

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Don Heinrich Tolzmann.** *Christian Moerlein: The Man and His Brewery.* Little Miami Publishing Company: Milford, OH, 2012. 198 pp. \$18.95. ISBN: 9781932250992

The brewing of beer in America is synonymous with German heritage. Evidenced today by the dominance of beer brands bearing German names such as Pabst, Anheiser-Busch, Yuengling, and Coors, the history and quality of American beers relied on German-Americans to establish nationally and internationally recognized malt beverages. Although Germanic influence on the U.S. beer industry corresponds most closely with mass migrations of German peoples to America in the wake of the revolutions of 1832 and 1848, perhaps the most famous and popular German contribution to the American beverage menu, lager beer, traces its proto-mythical origins to the primitive Philadelphia brew house of a certain ‘Wagner’ in 1840. Just one year later, in 1841, Christian Moerlein, whose name soon rung with the consonant tenor of Adolphus Busch, emigrated to the United States to try his luck as either a blacksmith or a brewer—apparently whichever paid the best in the New World.

Uninhibited by academic jargon or syntactical complexity, Tolzmann narrates the life and after-life of one of the five largest breweries of late-nineteenth-century America. In many

ways, the tragedy of Moerlein’s brewery is the story of Cincinnati itself, once proclaimed as the “Jewel of the West” and predicted to become the greatest city on Earth by the dawn of the twenty-first century (51). As a bustling metropolitan area of 300,000 souls, Cincinnati was a bastion of German culture in 1890. Tolzmann paints a portrait of his town at the *fin de siècle* as a veritable *Schlarafenland* of liquid gold and ample opportunities, where German-Americans (58% of the city’s population in 1890) gathered and tourists flocked to gambol in the verdant *Biergärten* and socialize in the grand taverns of the German neighborhood called “Over-the-Rhein.” Here, establishments served up all varieties of local German brews, foremost among them Christian Moerlein’s six famous draughts. The advent of prohibition, in Tolzmann’s narrative, precipitated the demise of the Moerlein brewery and Cincinnati’s golden age in one fell swoop. Even though beer and wine were legalized by emergency city ordinance in 1933, the damage was already done: The once frolicking mood of Tacitus’ Germans in America—made omnipresent in “family beer gardens, sitting rooms, and nickel beer”—was replaced by the mirthless institution of “the dimly lit tavern” (89). Thus, Tolzmann’s story of alcohol as an analog of culture serves to sketch the making and

unmaking of an almost world-famous city.

This reviewer finds great pleasure in the historical research, non-linear narrative elements, and careful attention to detail that went into making this volume. Informative and engaged with the historical events that lead to the founding and dissolution of Christian Moerlein's brewery, Tolzmann demonstrates great knowledge and interest in the local and transatlantic history of his subject. As a story with tendrils entwined in so many historical moments and theoretical concepts, however, it fails to map this rich intellectual territory sufficiently. Momentary ventures into discussions of the American Dream, the rags-to-riches myth, the German political situation of the mid-nineteenth century, and even the re-founding of the Moerlein Brewery at the pinnacle of a nation-wide craft brew craze in 2010 by Gregory Hardman, who writes the book's foreword, deflate without intellectual climax and lionize traditional narratives of great men and plutocratic patronage.

In all, the book reads as a work of local history, dedicated to the maintenance of local traditions and the promotion of contemporary local institutions. Two of the last three chapters, "The Moerlein Heritage Tour" and "The Moerlein Renaissance," act as guides to touring local sites related to the Moerlein family and business and the newly established Moerlein Lager House on

the bank of the Ohio River in Cincinnati. Nicely printed and adorned with many professional and amateur photos and historical images, the book makes for a fine addition to the personal libraries of anyone interested in local German-American histories, the history of beer brewing, or the history of German-American immigration and culture.

—Patrick Brugh

Loyola University Maryland

**Lisa Beichl.** *Reported Killed in Action: An unexpected soldier, a remarkable life.* Athens, GA: Deeds Publishing, 2015. 294 pp. \$24.95 ISBN: 9781944193041

Technically Lisa Beichl's text tells the story of her father, but it might be more correct to say that the elder Beichl tells the story himself and daughter Lisa provides the color commentary. At the core of the story is a diary which one of Lisa's siblings found after the father's death in 2015. Apparently none of the family had been aware of the newly discovered diary, which chronicled George's life as a young man, particularly the period which he, an American born in Philadelphia to German immigrant parents, spent as a student in Munich in 1939. The diary, along with notes George kept about his time as an American prisoner of war in Germany during World War II, became the impetus for a family project of recreating George's life. The current volume is the result of that project. Lisa Beichl, with help from friends and

family, brings together memorabilia from her father's life, historical accounts from the period, and original research to supplement memory in order to memorialize her father and tell his unusual story.

The book itself has an aesthetically appealing design—the text is frequently accompanied by images, often full-color documents or family pictures. However, the formatting is disconcerting. The pages of text are so often broken up by images that the whole is difficult to follow. The organization of the narrative is confusing as well. It appears as if there was an editorial decision to let the original documents in their raw form tell the story. Yet, as interesting as the documents themselves are, they cannot tell the story by themselves, and the reader who seeks to understand the significance of a given document or image must look either several pages ahead or back to find an explanation.

George Beichl was an interesting person. Some in the Society may remember him. He attended the annual dinner a number of times even though it meant a long trip home to Philadelphia at the end of the evening. He was a strong presence in the German Society of Pennsylvania, serving as its president for many years. Yet he apparently talked very little about his time as a POW or many other aspects of his early life. and the details of his story are fascinating. The intent in the present vol-

ume is to bring that part of his life to light, and indeed a lot of the documentary and personal information provides valuable insight into an immensely troubled era of world history. However, the intermixing of fond family reminiscences and solid observation of historical events makes the whole difficult to follow. Working one's way through the text can be somewhat daunting at times, but it is a journey worth taking, whether it is to know George Beichl better or to understand the complex chemistry of the life of a German immigrant before, during, and after the Second World War.

—Randall P. Donaldson

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**Gert Niers.** *Arrived at Last: An Immigrant Narrative.* AuthorHouse, 2014. 286 pp. \$28.99

ISBN: 9781491856420

Gert Niers, a leading scholar of German-American literature, recently published his autobiography after passing the milestone of his seventieth birthday. He was born in Dresden in October 1943, and shortly thereafter, the family moved to Wolfen, a small town in Saxony-Anhalt. Seeing no future in the Russian-occupied zone, the family, which was intact, settled in his father's home town of Oberhausen in the Ruhr in October 1945. He describes his childhood amidst the rubble, which took more than ten years to clear, as the Ruhr was badly bombed during the war.

“While I was growing up, this environment served as our playground” (4), he remembers. He attended a *Gymnasium*, taking English, French, and Latin and earning his *Abitur* in 1963. He then entered the University of Cologne, and graduated eight years later passing the *Staatsexamen* (equivalent of an M.A.) in German and French, which would qualify him to teach in a *Gymnasium*. He did not spend all of his time in Cologne, taking numerous trips to France, and he also spent two semesters in Freiburg, where he met his future American wife, Thelma Lynn Hurley.

After passing his *Staatsexamen*, he immigrated to the United States in the summer of 1971, and thus begins the second part of his book, “Living in the New World.” He and Thelma were married in October 1971, and they settled in Lakewood, New Jersey. His first job paid minimum wage in the print shop of the local paper, but he gained much useful knowledge about the production side of the newspaper business. In 1973, he took a position with the venerable *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold* (founded in 1834), where he was involved in the daily newspaper production, but also became acquainted with past and present German-American literature. As he was most interested in cultural developments, in 1978 he became assistant editor of *Aufbau* (founded in

1934), a weekly magazine of German-Jewish culture and literature. He met numerous German language writers, and became co-editor in 1985. He also entered the graduate program at Rutgers University and completed his doctoral dissertation on three German-Jewish authors who had immigrated to the United States.

In 1989, Niers decided to switch to academe and took a position initially teaching French at Ocean County College. In spite of a heavy teaching load of fifteen course hours per semester, he wrote numerous essays and reviews for academic and commercial publications and established himself in the field of German-American studies.

Since the title of the book has to do with immigration, some readers may wonder why Niers decided to come to America, a life-changing move. He writes that he visited the U.S. first in the summer of 1970 before immigrating the next year and enjoyed the freer lifestyle and the apparent unlimited possibilities, but there is little on why he was willing to leave Germany. Perhaps life with Thelma was the main draw, but he does not provide his readers with a substantive explanation.

Niers divides the book into three sections, the first, about 100 pages, covers his youth in Germany until

1971 in a fairly chronological fashion. The last section, about forty-five pages, gives sketches of nine German-American writers. The middle section first describes his professional life in America. The second part of the middle section (pages 163–213) contains a series of reminiscences and topics; there is a section on Hurricane Sandy in 2012, then a chapter on mice, then a chapter on American education and right-wing nationalism, followed by a chapter on his father's death. Some readers may find it hard to discern a theme in this portion of the book.

Gert Niers provides us a valuable glimpse into the world of German-American literature and culture. Numerous writers appear, and he gives sketches of their lives, their contributions to literature, and how they crossed his path and how he interacted with them. In a sense, he brought his culture with him to America and was able to add to the rich body of German-American studies.

—Nicholas B. Fessenden  
Columbia, Maryland

