

Emigrants from Germany

The most numerous group who came to Iowa was the Germans with nearly 36,000 arriving by 1860. The peak of German immigration was reached by 1890 when there were 127,246. From that time until the present their numbers have diminished, but they have always been in first place among Iowa's foreign born. As late as 1958, 306 Germans stated upon arrival at United States ports of entry that they wanted to live permanently in Iowa.

When they arrived in Iowa, the Germans were so numerous that it was impossible for them to concentrate in a limited area. Consequently, every section of the state has had its Germanic element at least in part. In 1870 there were only twelve counties in which the Germans were not one of the four largest nationality groups.

These immigrants during the past one hundred years have come largely from the German states of Bavaria, Prussia, Hesse, Wurtemberg, Oldenburg, Saxony, Hanover, Baden, Darmstadt, and Hamburg. However, probably every German state has been represented to some degree.

During the nineteenth century there were two basic reasons why Germans emigrated. The first

was to avoid compulsory conscription and extensive military service. The second was the confident hope that they could improve their own conditions and open up promising careers for their offspring.

This second cause was aided by the increasing volume of personal letters which arrived in Germany. On one trip a passenger who mingled with the travelers in steerage asked each one why he had left home. Without exception each took from his pocket a letter from a brother, cousin, son, daughter, friend or acquaintance. Handing over the letter, each would say, "Read this."

The Franco-Prussian War was given as a reason for increased emigration in the 1870's. In addition, many of the German states had removed or eased restrictions on emigration by that time.

Iowa newspapers during the nineteenth century were continually attempting to encourage one group or another to come to Iowa. In 1839 the Davenport *Iowa Sun* had learned that several thousand Germans had arrived at New York, all destined for the West. "There is room enough in the valley of the Mississippi for millions of such emigrants and the sooner they come over the better both for their own interests and for ours." At the same time the *Iowa Territorial Gazette* of Burlington was sounding an alarm. "They must, however, come soon, else we shall have no room for them."

Five years later the *Hawk-Eye and Iowa Patriot* of Burlington was saying of the Germans:

Let them come. . . . We have an immense territory of the finest soil in the world, now lying useless and uncultivated, which needs but the plough of the husbandman with ordinary diligence to yield a rich and abundant harvest. . . . Here, industry is sure to furnish all the necessaries of life. . . . Let the enterprising, industrious German come among us — he shall receive a hearty welcome.

Here, he will find all, socially and politically equal, and the naturalized foreigner has the same rights, and stands on the same footing of equality with the proudest of the land.

Let them come then, we repeat, and when they land on the shores of America, let them not tarry in our cities or linger about the sea board in the old states, but let them spread themselves over the fertile prairies of the West, where a trifle of money makes them, at once, land holders and where the soil is sure to render an ample return for their labors.

But let not the idle and dissolute come — such will find that here . . . industry is an absolute requisite to prosperity.

In 1867 land was still available. The area around Lyons was beginning to fill up with "hard-working Germans, whose quiet and orderly lives make them good citizens — whose small farms and frugal habits make a rich community." The next year increasing numbers were settling in the corners of Grundy, Franklin, Butler, and Hardin counties. Ackley was the center of "this miniature Germany."

Each year large numbers were added to the population, "fresh from the Faderland." Iowa could "stand a million of such people," said the *Des Moines State Register*, "and grow richer and better by it."

In 1869 a group of at least forty Hanoverians arrived at the Farmer's Hotel in Dubuque. The next day they left for Charles City. They had been persuaded to emigrate by the favorable representations of friends who lived there already. "If one or two can do this much in inducing emigration," asked the editor of the *Dubuque Daily Times*, "how much more could a regularly organized society do?"

The German colony in Westphalia Township, Shelby County, owed its origin to an advertisement in a newspaper. Emil Flusche from Grand Rapids, Michigan, undertook to sell railroad land in Iowa. The railroad company contracted to pay \$1.00 per acre on all land sold to German Catholics who became settlers, provided there were forty within eighteen months. Many Westphalian Germans responded to Flusche's ads, and there was a population of 207 within two years.

The account of the arrival of a German emigrant ship in New York City in 1853 gives a vivid description of this momentous event.

Moustached peasants in Tyrolese hats are arguing in unintelligible English with truck-drivers; runners from the German hotels are pulling the confused women hither and

thither; peasant girls with bare heads, and the rich-flushed, nut brown faces you never see here, are carrying huge bundles to the heaps of baggage; children in doublets and hose, and queer little caps, are mounted on the trunks, or swung off amid the laughter of the crowd with ropes from the ship's sides. Some are just welcoming an old face, so dear in the strange land, some are letting down huge trunks, some swearing in very genuine low Dutch, at the endless noise and distractions. They bear the plain marks of the Old World. Healthy, stout frames, and low-degraded faces with many; stamps of inferiority, dependence, servitude on them; little graces of costume, too — a colored head-dress or a fringed coat — which could never have originated here; and now and then a sweet face, with the rich bloom and the dancing blue eyes, that seem to reflect the very glow and beauty of the vine hills of the Rhine.

It is a new world to them — oppression, bitter poverty behind — here, hope, freedom, and a chance for work, and food to the laboring man . . . to the dullest some thoughts come of the New Free World.

These were the Germans who were to become a part of Iowa's population. Within a short time most were gainfully employed at a great variety of occupations.

Among the Germans farming was the most common. In 1920, 21,073 foreign-born Iowans owned farms, 208 were farm managers and 10,940 were tenant farmers. More than half of this total were Germans, tilling over two and one-half million acres.

As early as 1870 many had already become quite prosperous. For instance, there was Jacob Leophaidt, a Wurtemburger, who lived in Lan-

sing Township, Allamakee County, and had property worth \$21,000; or John Deitchler of Mills County who had accumulated land valued at \$32,500 since coming from Hanover; or William Wertz who emigrated from Darmstadt to Johnson County and was now worth \$22,600.

Many Germans had been trained in various professions before coming to Iowa. Only a few can be mentioned to illustrate their influence. Mary Dollmer of Henry County was a physician, perhaps the first woman doctor in Iowa. Two professors at Wartburg Seminary, Golfreed and Sigmund Fritschell, came from Bavaria while their students were from Hesse Darmstadt, Prussia, Bavaria, and Wurtemberg. At the State University of Iowa, Gustavus Hinrichs, Professor of Physical Science, had been born in Holstein while Charles A. Eggert, Professor of Languages, had been born in Prussia. At the other end of the employment scale at the University was H. Ruppert, a janitor from Mecklenburg.

A few held public office during the nineteenth century. Emil Bechman from Mecklenburg was county treasurer of Grundy County and Charles Bergh held a similar position in Humboldt County. The Deputy U. S. Surveyor in Dubuque in 1870 was George L. Fischer from Wurtemberg.

There are two interesting sidelights in connection with Iowa legislative bodies. Mrs. Margaret Funck, who was born in Germany in 1813,

came to Burlington in 1836. There she boarded members of the first legislatures of the Territory of Iowa. Another German who came to Mt. Pleasant in 1855, Theodore Schreiner, served fourteen years as door-keeper of the Iowa Senate.

Many nineteenth century Germans brought their skills with them and started new businesses in Iowa. John Bury, a Bavarian, made wagons and plows in Burlington, and a Prussian, F. M. Pleins, manufactured soap and candles in Dubuque.

Bellevue is typical of many Iowa towns. Joseph Luke, a Prussian, manufactured boots and shoes; Henry Engleken, another Prussian and Herman Aman, from Wurtemberg, were furniture manufacturers and Mathias Walter's product was soda water.

Brewers were usually German. Those in Dubuque, for instance, included John Stallman from Bavaria and Anton Heeb from Hesse. The latter hired nine brewers, all from Germany. In Council Bluffs both Charles Bock and Charles Stephan were brewers from Prussia. The dispensers of the wines and beers, the saloon keepers, were usually, but not exclusively, either German or Irish.

One would also find some foreigners in the entertainment field. At Lansing two Prussian tragedians, Louis and Maria Schram, were living in a hotel maintained by another Prussian, E. Ruprecht.

Occasionally there were some very unusual occupations performed by the people who had emigrated to Iowa. Jacob Luther, a German in Anamosa, gave his occupation as "water wheel patentee" in 1870. Or there was Daniel Silster, a Prussian in Algona, who called himself a "dog artist."

In 1870 an "ice cream saloon" in Burlington was operated by Henry Woellhaf from Wurtemberg. George Feuchlinger, another Wurtemburger, was printer of a German newspaper in Burlington. Germans were also often found following the occupations of shoemakers, clothiers, horticulturists, druggists, carpenters, joiners, cabinet makers, butchers, distillers, tanners, stone cutters, merchants, bakers, confectioners, hotel operators and inn keepers.