

America's True "Silent Majority"!

More Americans trace their ancestry to Germany than any other ethnic or racial group within the United States. But how many Americans know that if you took a blood test of a composite American, the largest unit of his blood would be German? This demographic also excludes millions of descendants of Austrian and Swiss immigrants among others who came here during the 19th and 20th centuries from German speaking lands and /or communities throughout Europe. Unlike their Anglo, Irish, Polish, Italian, Hispanic, Jewish or African American contemporaries, most German Americans today are hesitant to call attention to their ethnic heritage for the ghost of the Nazi holocaust still (irrationally and undeservedly!) continues to intimidate them. Historically, however, German Americans had always found themselves in cultural shootouts with the reigning Anglo Saxon American establishment whenever and wherever they settled in America. It was upon the United States' entry into World War One, however, that the death knell of their once proud German American consciousness would first be sounded. This is German Chicago's experience at that time!

Wartime Hysteria and the Psychological Assault on German American Consciousness in Chicago during WWI!

Continued from Bov/Dec 2010

Recap from Part IV

Chicago's Germans were generally spared from some of the more extreme forms of harassment the nationwide hysteria promoted primarily because of their numerical strength in the city, a political fact the mayor of Chicago, William Hale Thompson, nicknamed "Kaiser Bill" by the Chicago press, was well aware of. Chicago's police chief, Herman Schuettler, a second generation German American, was widely esteemed as Chicago's "greatest policeman." Another second generation German American, John Traeger, was the Sheriff of Cook County and, as mentioned before, so was the Catholic Archbishop of Chicago, George Mundelein.

Nevertheless, although fairly represented politically, it was not enough of a security blanket for many of Chicago's Germans. Worn down psychologically, uncomfortable in their own skin because of the disloyal label and needing to feel good about themselves again, they charted a more secure course by replacing their outward affinity for the German "Kultur" with the rituals of "patriotism." replacing their outward affinity for the German "Kultur" with the rituals of "patriotism." This led to an "Americanization" campaign.

"Americanization"

The primary path to "Americanization" was in *anglicizing* your German name whether as an individual or as an organization in order not to bring adverse attention to it. The fear that your German name could cost you your livelihood or put your organization under surveillance by federal authorities was more than enough for it to be shed or *anglicized*. The German Saengerchor renamed itself the Chicago Lincoln Club, while the Kaiser Friedrich Mutual Aid Society became the George Washington Benevolent Society.

Because of a "change in sentiment" officials at the German American hospital renamed it Grant hospital. Individual names such as Feld became Field, Mayer to Myer, Klein to Cline, Schmidt to Smith, Weiss to White, Schumacher to Shoemaker, etc.¹

"Americanization" efforts also urged changing Chicago's German named streets and schools, though these efforts had limited success. Thus Bismarck elementary school became Funston, and at the behest of Alderman Adamowsky, street names such as Berlin, Frankfurt, Coblenz and Rhine, all located in his 28th Ward were "Americanized." The attempt to rename Goethe Street, however, ran aground after strong protest was registered by two German aldermen, John Haderlein and B.S. Schwartz as well as a host of German organizations. The originators of the name change, Aldermen Fred Cary and Earl J. Walker, "denied that the name's German origin was the reason for the proposed change." But when Busse Place (after

Fred Busse, Chicago's only German mayor) was also objected to, their true intent was apparent to all, and the city council "unanimously" voted the proposal down.ⁱⁱ German monuments were also targeted. When it was proposed to remove the Goethe monument in Lincoln Park, the *Abendpost* decried it as "fanaticism, not patriotism." The Germans have been called "barbarians" in this war, but even they would not do the same to Shakespeare just because he was English. They also cited the *Tribune* reaction:

We cannot defeat Germany by tearing down statues of great Germans in Chicago. . . . Attacks are not only dumb and shameful, they are especially damaging in that they are unjust and irrational acts against loyal Americans of German blood. . . . This signifies a weakness of our land and is false patriotism.

The *Abendpost* then added that although Chicago's Germans are especially grateful to the *Tribune*, in the future we hope and expect this great paper will now bring its reporting in line with its editorial stances.ⁱⁱⁱ

Resurgent Anglo Saxon Know-Nothingism

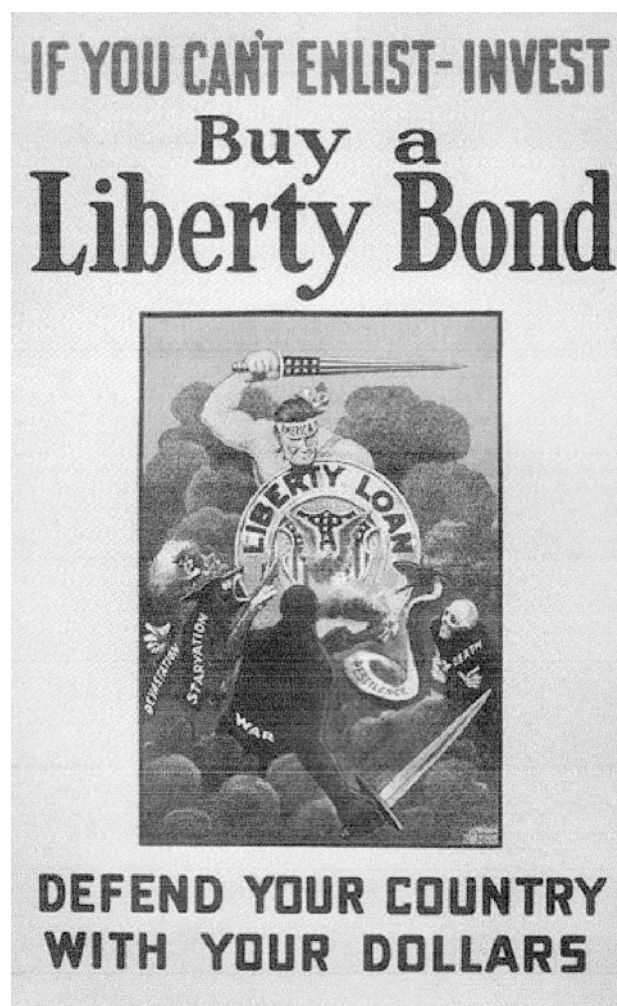
It was strongly suspected, if not taken for granted, that much of the instigation directed against everything German was merely camouflage for the current crop of Anglo Saxon "Know-Nothingism" harking back to the anti foreigner sentiment that existed in Chicago as well as the rest of America in the 1840s and 1850s which accompanied the arrival of huge numbers of Irish and Germans immigrants. The end game was to advantageously and decisively defeat *Germanism* in America once and for all. This sentiment is clearly expressed in an *Abendpost* editorial at that time:

Hating everything strange or what isn't Anglo-Saxon, they see the war a good opportunity to achieve their old aims. They serve not. . . the lofty aims of the Administration, but seek, rather, to pervert the politics of the Administration with their narrow hearted, backward and criminal agenda. They have made the German newspapers their first victim, knowing well, the effect it would have on the German language. . . . The war presents a perfect opportunity for them to achieve what in normal times would not have been possible.^{iv}

In another editorial, the *Abendpost*, in defense of the German language and cultural tradition, traced German loyalty back to the founding of the Republic. America's first bible had been printed in German and from the War of Independence through the Civil War, Germans and the German press had proven their loyalty. Even now there were "as many or more German Americans in the army and navy than Anglo Americans." Likewise, they have "proportionately

bought as many Liberty Bonds as any other group." The German press should be thanked for their editorial appeals and support for German American patriotism. All the loyal German American press have earned for their efforts is a continuation of attacks on their ethnic character.^v

Most Germans by Spring of 1918 came to the realization that outwardly adopting the goals of the Wilson administration was the only way to steer clear of the hysteria until the war ended. Recognizing that by purchasing more than their share of Liberty Bonds was a means of demonstrating their loyalty, Chicago's German organizations held rallies and drives to ensure full participation and smooth cooperation from all elements of their community. These public drives afforded opportunities for favorable mainstream press coverage, something the German community was in



dire need of. One such rally in March of 1918 at the Bismarck Gardens brought forth effusive praise from the Federal Reserve director of the Chicago Liberty Loan campaign. Testifying to the loyalty and organization of the Chicago's Germans, he stated, "They

could accomplish more by working alone than with outside interference." It was the general sentiment of the rally that while German Americans as a whole have proven their patriotism and loyalty to the United States, there has not been enough publicity given to their efforts. . . . and it was predicted that more than 35 percent of the Liberty Loan subscribers would be Americans of German origin.^{vi}

The *Abendpost* personalized for its readers the importance of purchasing the Liberty Bonds in a series of illustrations depicting German Americans as having the same stake in the war as all other Americans. Emphasizing that since many of their sons were now "over there," fighting for the "Stars and Stripes" and democratic ideals, it was time to stand behind the new homeland that had given them so much.^{vii}

The harshest Reality

Certainly, the harshest reality of the war German Americans had to face was the fact that many of them or their sons, grandsons, brothers or other such family members, friends and neighbors would be sent off to fight those of their own blood in support of England or France. "Brothers at War" was the subject of a Tribune pictorial in which the sons of opera singer Mme. Schumann-Heink were featured. Two were reported serving in the United States Armed Forces while one was serving in the German Kriegsmarine or German Navy.^{viii} This was a test of loyalty few other Americans would have to undergo. Nevertheless, most German Americans rose to the occasion in defense of their personal honor and to erase any doubts as to their validity as patriotic Americans.

The late, great senator from Illinois, Everett Dirksen,

the son of German born parents, personified this spirit as did thousands of other German Americans caught up in these trying times:



Everett Dirksen served as an artillery lieutenant during WWI and as US Senator from Illinois was the US Congress' Minority leader during the 1960s.

In 1917 in Pekin, Illinois, it was well known that Mrs. Dirksen kept a picture of Kaiser Wilhelm on the wall. . . . Anti German sentiment was so strong at the time that a band of Pekinites came to her home and demanded its immediate removal. It was further intimated that if her boys did not fight for the United States, it would be an indication of disloyalty. Veiled threats were made that if the Dirksens did not join the battle against the so-called hated Hun, the torch might be put to her house. . . . Under these circumstances Ev

decided to drop out of college and join the army right away. His twin brother Tom had been given an exemption because he was married. His older brother had been drafted but was released because of a physical disability. Thus, it fell to Ev to clear the family name of any taint of pro-German sympathy.^{ix}

"Coming from a pro-German background that never considered this war to be a noble crusade at all," Dirksen years later argued that "Robert Lansing, Wilson's secretary of state, had from the start shaped American foreign policy in the direction of the Allies^x."

Congressional Medal of honor recipient aka America's "Ace of Aces" (having shot down (25) more German aircraft than any other American combat flier), as well as the other German Americans such as Chester Nimitz, Carl Spaatz and Dwight Eisenhower (all junior officers in this war who would go on to play more significant roles in the next war) are strong indication of the German American contribution to the



As most Chicago Germans were only one or two generations removed from the "fatherland," family members fighting on both sides of the conflict were not unusual at all as was the case in the Schumann-Heink family. (Chicago Tribune, 7 April 1917)

American war effort. Even the commander of the American Expeditionary Force, "Black Jack" Pershing, the German press continually pointed out, had descended from a German immigrant named

"Pfoerschin." In his autobiography Rickenbacker recalled that the airfield he was stationed at in France was "run by five officers named Spaatz, Wiedenbach, Tittel, Rickenbacher (spelled this way at this time) and Spiegel, who were "called the five German spies behind our backs." As commander of the 94th "Hat in the Ring" Aero Squadron, Rickenbacker, aware of the anti-German instigation back in the United States, wrote home to a friend while replacing the h in his name with a k. Informed of this by a friend, the newspapers picked up on this "patriotic" gesture and reported that "Eddie Rickenbacker has taken the Hun out of his name."^{xi}

Chicago's papers were fond of reporting and praising Chicago's Germans who were in uniform, especially if it seemed, if their parents were German born, as many of them were. Articles such as these served as examples of and reinforcement for German American support for the war. "Although I am German born, I am proud that my son is in the service of the United States," said Mrs. Geiger of 2235 West Fullerton. Her son, Private Charles Geiger had recently been severely wounded in France. "I owe everything I have to this country, and when my other two boys are old

enough for service, I will be only too willing to let them go."^{xii} In a *Tribune* article titled "Melted" the four sons of the German born Mrs. J.P. Kraft of Oak Park are pictured and it was reported that she "boasts of all four

of them serving in the army at the present time."^{xiii}

Overseas casualty lists also reflected the German American contribution to America's war effort. In one typical casualty count printed in the *Tribune* in the Spring

of 1918, German names such as Ebner, Ortmyer,

Lugginland, Schwatz, Mock, Kronbach, Hoerning, Tapager, Reimer, Kalf, Bernl, Brenner, Brockelmann, Frantz, Fueren, Gruell, Haas, Lommel, Ordemann, Schultz, Schwab, Sorlein, and Wickler accounted, within the total of eighty-five listed, almost one third of that particular day's casualties.^{xiv}

In fact, at war's end, the Cook County World War One Honor Roll, commemorating those of its residents who had died during the war in service to their country, reveals that "at least one fourth of all the fallen soldiers bore German names."^{xv}

Mike Haas, GADA Editor

To be continued. . . .

All footnoted quoted sources are available upon request and only have been omitted because of space limitations.



Eddie Rickenbacker, a pre war Indy 500 race car driver, started the war as "Black Jack" Pershing's US Commander of the AEF personal driver and ended it as a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient and America's "Ace of Aces," having shot down (25) more German aircraft than any other American combat flier.



Carl Spaatz was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in WWI and commanded the US Army Air Corps in Europe during WWII.

