

# GERMAN COMMUNITIES IN NORTHWESTERN OHIO: CANAL FEVER AND PROSPERITY

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In the introduction to his comprehensive study of the Maryland Germans, Dieter Cunz called for laborers in the vinyard of immigration history, pointing out how much spade-work was still to be done before the " story of the peopling of America " could be written.<sup>1</sup>

Now, twenty years later, the call is still urgent. How much material pertaining to the history of immigration is ready and waiting for the harvest, was driven home to me recently in the course of linguistic field work in several rural communities in Northwestern Ohio. I had to know the history of the settlements and their people in order to be able to understand and interpret intricate problems in the speech of these language islands. And the deeper I became involved with the history and the lives of these people, the more fascinated I became by my research.

I believe this work, dealing with German settlements in a Midwestern state in the middle span of the nineteenth century, to be of general interest, because it is rather characteristic of an important phase in the German settlements of the United States, a phase that has been called the " second wave " of German immigration. This mighty wave rolled into the Midwestern states between 1815 and 1860, into a region which Dieter Cunz aptly defines as the "'German quadrangle' on the map of the United States, roughly within the lines connecting New York City, Minneapolis, St. Louis, and Baltimore ".<sup>2</sup> Characteristic not for the comparatively small group of intellectuals and liberals, the " Forty-eighters ", who preferred the cities to the country, but typical rather of the small farmer, of the great mass movement of German immigrants into the rural areas after the passing of the Indian, where they cleared the forest lands, drained the swamps, and cultivated the land, founding towns and villages to be the centers of such communities. These immigrants had left their homeland not for political reasons, but because they were hungry, hungry for land, land to own and to till. They were experienced farmers, many had been tenant farmers or day laborers on large estates.<sup>3</sup> They were lured to America by the prospect of a better life, offered to them in the form of Congress lands, which, even with their modest means, they were able to buy.

<sup>1</sup> Dieter Cunz, *The Maryland Germans*, (Princeton, N. J., 1948), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Dieter Cunz, *They came from Germany. The Stories of Famous German-Americans*, (New York 1966), 10.

<sup>3</sup> There is, to my knowledge, no overall statistical information published concerning the vocational background of immigrants from rural Germany around the middle of the nineteenth century. Tabulations in government archives and regional offices, however, can give us a fair idea of this background. The official lists of names of emigrants and their occupations kept by the district of Damme in Oldenburg are, I believe, typical of much of the German immigration into the rural Midwest. The most frequent designations are *Kötter*, *Heuermann*, *Dienstknecht*, *Dienstmagd*; less often occurs *Kolon* ("landowner"); relatives of a *Kolon* appear more frequently in these lists, because they had no hereditary claims on the family land. These lists are easily accessible in an exemplary regional study of emigration: Johannes Ostendorf, " Zur Geschichte der Auswanderung aus dem alten Amt Damme (Oldg.), insbesondere nach Nordamerika, in den Jahren 1830-1880 ", *Oldenburger Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Heimatkunde*, XXXXVI-XXXVII (1942-43), (Oldenburg, 1943), 164-297.

The German settlements of Minster, New Bremen, New Knoxville, Fort Jennings, Glandorf, Ottoville and others have one thing in common: all are situated in the Northwestern part of Ohio; they date from the Thirties and Forties of the last century; and all of them are in some way or another connected with the Miami and Erie Canal.

Since the second decade of the nineteenth century there had been a growing demand in the country for better ways of marketing agricultural products of the inland regions. The roads in the interior were impassible in winter and in the rainy season, and few rivers were navigable. Canals seemed to be the answer. It was the *Erie Canal* in the state of New York, that made people in Ohio clamor for a canal system of their own connecting Lake Erie with the Ohio River.

Frederick Jackson Turner, in his classic *Rise of the New West* (1906) calls it " the glory of Dewitt Clinton that he saw the economic revolution which the *Erie Canal* would work ". The Governor of New York himself termed it a " bond of union between the Atlantic and western states " and predicted: " As an organ of communication between the Hudson, the Mississippi, the St. Lawrence, the great lakes of the north and the west, and their tributary rivers, it will create the greatest inland trade ever witnessed."<sup>4</sup>

Clinton's expectations were fulfilled. The Erie Canal, completed in 1825, by creating a water route between New York City and Buffalo not only opened avenues for farm products to markets in the East and moved manufactured goods into the interior, it also was instrumental in opening the West to an ever increasing tide of immigration. It promoted Great Lakes navigation, and was directly responsible for the construction of the Ohio system of canals.<sup>5</sup>

In 1825 the Ohio State Legislature authorized two main canals: the Ohio Canal from Cleveland to Portsmouth through the center of the state, and the Miami and Erie Canal, first from Cincinnati to Dayton, and later extended to Toledo. The Cincinnati to Dayton section was opened in 1829,<sup>6</sup> ready for the tide of settlers which started to roll north in 1830; the extension, running to the junction of the Auglaize and Maumee Rivers near Defiance, was completed in 1845. Here it joined the Wabash and Erie Canal, which connected Evansville, Indiana with Toledo.

The Miami and Erie Canal followed roughly the old military trail from Cincinnati north to the Maumee River,<sup>7</sup> a natural route for trade and

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *Rise of the New West 1819-1829*. I quote from the paper back edition, Collier Books (New York, 1962), 43 f.

<sup>5</sup> At that same time similar projects were started in other states: Pennsylvania began her system of alternate sections of tramway and canal (1825), and projects were planned or started in Maryland, Virginia, Illinois and Indiana. See John J. George Jr., " The Miami Canal ", *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society Publications*, XXXVI (1927), 92. Much of the following account is based on this informative article, which cites the important literature on the subject. An exhaustive bibliography can be found in: *History of the Miami and Erie Canal from Middletown to Cincinnati*, by Raymond Standafer (unpubl. M. A. Thesis, Miami University, 1949). Helpful maps and interesting illustrations are found in some smaller publications, as for instance: *The Miami and Erie Canal. Symbol of an Era*, (Dayton, Ohio, Carillon Park, [n. d.]); "Up the Creek without a Paddle", *Ohio Bell Voice*, XV, No. 3 (1968), 8-11; and a brochure, published by the *Ohio Historical Society*, Marilyn G. Hood, *Canals of Ohio, 1825-1913* (Columbus, 1969). As to the canal and its history of Auglaize County and Northwestern Ohio I am indebted to William J. McMurray, *History of Auglaize County* (Indianapolis, 1923). A comprehensive study of the administration and economy of the Ohio canals has just been published by the Ohio University Press: Harry N. Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861*, (Athens, Ohio, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> The first boat arrived in Dayton from Cincinnati in 1829. George (*op. cit.*, 95) says that " before the end of 1828 the whole line from Cincinnati to Dayton . . . was completed."

<sup>7</sup> "Wayne's Trace", as it was called, went along the fertile valleys of the Great Miami, the Auglaize, and Maumee Rivers from Cincinnati to what is now Toledo (" Fallen Timbers"). The importance of this route for commerce was early recognized: a German merchant in Cincinnati, Martin Baum, who had come from Hagenau to Baltimore before the Revolutionary War and then had gone to the " West " with General Anthony Wayne, was the first landowner and " city planner " of what is now Toledo. He considered this site to be the logical terminus of a line of commerce from Cincinnati. See Albert B. Faust, *The German Element in the United States* (New York, 1927), I, 425.

commerce. The canal ran from Cincinnati, through Dayton, Piqua, Minster, New Bremen, St. Marys, Delphos, Defiance to Toledo in the northwestern corner of Ohio. 248 miles in length, it rose to its highest point in Auglaize County, 512 feet above the Ohio River level. This is the summit of the divide between the waters of the Ohio and the waters of Lake Erie. Four German communities are situated on this very summit which extends a little more than twenty-one miles: Fort Loramie, Minster, New Bremen, and New Knoxville. Fifty-three locks were required to lift the boats "over the hill" and fifty-two locks to take the fall of 395 feet to the level of Lake Erie.

The importance of the canals for the economic development of the state and the growth of pioneer settlements must not be underestimated.<sup>8</sup>

The construction of the canal meant hard money in the pockets of the pioneer settlers. We know from memoirs and biographies that the majority of these pioneers worked on the canals, digging the canal bed when the construction neared their neighborhood, but also working on sections far away. Groups of German pioneer settlers from New Bremen, and Minster for instance, worked on the Wabash and Erie Canal in Indiana before the Miami and Erie Canal passed through their settlement.<sup>9</sup> To bring home badly needed cash, the men in Glandorf worked on the canal far away from their wilderness home, while the women tilled the fields.<sup>10</sup>

The canal supplied an outlet for farm products. Since corn was the staple crop, pork and whiskey was the important money-making freight that was shipped by canal—it was the pork that bestowed on Cincinnati the sobriquet "porkopolis" and laid the foundation of one of the industries for which Cincinnati is best known still today: soap. The whiskey distilled by the German farmers was shipped and sipped as far south as New Orleans. All this meant sudden prosperity. "The country along the canal, fifteen miles and more on either side", one informant told me, "blossomed up suddenly like a second paradise, and became the breadbasket of the nation". Besides creating markets for inland products the canal, by supplying water power, made it possible to erect saw mills and grist mills, a great boon for farmers all along the route of the canal.

All this meant hard cash, a rare commodity indeed among immigrants. It turned their farms just wrested from the wilderness, into going concerns. Not only were they able to purchase farm implements, but it enabled them to pay off the land, which most of the pioneers had bought on option from the government, often paying down only a few cents per acre. I am sure, what my informant told me about the New Knoxville community is true

<sup>8</sup> If there are some doubts how much actually the canals contributed to the fabulous increase of Ohio's population to two million in 1850, the following facts certainly show the importance of these waterways: (1) Population density per square mile for canal counties was much higher than the average density for the whole state. (2) At the peak of canal operation, between 1830 and 1850, the rate of increase of Ohio's population was greater than in any other twenty year period in the history of the state. (3) In 1850 fourteen of the twenty-two largest cities were on canals, four on Lake Erie, and four on the Ohio River. See Standifer, 151 f.—La Vern J. Ripley in his study "The Columbus Germans", *The Report*, 33 (Baltimore, 1968) stresses the importance of the Ohio Canal for the growth of Columbus, Ohio: "In September of the same year (1831), water was turned into the Feeder Canal joining Columbus to the Ohio Canal which linked . . . Lake Erie with the Ohio River. As barges ascended to discharge and receive freight, immigrants swelled the population of the Capital City from 1,500 in 1827 to nearly 20,000 a short thirty years later." (2-3).

See the recollections of Charles Boesel, one of the New Bremen pioneers: "Ansiedlung von New Bremen", *Der deutsche Pionier*, I (1869-70), 84-121 (especially 119); cf. also: "Ansiedlung von Minster, Auglaize County, Ohio", *op. cit.*, 147-152 (especially 149). The pioneers that settled New Knoxville also worked on the canals in Indiana and Ohio as did most settlers along the route of the canal. I learned this from written and oral recollection of local people, some of which I have recorded on tape. Mr. William Henschen, for instance, a farmer and former schoolteacher in New Knoxville told me that almost all the early German settlers worked on the "Fort Wayne—Toledo Canal" and the Miami and Erie Canal.

<sup>10</sup> "Die deutsche Ansiedlung von Glandorf, Putnam County, Ohio," *Der deutsche Pionier*, I, (1869-70), 300-303.

also of other pioneer settlements: by the end of the Civil War most farmers had paid off their debt to the government.

The great mass of German immigrants between 1830 and 1860, who settled in Northwestern Ohio, Indiana and points beyond passed through Cincinnati. The "Queen City" actually was the gateway to the West for thousands of immigrants, the rallying point from which they set out to their future homes. They arrived in Cincinnati by flat boat or steamer on the Ohio river. Biographies of the early settlers found in county and church histories, as well as in oral tradition, faithfully handed down from the pioneer generation, show that Baltimore was the favorite port of entry. From Baltimore they travelled by Conostoga wagon to Pittsburgh or on the National Road to Wheeling, whence they continued their journey down the Ohio to the Queen City of the West. A few of the very early pioneers lured by the cheaper mode of travel on water entered by the harbor of New York and shipped family and worldly belongings up the Hudson to Albany, on the canal to Buffalo, by Lake steamer to Cleveland, then south on the Ohio canal to Portsmouth and on to Cincinnati.<sup>11</sup> This route was soon abandoned, however, because it was too time-consuming and made the settlers arrive in the dead of winter, too late to plant a first crop. I might add that it was not rare for German immigrants to come up river from New Orleans.

Many of them stayed in Cincinnati for longer periods of time, before moving on to clear the virgin forest or drain the fertile, but treacherous "Black Swamp" that covered wide stretches of Northwestern Ohio.<sup>12</sup> Some, having joined land companies being organized in Cincinnati, waited there for the scouts to return with the news that a town site had been selected. This was the course of events for instance in the case of Minster, New Bremen, and Fort Jennings.—The rapid growth of Cincinnati from 25,000 inhabitants in 1830 to 115,000 in 1840 was largely due to this influx of German immigration. It created a strong labor market, and the high wages paid were welcome cash for the often penniless immigrants. This money they used for downpayments on their farms. Frequently they were able to pay off financial obligations incurred in their journey from Germany within an incredibly short time.

And now to the German settlements themselves! In the present paper I shall limit myself to the four colonies on the summit of the divide.<sup>14</sup>

The last Indians departed from this region in 1832.<sup>15</sup> The offer for

<sup>11</sup> Several of my informants reported that their grandfathers or greatgrandfathers in 1836 had come from New York City by the Erie Canal to Buffalo, from there on the lake to Cleveland, from Cleveland south on the Ohio Canal and the Ohio River to Cincinnati, and then had travelled up north on the new Miami Canal as far as Dayton from where they proceeded by wagon to their destination New Knoxville.—Some immigrants, as for instance Father Wilhelm Horstmann, the founder of Glandorf, sailed from Buffalo to Detroit and entered Northwestern Ohio from there. See *A Portrait and Biographical Record of Allen and Putnam Counties* (Chicago, 1896), 382.

<sup>12</sup> Francis P. Weisenburger, *The Passing of the Frontier, 1825-1850, The History of the State, of Ohio*, ed. by Carl Wittke, V. III, (Columbus, 1941), 48 f.

<sup>13</sup> See E. R. Kuck, *An Historical Account of the Early Religious and Social Life of the New Knoxville, Ohio Community, 1836 to 1900*. (New Knoxville, Ohio, 1962), 18. Weisenburger, *op. cit.* 52, states that " By 1830, approximately five per cent of the population of Cincinnati was German; by 1840, twenty-three per cent; and by 1850, twenty-seven per cent. Together with their children born in the United States, the Germans, as early as 1840 constituted 14,163 of the 46,382 persons in the city." See also Faust, I, 426.

For a parallel situation, i. e., the close relationship between the rise of a city (Baltimore) and a prosperous hinterland (Western Maryland) c. f. Dieter Cunz, *The Maryland Germans*, 157-159.

<sup>14</sup> I hope to treat settlements farther north, Delphos, Glandorf, Fort Jennings and others, in the near future.

<sup>15</sup> Although the facts are well known and found in many historical accounts easily available, I shall give a bare outline here. Originally the land in question was claimed by the Miami. After their removal to Indiana in 1782 (General George Roger Clark), the Shawnees, having been driven out of the Carolinas and Georgia, occupied this land, their famous Council House being at Wapakoneta, the present county seat of Auglaize County. After the Greenville Treaty of August 3, 1795, which brought the long hostilities to a formal close, groups of the Shawnees began their migration to Missouri. The last Shawnees led by their chief Blue Jacket moved out of this part of Ohio in 1832.

sale of Congress lands and canal lands<sup>18</sup> started a regular tide of immigration into this territory. The villages of Minster and New Bremen were platted in 1833, founded by colonizing societies out of Cincinnati. The earliest settlers of the other colonies moved into the territory at about the same time. The towns New Knoxville and Fort Loramie, which are the centers of these communities, were platted in 1836 and 1837 respectively. Fort Loramie, Minster, and New Bremen are on the canal itself; it passed right through the center of town. New Knoxville is a few miles east of it.<sup>17</sup> By 1829 the canal had been completed as far as Dayton, the terminal point for the earliest pioneers; from there they preceded by wagon to their destination.

Most of the settlers came from the Northwest of Germany. A visitor to this part of Ohio is struck by the similarity of the landscape; flat country with a wide horizon and a tremendous sky above it, farm houses with large, prosperous barns and groves of oak trees and other hardwood. In any direction, before one becomes aware of a town, one sees the stately church towers rising from the plain. The swamps that covered large tracts of land when the first immigrants arrived, have disappeared, reclaimed into fertile fields as have those in the pioneers' native Westphalia and Lower Saxony. The early settlers must have felt at home here.

We must not forget that these colonies are predominantly rural communities. The towns serve as the center of communal life, with church, school, bank, post office and markets. This, too, reminds us of the rural *Gemeinden* from which the pioneers came. In the course of time the towns have developed commercial and industrial enterprises, some of considerable size and importance, providing a livelihood for the ever-increasing population, but the strength of the community is still the farmer. Official census figures are misleading, because they give only the population within the corporation limits of the village, ignoring the large farm population which is in every way an active part of the community.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> A strip of land along the route of the canal was offered to settlers by the state at one Dollar an acre. As early as 1828 Congress had granted lands along the proposed canal to help finance the initial survey. See George, "The Miami Canal", 96, and McMurray, 145 and 415.

<sup>17</sup> Fort Loramie belongs now to Shelby County; Minster, New Bremen, and New Knoxville to Auglaize County.—My account of the history of these settlements is based chiefly on the following sources.

MINSTER. "Ansiedlung von Minster, Auglaize County, Ohio", *Der deutsche Pionier*, I (1869-70), 147-152. "Zwei Agitatoren der Auswanderung. II. Franz Joseph Stallo", *Der deutsche Pionier*, VII (1875-76), 2-16. Velma F. Schmieder, *Souvenir of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of Minster, Ohio*. (Minster, Ohio, Post Printing Co., 1932).

NEW BREMEN. Chas. Bösel, "Ansiedlung von New Bremen", *Der deutsche Pionier*, I (1869-70), 84-121. Carl Bösel, "Einwanderers Abenteuer", *Der deutsche Pionier*, III (1871-72), 216-217. *New Bremen Centennial, 1833-1933, July 1-2-3-4*, (New Bremen, The Home Printing Company, 1933).

NEW KNOXVILLE. In addition to valuable information from older residents, and especially from my friend Jacob A. Meckstroth, native of New Knoxville and former editor of the *Ohio State Journal*, I am indebted to: G. H. Kattmann, *Souvenir of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of New Knoxville, Ohio, July 21, 1836—July 21, 1936*. (New Bremen, Ohio, Home Printing Company, 1936). Information on church history and the religious life of the community can be found in the following: *Centennial Souvenir. In Story and Pictures Presented in Commemoration of One Hundred Years of Worship and of Service. 1838-1938, The First Evangelical and Reformed Church, New Knoxville, Ohio*. (Cincinnati, Roessler Brothers, Printers, 1938); *1838-1963, 125th Anniversary Memoirs, The First Evangelical and Reformed Church, New Knoxville, Ohio*. (New Knoxville, 1963); and the mimeographed publication by E. R. Kuck, cited in note 13.

For all three communities I am also indebted to the history of Auglaize County, by McMurray, cited in note 5.

<sup>18</sup> The following table lists the population according to the 1960 census; the official estimate for 1966 in parenthesis; followed by the approximate number of souls for the entire community between slants:

|               |      |        |        |
|---------------|------|--------|--------|
| MINSTER       | 2193 | (2372) | /3900/ |
| NEW BREMEN    | 1972 | (2206) | /3700/ |
| NEW KNOXVILLE | 792  | (869)  | /2500/ |
| FORT LORAMIE  | 687  | (—)    | /2000/ |

The estimates for the entire communities were given to me by a reliable authority, J. A. Meckstroth, a native of New Knoxville (see note 17); a newspaper man and political writer, who is not only a keen observer, but has been all his life in close contact with his native community where many members of his family live and where he has innumerable friends in the farming and business community.

These four communities, as well as the German settlements of Glandorf and Fort Jennings are remarkable in another respect: they are what the German ethnographer calls *landsmannschaftliche Siedlungen*, i. e. the immigrants of each community came from one, usually a small district in the homeland and they were held together by the ties of kinship, religion, common history and speech. The Minster and Fort Loramie pioneers came from Southern Oldenburg and related Catholic regions near Osnabrück, those of New Bremen from the old province of Hanover.<sup>19</sup> In New Knoxville we even have the rare case that almost all of the early settlers, and the majority that arrived in the following fifty years, came from a single small Westphalian village, Ladbergen, halfway between Münster and Osnabrück.

Whereas in the first wave of German immigration, i. e. the immigration of the eighteenth century, the South Western parts of the Empire (Palatinate, Württemberg, Hesse) played a predominant part, the " second wave " of the nineteenth century originated predominantly in the provinces north of the Main River. The settlers of the Northwestern Ohio communities with which we are concerned emigrated from the Northwest of Germany, Westphalia and Oldenburg, especially its Southern part, the " Oldenburger Münsterland ", predominantly Catholic, with strong historical and spiritual ties to the old Bishopric of Münster.

It is from this territory that the founder of Minster, Ohio came, Franz Joseph Stallo, who has been called by one local historian the " Oldenburger Pilgervater ".<sup>20</sup> Francis Joseph Stallo was a natural born leader and organizer, highly intelligent and exceptionally gifted and energetic. He was considered eccentric by some. Not only was he the first to emigrate from his German home district, the parish of Damme, but also the prime mover of an ever increasing emigration from his homeland, a migration that reached such proportions that the local German authorities took steps to halt this flood. Stallo came from a family of small farmers and schoolteachers. Born 1793 in Sierhausen in the parish of Damme he became a teacher like his father before him. But soon, bored with the narrow and confining life of a country schoolmaster he learned the printer's trade and in 1815 opened a shop in his hometown where he also sold and bound books. He was a man of intellectual curiosity and many interests and well versed in physics and mechanics, and he had done pioneer work in irrigation and reforestation of his native heath. Because of his liberal views in politics and religion he got into trouble with the Oldenburg authorities. It was the publication and distribution of " seditious " pamphlets, and his activities as an agent recruiting immigrants to the United States that finally led to his arrest and his emigration to America.

He came to Cincinnati in 1830 and one year later his family followed.<sup>21</sup>

Stallo immediately began his activities to make his dream of a German colony in the West come true. By corresponding with his old friends in Germany he brought about a constant stream of immigration into Cincinnati from Southern Oldenburg and a few nearby communities, Twistringem

<sup>19</sup> New Bremen, however, had quite a number of immigrants among its early settlers that came from the Rhenish Palatinate. See below.

<sup>20</sup> Ostendorf, 171. My account of Stallo is based on information in this study and on the sources cited in note 17 under Minster. The essay in *Der deutsche Pionier* VII, signed " R.," i. e. written by H. A. Rattermann, has been excerpted by Gustav Koerner, *Das deutsche Element in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika, 1818-1848*, (Cincinnati, 1880), 219 f., which in turn supplied the information for the story printed in the *Veichtaer Zeitung*, Nr. 8, 1886.

<sup>21</sup> Most sources give 1881 as the date of his arrival in the United States (*Der deutsche Pionier*, I, 150; VII, 10 f. and Schmieder, 82). I follow Ostendorf, 168, who states that according to the official register (" nach dem amtlichen Register ") he emigrated in 1880. Ostendorf assumes that he went alone at that time and returned after one year to take his family across.

for instance, which in 1817 had been ceded to Hanover, and from Catholic sections of Osnabrück; all these were related to the Oldenburgers by ties of blood, religion and tradition. The first group arrived in Cincinnati as early as 1832. Stallo presided at a meeting that took place in April of that year.<sup>22</sup> A stock company was formed for the purchase of land on which to found a colony. Stallo was one of two committeemen elected to inspect Congress lands for sale in Ohio and Indiana. Upon their return Stallo was authorized to purchase a section of 640 acres, the site of the present town of Minster.

The first group of settlers left Cincinnati soon thereafter, going by canal boat as far as Dayton and then to Piqua and on to their chosen land.<sup>23</sup> Stallo himself made a plat of the town site, surveying being one of the many arts this remarkable man mastered. He divided the section into 144 shares, and on April 1833 each of the assembled members drew one of the 144 slips of papers out of Stallo's hat.<sup>24</sup>

Stallo himself called the village "Stallo's Town".<sup>25</sup> After his death the name was changed to Münster in honor of the illustrious Cathedral city of Münster, the spiritual capital of the God-fearing early settlers.

Stallo had died suddenly in 1833, one of the many victims of the dreaded Asian Cholera that took a heavy toll of the immigrants in the different settlements.

Soon after his death legends sprang up, inspired by the colorful and often eccentric personality of the founder of Minster, legends that claim the interest of the folklorist, if not the historian.

For instance the story of how the town got its name. According to some the name Stallo's Town was chosen by the ambitious leader himself; but there is also this amusing report: after several suggestions had been turned down by the members of the company, Neu Damme for being suggestive, Neu Twistringgen and Neu Osnabrück for inviting ridicule from their future Yankee neighbors, someone proposed Stallotown. Whereupon the proud Stallo tapped a keg of beer to properly celebrate the christening.<sup>26</sup> He himself, so the story goes on, nailed a board with this name on the trunk of a giant beech tree in the center of the new colony, the day they arrived.<sup>27</sup> One day, tradition has it, the sign was knocked down by a runaway team of horses and never replaced. About that time a growing feeling sprang up in favor of Münster.<sup>28</sup> Evil tongues, however, claimed, the sign had been torn down by irate citizens who believed Stallo had cheated them out of their rightful share of the property.<sup>29</sup>

This latter charge came not entirely out of a blue sky. Unlike the proverbial "wise family father" Stallo had neglected to put his house in order, before the Lord called him home. He died intestate and was still holding title to the land, having neglected to execute deeds to the several lot owners. There were angry voices and accusations. Finally, in 1836, "a bill was

<sup>22</sup> According to *Der deutsche Pionier*, VII, 11 the first group of immigrants from Damme and Twistringgen arrived in Cincinnati in the spring of 1832, and the meeting took place in April of that year. Schmieder 7, sets the date as Sept 1, 1832 and states that it was attended by "97 young Germans".

<sup>23</sup> There is no doubt that the first settlers arrived in 1832 in what is now Minster; according to the *Der deutsche Pionier*, VII, 13 ff., in the late summer (the names of the families are given). They are reported to have marched from their meeting place in Cincinnati to the canal boat in a regular procession, at the head of which a white muslin flag was carried with the inscription "Stallotown". In the fall of the same year additional settlers reached the colony which by January 1, 1833 counted 52 souls, *ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> Schmieder, 8 ff., prints a list of the 144 lots and their owners, based on the court record

<sup>25</sup> It is spelled "Stallostown" in some sources, "Stallotown" in others.

<sup>26</sup> *Der deutsche Pionier*, VII, 12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> McMurray, 440.

<sup>29</sup> *Der deutsche Pionier*, VII, 16.

filed in chancery for the purpose of securing title to purchasers of these lots". Individual title was eventually effected.<sup>30</sup>

But rumors didn't die easily. The self-willed town builder was said to have been denied a Christian burial in the churchyard and to have been buried right in the village street. The real reason for this strange grave site, however, had not been religious fanaticism, but the deadly fear of contagion that made the settlers bury all their dead as quickly as possible and right in front of their houses. Later the street had been widened—and still later his body was removed to a permanent place of rest.

And then there is a story, recorded long after his death, telling, how, when Stallo had the first inkling that he was in the grips of the dread disease, he threw himself on his snow white steed and galloped, a second *Schimmelreiter*, wildly up and down the rough plank road in town, arguing with God in Heaven, screaming: " I can't, I must not die, before my affairs are in order, God must let me live until the poor have received their bills of sale!"<sup>31</sup>

Three miles north of Minster is the flourishing town of New Bremen, an all Protestant community, just as Minster was wholly made up of Roman Catholics.<sup>32</sup> Like Minster New Bremen also was organized by a German stock company in Cincinnati in 1832. There were 33 members in the original group. Two scouts, sent out to select suitable land, bought 10 acres of government land at one dollar per acre, which was then divided into 102 lots. Each member received one, as decided by lottery—the rest was offered for sale. Since most of the original members came from Lower Saxony they called their town Bremen. It was recorded on June 11, 1833.

The first log cabin was built in the summer of 1832 and the first families, six in number, arrived in the same fall. In the spring of the following year others followed, settling on farms close to Bremen. Not all of the pioneers were of North German stock, however: in the summer of that same year several families from the Rhenish Palatinate settled in the community, four miles from town.<sup>33</sup>

In 1838 the Miami and Erie Canal finally reached the divide, passing through the middle of Minster and New Bremen, thereby causing a rapid commercial and industrial development of the two communities.

The community of New Knoxville is also entirely Protestant. The settlers came from the village of Ladbergen in the Westphalian *Grafschaft Tecklenburg*. In 1834 the first Ladbergers arrived in this region, scouts, so to speak, for a number of families that were eager and ready to leave their homes for the promised land of America.<sup>34</sup> Stopping first at New Bremen they took up Government land four miles away, at \$1.25 an acre. This was the beginning of a continuous migration from Ladbergen. According to records in the archives of that town there were 315 persons that left their homes in the nine years between 1833 and 1841. Of these 81 were

<sup>30</sup> McMurray, 440.

<sup>31</sup> *Der deutsche Pionier*, VII, 15 f.

<sup>32</sup> Originally both towns were in the same township, German Township, but in 1858 a division was made, creating a separate civil entity in the southern part: Jackson Township with the village of Minster. The northern half with New Bremen kept the name German Township. As late as 1920 there were in the former not more than " half a dozen Protestants ", according to McMurray, 441. Today the religious boundaries are somewhat less rigid.

<sup>33</sup> Some of these, like the Boesel and Maurer families became leading citizens and successful business men. They were active in politics. Carl (Charles) Boesel for instance was elected to the Ohio House of Representatives (1868-67) and the State Senate (1868-71).

<sup>34</sup> Jacob A. Meckstroth told me that his greatgrandfather Hermann Heinrich Meckstroth was one of the earliest settlers. " He sold out in Ladbergen, paid his debts and came to what later became the community of New Knoxville." Like most of the early immigrants he came with his family, four boys and two daughters and sons-in-law. He bought " four times ninety-six acres of Government Land on option, at \$1.25 an acre ". Hermann Heinrich Meckstroth had been preceded by two of his sons in 1834, who " spied out " the land and sent favorable reports back to Ladbergen.



unattached individuals, the rest 43 families with 3 to 8 members and 24 couples. Peak years were 1840 and 1844 when 103 and 104 persons respectively left Ladbergen. Most of these early emigrants went to Ohio.<sup>35</sup>

People have often wondered how a town, so thoroughly German, got the name New Knoxville. The town was laid out by a professional town planner or developer, a man of Irish descent, James K. Lyttle. He platted and recorded the village of New Knoxville in 1836 naming it in honor of the reformer John Knox, a distant ancestor of his mother. Having completed the work of surveying he left the community and settled in St. Marys. As late as 1848, that is 12 years after its founding, there was only one building standing in the "town", in addition to the log church. "There just was no excuse for its founding," I was told.—After 1850, however, the village grew quickly, saw mills and other small establishments springing up.

Fort Loramie is another community founded after the first German families had already established farms in the surrounding township for several years. The town was platted in 1837 and named Berlin. The name was changed to Fort Loramie around the turn of the century.<sup>36</sup> After the canal reached the village more families moved in and the community grew and developed. The people are of the same ethnic stock as the settlers of neighboring Minster.

In a description of Fort Loramie at the end of the century we find the following report on how the community kept its identity: "After settlement here the Germans strove to prevent settlement of Americans in their midst, and by different methods nearly succeeded. Still a few straggling Americans settled on lands within the township, but each soon found it desirable to leave, and so was bought out as early as he could sell, and generally was succeeded by a German. This, at least, was the plan of the German settlers themselves, and keeping the plan in view, they have preserved the characteristics of nationality, religion, and politics up to the present time."<sup>37</sup>

There is another statement in this description of Fort Loramie that could have been made about any of these communities: "They have excellent farms", it says of the settlers, "erected substantial buildings, and in their own way and according to their own ideas, pursue the enjoyments of life. Perhaps their church comes first and the building is almost fit for the abode of personal gods".<sup>38</sup>

The church always has come first, and still does in our day. The church was the very first concern of the pioneers. The modern traveler through these towns is surprised and impressed by the magnificence and size of their neo-gothic, red brick churches, their steeples rising high above the fertile farm land. These impressive stone churches were built in the seventies and eighties, replacing the modest log churches of the founding days. The

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Saatkamp, 1000 *Jahre Ladbergen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Tecklenburger Landes*. Herausgegeben vom Heimatverein Ladbergen (Westfalen). (Ladbergen, 1950), 133-137. Among the early settlers of New Knoxville was the maternal great-grandfather of Neil Armstrong, the man who first set foot on the moon: Fritz Kötter, born in Ladbergen, emigrated to the U. S. A. and settled in the Ohio community around 1860. His daughter, Caroline Katter, married Martin Engel, whose ancestors had also come from Germany, and their daughter Viola is Neil Armstrong's mother. See *Tecklenburger Landbote*, 12. September 1969.

<sup>36</sup> See *History of Shelby County, Ohio, with Illustrations and Biographical sketches of Some of its Pioneers*, (Philadelphia, 1888), 257-263. A. B. C. Hitchcock, *History of Shelby County, Ohio*, (Chicago, 1918), 372. Fort Loramie is situated near the site of the old fort of that name, built by General Anthony Wayne. It was named after Peter Loramie, a French-Canadian trader, who operated a store on this site in 1769.

<sup>37</sup> *History of Shelby County . . .*, (1883), 258. About politics and its place in the life of the settlers the writer has this to say: "Next (to the Church) come social customs, and fronting these as lager beer, without which it appears life would be a burden, and liberty a misnomer. Following this comes politics, in which field some one man will be found to hold an electoral dictatorship, and on election day Democratic ballots will be found "thick as autumnal leaves in Valambrosa". *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

pioneers always provided for a church in the original town plat and the church was usually the first building to go up. The log church is gone and so is the frame church that took its place, but the " church " is still first in the heart of the community. It is the center of their lives.

When describing how the German settlers did preserve " the characteristics of nationality, religion and politics to the present time ", the writer, quoted above, might have added that of native language. All these characteristics were actually preserved into the twentieth century, to some degree even into our days.

And it was the problem of language that first awakened my interest in these German communities, especially the Low German dialect of New Knoxville.<sup>39</sup> New Knoxville, you recall, is exceptional among German settlements in this country: the majority of the early settlers came from one single community in Germany. In the New World they held on not only to their peculiar culture, tradition and faith, but also to the idiom of their village; and this idiom, the speech of Ladbergen, remained the language of daily life in their new community on the other side of the Atlantic.

An exciting research project for the linguist. Here he has the rare opportunity of comparing the speech of an isolated community in the New World with that of the mother village in the old country, from which it has been separated for more than a hundred years.

Perhaps I should point out that in New Knoxville of today the oldest people are trilingual: they speak *plattdütschk*, English and, to some degree, the High German they had learned as youngsters in church and school; up to the early Twenties High German was also taught in grade school for six weeks each fall. People in the middle-age group are bilingual: they speak both Low German and English, while the youngest generation, with some notable exceptions, speak only English, although many still understand what their elders say in *Platt*.

I carried out extensive research and field work, interviewing and recording on tape representative speakers, both in New Knoxville and Ladbergen. The result of the study was most rewarding: a comparison of the two dialects showed first of all, that no major changes had taken place in the last 130 years in the sound structure of either language. This is all the more surprising if we call to mind that the New Knoxvillites have been living all that time in close contact with two other Low German communities near by, New Bremen and Minster, speaking similar dialects, to be sure, but with significant and striking differences in phonology and vocabulary. There are for instance the so-called " broken vowels ", so characteristic of the Westphalian dialect and still unchanged in the speech of New Knoxville, but not found in the other dialects: *kuaken* ' to cook ', *biërg* ' mountain ', *pieper* ' pepper' *he is stuarbm* ' he died' as against *kohken*, *berg*, *paper*, *he is storben*. And I found no interference by the neighboring speech communities in the vocabulary on New Knoxville. The New Knoxvillites still hold on tenaciously, in spite of ridicule from the neighbors, to their *Rüë* against *Hunt* ' dog'; *Pütte* against *Soht* ' farm well'; *Pruhm* against *Pluhm* ' plum '; or *küden* against *spräken* ' to speak '.

These rigid lines of demarcation, linguists call them "isoglosses", between features of the Low German of New Knoxville, New Bremen and Minster in twentieth century Ohio are still indicative of the dialect regions the early settlers had come from a century ago: Westphalia, Lower Saxony and Southern Oldenburg. This is remarkable if we consider that during

<sup>39</sup> For the discussion of the language problem c. f. Wolfgang Fleischhauer, "Westphalian in Ohio", *American-German Review*, XXX (1963), 7, 26-30.

all those years the people of these three communities used Low German in their business dealings and social intercourse.

In contrast to the stability of the sound system there has been change and innovation in the lexicon, in the form of loanwords from English. I want to stress that such loans are evidence of the vitality of the dialect, because only a language that changes with the times is alive, and not yet a museum piece. Goethe knew this truth and put it well when he said in his *Maximen und Reflexionen*: " Die Gewalt einer Sprache ist nicht, daß sie das Fremde abweist, sondern daß sie es verschlingt". Modern life with its technical and scientific advances constantly creates new concepts and these demand new words. For the farmer there are for instance novel technics, the use of chemicals, or new, sophisticated machinery. This borrowing process from the English standard language in the Ohio communities is closely paralleled in rural communities in Germany: Terms like *Silo*, *Mähdrescher*, *Vielfachgerät* and *Autobahn*, borrowed from the High German standard are as integral a part of the lexicon of the Westphalian *Bauer* as *Silo*, *baler*, *spray*, and *underpass* are at home in the *Platt* of the New Knoxville farmer.

The most interesting result of the investigation, however, was the discovery that the colonial speech of New Knoxville had preserved a definite archaic flavor. It has held on to words and phrases that have become extinct in the home dialect of Westphalia, having been replaced there by items from the High German standard. Only in the speech of the very old villagers did I find some of these words still in use. " Goodness gracious, I haven't heard that word for a long, long time," old Ladbergeners, listening to my tapes, would exclaim. " Grandfather used to talk like that."

Such archaic elements, expressions lost in the dialect of the Westphalian village, but still very much alive in the *Platt* of the Ohio community, not only allow the linguist to draw conclusions as to the Ladbergen dialect of a century-and-a-half ago, but also provide new evidence of an interesting phenomenon, observed elsewhere in different languages and various parts of the world, namely the fact that " colonial speech " shows the tendency to resist change and is much more conservative than the mother tongue—another striking example being the remainders of Elizabethan English in the Southern Appalachians.

An historical event and an invention generated some fundamental changes in these German communities: the First World War and the advent of the automobile. Until then daily life and the mores of the community were those of their home across the sea; the original dialect had remained the everyday idiom of each community, faithfully preserved. High German had been the language of church service and instruction. This slowly gave way to English as it did in thousands of churches all through the land. However, some remnants of German have survived into our time. In New Knoxville, for instance, the use of German in church in 1950 was confined to a Sunday morning Bible class. But the minister, when visiting the very old, still read to them from the German Bible.<sup>40</sup>

And the communities have maintained a certain German identity and flavor. Although elusive and hard to pin down, it is very real indeed, easily noticed by an observant visitor to these towns. A news reporter in 1950 made this statement, that would be true of all communities: " But German speech is still often heard when New Knoxville people meet, and the bond of common origin and culture is a very important element in their communal life." <sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *The Christian Century*, LXVII (1960), 235.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

Let me close with a few words about the churches in these German towns of Northern Ohio. As I said before, the church has been and has remained the center of community life. And it has been an active church and a vital force. In 1950 the Evangelical and Reformed Church of New Knoxville was chosen in *The Christian Century's* poll of 100,000 ministers as the rural church most worthy of study in Midwestern and Eastern states. *The Christian Century* called it the physical as well as the spiritual hub of one of the loveliest farm neighborhoods in America, and pointed to the remarkable fact that in 120 years of its existence it has sent thirty-nine men and three women into the Christian ministry. "If that record has been equaled or excelled," the paper added, "the fact deserves publication."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The essay "Evangelical and Reformed, New Knoxville, Ohio", the second of a series entitled "Great Churches of America" appeared in the issue of *The Christian Century* cited in note 40, pp. 233-238. It might be of interest to the reader that the connection with Ladbergen and her church has never been broken. On the occasion of the Centennial of the New Knoxville church in 1938 the Mother Church in Ladbergen sent a German Bible "as a token of her love and affection". In 1950 the pastor of the Ohio church, Dr. D. A. Bode, went to Ladbergen to represent the congregation at the one-thousandth anniversary of the founding of the Church in Westphalia and to present a silver altar cross.