

The German Americans in the
Greater Bridgeport Area

A SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEY

The Sociology Colloquium

In cooperation with the
UNIVERSITY OF BRIDGEPORT
Bridgeport, Connecticut

1964



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by

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Preface

This survey is a cooperative effort by the students in the Methodology course in the Department of Sociology. Those who took part in this study were either seniors waiting to be graduated or juniors hopefully scanning the skies of the future graduating classes. The tasks of obtaining material for a study of this nature and the tremendous effort needed to sift, analyze and arrange the material for a study can prove quite burdensome, particularly when it has to be juggled in between the other activities that prevail in a college year. It is a credit to this group that it was able to ferret out sources not too easily available.

There was a total of twenty-three members in the group. It was too large to work as a unit and equally unmanageable if the members work as individuals. The approach selected by the group was to divide the members into committees in accordance with their interests. The final arrangement was:

Committee on History: Marion Armstrong, John Gioffari, Yolanda Delgado, Alain Jeffrey, Phyllis Snyder, and Cecelia Starinsek.

Committee on Economics: Clara Coleman, Walter Gabuzin, Barbara Kass, and Sue Seidel.

Committee on Religion: Paulette Harper, Rene Machado, and Gloria Pulito.

Committee on Social Structure: Delfina Acuto, William Carroll, Marilyn Moon, and Robert Meyers.

Committee on Relationships with Country of Origin: Robert Daloia, Michael Hoffman, Anton Kolton, Thomas Nadeau, Ellen Rosenthal, and Robert Zuccaro.

In the final analysis, the greatest gain that the student group realized from this undertaking was a living experience in group action. They worked toward a goal which, in itself, had to be first worked out and then achieved. The undersigned, a member of the Department of Sociology, experienced the most comforting feeling possible as he guided the unorganized through days of travail to the end of achievement.

Benjamin Wiznia

May 30, 1964

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Chapter I The Germans In

A study of the Germans in our ethnic group in our midst. It is estimated that the population has German blood in its veins. They have participated in and contributed to the development of the country. Their pattern has been to become Americanized and to retain their identity within one generation.

Christopher Columbus, the discoverer of the New World, was the first to set foot on the continent. But it was another German, Martin Waldseemüller, who wrote about the voyage and suggested the name America.²

Some authorities believe that the first group of German-Americans came to America in the company of Alsatians and Huguenots, and settled in Port Royal, South Carolina in 1562—a settlement that was destroyed by the Spaniard, Menendez, four years later. Captain John Smith's accounts show that Germans were members of the Jamestown colony in 1607. Germans continued to come to Virginia and to use their skills as glass blowers, millwrights, tobacco planters, and vintners.³

The largest number of Germans, however, settled in New Netherland, an area stretching along the Hudson Valley from Manhattan to Albany. The first director general of New Amsterdam was Peter Minuit who was born in Wesel, Germany. He arrived in the colony in 1626 with almost absolute ruling powers, and transformed the settlement into a well organized and prosperous community.

German born Jacob Leisler became the second governor of New York. In 1690, when New York was attacked by the French, Leisler invited the governors of Massachusetts, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia to meet in New York. This historic conference could be considered the first American congress which was followed by others and which, in turn, led to the Continental Congresses.⁴

The first permanent German settlement in America was founded in Germantown, Pennsylvania. It was largely through the efforts of the Englishman, William Penn, who was interested in finding settlers for the large tract of land he had received from the English government and visited the European continent for interested persons. He found volunteers among the Mennonites, Schwenkfelders, Dunkards, and Pietists, religious sects not tolerated by the dominant Protestantism.

1. Theodore Huebner, *The Germans in America*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962; Preface, P. V.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-26.

interest, however, was political and social, rather than
which started the waves of emigrations
brought hundreds of thousands of Germans
German who had been in New
in his efforts to bring Germans
German immigrants to Philadelphia
in 1689, and Pastorius served
leadership of this conscientious public
1688 made the first formal protest
years before the Civil War.
Revolution (1707) in Europe received a
inspired by Germans on that continent.
and triggered another wave of German
group, arriving in 1708, settled in
another group settled in Berks County,
the Newburgh settlers was an orphaned
angel, who became apprenticed to William Brad-
under of the *New York Gazette*. Zenger later started his own
newspaper, *The New York Weekly Journal*, in which he attacked British
administrative policy. This led to his imprisonment and trial for
libel and his acquittal and resulting fame marked the beginning of
what has since become one of the cherished tenets of the democratic
way of life in America, freedom of the press.⁶

Germans continued to settle along the Eastern Seaboard, in
Maryland, Virginia, and Georgia, but by the middle
of the nineteenth century most of the German immigrants had found
permanent homes in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin,
and Texas. The first German settlement in New England was at
Waldoburg, in Maine, named after Samuel Waldo, the son of a Swed-
ish nobleman and a German mother. Joseph Crellius, a Bavarian, and
owner of the second German language newspaper in America, helped
promote German immigration into Massachusetts. A settlement known
as Germantown, ten miles south of Boston, was founded and Benjamin
Franklin, impressed by the industriousness of the town, bought eight
building lots.⁷

Americans of German origin played important roles in the Amer-
ican Revolution. Although the original German immigrants—Quakers,
Mennonites, Dunkards—diedly arms because of religious scrup-
les, their loyalty to the American cause was demonstrated by
their readiness to supply food and clothing to the colonial armies. The
Germans of the Reformed and Lutheran churches, since they had no
religious scruples, played leading roles in the Revolution. Outstanding
Germans in the struggle included Michael Schlatter, Peter and Henry
Muhlenberg, John Treutlen, Baron Von Ottenforff, Frederick Steuben,
John Kalb, Gerhard Von der Wieden, Heinrich Lutterloh, Johann
Schott, and many others.⁸

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-26.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-39.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-55.

Immigration into the United States rose sharply after the German revolutions of 1848 and 1849. Immigration statistics of Germans arranged by decades according to the census, reports an extraordinary increase in the decade from 1841 through 1850, and high figures in subsequent years, with the highest number coming in the decade between 1881 and 1890. The following table shows this:⁹

Immigration of Germans into the United States by Decades

1821-1830.....	6,761
1831-1840.....	152,454
1841-1850.....	434,626
1851-1860.....	951,667 ^a
1861-1870.....	787,468
1871-1880.....	718,182
1881-1890.....	1,452,970 ^b
1891-1900.....	505,152
	5,009,280

^a Revolutions of 1848 and 1849

^b To escape conscription after Franco-Prussian War

Generally, the number of German immigrants reflected conditions in Europe and related directly to periods of depression and prosperity in the United States.

The revolutions of 1848 and 1849 brought the cream of German intellectuals to our shores. In contrast to the earlier immigrants who were mainly peasants and tradesmen, the *Forty-Eighters* were highly educated teachers, doctors, lawyers, and editors. Among the exiles who later become prominent were: Frederick Hecker, Carl Schurz, Karl Heinzen, Gustav Struve, August Willech, and Wilhelm Weitling. They were well informed about political and social conditions in the United States. Witke says: Not their number but their extraordinary ability, spirit and influence made them significant."¹⁰

The *Forty-eighters* were on the whole quite vocal and enterprising. They became known as the "Greens" in contrast to the earlier and more placid immigrants known as the "Grays."¹¹ The new arrivals were also critical of the non-German residents and aimed their barbs at existing American conditions. They attacked the ill-kept cities, American education, and the Puritan Sunday. Native Americans did not welcome the criticism of the German immigrants, and for this reason and others as well, the so-called Know-Nothing party came into existence, with the chief aim of thwarting the foreign-born from achieving political equality.¹² The Germans did not take to this discrimination and there were natives who supported them. In Boston, Carl Schurz, best known of the *Forty-eighters* was invited by a mayoralty candidate who opposed the prevailing anti-foreign prejudice, to make a speech, Schurz said: "Every people, every creed, every class

9. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

10. Carl Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1952, pp. 19-21, 371.

11. Huebner, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

12. Katherine Shippen, *Passage to America*, New York, Harper Brothers, 195, p. 97.

make a speech. Schurz said: "Every people, every creed, every class of society has contributed its share to that wonderful mixture out of which is to grow the great nation of the new world. It is true the Anglo-Saxon establishes and maintains his supremacy, but without wholly absorbing the other national elements. They modify each other, and their peculiar characteristics are to be blended together by the all-assimilating power of America."¹³

In the crisis that preceded the Civil War, a majority of German Americans led by the Forty-eighters, supported the Union. They found slavery incompatible with their belief in democracy and demanded its abolition. They protested the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 which proposed extending slavery into the public domain. Out of the controversy came the birth of the Republican Party at Ripow, and many of the Germans joined the new political alignment. In opposition to the majority of the German Americans in favor of abolition and union, the older German groups remained staunch Democrats. The struggle for their vote divided the Germans through the 1850's, and represented the final contest between the "Grays" and the "Greens."¹⁴

Once the Civil War started, German support of the Union was significant. A statistical summary shows this clearly. The Union army totalled slightly over two million men; the major divisions according to ethnic and native groupings were:

Native Americans	1,523,267
Germans	176,817
Irish	144,221
English	45,508

There were five hundred Germans with the rank of major, colonel, or general in the Union army. Germans in Missouri organized the Home Guard and helped depose the pro-Southern Governor Jackson. Several Forty-eighters, including Franz Sigel and Carl Schurz, were leaders in the Home Guard and helped in the defeat of the secessionists. Evaluating the contributions of the German born groups, President James of the University of Indiana summed it up this way: "They saw what was right and they planted themselves firmly and distinctly on that side with no hesitation and no wavering. The influence of the Forty-eighters at this great and critical time of our national life was decisive. They turned the balance of power in favor of union and liberty."¹⁵

One of the most remarkable Forty-eighters was Carl Schurz who came to the United States with his wife in 1852. He became interested in law and was admitted to the bar in 1858, but his chief concern, at the time, was public affairs. This led him to take part in the campaign and election of Lincoln in 1860, and when the war broke out, Schurz was given a commission as Brigadier General of the Volunteers by Lincoln.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

14. Wittke, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-201.

15. Huebner, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

After the war, Schurz turned to journalism and worked under Horace Greeley on the *Tribune*. He subsequently became editor of the *Detroit Press* and then, of the German language daily of St. Louis. From 1877 to 1881, he was Secretary of the Interior under President Hayes. After retiring from public life, Schurz worked as editor of the *New York Evening Post* for several years. He died in 1906. In one of his most famous speeches which probably illustrates his philosophy best, Schurz said: "My country right or wrong; if right to be kept right, if wrong to be set right."¹⁶

In the political history of the United States, the German-American has not, as a rule, aligned or identified himself with any definite group. Yet, leaders such as Schurz, Heinzen and General Sigel were not averse to rallying their groups either in favor, or in opposition to specific measures. Thus, the German element opposed the sale of surplus war materials to France in 1870 and 1871, the years during which German unification in Europe was accomplished. In the following decade, when the influence of the *Forty-eighters* was declining, German Americans took issue with the question of Temperance, and Sunday closing ordinances.¹⁷

The Germans have played important roles in America. In agriculture in the 1900's, ten percent of all farms were owned by Germans, three times the number owned by people of English ancestry. The quality of their farming was outstanding. They were particularly skilled in fruit growing. Johnson Schwerdkoff dominated the strawberry market. There were other Germans who made outstanding contributions to farming and fruit growing techniques.¹⁸

The Germans were also active in the early labor movement in the United States. The socialist and labor movements were closely allied, and nearly all the early members were German. The *Forty-eighter*, Wilhelm Weitling, advocated many social reforms and was the leader of the first national convention of German working groups in Philadelphia in 1851. A central committee of United Trades was organized, and "Republik der Arbeiter" was published weekly.¹⁹

In industry, Germans have been active since colonial days. They were skilled weavers, glass makers, and silk processors. In food, they excelled in grocery and delicatessen stores. In 1872, Henry Heinz started his pickle business in Pittsburg. Oatmeal originated with Ferdinand Schulmacher who came to America in 1850. John Hecker invented self-rising flour. Claus Spreckels started the Bay Sugar Refining Company in San Francisco in 1847, and organized the beet sugar industry. A German jew, Nelson Morris, provided food for the Union army and was the first to send cattle on the hoof to Europe.

16. Rachel Dubois and Emma Schweppe, *The Germans in American Life*, New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1936, p. 62.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 256-260.

18. Huebner, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-124.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-133.

The great brewers in America have German names: Annheuser-Busch, Bltaz, Schlitz, Schaefer, Ehret, and Pabst. In the hotel business, George Boldt was president of the Waldorf Astoria. There are other famous names connected with science, engineering, and finance. George Roebling invented the modern suspension bridge and Charles Steinmetz's inventions for General Electric are said to be on a par with those of Edison. Bausch and Lomb are known for their fine optical equipment. In the steel industry, Andrew Carnegie's two lieutenants were Germans—Henry Frick and Charles Schwab. The first pianos in America were made by Behrent, Albrecht and Steinway.

Several German jews started as peddlers and became department store magnates. Straus, founder of Macy's and Abraham and Straus came from Bavaria, and Bloomingdale started as a peddler in Kansas. Outstanding German Jews in the field of finance and philanthropy are Otto Kahn (Metropolitan Opera), Bache and Altman (Metropolitan Museum of Art), Guggenheim, who supported three foundations, Schiff and Warburg, who gave huge sums to libraries, and Julius Rosenwald, who gave thirty million dollars to a foundation to be spent for the benefit of mankind.²⁰

Chapter II

German-Americans In Bridgeport Area — Introduction

The most apt statement that can be made at the outset is that unlike other ethnic subcultures which have succeeded in maintaining their identities in the Bridgeport area, the group of German ancestry seems to have labored hard to erase any visible ties with their cultural backgrounds of the past. This theme of active assimilation was noted by all who took part in this descriptive survey. However, evidence exists to show that on occasions, when Germany became involved in world conflicts, the residents in the Bridgeport area, like others of German extraction in various parts of the United States, sympathized with the mother country. It should be pointed out, however, that identification with countries of origin during their periods of stress has also been true of other national groups. The difference, of course, lies in the fact that on the two most important occasions, the United States ended up as a belligerent against the German nation.

What has impressed our researchers most, as they studied written sources and interviewed residents of German extraction, was the absence of strong organization or cohesiveness among the Bridgeport German Americans. Though close to New York City where German-American activity always has been strong, their Bridgeport counterparts never developed anything resembling the organizational structuring of a large city, or even that of its neighbor city, New Haven. Possibly, the nearness to the big metropolis made it unnecessary to duplicate the already existing organizations. For example, our re-

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-128.

searchers were unable to uncover the existence of any German-language newspaper in the area, either in the past or the present. In contrast, New Haven has had several such newspapers and one in particular, the *New Haven Anzeiger*, had been successful around the time of World War I.¹ In fact, a study of the German American New Haven residents' attitude during World War I was made and was based chiefly on material that appeared in this and other German language papers in New Haven. The author of the study estimated that there were about 3,300 Germans around the time of World War I in New Haven, and that they were quite active in supporting the German position. No definite source for a similar study of attitudes in the Bridgeport area could be found. An examination of the Bridgeport English language newspapers for the period produced no suitable data on which conclusions about the feelings of the German-American group in this particular area could be based. This is not to say that the German-American community was not actively engaged in an effort to marshal sympathy for the German cause, but the absence of reports of active participation may mean that those of German background could have worked with neighboring groups.

There is, however, little doubt that a considerable number of Germans, as well as Austrians, have been in the Bridgeport area for many years. The exact date of the first such arrival into the area will probably never be known, although it has been suggested that the first German to have settled in Bridgeport was a man named Lutz who is recorded as a member of the congregation of the first Roman Catholic service in 1830.² Since Bridgeport did not become incorporated as a city until 1836 and at that time had a total of only 3,000 inhabitants, it can be assumed that the actual number of Germans or those of German descent in the area around 1830, was quite small.³ A study of Connecticut completed in 1938 claims that the entire state of Connecticut had only four Germans at the time of the 1790 census. The same source refers to the first settlers of German descent in the state as coming from the stragglers of the Hessian reinforcements of the British army during the American Revolution.⁴ This would indicate that Connecticut was not a place to which many Germans came directly from their European homes as they did to other states, such as Pennsylvania and New York. In all probability the Bridgeport area, prior to 1830, did not offer sufficient opportunities for the farmers or the artisans of German extraction. However, after the abortive revolutions in 1848 in Europe, Bridgeport also became part of the new homeland for some of the new German immigrants.⁵

1. H. Wentworth Eldredge, "Enemy Aliens" in *Studies In the Science of Society*, ed. by George Peter Murdock, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1937, pp. 201-224.
2. Frank O'leary, "German Culture Found in Early Bridgeport", *Bridgeport Post*, January 28, 1958.
3. "Bridgeport", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1963 edition, Vol. 4, p. 191.
4. Federal Writers Project, *Connecticut*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1938, p. 46.
5. Elsie N. Dannenberg, *The Story of Bridgeport 1836-1936*, Bridgeport Centennial Inc., 1936, p. 123.

According to the census of Bridgeport in 1850, there were 138 Germans in the area at that time.⁶ One of the first German families that settled in Bridgeport on Main Street in the 1850's were the Schrads, later changed to Schread.⁷ By 1874 when the German Catholic Church was founded, there were twenty-five families in the congregation and by 1886, the number grew to seventy-five, or about three hundred church members.⁸ Since many Germans were also of the Protestant faith and some may have been of the Hebrew following, also, the actual number of German inhabitants in the area must have been much greater. A city directory of 1886 includes many families with German sounding names, but the actual number of residents cannot actually be ascertained from these listings.⁹

For the most part, the first Germans did not remain concentrated in specific areas in Bridgeport. However, newspaper accounts have reported that a good many of them lived around Congress and Middle Streets. Another group was said to have settled mostly on the east side of the city, around Kossuth, Pembroke, Hallett and Hamilton Streets. One of the districts inhabited by the Germans was known as "Johnsville." Whatever concentrations the German immigrants may have developed in the early years of their residence dissolved rather quickly. The German immigrant had at least one advantage over the other incoming groups in that they were either educated or possessors of skills and trades. They have been variously described as having such qualities as thrift, discipline, conservatism of mind, and industriousness. One writer has described them as: "Members of the race made a competent livelihood, earned good money, saved it, raised their families and then scattered themselves through the whole of Bridgeport. ⁷ a few years there were no regular German settlements."¹⁰ By 1936 there were approximately 2,000 German people in Bridgeport¹¹ and in the same year there were between 5,000 and 6,000 Germans of first and second generation stock in the city.¹²

One of the problems encountered by our study group was the inability to locate so-called "old timers" who could be depended upon to give an account of what German-Americans contributed to the development of Bridgeport. The lack of sufficient respondents, however, did not obscure the fact that the residents of German extraction played important roles in almost all of Bridgeport's activities. In later chapters more detailed examinations of these roles will be made, and some of the economic, social and religious institutions through which the

6. Samuel Orcutt, *History of the City of Bridgeport*, Fairfield County Historical Society, 1887, p. 230.

7. O'leary, *Bridgeport Post*.

8. Samuel Orcutt, *History of Stratford and Bridgeport*, Fairfield County Historical Society, 1886, p. 671.

9. Ann Whelan, "Romance of the German Colony in Bridgeport", *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, October 21, 1934.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Dannenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

12. Whelan, *Bridgeport Post*.

early German speaking groups channeled their experiences will be described. Again, it should be made clear that due to the rapidity of the assimilation process, very few of the old institutions have survived, and even those which are still identifiable, can no longer be considered uniquely German in structure or pattern.

Like all men and women either of native or foreign stock, the German immigrants and their descendants had to find means through which they could earn a living. Little difficulty seems to have been encountered by this group as far as earning a livelihood was concerned. The industriousness of the Germans has never been in doubt. The first immigrants who came to Bridgeport were blacksmiths, wagon spring makers, coach builders and saddle makers. Brewing of selected malts and grains was one of the industries which such German families as Benz, Colonel Speidel, the Klauses on Hamilton Street, and several others followed.¹³ As industry developed in Bridgeport, the German skills as machinists and toolmakers were welcomed by the new factories. Such early Bridgeport manufacturing establishments as Wheelers and Wilson's Sewing Machine Company and Wood's Carriage factory, employed many workers of German and Austrian extraction.¹⁴

Like other ethnic groups in Bridgeport, the German speaking immigrants and their descendants erected churches for worship and for the training of their young. It is believed that the first German Church was founded by immigrants of Saxony in 1860 and was called the German Reformed Evangelical Church.¹⁵ The church organization for German Catholic believers came about in 1874. There were other churches which were originally founded by German speaking Protestant groups of various denominations, but most of these seem to have dropped from their identity the word "German," and as will be shown later, there are very few important churches left in Bridgeport which still maintain a distinct relationship with the old structure and purpose.

Frequently, present day institutions afford a clue to their beginnings in the past. However, this is not true for the social life of the German speaking groups. Unfortunately, it has proven almost impossible to reconstruct from what exists today, the past social arrangements that were used by the German speaking groups in the Bridgeport area. The two societies which still bear German names, Germania Hall and Schwaeben Hall may truthfully be said to be so in name only. However, these organizations did flourish early in the history of the Germans in Bridgeport and its activities will be discussed later. Here it may be mentioned that the organizations served as places to which the early immigrants could come and enjoy singing their folk songs and converse in the mother tongue. There is a record of the first old-fashioned German picnic that was held in 1859 in the original

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Bridgeport Post*, January 28, 1956.

15. Whelan, *Bridgeport Post*.

German Hall on Wall Street.¹⁶ From the earliest years, the German immigrants enjoyed expressing themselves in song at periodic "Saenger festen" which, freely translated, means singing celebrations. German-American singing groups were present in almost all the cities in which they lived, and Bridgeport was no exception. It has been said that "Saengerfesten" in their heyday in Bridgeport was the noblest contribution of the race to the cultural life of the city.¹⁷

Early Bridgeport German families used to gather in such places as *Wagner's German Beer Garten* to drink beer and listen to music. Another popular place was *Sailer's Hall* on Main Street. Sundays were often the picnic days and *Staeltler's Grove*, located in a wooded section on Iranistan Avenue, probably reminded some of the old timers of the woods of the old homeland. Some would go on outings to *Pembroke Lake* on the eastside of Bridgeport, now the home of the Remington Arms plant.¹⁸ Life of these German newcomers, and those of their offspring, was in the early days of Bridgeport not unlike that of Germany, but this cohesiveness did not last. Those of German background were mostly concerned with learning the English language, working, and saving their money, so that they could set themselves up in business and perhaps buy their own homes. Because of their zeal and ambition they contributed to the advancement of the industrial, commercial, and social life of Bridgeport.¹⁹

Politically, those of German extraction never seem to have voted in a block and, only on rare occasions, have there been direct or implied appeals for a united German vote. The exceptions may have come in the years preceding the two World Wars, when some of the political aspirants would take cognizance of sentiments for the country of origin. The respondents who gave information could give no definite evidence of any political trends or leanings among the German ethnic groups. If anything, the Germans in Bridgeport favored the Republican party, but a good many were independent voters. William P. Behrens was a Republican mayor of Bridgeport.²⁰ Other Germans served the city as aldermen and as members of various boards. The Socialist party in Bridgeport contained originally a majority of Germans in its membership, but this was a phenomenon that was quite common in the early Socialist movements all over the world. This party's earlier meetings in Bridgeport were conducted in German. Later, when non-Germans joined the group, it was decided to use English at the meetings. Mr. Fred Schwartzkopf joined the Socialist party in Bridgeport around 1914 and was elected Alderman in 1931. In 1933 he was elected city clerk and served along with Socialist Mayor Jasper McLevy for many years. He finally retired from office in 1955 after eleven two-year terms. It is to him that this study is greatly indebted for the information on the political activity of the German-American group.

16. *Bridgeport Post*, November 1, 1936.

17. Whelan, *Bridgeport Post*.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. Interview No. 13.

Chapter III

The German-Americans In the Bridgeport Economy

Earlier in this survey, references to the technical skills and special talents of the German-Americans were made. With such attributes, the German speaking arrivals and later their descendants easily established themselves as an integral element in the community, and as the past moved into the present, the contributions of the German residents blended into the total flow of the community business life.

There were beginnings, however, and one of the earliest German settlers in Bridgeport was Jacob Kiefer who was born in Strassburg, Germany, on September 6, 1829. He was brought to the United States as a child and to Bridgeport in 1846. He participated in the city's community life, becoming a member of the Volunteer Fire Department, the Republican party, the State Militia, the Masons, and the Seaside Club. He served as a member of the Common Council and was elected President of the Board of Aldermen in 1886.¹

Kiefer was a journeyman cabinet maker and started his own factory for the manufacture of furniture, using machinery of his own design. The factory employed 400 men, making it one of the largest furniture factories in the East.² Kiefer was the first man to bring to the city people of German background in any numbers. He brought 40 men and their families into the Bridgeport area to work in his factory. Since the population of the city was approximately 6,000 in 1846, the addition of this group of workers not only added to the economy of the city, but also increased the number of skilled workers in the area.³

There were other individuals who contributed much to the economic and political life of the area. The Bridgeport City Directory of 1887 lists names and types of businesses of some of the Germans at that time. Among those listed are:

Stegeman and Whetstoen—grocers and wine merchants.

Charles H. Hartmann—successor to the Bridgeport Brewery Co.

William H. Gunderman—Carriage Maker.

Lieberum Bros.—Furniture Dealers.

J. Huber—Ice Cream.

The factories and distribution agencies in Bridgeport and its vicinity attracted large numbers of Germans and Austrians during different periods of economic endeavor. The skills which the Germans learned in long periods of apprenticeship made them especially valuable to the many industries which began to build up into what later became the Bridgeport complex of manufacturing diversity.

1. George Waldo, *History of Bridgeport and Vicinity*, New York, The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1917, pp. 325-33.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 340.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

However, it was not only in the factory system that the Germans used their talents. They were brewers, bakers, shoe makers, leather and harness workers, blacksmiths, forgers, ice cream makers, toy makers, baseball manufacturers, furniture makers, florists, machinists, and many others. It seems that their skills and economic interests formed a cross section of the economic life of the community.⁴

One of the early manufacturing plants in Bridgeport was the Wheeler and Wilson Company which came to the city in 1856. This company manufactured sewing machines and made use of many of the German-American skills. This company was bought by the Singer Sewing Machine Company in 1905.⁵

Another early manufacturing plant was established by two Weidlich brothers, in 1902.⁶ Its first location was at Sterling and Noble Avenues. Its products consisted mostly of silver plated ware and novelties; the company employed 150 people to do the work. At present, this company operates under the name of Weidlich, Inc., at 140 Hurd Avenues. It now makes trophies and silver plated objects. One of our interviewers spoke to two old employees who corroborated the facts of the factory's origin, but they did not think that there were any Germans working there now.⁷

The technical skills of the German immigrant were recognized as early as 1607 when John Smith used them as pitch makers and glass blowers. Their fame as mechanics and machinists has always made them welcome in factories requiring such skills. One informant, a factory employee for the last 40 years, told one of our interviewers that to his knowledge every factory in which he ever worked, had many skilled workers of German extraction or German immigrants. Although he, himself, is unskilled, he has always found those workers of German background to be industrious, conservative, and devoted employees. He also praised their cooperativeness and characterized them as always ready to assist those less skilled.⁸

This group's diligence, methodical ways, and loyalty to employers were traits which were admired by other groups in the community. Their presence did not generate the friction usually associated with a new group trying to find their place in the social strata.⁹

Our researchers were interested in obtaining reactions from present day German-American economic establishments concerning their experiences during war times. The owner of the Helmut Volkswagen told our interviewer that he was born in Germany in 1928 and was always associated with precision tools as a mechanic. He first came to New York City and lived with a German professor in the Yorkville section. He felt that in that particular area, the Germans

4. *Directory, City of Bridgeport*, Bridgeport, Connecticut, Price, Lee and Co., 1886.

5. *Bridgeport Post*, January 28, 1956.

6. Interview No. 3.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Interview No. 12.

9. Whelan, *Bridgeport Post*.

lived in exclusive groups as Germans, and that they did not get into the American stream of life. His own experience in Bridgeport has been quite different. He found no discrimination during the war. He married a girl of Scotch-Irish family background.¹⁰

A waiter who works at Kunkel's, a recognized German type of restaurant, told us that he was a third generation German and that it was his grandfather who had started the business. He, himself, had little time for German organizations. He also felt that most Germans in Bridgeport have become assimilated into the community.¹¹

Germans or their descendants have also been associated with delicatessen stores. The owner of one such business, Gronau's Delicatessen, told one interviewer that his store catered especially to German tastes. He came from East Germany when he was ten years of age. Neither he nor his family took part in any so-called German activity. He did say that the family spoke German in the home because of his elderly mother who lived with them. He served in World War II as an interpreter and never experienced any discrimination. He did say that the Germans were very class conscious, and that the highest classes did not associate with those of the lower social groups.¹²

In the years preceding World War I, the influence of the Bridgeport German-American Alliance was an important element in the Bridgeport German-American people's lives. For example, in a program booklet of August 2-3, 1908, reference is made to the "Principles of America." In this pamphlet the members of the various German-like organizations are urged to stand by and have the greatest respect and honesty in all business and labor dealings.¹³

The German-Americans also played a role in the early labor union activity in Bridgeport. At first, such union organization was confined to cigar making, bakery and brewing fields. In these unions, those of German origin held high positions because of the predominant German speaking membership. However, in other fields of work, the German element joined but they were not as active as in the labor organizations with a predominantly German membership. This interest in labor organizations probably had its roots in the beginnings of the Socialist movement which, at first, had many leaders of German backgrounds. Another element may have been the strong belief in dignity of labor which was shared by the workingmen in Germany, on the continent. With time, a good many of the immigrants, and their descendants, moved rapidly into supervisory positions and this made them more a part of the management.¹⁴

In the years during which the two World Wars were fought, many German-American residents of Bridgeport contributed their talents

10. Interview No. 5.

11. Interview No. 7.

12. Interview No. 4.

13. *Official Program*, Published by the Bridgeport Central Verband, April 2-3, 1908.

14. Interview No. 13.

and skills to the all-encompassing war production effort. Bridgeport constituted an important part of the country's producing complex, and many of the manufacturing plants in the city had their share of workers of German blood. Most of those interviewed did not feel that there was any discrimination shown toward them. There were instances, however, when the allegiance of some of the German-Americans may have been in doubt. Thus one respondent, a person of another ethnic minority, recalled that in 1942, several machinists in a plant owned and operated by a large nation-wide concern, were removed from their jobs because of their alliance with the German-American Bund. This same man reports that in the years immediately following the war, these same persons were restored to their jobs.¹⁵

Our researchers were unable to find anyone who could or would say how he felt about producing arms that were to be used against Germans in the various war theaters. On the whole, the attitude of most German-Americans may have been the same as the one expressed by a German-born resident at the time of World War I in New Haven, who, when asked how he felt about rifles and ammunition he was making and which would be used against the Germans, said: "Gesheft ist gesheft." which, freely translated, approximates our own expression, "Business is business."¹⁶

It has not proved possible to obtain any statistical data that would give an exact picture of the contribution by the residents of German origin to the general economic structure of the Bridgeport area. Most members of ethnic groups tend to blend into the amalgam of life, and this has been found to be even truer with the German groups. Inter-marriage, upward mobility, changes in religion, and horizontal movement have combined to render any generalization quite useless. Our researchers have concluded that German-Americans are represented in all the professions. Inquiries from personnel men in large plants on the subject merely brought confirmation of the fact that the names of engineers, machinists and technicians are German sounding. Evidence that German-Americans are in businesses of various kinds hardly needs documentation. There are professors and instructors with German sounding names in our own university, certifying claims made by others, that German-Americans are in the teaching professions. It would not be far from the truth to say that the German-American influence in industry and business has not been any less in Bridgeport than in the nation as a whole.

15. Interview No. 8.

16. Eldredge, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

Chapter IV

Social Life and Its Organizations

A separation of life's functions of any group is always difficult, since no one lives in compartmentalized arrangements, and this is also true of the German-American social activities. It has been shown earlier that on a national level, the immigrants from German speaking countries transplanted certain social arrangements which they had found useful in their own homelands. The German speaking groups in the Bridgeport area, like their counterparts elsewhere in the 1850's, needed ways with which to ward off feelings of loneliness and they found group activities to be what they wanted. As a people, the Germans have always tended to group singing, and this type of social group activity began early in the Bridgeport area. The Germania Society with emphasis on group singing was organized on January 7, 1851.¹ Many years later, one of its members put the purpose of this society into these words: "Music is the magic medium which telescopes time and distance."² In addition to alleviation of loneliness, the society was also to be used as a way of preserving for the children the best in the rich musical history of the father land.³

The importance of the organization is reflected in the fact that Philo C. Calhoun, the Mayor of Bridgeport in 1857, took part in the establishment of the society when it was founded.⁴

The society had forty-five members at the outset, with twenty-three being active. By 1860 the number of activities was curtailed due to the Civil War and one account claims that during the years 1861-67, the Society was depleted because many of its members joined the armed forces.⁵ In 1896, the Society purchased an old Baptist church at 1790 Main Street, Bridgeport and this location is still its home. A fire ruined the structure in 1907, but the outline and the repaired buildings form the present club.

The members in the singing groups were only males, at first. The first women's group was organized in 1896 as the Germania Ladies Aid Society. In 1931, a second women's group, the Rhineland Ladies was organized and the last group was founded in 1939, under the name of the Germania Ladies Choral Society.⁶ The Germania Organizations' chief purpose seems to have been the fostering of an interest in the old German culture, but with the years, persons of non-Germanic origin were allowed to use the facilities. In 1933 the Remington Arms Glee Club was merged with the existing singing societies and this move doubled the active membership. A program brochure of a German Day celebration held in August 1908 mentions the names of all the

1. *Bridgeport Post*, January 13, 1952.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, April 20, 1947.

societies which took part in the event, and among those, in addition to the Germania groups, were the Schwaebischer Choral group, the German Workingmen's Aid Society, the German American Club, the Schwaeben Benevolent Verein, Saint Joseph's German Catholic Benevolent Society, and the Steuben Lodge I.O.O.F.⁶ All of these groups were described as members of the Bridgeport Central Verband, the unifying organization of all the German societies in the area.⁷

The Germania Society has always stressed singing competitions. The history of the organization details the participations in song fests all over the state and in other states. The Society has also extended its facilities for use by other ethnic groups and from time to time it has set aside special nights for such purposes. Thus on St. Patrick's Day in 1962, Germania Hall was used for a "Wearin' O' the Green" celebration. A year earlier, a similar celebration was known as "Irish Night." The Society also arranges its own programs in a way that honors specific areas of European Germany. Such a celebration was "Bavarian Night" on March 22, 1962.⁸

Another German-American institution with a long and continuous history is the Schwaeben Maennerchor, founded on November twenty-fourth, 1895.⁹ It grew out of the Bridgeport Schwaeben Sick Benefit Society which, itself, was organized in July of 1886 by natives of Wurtemberg, Germany. The Sick Benefit Society was originally affiliated with the local Germania group, already described. For the first ten years of its existence, the Schwaebischer Maennerchor consisted only of natives of Wurtemberg. Beginning in 1905, members were admitted regardless of their national origin. Mr. John Waldyer, member since age twenty-one and whose father was one of the original members, feels that more people, outside of Wurtemberg natives, were allowed to join in order to increase the size and quality of the singing groups. At first, members combined activity with the Germania Singing Society, but by 1907, they built their own structure. The members then moved into their clubhouse at 37 French Street in Bridgeport and began to take part in various saengerfests.¹⁰

With the outbreak of World I, the organization found itself facing the prejudice that confronted all groups comprised of Americans of enemy national origin. For most, the allegiance to the United States could not be questioned. They participated in all patriotic events in the Bridgeport area. During World War I the Society members formed a Liberty Chorus to sing at the War Bond rallies and other local war time events.¹¹

During World War II Schwaeben members united with other German-American groups in Bridgeport to purchase and present to

6. Official Program.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Bridgeport Post*, March 11, 1962.

9. *Program for the 50th Anniversary*, September 1945.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, September 2, 1945.

the Bridgeport Chapter of the Red Cross a mobile canteen for the purpose of protecting the lives of the community, in the event of an attack. Society members also gave concerts at other patriotic rallies and both, as an organization and as individuals, did their share to bolster the home front, while their sons, brothers, and younger members fought in the war.

After the war, singing competitions again became popular. In September 1945 the Schwaebischer Maennerchor celebrated its golden jubilee (50th Anniversary) with a three day program of special events. Fritz K.G. Weber, Director of the Schwaeben Men's and Ladies chorus, was honored for his thirty years of service with the local group. There was also a 65th anniversary dinner-dance on November 27th, 1960 which was attended by Mayor Samuel Tedesco who praised the members for their many civic and singing accomplishments.¹²

The group's singing activities have continued to the present. In 1958, the then Governor, Abraham Ribicoff, proclaimed one of the days in a special event as German-American Day throughout the state. In 1963 the Schwaeben Sick Benefit Society sponsored a Harmony Hop, as part of the Barnum Festival celebration.

The Schwaebischer Maennerchor's current plans call for an appearance at the New York World's Fair in 1964 to publicize a gigantic saengerfest scheduled for Madison Square Garden in the same year.¹³

Just as in the cases of other foreign born societies, the German-American groups also provided benefit and aid to their own needy, in the early years of their history. It seems that these groups wanted to maintain their independence and not to become a burden on those who had let them come into their land. Possibly, this need to provide for themselves were remnants of the old cultures. The assistance that was provided was small and, for the most part, involved temporary aid in times of illness or undue stress. Many of these organization purchased their own burial grounds and provided some assistance to the deceased's survivors. The German groups in later years attached their benefit plans to the more inclusive and growing insurance programs. Although these groups began as self supporting insurance associations with compensation consisting mainly of helping a neighbor in need, they now have become connected with major insurance companies and the monetary benefits to members have increased.

A history of the German-American social institutions in Bridgeport will not be complete without a reference to the Turner Association activities. A Bridgeport Post report under the heading: YOUTHFUL GYMNASTS, FATHERS AND MOTHERS CARRYING ON EUROPEAN TRADITION, gives a brief historical account of this institution in Bridgeport. The organization's traditional name under which it was founded on a world-wide basis is "TURNVEREIN". A member in good standing is expected to be an "excellent gymnast, clean cut, of good moral character, and with a healthy developed mind." In Bridgeport,

12. *Bridgeport Post*, November 28, 1960.

13. *Bridgeport Post*, July 18, 1963.

the Turnverein began in 1933, was deactivated during World War II, and started up again in 1955. Among its members in 1955 were many descendants of the original 1933 group.¹⁴ In an interview with a gymnastic teacher, it was learned that the main purpose of the organization was physical fitness. Original dues was small, and though higher now, it amounts to only 25 cents a month. The entrance age is 7 and above, and a member's progress is measured by his gymnastic accomplishment and efficacious use of athletic apparatus. When membership was low, persons of non-Germanic stock were admitted, but of late, the trend has shifted back to limit membership to those of German origin.¹⁵

At the present time, Germania Hall, the oldest of all the inclusive German-American organizations in Bridgeport, continues to be the society that is best known to those in this ethnic group. Its current President, Hans Peters, told one of our interviewers that the main objective of this organization is to keep the remnants of that which the early German immigrants brought into this country. According to this same respondent, the Germania members are first and uppermost devoted to the United States ideals and policies. Membership in *Germania*, according to Mr. Peters, is growing and an effort is being made to limit new membership to persons with Germanic kinship. An applicant for admission must be sponsored by another member, then interviewed by a committee and, finally, has to be voted in by the group. Women cannot become full members, but must belong to the various auxiliary groups. The membership estimate as of April 1964 was 380, with a total population of about 800. Music and singing remains the chief interest, and local competition and participation in other areas still constitute its chief activities.

Ongoing activities include the ERNTE-DANKFEST, a celebration resembling the American Thanksgiving, but held usually in September. In October there is a festival celebrating the harvest season. A group of dancers known as SCHUPHPLATTLER celebrate the coming of the summer. In July there is a planned German picnic for the purpose of instilling harmony or as the Germans put it GEMUETLICHKEIT. In February of each year, there is a celebration during which an old custom referred to as SCHLUCHTFEST is commemorated. In the ceremony, a pig is slaughtered and pigs knuckles brought in from New York City is the food eaten by most. The custom of having an "Irish Night" has also continued. Every three or four years the Society sponsors an organized trip to Germany and in the year 1964, 140 people will voyage to Europe for a four week stay.¹⁶

Although it is quite true that assimilation into the main stream of the United States culture has erased many of the ties of the German-Americans with the mother country, there still remain several visible vestiges with a good deal of life in them.

14. *Bridgeport Post*, May 1, 1955.

15. Interview No. 2.

16. Interview No. 11.

Chapter V

The People and Religious Institutions

The Germans who come to America brought with them the religious beliefs and practices to which they had adhered before emigrating. The Lutheran Church was one of the more dominant in parts of Germany at the time when the first settlers reached the shores of America. There were others who practiced Roman Catholicism and still others who were members of smaller groups. It is estimated that by 1750 forty thousand German Lutherans lived in Pennsylvania.¹

The religious affiliations and practices of the early German speaking residents in Bridgeport cannot be identified with sufficient definitiveness. Records of organized churches and congregations do date back as early as 1787, but the history of the very early worshippers is not available.

The Methodists of German extraction are said to have met in 1787 with only seven persons in the congregation.² Later, services for these German worshippers were held at Union Point Mission, corner of East Main Street and Nichols Street. The first German Methodist Church was located on East Main, between Barnum Avenue and East Washington Avenue.³

The so-called German Methodist Church was founded in 1878 but it was not until 1909 that the church in its current form was built and dedicated as the German Methodist Church, and was located on Grand Street. This full name remained until it was legally changed to Grand Street Methodist Church on July 10, 1941. A trustee, William C. Halles, explained the basis for the change on the supposition that the word "German" was misleading because the members were not German, but of German extraction.⁴

Some of the German-speaking Bridgeport area residents were of the Baptist denomination and they also managed to become organized into a congregation. On July 23, 1885 a pastor from New Haven came to Bridgeport to hold services for a group that numbered nine. On June 6, 1885 a Reverend William Ritzman started a Sunday School and later became pastor of the Baptist group. Actual organization of a church took place in 1888 and in the following year, it became publicly recognized. The first church building that served the group exclusively was dedicated on June 30, 1890. In 1922 the church edifice as it appears today was dedicated, but the word "German" in its name was dropped in 1935 and the church's name was changed to Kings Highway Baptist Church. There may still be members of German extraction, but the congregation does not consider itself as ethnically oriented.⁵

1. J. Everett Arden, *Meet the Lutherans*, Augustan Press, Illinois, 1962, p. 125.

2. *Bridgeport Post*, January 23, 1941.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Bridgeport Post*, July 10, 1941.

5. *Program, Fiftieth Anniversary of the Kings Highway Baptist Church*, Bridgeport, Connecticut, Dec. 17-18, 1938.

Since there was a considerable number of Lutherans among the German immigrants who came to this country, it is safe to conclude that Bridgeport was home to a number also. The organized Lutheran Church of any consequence and as it is still known today, was St. Paul's Lutheran Church or as it was also known, the German Evangelical St. Paul's Congregation. From the very beginning, it devoted its efforts to the unchurched people of German descent. The first meeting place for the small St. Paul congregation was a little house on Beach Street and on March 6, 1893, the church was organized, but it was not until a year later, that a church building was erected, and still more months before it was dedicated on August 12, 1894.

The first settled pastor of St. Paul's was the Reverend James D. Wittke, who was educated in Germany and served as pastor from 1893 to 1898. The first church location was at 66 Harriett Street.

The new St. Paul's Church is located at 1445 Noble Avenue and was used for the first time in December 1953 for Christmas services. The church building is of Gothic architecture and its estimated cost is \$250,000. In 1962 a \$100,000 addition was begun.⁷

The organizations at St. Paul's include the following: The Ladies Aid Society, Society of St. Paul's, Senior Luther League, and Men's League. All of these organizations have social as well as benevolent functions. The Congregation has also a Sunday School.⁸

Considerable information about St. Paul's Congregation was received from an interview with Reverend Bengtson, Pastor of St. Paul's. According to him, the original congregation in St. Paul's was German. Most of the Lutheran congregation presently at St. Paul's is of German origin and the twenty-five charter member families were, according to him, all German. The Sunday school has classes for children from nursery school age through high school, and its enrollment is over two hundred. There are 750 active, confirmed members over fourteen years of age and 900 baptized members. Church membership in St. Paul's hit a peak in the 1940's, but began to decline in the 1950's. It has been going up since the 1960's.

In 1903 a faction in the Congregation interested in speaking English broke away from those who wanted to maintain the German language. The group that left founded the First English Church which is located on Laurel Avenue. St. Paul's still has services in German, three or four times a year. The Church belongs to the North-Eastern Synod because of its geographic location, but its historical roots rest in the General Synod.⁹

Another group of Bridgeport residents of German extraction founded the First German Evangelical Lutheran Zion Church which at present is located at 600 Grand Street. It was first organ-

6. Historical Records Survey, *Lutheran Church in Connecticut*, Work Progress Administration Project, 1941.

7. *Bridgeport Post*, May 21, 1933.

8. Historical Records Survey, *op. cit.*

9. *Ibid.*

ized in 1892, incorporated in 1895 and joined the Missouri Synod in 1897. Before the first church structure was built, services were held in St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Kossuth Street and Washington Avenue. This group's first church building was finished in 1922.¹⁰ Current membership is about 850, a figure that is probably at an all time high. Services are conducted both in English and German. There is a parochial school that teaches from the first grade through the eighth grade. This is the only school of its type in the Bridgeport area. The church organization also has a Ladies Aid Society, a Young People's Group, and a Men's organization.¹⁰

Another group of Bridgeport residents of German extraction founded the organization in which their members of the Roman Catholic faith could find a religious haven. St. Joseph's Mission for German Catholics organized around 1874. The Church itself became known as the St. Joseph's Catholic Church and was organized in 1874. The first mass was celebrated in T.A.B. Hall, 440 Main Street. By April 1879, a church building was completed, but the extent of its membership at the time is not certain. Two years before, there were seventy-five families with a total population of three hundred.¹¹ In 1877, Sunday school enrollment was at one hundred, and Masses were celebrated and sermons were preached every Sunday.

In 1886, the Mission became St. Joseph's Parish with Father Ariens as pastor. In the same year, the membership numbered seven hundred German parishioners and five hundred French. Father Ariens who was of Belgian ancestry, spoke both German and French fluently. In the early 1900's a school building was erected, and a full-graded school was run by seven Sisters of the Order of Notre Dame. A new church building was erected in the 1920's on the same site.

Father Dahme, the successor to Father Ariens, was assassinated on February 4, 1924 by an unknown person, as he was walking on Main Street. Police tracked down a man who "confessed" to the murder, but during the trial, the self-styled murderer recanted and was acquitted. Father William Krause was the next pastor, and he faced a dwindling parish. Another priest who played a prominent role in the parish, was Father Olschefskie who, within three years, erased the mortgage on the church property.¹²

Information about the current activity as well as some past historical data was secured in an interview with Monsignor Zibell, the present pastor of the Church. He reported that most German Catholics in this area came from Bavaria and the Rhineland, with the majority being from Bavaria. Those who came from the Rhineland were from Fulda, a city in that German province. More immigrants moved to New Haven, Connecticut than to Bridgeport because there was a greater need for skilled technicians in New Haven than there was in Bridgeport at that time.

10. Interview No. 9.

11. Orcutt, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

12. Booklet published by the Church on its 45th anniversary, 1937.

Most of the Germans in St. Joseph's come from low middle-class socio-economic backgrounds. A large percent are machinists and some others are still in the sheet metal business. Very few members at St. Joseph's are college graduates.

The church pastor verified the fact that the twenty-five charter members at St. Joseph's were exclusively German. During the depression days the parish membership dwindled. With the second and third generations of German-Americans at St. Joseph's, a good number of families dispersed into other parts of the city where they sought larger quarters, better locations, or better job opportunities.

At present, St. Joseph's Parish has an estimated 814 to 900 members. A fire at St. Joseph's destroyed the older church records and comparison of membership lists is not possible. However, according to Father Zibell, as the newer generations became more Americanized, church membership definitely decreased. The newer members chose to speak English and were very mobile. Nevertheless, there is still a strong nucleus of old German families or families of German origin within the Church. The school attached to St. Joseph's Parish, although originally devoted exclusively to the education of German-Americans, now accommodates, also, children from other nationality backgrounds.

Father Zibell commented on the 1886 composition of St. Joseph's which, as indicated earlier, was both German and French. There seems to have been little conflict between French and German populations. The combination of membership may have been the result of two ethnic groups coming into contiguous areas, and because of need and a common religion decided to make use of one church. This combination of different national backgrounds was aided by the fact that the pastor spoke the two languages quite well. Despite the compatibility that existed originally, the French group broke away and formed St. Anthony's Parish.¹³ It would be difficult to establish the reason for the split, but relationships between the two nationalities were on several occasions quite strained because of conditions in Europe. A study of this aspect of the situation may, in itself, prove interesting and productive.

Father Zibell believes that there are very few families that speak German at home. Some of the more recent arrivals and some of the older residents may still be conversing in German. Some subscribe to out-of-town newspapers. However, the assimilation process has engulfed this group to a large extent. It has been established that the deceased German Catholics of this area are buried in St. Michael's Cemetery.

The St. Joseph's Church, like many other churches, has in it many social groups whose chief functions are related to the furtherance of religious participation through social interaction. There are men's and women's groups, and their efficacy is commensurate with

13. Interview No. 14.

their efforts and inclinations. The one change that has occurred, according to the pastor, is that services are no longer conducted in the German language.

Just as in all pursuits of life, the religious practices of the German-American subculture no longer has the uniqueness that makes this group any different from those around them. From time to time, such as during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of St. Paul's Church in 1953, some of the old experiences and patterns of behavior are nostalgically recalled and relived. These recalled episodes are but memories and, at best, they constitute the material out of which pageants and plays are made. Nevertheless, events do occur on the world stage, and certain repressed feelings become re-awakened.

There have been two world crises in the last fifty years in which some persons of German-American background chose to favor the old ties against the new ones they had established. For most of the group, however, the days of the crisis were painful. For a consideration of these infrequent events, the final chapter of this survey is devoted.

Chapter VI

Periods of Stress For The German-Americans

Every nation goes through periods of strain during which its populations usually submerge internal differences and unite to meet the threat of danger. A nation such as the United States, composed as it is, of various races and of many national origins, will have more reason to fear vulnerability when any of its subgroups supports the source of danger. In at least two periods of the history of the United States, during the World Wars, the German-American nationality subgroup has had to struggle with the problem of dual allegiance. On each occasion the problem for the German-Americans was aggravated by the fact that their mother country was considered the aggressor. It is in that context of world feeling that our evaluation of the attitudes of German-Americans in Bridgeport had to be measured and, needless to say, the responses which our researchers found were mostly non-committal.

Those who agreed to talk about the feelings which prevailed during the wars were, on the whole, defensive. That there were residents in the Bridgeport area with strong sympathies for the German cause never was denied by any of our interviewees, but there was some doubt expressed about the extent and effectiveness. In other words, Americans of German descent in today's Bridgeport do not deny the existence of some ambivalent feelings during the years of the two world conflicts, but they are also quick to point out that large numbers of their nationality group contributed to the total effort in

both wars. In speaking of allegiances and attitudes they are quick to point out that the early German immigrants came to this country to seek political freedom and to improve their living conditions. Several students on the same subject have corroborated this, but have found that during the years which preceded the United States' entry into World War I, German-language newspapers in this country tended to uphold the German position.¹ The same commentators have shown that German-American groups in the United States raised funds for the so-called victims of the war, and that many German-American leaders tried desperately to prevent America's entry into the war.² Feelings throughout the country against those of German origin grew stronger as America moved closer to ultimate involvement. However, most of the German-American societies and associations were not dissolved.³ A German-American interviewed for this survey reported that he had come to this country at the age of sixteen prior to World War I, in order to avoid induction into the German Army. Some of his friends had also come to this country for the same reason. During the war, this man's family had a meat catering business which sold mostly to wealthy Jews who did much entertaining. As soon as the war began, the Jewish customers stopped trading there and the business failed. The incident was probably not unique and repeated itself during both wars.⁴

A search of some of the local newspapers in the Bridgeport area failed to provide any significant entries on the subject of attitudes during the period of World War I. Newspapers such as the *Bridgeport Post* and its morning edition, the *Bridgeport Telegram*, seem to have taken great pains to maintain equal coverage of both sides in the war. A column, "The People's Say", the only space regularly provided in the noon newspaper for letters of public opinion, contained references for the most part to local political news. The letters reviewed by our researchers made slight reference to the so-called "enemy alien" and the "hyphenates". Evidences of pro and anti-German feeling appeared now and then. One article, for example, entitled "No German-Americans" declared there was "no such thing as an hyphenated American." It asserted further, that Americans of German ancestry who express anti-American or pro-German attitudes should be deported.⁵ Several days later the same newspaper reported a statement by one, Max Rubin, described as a native German and former German Army officer, living in Stratford, to the effect that the only way Germany could be defeated would be by starvation. However, Rubin did not believe this was possible because of the German successes with the U-Boats.⁶

1. Huebner, *Op. Cit.*, p. 145.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Interview No. 6.

5. *Bridgeport Post*, January 6, 1915.

6. *The Bridgeport Post*, January 10, 1915.

There was, however, considerable concern and anxiety over espionage and possible sabotage in the Bridgeport area. One story in the newspaper reported the capture of a "Germ" found walking suspiciously around the Union Metallic Cartridge Company's grounds. A false beard and moustache were found on his person and when questioned, he said that he had arrived from Germany five years before. The suspect was finally adjudged a "religious fanatic", but the incident did lead to a strengthening of the guard around the plant.⁷ Another incident was reported soon after America's entry into the war. A German family near Westport was discovered harboring a large quantity of high explosives and amateur radio equipment.⁸ As 1917 was drawing closer and the German U-Boat campaign was taking its toll among American passengers, sailors, and shipping, it must have become increasingly difficult to be an American of German descent. John T. King, a member of the Republican Party is reported to have told a group in the Germania Hall that he, too, was a hyphenate and proud of it. His assertion was in connection with a rally reported in the newspaper under the headline, "Germania Club Rally—King Says He Is Proud To Be a Hyphenate."⁹

There was some effort as late as March, 1917, to express anti-war feelings, and in this connection a group calling itself the Bridgeport Socialists sought to be the principle voice of the pacifist position. The protest against preparedness was to be presented at a rally of the Socialists in Bohemia Hall, but the meeting was broken up by police. Thereafter, angry speeches were said to have been made about suppression of constitutional rights, but leaders of the rally strongly denied any unpatriotic intention in the meeting or in members' affiliations. In earlier years the Bridgeport Socialists attracted many German-Americans to membership, but at the time of the war, the relationship between the two groups was not too well defined and remained unclear. It was never determined whether the Socialist rally had been German-motivated.¹⁰

What is perhaps most revealing and significant is that by March, 1917, following the increase in international spy and sabotage incidents, such as the Zimmerman Affair, many national minority groups began to declare their loyalties. At a "Slovak Mass Meeting" ex-President Taft was scheduled to speak on the topic, "American Patriotism."¹¹ Other headlines proclaimed that Hungarian businessmen were pledging their support for the Home Guard being organized in Bridgeport.¹² However, there was almost no statement from the German-Americans carried in the Bridgeport papers. It was only after the United States was officially in the war that one of the newspapers was able to report a definite position taken by German-American

7. *The Bridgeport Post*, January 28, 1915.

8. *The Bridgeport Post*, March 28, 1917.

9. *The Bridgeport Post*, November 2, 1916.

10. *Bridgeport Post*, March 12, 1917.

11. *Bridgeport Post*, March 2, 1917.

12. *Bridgeport Post*, March 26, 1917.

cans, when the German singing societies were featured as the Liberty Chorus at a mass rally. With America in the war, there is evidence of a waning interest in German-American activities. Thus the German Alliance, a super-organization which included all the important German-American societies and social groups, voted to disband permanently. The Alliance voted to use its \$1100 in treasury funds for the purchase of Liberty Bonds, and to give the remainder to the American Red Cross and the German Reformed Church.¹⁴ The instances cited do not point to any conclusive pattern of German-American Activity during the period of World War I. However, the available information does indicate that suspicion of families of German extraction did exist. For the most part, the German-Americans essayed to avoid the disputes on the neutrality issue during the years preceding the U. S. War Declaration. Once sides were chosen and the United States was in the war, most German-Americans contributed to the war effort.

The period of the Second World War was much easier for the German-Americans, as far as their allegiances and affiliations were concerned: The so-called *Old Guard* was no longer living and the new arrivals were refugees from German atrocities on the European Continent, and they held little wrath for the Germans in power. At the same time, the younger generation had become assimilated into the mainstream of the American population and they identified with the American culture rather than with the Nazi Germans of the 1930's. Among even those German-Americans who still had a warm spot in their hearts for the mother country, the conduct of the Storm Troopers was unpalatable. United States and world opinion was too strong to countenance any outspoken support for the plans of an aggressive Germany. Yet, there were groups in the United States which propagandized for the acceptance of German behavior as a passing phase in a reawakening Germany. The German Bund, with headquarters in New York City, attempted to locate a training camp in Kettle town, near Southbury, but an aroused populace forced cancellation of the contract.¹⁵ German propaganda was quite in evidence all over the United States.¹⁶ One reporter on a local paper, writing in 1951, about the pre-war years said that, "the average German citizen has been bombarded with anti-democratic propaganda since 1933."¹⁷ However, the propaganda failed to take root among most Americans of German extraction. A large number of them gave their lives and resources to preserve the freedom they enjoyed in the United States.¹⁸

One informant, a Bridgeport resident and a member of the German Singing Society for many years, offered her impressions of German-American attitudes during World War II. She said that the

13. *Standard-American*, April 11, 1918.

14. *Standard-American*, April 23, 1918.

15. Federal Writers' Project, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

16. Huebner, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

17. *Bridgeport Post*, October 19, 1951.

18. Huebner, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

German immigrants and their descendants who might have still maintained some ties with Germany, "knew which side their bread was buttered on." They suppressed whatever feelings of old German nationalism remained and worked for the American war cause. Agreeing that prior to the actual outbreak of hostilities the German-Americans in Bridgeport sent packages to relatives in Europe, she noted that this was a practice of long standing, not only by the Germans, but almost by all other ethnic subcultures.¹⁹

The observations by our informant probably sum up the true state of the German-American attitudes during the second war. There were no doubt individuals who favored the new Germany but, on the whole, the young men and women of German parentage in the Bridgeport area supported America as much as any other national or ethnic groups.

19. Interview No. 10.

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8. Machinist in Bridgeport, Interviewed by Barbara Kass, April 1964.
9. Albert Marks, Interviewed by René Machado, April 1964.
10. Katherine O'Sullivan, Interviewed by Ellen Rosenthal, March 1964.
11. Hans Peters, Interviewed by Robert Myers, April 1964.
12. Resident of the City of Bridgeport, Interviewed by Sue Coleman, April 1964.
13. Fred Schwartzkopf, Interviewed by Walter Galazin, April 1964.
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