiguex on October 20, 1541." Accessed from http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/one/corona9.htm on April 18, 2008.

"Distribution of Immigrants, 1850 – 1900." *Reports of the Immigration Commission*. U.S. Senate Document #756. 61st Congress. 3rd Session. 41 volumes. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office. 1911.

Doniphan County School Directory – 1927-1928.

German Methodist Episcopal Church. "New Records: 1890 – 1919." Translated by Mrs. Edward Tolmie.

German Methodist Episcopal Church. "Old Records: 1858 – 1891." Translated by Mrs. Edward Tolmie.

Goode, Reverend William H. *Outposts of Zion: With Limnings of Mission Life*. Cincinnati, OH: Poe and Hitchcock. 1863.

Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas. Illustrated. Chicago: J.S. Bird. 1882.

Isely, Elise Dubach. *Sunbonnet Days*, as told to her son, Bliss Isely. Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd. 1935.

Loehe, Johannes Konrad Wilhelm. "Etwas von unsern ungelehrten Pedigren in Amerika," *Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und uber Nord-Amerika*. 1843. No. 9. Col. 4 and 5. In *Moving Frontiers: Reading in the History of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. Carl S. Meyer, ed. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. 1964.

_____. "Community Constitution of the Frankenmuth Community". In *Moving Frontiers: Reading in the History of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. Carl S. Meyer, ed. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. 1964.

_____. "Uber die Wichtigkeit der englischen Sprache fur die lutherische Kirche Nordamerikas," *Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und uber Nord-Amerika*. 1846. No. 4 and 5. Col. 38. In *Moving Frontiers: Reading in the History of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. Carl S. Meyer, ed. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. 1964.

Ott, Reverend Charles. German Methodist Episcopal Church, "Old Records: 1858 – 1890." Translated by Mrs. Edward Tolmie.

Petition for Naturalization, United States Government, April 5, 1922.

Seyffardt, William. 1851 letter to his parents and 1852 letter to his father. Thomas Dublin. *Immigrant Voices: New Lives in America, 1773-1986*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. 1993.

_____. 1860 letter to his parents, brothers, and sisters. Thomas Dublin, ed. *Immigrant Voices: New Lives in America, 1773-1986*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. 1993.

Trinklein, John J. Memoirs. May 15, 1943. Printed in Dorothy Kuehl and Karen Meyer. *Friedens Au: A Centennial History of the Trinity Lutheran Church of Riesel, Texas – 1883-1983*. Riesel, TX: Trinity Lutheran Church/Riesel Rustler. 1983.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Immigrants and their Children 1920*. Prepared by Niles Carpenter. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office. 1927.

Wathena Gazette. Thursday, August 22, 1889. Volume 3. Number 8.

The Wathena Times. Volume 21. Number 17.

The Wathena Weekly Star. October 28, 1898.

Secondary Sources

Abel, Anna Heloise. "Indian Reservations in Kansas and the Extinguishment of Their Title." Kansas Historical Collections. Vol. 8. Produced as a map in *Fire on the Prairie: Methodism in the History of Kansas*. Published by the Editorial Board of the Kansas Methodist History. Printed by the Methodist Publishing House. 1969.

Ahlstrom, Sydney E. *A Religious History of the American People*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 1972.

Anderson, S. Chris, and Ernest Thode, *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Germanic Ancestors*. Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books. 2002.

Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. New York: Meridian/ Penguin Books. 1995.

Billington, Ray Allen. *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, (New York, 1960.

Blessed for 75 Years, 1913-1988 – The History of the Zion Lutheran Church of Kearney, Nebraska. Kearney, NE: Zimmerman Printing Co. 1988.

Boehlke, LeRoy. Reprinted in *Pomeranian Culture and Genealogy*. Germantown, WI: Pommerscher Verein Freistadt. 1997.

Bruncken, Ernest. *German Political Refugees in the United States during the period from 1815 – 1860*. Special print from "Deutsch-Amerikanische Geschichtsblatter." 1904. San Francisco, CA: R and E Research Associates. 1970.

Clark, Christopher. *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 2006.

Christ Lutheran Church: A Brief History of the Congregation – 1884-1934. Wathena, KS. 1934.

Clebsch, William A. *From Sacred to Profane America: The Role of Religion in American History*. New York: Harper and Row. 1968.

Coburn, Carol K. *Life at Four Corners: Religion, Gender, and Education in a German Lutheran Community, 1868 – 1945*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press. 1992.

de Belmont Hollingshead, August. "The Life Cycle of Nebraska Rural Churches." *Rural Sociology*, II. June 1937. In Frederick C. Leubke, *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans in Nebraska, 1880 – 1900*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press. 1969.

Dinnerstein, Leonard and David M. Reimers. *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*. 3rd Ed. New York: Harper and Row. 1988.

Dublin, Thomas, ed. *Immigrant Voices: New Lives in America, 1773-1986*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. 1993.

Gerlach, Russell. *Immigrants in the Ozarks*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press. 1976.

Gray, Patrick L. *Gray's Doniphan County History: A Record of the Happenings of Half a Hundred Years*. Bendena, KS: The Roycroft Press. 1905

Groh, Sharon and Georgia Groh. *History of the United Methodist Church of Wathena, Kansas – 1858-1983*.

Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company. 1951.

Hawgood, John A. *The Tragedy of German-America: The Germans in the U.S.A. During the Nineteenth Century and After*. New York: Arno Press. 1940.

Herwig, Holger H. *Hammer or Anvil? Modern Germany 1648 – Present*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co. 1994.

"History of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church—Wathena, Kansas" in *Rejoice in the Lord Always and Again, I Say Rejoice: A Centennial Church Directory of Christ Lutheran Church*. St. Joseph, MO: Olan Mills. 1984.

Holborn, Hajo. *A History of Modern Germany, 1648-1840*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1967.

Holter, Don W. *Fire on the Prairie: Methodism in the History of Kansas*. Published by the Editorial Board of the Kansas Methodist History. Printed by the Methodist Publishing House. 1969.

Hudson, Winthrop S. *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1965.

Kuehl, Dorothy and Karen Meyer. *Friedens Au: A Centennial History of the Trinity Lutheran Church of Riesel, Texas – 1883-1983*. Riesel, TX: Trinity Lutheran Church/Riesel Rustler. 1983.

Leubke, Frederick C. *European Immigrants in the American West: Community Histories.* Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press. 1998.

_____. *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans in Nebraska, 1880 – 1900*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press. 1969.

The Lord Loves the Gates of Zion: The 125th Anneversary of the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Worms, Nebraska – 1874-1999. Grand Island, NE. 1999.

Meier, Everette and Herbert T Mayer. "The Process of Americanization," in *Moving Frontiers: Reading in the History of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. Ed. by Carl S. Meyer. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. 1964.

Meyer, Carl S. "Early Growth of the Missouri Synod." In *Moving Frontiers: Reading in the History of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. Carl S. Meyer, ed. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. 1964.

_____. *Log Cabin to Luther Tower: Concordia Seminary During 125 Years Toward a More Excellent Ministry, 1839-1964*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. 1965.

_____. "The Missouri Synod and Other Lutherans Before 1918." In *Moving Frontiers: Reading in the History of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. Carl S. Meyer, ed. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. 1964.

Neils Conzen, Kathleen. "Historical Approaches to the Study of Rural Ethnic Communities." In Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press. 1980.

_____. "German Catholic Immigrants Who Make Their Own America." In Jon Gjerde, *Major Problems in American Immigrations and Ethnic History*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. 1998.

Ohm, Helen, Audrey Boehlke, and LeRoy Boehlke, *Pomeranian Culture and Genealogy*. Germantown, WI: Pommerscher Verein Freistadt. 1997.

Ostergren, Robert C. *The Immigrant Church as a Symbol of Community and Place in the Upper Midwest*. Great Plains Quarterly. Volume 1. Number 4. Fall 1981. Lincoln, NE: Center for Great Plains Studies. 1981.

Ozment, Steven. *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People*. New York: Harper Collins. 2004.

Reaves, Patricia I. *A German Genealogical Primer*. Brookfield, IL: Published by the author. 1997.

Smith, R.F. ed. *Doniphan County, Kansas, History and Directory for 1868 – 1869*. Troy, KS: Smith, Vaughan, and Co. 1968.

Vexler Robert I., and William F. Swindler. eds. *Chronology and Documentary Handbook of the State of Kansas*. New York: Oceana Publications. 1978.

Maps

1883 Doniphan County Map taken from William G. Cutler's *History of the State of Kansas*, (Chicago, IL: A. T. Andreas). Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.

Pictures

Daguerreotype of Mrs. Elise Dubach Isely. Courtesy of the Isely Information Project

Picture of Reverend William H. Goode. Courtesy of the Baker University Archives.

Picture of Alexander William Doniphan. Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives.

Picture of Benitz brothers. Courtesy of Benitz family archives

Pictures of Wathena English Methodist Episcopal Church, Smith Creek German Society Methodist Episcopal Church, Wathena German Society Methodist Episcopal Church, and United Methodist Church buildings. Courtesy of the United Methodist Church, Wathena, Kansas, archives.

Picture of Christ Lutheran Church buildings. Courtesy of the Christ Lutheran Church archives.