Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

The German Churches of Covington

A History of the German People and Churches of Covington, Kentucky

By

Karl J. Vercouteren

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THE GERMAN CHURCHES OF COVINGTON

A history of the German people and churches of Covington, Kentucky: why the people came, how they organized their churches, and what happened to people and churches in the years that followed.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a product of early 1977. Americans had just shared the experience of the Bicentennial, in which they looked back to their national beginnings. They had also shared the experience of those cold and snowy days in January, 1977, when they sat glued to their television sets watching a series called "Roots." Those experiences reminded us all that pride in our beginnings, our backgrounds, our nationalities, our ethnic and racial heritages, is not a thing to be hidden or to be ashamed of, but rather a foundation on which to build our lives, now in the present and into the future.

The specific occasion was a speech given to Church Women United of Covington in March, 1977, at Grace United Church of Christ. It was discovered that the women of the churches of East Germany had prepared the 1977 World Day of Prayer service. East Germany is the traditional Protestant section of Germany. The major church there is the Evangelical Church of East Germany, one of the churches that forms the European "roots" of the United Church of Christ.

The writer, who had dabbled in a "pop-history" project for the Bicentennial -- "Old Covington Walking Tours" -- was invited to prepare a serious presentation on the German churches of the community. The speech has been amplified and polished into the present paper, with production assistance from Mrs. Ruth Schmidt, a member of Grace Church. It is presented to the churches and people of Covington as a "going-away present" -- the writer will complete his twelve-year pastorate at Grace Church this summer and move from the area -- and it is a longstanding German tradition to mark important occasions with a "Festschrift!"

Let us, then, consider a heritage: the German people of Covington and their churches, why those people came and what happened to them after they arrived.

THE BEGINNINGS

The very first Germans came into the area along with the earliest explorers and pioneers. They came from Pennsylvania, down through Ohio, and into Kentucky. Others came from North Carolina, through the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky. This was during the time just prior to the American Revolution. Then the Germans who had served in the American Revolutionary War

came West in larger numbers. Some of them had land grants in their pockets and they were coming West to farm. Others came to seek their fortunes in the new towns and villages of the West. Losantiville changed its name to Cincinnati and was becoming a sizable town before much ever happened on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River.

In 1815 a group of area entrepreneurs formed a land company and bought some farm land from Thomas Kennedy. Kennedy was both a farmer and ferry boat operator. He had a farm at the present location of George Rogers Clark Park, on Riverside Drive in Covington. The land company established a village on the south bank of the Ohio River, west of the Licking River, and called it Covington. Things did not go well for the land company during the first years, and it almost went bankrupt. By 1830 there were only 715 residents in the new town. But the next decade was one of steady growth as settlers poured into the area, mostly into Cincinnati, but also across the river into Covington. Germans formed a large part of that growth.[1]

German immigration and church organization are discussed in the historical paper of the "German Pioneer Club." (This was a group of people who came from Germany and were among the original settlers of the early migrations.) The occasion was the club's 25th anniversary in 1903.

> "Churches, for both English-speaking and German-speaking, were slow in organizing on the Kentucky side. A number of churches had been founded in Cincinnati, including German churches of several different denominations. Gradually, however, the number of Germans here grew so greatly that they longed for their own churches and parishes."[2]

The German Protestants probably had the first preacher in Covington. He was the father of Mr. William Ernst, a prominent banker and one of the founders of Covington's First Presbyterian Church. Rev. Ernst occasionally preached in German in the English Presbyterian Churches. There was no organized congregation. The immigrant Germans were not Presbyterians: almost all held fast to Lutheran, Evangelical, or Reformed teachings, and did not join the Presbyterian Church.

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1 The founding and early settlement of Covington is well-documented in Allen Webb Smith's Beginning at the Point.

2 German Pioneer Club, 25th Anniversary Booklet, p. 27.

Only the Methodists were able to found a small organization and maintain it. The Rev. Heinrich Ernst Pilcher came to Covington in 1840 and stayed several years, but no congregation was established until later.

The first Catholic church in Covington was organized in 1833 at the south-east corner of 5th and Montgomery Streets. In 1834 (the same year that the town of Covington was chartered as a city) a church building was dedicated: "The Mission Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"---usually shortened to "St. Mary's." Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati officiated at the dedication, even though Covington was officially part of the Diocese of Louisville. An interesting clue to the make-up of the new mission is the fact that there were two speakers at the dedication: one was Father Stephan Montgomery, a Dominican priest who founded the mission and served as its first pastor---in English. The other speaker was Father Martin Henne, then of Cincinnati, who spoke in German. St. Mary's was formally constituted as a parish in 1837. The small number of Germans who belonged to it only occasionally had the services of a visiting German priest.

Everything to this point is really a pre-history of Covington's German churches, both Catholic and Protestant. The numbers of Germans were small. They either commuted across the river to churches in Cincinnati, or were served under some temporary arrangement in Covington.

By 1840 Covington's population had reached 2,026, and the number of Germans was definitely on the rise. It is estimated that 200 Germans per day were arriving in Cincinnati in 1840. That is when German churches began to organize in Covington.

GERMAN CATHOLICS

Let us first trace the development of the Roman Catholic churches of Covington. In 1840, there were only 74 German priests in all of America. A German priest was a real curiosity! And if a German priest arrived on these shores he was quickly "detained" by the bishops of the cities along the East Coast. There were many Germans there, and the bishops wanted priests to serve them. The bishops in the growing communities of the West had to take second pick. But there was also a growing German population to serve in the West. So the bishops sent pleas to mission societies in Germany and Austria to send priests. The author

of Mother of God Church's 100th Anniversary history quotes Bishop Neumann of Philadelphia in a letter begging for priests: "Among the hundreds of Irish Priests, not a single one has been able to care for a German parish with success."[3]

Perhaps that was not the problem at St. Mary's in Covington; perhaps it was. At any rate, by 1841 it was thought to be necessary to organize the German element into a separate congregation, and "Muttergottes Gemeinde" was formed. Again, from Mother of God's 100th Anniversary history: "Covington was fortunate in securing a German pastor at a time when the bishops of the country counted them as gold bricks."[4] The man who was the "gold brick" was Father Ferdinand Kühr. He was a graduate of the College for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. He came to America in 1840. Father Kühr began his work in Covington in 1842. In 1844 Father Kühr wrote about the founding of his new church to a friend back in Austria:

> "At my arrival in Covington two years ago, I met with about forty families who possessed so little knowledge of churchly matters that one could not attribute a name to them. I myself carpentered an altar, that at the present time serves as high altar in the new church. I made the remaining objects necessary for spiritual services or sought to borrow them. I then held Mass for several months in a hall that I rented from the Americans...I strove to buy a construction site as soon as possible for the new church...Since my parish grows from day to day, I see that the church will soon not be able to seat all the faithful."[5]

The hall of which Father Kühr spoke was an upper story on the lower market of Covington, across the street from the present City Hall. The inner dividing walls were removed and this hall served the Germans as their first church building. In 1843 there was a procession from the hall for the laying of the cornerstone of Covington's first German Catholic Church. The site was at the corner of Sixth and Washington,

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[3] Sister Mary Carmelite Brungs, S.N.D., The Church of the Mother of God: A Centennial Chronicle, p. 23.

[4] Ibid., p. 24.

[5] German Pioneer Club, p. 27.

which was then at the edge of the city. The first church cost the considerable sum of $7,597.51 including the building site. A school was built in 1848, and the church was enlarged in 1851. Later it was replaced when, in 1870, in its place was built the magnificently large Mother of God Church, which stands as a Covington landmark today. The cost then was more than $100,000. A new school was constructed across 6th Street from the church in 1905.

In 1848, German Catholics in the Lewisburg community on the western edge of Covington, where Lexington Pike started to wind up the hill, formed the "St. Aloysius School Society of Lewisburg" for the purpose of collecting funds for the erection of a school in that community. The school opened in 1849 with 23 children. In 1853, the Diocese of Covington was established, separating the eastern half of Kentucky from the Diocese of Louisville, and the following year---1854---Bishop Carroll dedicated a new brick church at the corner of Leonard and Worth Streets, clinging to the hillside in Lewisburg. There was a dispute about the name of the church---the parishioners wanted to call it Saints Peter and Paul---the Pastor preferred St. John's. St. John's Church it was, and it is, and it has been relocated since 1924 in its present building on Pike Street![6]

And the Germans continued to arrive! In 1859, Bishop Carroll invited two Benedictine priests to work among the Germans in the Helentown area---east 12th Street---which was then the southeastern corner of Covington. St. Joseph's Church was built at 12th and Greenup Streets and stood there until the late 1960s. The Benedictine Fathers also constructed a priory behind the church, on Bush Street, where the "Covington Altar Stock Building Company" was organized and housed. It was run by Brother Cosmas Wolf---no longer did priests have to build their own altars! They had someone to do the job for them.

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[6] Brungs, p. 34: "The First 'Kirchen Buch' of St. John's Congregation bore the title 'Church of St. Peter and Paul.' But Fr. Kühr objected: 'You are children of the Mother of God Church, and your church should be placed under the patronage of her adopted son, John.'"

This company became the center for the amazing architectural and artistic productions of the next few decades, which can be enjoyed in Covington's older Catholic Churches to this day. Noted artist, Johann Schmitt, was a partner in the venture---and Frank Duveneck, as a young man, served as an apprentice with the Covington Altar Stock Building Company.

The Benedictines also brought other brothers from Pennsylvania and established a monastery and vineyards on the hillside south of Covington. They called it Monte Casino, after the famous Benedictine monastery in Italy. It was organized in 1877. The "smallest church in the world," featured in Ripley's "Believe It Or Not," was built on the hillside and remained there until it was relocated on the campus of Thomas More College. The vineyard and winery supported the monastery until prohibition spelled an end to it in 1918. The Benedictines also established St. Benedict's Church on East 17th Street in the year 1885.

Meanwhile, back downtown, families from Mother of God Parish living in the western part of the city, formed St. Aloysius Parish in 1865. The present building on West 7th Street was begun in 1866. It has the unusual feature of a replica, in the undercroft, of the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. The replica was imported from Germany and installed there in 1889.

In 1870, still another German parish was formed---St. Augustine's, in Peaselberg---and the early history of that church was almost tragic. There were some bad investments in the early years, and the church actually went bankrupt. The building was put up for sheriff's sale, but fortunately, a corporation was formed to buy the building back at the public auction. It was then made available for the use of members of the church, who eventually paid off the debt. St. Augustine's Parish was sub-divided in 1890 to form Holy Cross Parish in Latonia.

Control of property was one of the early and serious controversies within the Catholic Church, not only locally but throughout the country, and the Germans had particular feelings about the issue. The Germans were often forced to stand up against bishops who, at that time, were by-and-large Irish, so there was an ethnic difference and a language difference along with the disagreement over policy. Mother of God Church, for instance,

had elected trustees from its very beginning. These were gentlemen of high competence and skill and professional people in the community. They believed very sincerely that the congregation should control the temporal affairs of the church while the bishops should control the spiritual matters. The issue was brought into the Kenton County Circuit Court in 1854 and was battled out there over a period of a year. The first decision favored the trustees, but later the case was dismissed. Eventually in all of the Catholic Churches throughout all the United States, the decision was in favor of the bishops holding title to the property.[7]

One last word about the German Catholics. That is a word about education, for having strong Catholic schools was always an issue with the Germans. A major question in the 1800s was how to serve the growing population of German-speaking Catholic children. In 1875 the Bishop of Covington, at that time Bishop Augustus M. Toebbe, sent away to Germany for his own sister who was a member of the Order of Sisters of Notre Dame. A group of sisters arrived in Covington that year and opened an academy on 5th Street. They also served as teachers in many local parochial elementary schools.[8]

THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Now let us move on to the Protestants. They were smaller in numbers than the Catholics in terms of Covington's settlement, but they also grew from the mid-1800s on. There were some earlier efforts, particularly from the German Methodist Episcopal Church, to begin work in Covington. Also, the Presbyterians had occasional German preachers who came to preach at the First Presbyterian Church, as noted above. The efforts of the Methodists took root in 1847 when a congregation was gathered, calling itself the Immanuel Methodist Episcopal Church. It was affiliated with a church in Newport in 1848, and did not achieve independent status until 1855. The first building was a frame Chapel in the 700 block of Craig Street. This building is said to have been the site of Covington's first Christmas tree. In 1869 the congregation moved to a building at 10th and Russell Streets, and relocated in Lakeside Park in 1950.

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7 Ibid., pp. 32-34.

8 Rev. Leo G. Kampsen, "German Immigration to Covington," Papers of the Christopher Gist Historical Society, Vol. 2, pp. 136-138.

German Protestants of the Reformation tradition---that is, the Lutherans and Evangelicals---had a later start. A Pastor Goebel came over from Cincinnati from time to time in the mid-1840s to conduct services in the city schoolhouse. In 1847 the group organized as the "German Protestant Evangelical St. Paul's Congregation." Prominent Germans, like the brewers Geisbauer and Degelow belonged to this church. They built at 11th and Banklick Streets: first a frame building, then the first story of the present brick building in 1861, and the upper story in 1867. In 1875 a tower was built---with a clock, a bell, and a hand pointing to heaven! St. Paul's congregation eventually became an Evangelical and Reformed Church and entered with that denomination into the United Church of Christ in 1957. In 1968 St. Paul's moved to new quarters in Lookout Heights.

During the days of flourishing German churches before World War I, a pattern emerged for the founding of new churches, not all that different from the founding of churches by other groups. A group would gather in their homes for worship or they would begin a Sunday School. Then they would seek out a pastor from some nearby church, who would help them get organized. Then, as the congregation grew, attracting the new immigrants moving into the neighborhood, it would move into a school or a hall to hold services. The next step was purely economic: when sufficient funds were gathered, then a building would be built and a pastor would be called.

Following this pattern, a small group in West Covington had its beginning in 1892. The "First German Evangelical Protestant St. John's Church of West Covington"---they liked long names in those days! The pastor of St. Paul's helped the new group get started and St. Paul's congregation assisted in other ways. Strangely, the 1922 history of St. Paul's Church makes no mention of this missionary venture. One would think St. Paul's would have been proud of starting a new church. It is not even mentioned. Perhaps it was so common in those days to lend a hand that no mention was needed.

Another church had a similar start in Latonia, then still a far-distant suburb of Covington. In 1908 a church was formed, first taking the name "St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church," then just "St. Mark's Evangelical," in 1934 "Evangelical and Reformed" and after 1957, "United Church of Christ."

Grace United Church of Christ had its beginning above a grocery store at the corner of Pike and Craig Streets in April, 1862. It organized as a Reformed Church, with help from other German Reformed churches in Cincinnati. A lot was purchased and construction of a church building began at the corner of Willard and Lockwood Streets. This was during the Civil War, and the story is told of how the builders stopped their work when Morgan's Raiders threatened the area. The Germans, out of their loyalty to the Union, went to the hilltops to help build battlements before coming back to finish building the church.

The Westside was a new suburb in 1862. There was a large estate owned by pioneer flour mill owner A. L. Greer across Willard Street from the church. That estate was not sub-divided until the 1880s, so that at least for the first twenty years of her history, Grace Church had a beautiful vista of trees and park and suburban landscape---in what is now a crowded urban neighborhood. Also, it was a lot easier to find a parking place in those days! Grace Church gave birth to its daughter church in 1894: Immanuel Reformed Church, Bromley. Again, through denominational merger, these churches became part of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1934 and the United Church of Christ in 1957.

Mention should be made of two other churches that also represent the German heritage, but don't share quite as long a history as these earlier churches: Zion Lutheran Church started out at 14th and Madison in the 1930s and shortly thereafter moved to Park Hills. However, the branch of Lutheranism that Zion represents was present in Northern Kentucky from its very earliest days. Hopeful Lutheran Church in Boone County was founded in 1805-06, the oldest Lutheran Church west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Bethany Lutheran Church represents the staunchly conservative Lutheran tradition of the Missouri Synod. Bethany was started as a mission by a Cincinnati church in 1934. Just in recent years it left its building at Wallace and Madison and relocated on Turkeyfoot Road.

What has been presented up to this point is a skeleton outline of the German churches of Covington. We have tried to answer some basic questions: When did they begin? What did they call themselves? And

where were they located? Of course, that is only part of the story. Let us examine three other questions to round out our picture of the German churches of Covington:

---Why the bewildering number of denominations among the Protestants? They had one name first, then another, they joined this, they joined that. Didn't those people know who they were? That's one question.

---Another question: Whatever happened to the German language and culture?

---And still a third question: Why did all those Germans come here in the first place?

WHY THEY CAME

Let us begin with the last question: Why did the Germans come to Covington? The American promise of a new beginning in a land of freedom and opportunity had a special appeal for the Germans. Up until the 1870s there was no Germany. There was just a collection of some 200 independent states. They shared a common language, they had a loose affiliation with each other, but otherwise they were independent and separate.

For a thousand years the German states formed a kaleidoscope of competing fragments that were always changing. First one principality would become powerful, gather allies, go to war against its neighboring states, then another would come into ascendance---and on and on---a totally unstable condition.

This unstable condition was not caused by the Germans alone: her powerful neighbors encouraged instability by aiding one party against others, so that all of Central Europe was torn apart by internal squabbles. The only attempt to provide some stability was a loose confederation of the more powerful German states called the "Holy Roman Empire." This confederation has rightly been described as neither "holy," nor "Roman," nor an empire! It was the last remnant of the short-lived empire established by Charlemagne in 800 A.D. The intervening years had seen the

emperor's power all but disappear, until in the 15th Century he was little more than a figurehead. Real power lay in the hands of the Prince-Electors of the major German states, always tempered by France to the West, and the ecclesiastical and temporal power of the Pope to the South.[9]

Then came 1492. We remember the year for two reasons: Columbus sailed West, and Martin Luther nailed a statement on a church door. Not the most newsworthy events back then in 1492, but we are still living with repercussions of both of them. Columbus' discovery opened up a New World. The Reformation brought into focus great unrest---both in the church and on the political scene---and it's hard to tell where the one ends and the other begins. Sparks from the Reformation literally set all of Central Europe on fire. The German princes---Catholic and Protestant---led holy wars against each other, in the name of religion, but often purely for political advantage. The most devastating of these was the "Thirty Years' War" (1618-1648). The Thirty Years' War cannot be understood simply as Protestant versus Catholic: Catholic France often sided with German Protestants against German Catholics, with the cynical purpose of destroying <u>any</u> threat from the Germans--- and adding to her own territory the German provinces along the Rhine.

At the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, France was powerful and Germany was devastated. Just one figure: the population in thirty years had fallen from 16 million to less than 6 million people. Germany was in ruins! One of the terms of the settlement was that each German prince could choose the religion within his territory---Catholic or Lutheran or Reformed. If your religion differed from your prince's religion, then you were in trouble. You suffered persecution or you moved out. Much of the early German migration into Pennsylvania and North Carolina began for that reason.

The 1700s began with Louis XIV and ended with Napoleon. Wars and dislocations and persecutions flared up for an entire century. When Napoleon was finally defeated in 1815, the rulers of Europe tried to put things back the way they were before---to their own advantage, of course. But it didn't work. France was no longer the threat that it once was. Prussia, in Northeastern Germany (capital city, Berlin) began growing in power. Pressure for democratic reform also grew.

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[9] Williston Walker, <u>A History of the Christian Church</u>, pp. 257-263.

In 1848 revolution broke out, but it was short-lived. The democratic revolutionaries couldn't overcome the growing power of Prussia, so those who sided with the revolutionaries and radicals had no other choice but to get out. Prussia, under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, consolidated its power over all of Germany and regained the Rhineland provinces that had been lost to France.[10] When the Franco-Prussian War ended in 1870, modern Germany emerged---a nation for the first time. All the forces were operating that would eventually destroy it as a nation in two World Wars: Militarism, which was fed by the universal conscription of young men. Religious persecution, which was now directed against any group that disagreed with the German State. And educational restrictions---intolerant laws that claimed that the control of the child belonged to the state.[11]

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[10] Dr. Martin P. Davis notes that "1790 to 1870 was not all war, revolution, and turmoil, although it was called 'Die duerre Zeit des Vernunftglaubens' (the barren period of rationalism). Positive, creative minds in Germany were making inspiring contributions in the struggle for more liberty and rights for the masses. In the literary field were Schiller (1759-1805) and Goethe (1749-1832). In philosophy, Kant (1724-1804), Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Fichte (1762-1814), and Hegel (1770-1831). In the musical world, Mozart (1753-1791), Hayden (1732-1809), Beethoven (1770-1827), Schubert (1797-1828), Mendelsohn (1809-1847), Wagner (1813-1883), and Brahms (1833-1897). Theologians and pastors were no less outstanding during that period . . . Hymnology was at its best preceding and during the revolutionary decades . . ."

(Conflicts erupted between the orthodox "old believers"---Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Evanglical---and, on the one hand, enlightenment rationalists---the "modernists" of the day---and on the other hand, the pietists---European counterparts of America's "Great Awakening" revivalists. Critical scholarship of the scriptures was beginning, often carried out with an anti-religious bias. Pioneering church-sponsored social work was another thrust, under the auspices of Catholic religious and lay orders, and newly-formed Protestant orders of deacons and deaconesses. "Missionshauser" sprang up to prepare clergy for far-flung mission fields, among them frontier America.---K.J.V.)

"With this background from which the settlers came to America, one may be more able to understand the struggles, tasks, and heartbreaks of our early pastors. Breaking away from a state-controlled church, from a totalitarian priesthood, when church life was not at its highest level---escaping from totalitarianism, autocratic monarchies, and from a rigid social system---revolutionary refugees, political escapees, underprivileged of all classes brought with them their prejudices as well as good qualities, and found it not an easy matter to adapt themselves to a free, pioneer life." Dr. Martin P. Davis, Historical Background of German Churches in and Around Cincinnati, Box 1, file 1.

[11] Kampsen, p. 136.

So people left Germany: in ever increasing numbers they left---Protestants and Catholics---and they swelled Covington's population from 16,471 in 1860 to 37,371 in 1890.[12]

Persecutions, wars, and the beckoning call of the new opportunities in a new land---these were the reasons why the Germans came.

THE RISE OF DENOMINATIONS

The second question: why all the Protestant denominations? One reason derives from the foregoing thumbnail sketch of German history: with over 200 independent states and each prince of each little state deciding what the local religion would be, a person really didn't have much choice about religion. If you lived in a certain place you belonged to a certain church, be it Catholic or Protestant of whatever background. In America, churches were based on a different order. Here they were voluntary associations of individuals. The question was wide open as to what kind of church the German-American churches would be.

Secondly, there were doctrinal differences that began in Germany. The Lutheran and Reformed branches of Protestantism had their different ways.[13] Americans will be more familiar with the English expressions of the Reformed churches: Pilgrims and Puritans, which became, on these shores,

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12 Fr. Kampsen relates the influence of placards appearing in the railway stations of small German towns, extolling the unlimited opportunities awaiting anyone who would migrate to Kentucky. Favorable comparisons were made between the Ohio Valley's topography and that of the Rhineland. Also, imported American bacon arrived in Germany, underselling the highly-taxed German-produced bacon. Ibid., p. 135.

13 Lutherans gathered around the Augsburg Confession (1530) and other doctrinal standards spelled out in the Book of Concord (1580). The Reformed group looked to the Heidelberg Catechism (1562) and the teachings of Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin for doctrinal guidance. Lutherans held to the belief that the elements of the Lord's Supper underwent metaphysical change as they were consecrated, becoming the real body and blood of Christ. The Reformed position tended toward a more symbolic understanding of the Sacrament. Lutheran liturgy was often "high," stemming from Martin Luther's translation of the Mass into German. The Reformed liturgy was generally "low," attempting to re-establish a purely biblical norm through exclusive use of the Psalms for music and great emphasis on the centrality of the preached Word of God. For a more detailed discussion of Lutheran and Reformed post-Reformation history, see United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, History and Program of the United Church of Christ, pp. 17-18, and Lowell H. Zuck, European Roots of the United Church of Christ, pp. 3-8.

the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches. While differing in organization, their doctrinal basis comes from the tradition of Zwingli in Switzerland, Calvin of Geneva, and the other reformers of that particular branch. To confuse the issue further, there was an attempt, at the time when the Prussians were gaining strength, to bring the Lutheran and Reformed parties together. This movement started with Frederick the Great around the beginning of the 19th century, and was called the "Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union."[14] It combined Lutheran and Reformed in doctrines and practices. But there were Lutheran and Reformed groups that had no desire to merge. Their followers came to America, along with the third, Evangelical group.

Another element in the formation of denominations might be called affiliation for practical reasons. This quote from St. Paul's Church's 75th Anniversary history written in 1922:

> "In the first quarter of the century of the existence of the congregation, they had very little fortune and much misfortune with their pastors. The good ones remained only a short time on account of the small support received. The non-efficient were hard to get rid of, which often brought on bitter controversies. The heaviest crisis of the congregation came when a few of the members desired to rule and control the congregation, to dictate everything and force the congregation to take a certain man as pastor who was so ignorant that he could not even write his own name, but who had the gift of speech and thus gained influence with the majority.
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> "The majority of the congregation refused to re-elect this man and this led to a division of the congregation in 1858. The minority attempted to get possession of the church property, and a long drawn-out legal entanglement resulted from this."[15]

Why affiliate with other churches? If there was an outside ecclesiastical authority maybe it could settle these kinds of internal divisions. Perhaps it could provide pastors who were better qualified and wouldn't lead the church into these kinds of squabbles. And

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[14] The Evangelical Church of East Germany, mentioned in the introduction above, is directly descended from the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union (1817). cf. Zuck, pp. 13-15.

[15] _____, 75th Anniversary of the Evangelical Protestant St. Paul's Congregation, p. 5.

perhaps congregations could join with other congregations to support the colleges and seminaries needed to train competent, capable pastors. These were powerful reasons for affiliation.[16]

INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

There were also reasons for remaining unaffiliated or for forming only the loosest organization beyond the local congregation. This quotation from the 75th anniversary booklet of St. John's Congregational Church, in 1967:

> "The basis of their religion was a simple faith and the spirit of thanksgiving (for new opportunities and freedoms that they found in this land). They did not feel the need for ecclesiastical direction from without. The church was to be the expression of their own devotion, and the church they founded was independent and not affiliated with others. This was quite common during the last century."[17]

There were many divisions among the Germans that were simply brought over from Germany, differences in dialect[18] and culture, differences in being liberal or conservative (either in religion or politics), differences in practice. There were some churches that began The Lord's Prayer "Unser Vater" and some that prayed "Vater Unser." We think it strange that there would have been divisions over such things, until we consider what happens when we try to pray The Lord's Prayer today, in English, and get to the words "forgive us our---debts?"---or "trespasses?" Some things don't change very much!

The historian must question whether differences among congregations and and groups of congregations caused denominational development or were used to justify and buttress group identities that were already develop-

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16 We should not suppose that problems of authority and the provision of capable pastors were simply Protestant problems. The trusteeship controversy in the Catholic Church was a struggle over authority questions. And the need for competent clergy led initially to requests for priests from German missionary societies and religious orders (e.g. the Benedictines in Covington) and later to the establishment of diocesan seminaries.

17 Rev. Walter Haupt, 75th Anniversary of St. John's Congregational Church, p. 1.

18 Davis quotes an early German pastor: "They came from North Germany, the low German 'Plattdeutsch.' Others came from South Germany (high German), and when they heard the Plattdeutsch conversing on the street and could not understand it, they thought it was English, and one said to another, 'If we could only speak English as quickly and fluently as they!'" Davis, Box 1, file 1.

ing. The answer is probably not "either-or," but "both-and." Dr. M. P. Davis summarizes the ingredients in the forming of congregations and denominations:

> "To understand the shape which German churches took in America, it is necessary to know the conditions in Germany from 1825 to 1870:
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> 1. There was a state church, often less than spiritual, with government officials guiding its policies.
> 2. German churches were static and formal---it was fashionable to be baptized, confirmed, married, and buried by the church.
> 3. The State collected and paid church taxes---only a few charitable institutions existed on a voluntary basis.
> 4. This was a revolutionary period against autocracy and military service. Many good teachers and preachers had to flee to the United States. Naturally, they favored separation of church and state, and more democracy within their religious institutions.
>
> "One result was that many of the Germans who came here were anti-church or neutral. Those who joined a congregation often opposed membership in any organized denomination. Many deserted to lodges, the Turnverein (gymnastic societies), Gesang Verein (singing societies), or Schuss Verein (shooting clubs---target shooting was the great American sport of the 19th Century) and ignored the church."[19]

It was generally in these social groups that the "gemütlich," fun-loving nature of the immigrant Germans was expressed---not in the churches. Religious prejudices common in that era (and not only in German churches) kept people apart,[20] while the social groups pulled them together. An example of the religious feelings of the day is seen in the pastor's report of 1899, Concordia Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), Cincinnati:

> "We are the only 'rechtglaeubige' (right-believing) congregation in this big city. We are surrounded by congregations which tramp on the Christian confessions. These congregations are to a great extent 'zuchtlose Haufen' (mobs without discipline). Their children are confirmed only because it is 'custom.' What a tragedy. But what do the wolves care who have a good living and call themselves preachers. Because we are surrounded by such wild, undisciplined mobs, we must be more strict to hold our own."[21]

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19 Ibid., Box II, file 42.

20 "The editor of the Katholische Kirchen Zeitung remarked in 1855: 'The American Know Nothings are not half as bad as the Free Masons, Turners, and other German good-for-nothing fellows.' Indeed, the German Catholics suffered more from the 'Forty-Eighters,' the radical non-Catholic Germans, than from all other bigots together." Brungs, p. 34.

21 Ibid., Box II, file 42.

GRACE CHURCH: A CASE STUDY

We have noted many reasons for forming congregations, the pressures that kept them in or out of denominations, and the influences that gave them their unique shape. Many of these things can be seen in the way Grace Church, Covington, came into being in 1862.[22] One story has it that John Schleutker, baker of pumpernickel bread and a founder of the congregation, wanted his daughter to have a "high German" education. The only place in Covington where such an education was provided for girls was the Catholic parochial school. The daughter was enrolled, and all went well until she was pressured to become Catholic. At that point, the indignant father gathered a group of his friends, formed a church, and called a man to serve as both pastor and teacher (it is known that a German-language day school was conducted at the church during its earliest years). Some people left St. Paul's Church to help found Grace, probably because of the contention there in the late 1850s and early '60s. Then there were matters of doctrine and practice: Reformed worship was simpler than Evangelical or Lutheran worship. The Reformed Church provided a strong doctrinal identity, based on the Heidelberg Catechism---no "tramping on the Christian confessions" here! The Reformed Church was organized on a presbyterian form of church government: constitutionally delineated authority was shared by the congregation, its "Consistory" (official board of Elders and Deacons), the "Classis" (assembly of representatives from several congregations which had limited authority over member churches), and "Synod" (name used for both regional and national policy-making assemblies).

The Reformed Church traced its American beginnings to 1725 in eastern Pennsylvania. It had established its first seminary for the training of ministers in 1787. The Reformed Church, largely through the efforts of the pastor of First Reformed Church, Cincinnati, helped the Covington group to organize. After the difficulties at St. Paul's, then still an

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22 cf. Gilbert Kingsbury, The History of Grace United Church of Christ. Also, there is a brief discussion of the history of the German Reformed Church in the United States in U.C.B.H.M., pp. 18-26.

independent Evangelical church, it is easy to see why the founders of Grace Church turned to the Reformed denomination: here was an established, external authority, capable of providing trained pastors, and strong enough to keep wayward clergy and congregations in line![23] One final story, perhaps apocryphal, is that St. Paul's allowed beer drinking in the church building. For "Reformierte" folk, such a practice was "verboten"---another possible reason for forming a separate congretion![24]

Denominations did develop, some strong and even authoritarian, others based on loose affiliation. Some, like the German Methodist Episcopal Church, eventually merged with their English-speaking counterparts. Others, like Evangelical and Reformed, overcame former differences and discovered unity in the common aspects of their heritage. They joined later with many of the former independent German churches that had found their way into the Congregational Christian communion, to form the United Church of Christ (1957).[25] Lutherans joined with their Skandinavian counterparts when language no longer made a difference. In summary, as congregations and groups of congregations joined to meet common needs, denominations were formed.

THE END OF AN ERA

Whatever happened to the German language and German culture? The high point was reached at about the beginning of the present century, when German could truly be called America's second language. But even then

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23 The original (1862) constitution of Grace Church states, "No unbelieving or rationalistically inclined pastor should ever be a pastor of this congregation." Davis, Box I, file 12.

24 This prohibition evidently did not extend to the personal habits of church members. A possible indication is seen in the Consistory minutes of 1925---a reply to a request from the Anti-Saloon League: "We are not interested to the extent of having a speaker come to us." Ibid., Box I, file 12

25 The complicated process by which independent churches eventually organized into the German Evangelical Synod of North America (1877) or into the free German Evangelical Protestant (Congregational) denomination (1911) is graphically displayed on a chart prepared by Dr. Carl E. Schneider, Origins of the United Church of Christ.

there was growing pressure to change. This pressure came from high places, and low places. We have referred to the efforts in Germany under Bismarck to achieve cultural unity---"Kulturkampf" (literally "culture battle"), it was called. The rampant nationalism of the 19th Century demanded such activity. Not only in the older nations of Europe, but also in the United States, there was a movement to achieve national unity through government sanction and social pressure.

Pressure from on high came from the highest place in the land: from no less than the President of the United States. These are the words of Theodore Roosevelt to the annual dinner of the Holland Society of New York, in the year 1896:

> "The prime virtue of the Hollander here in America and the way in which he has most done credit to his stock as a Hollander, is that he has ceased to be a Hollander and has become an American, absolutely. We are not Dutch Americans. We are not "Americans" with a hyphen before it. We are Americans pure and simple, and we have a right to demand that other people whose stocks go to compose our great nation, like ourselves, shall cease to be aught else and shall become Americans."[26]

This is but one example of pressure from high places, designed to make America that kind of "melting pot" where all differences are leveled off and where all cultures become one new kind of culture.

The pressure also came from low places---from groups like the "Know-Nothings" of the last century, and the Ku Klux Klan, which was a successor group. We are familiar with the part of that story which affects Black Americans, but there was another part which was anti-Catholic and anti-foreign. The tactics sometimes used are also familiar: the burnings, the beatings, the lynchings.[27]

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26 Theodore Roosevelt, "The Hollander as an American," America First, pp. 213-214. The writer claims maternal descent from the 1848 German immigration to Eastern Wisconsin, but took special interest in this passage because on the other side of the family he is third-generation Holland-American. There appears to be a somewhat lower degree of cultural assimilation among Midwestern Hollanders---and Germans--- than Roosevelt claimed for his Eastern Seabord compatriots, which is probably related to a much earlier arrival of his ancestors to America.

27 A well documented, local case in point is the "Turner Riot" of 1856. Covington Turners, on their way to an outing, were attacked by an "antagonistic gang . . . of Knownothings and Slave-adherents." Covington Turner Society, The First Hundred Years, pp. 8-14.

Pressure from high places, pressure from low places, pressure also from within the German community. There was what has been called the "second generation phenomena." The first generation of immigrants would keep the language and cultural traditions alive. Then came the second generation. That's when the questions were raised and the pressures began. Young people, who grew up with a minority language and a minority culture, were comfortable with it at home. But they were soon exposed to majority ways when they went outside the home, into the schools and into the larger community. The biggest crunch came in terms of the German language, which was also used in the worship of the German churches. The story of the pressure to change happened time and time again. It is written into the history of all the local German-background churches.

Perhaps the best illustration of the tension comes from a church to which the writer belonged in Wisconsin. In the early days of this century a group of young people brought a petition to the Elders and Deacons of the church, to have services, at least part of the time, in the English language. The church fathers responded in typical fashion, and wrote their answer in the official minutes where it can be read to this day, "Unser Gott ist ein deutscher Gott!" (Our God is a German God).[28] But it was a losing battle. Most of the churches gradually adopted a pattern of bi-lingual worship, where either parts of the service were done in one language and then the other, or there was an early service in one language and a late service in another. Or one Sunday you worshipped German, the next Sunday you worshipped English. An accommodation was worked out in some way.

World War I signaled the end of an era. And more than that: it spelled the collapse of a culture! A sad reversal of history occurred. During the Civil War, the German language was the sign of a sure loyalty to the Union. In World War I it became the sure sign of disloyalty to suspicious English-speaking Americans.[29] Covington was a hotbed of anti-German sentiment. There were rallies here---anti-German rallies. There

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[28] Consistory minutes c. 1916, Zion Reformed Church (now United Church of Christ), Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

[29] At Grace Church, a Consistory meeting was called by Rev. William Miller on April 12, 1918, "to discuss the advisability to eliminate the German services on account of the war with Germany and the general hatred of everything German by some of our fellow citizens." Davis, Box 1, file 12.

were petitions taken to the Governor of Kentucky to ban the teaching of German in all schools, even in the universities. "True Americans" didn't want to expose their children to this subversive element![30]

Then, to top it all off, prohibition came along and shut down those most German of institutions, the breweries. Of course, home brew continued to be made in German homes, but prohibition also spelled the end of those identity-giving institutions that brought the German people together---the beer garden and the social club, where Germans had kept their language and culture alive all those years.

How did these changes affect the people? Many changed their names. If your name was "Braun" suddenly it became "Brown." If it was "Schmidt," perhaps it would become "Smith." It was a time when German people became quiet, conservative, and felt the need to express a 100 percent, thorough-going Americanism. It was the churches more than any other institution that helped carry them through the great trauma of this change. Clergy today remember the great changes in the 1960s and how difficult it was to pastor a church during those days. How much more difficult it must have been for the German pastors in the years immediately following the First World War: what tremendous changes occurred in their religious communities and their cultural communities over that time! It's to the pastors' credit that almost all of the German churches in Covington enjoyed long pastorates during that time. The story is repeated time after time of capable men who were able to carry their people through a very difficult and trying time.[31]

During those years, the immigrations slowed down to a mere trickle. It was a time of drawing together in the church, a focusing upon the close family ties that had always been a part of the German churches, and which now sustained them. Some churches didn't make it, but many of them did survive the difficult years. Some even managed to regain the momentum lost following World War I. In Covington, the German churches survived.

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30 Kentucky Post, March 13, 1918, p. 1.

31 Davis quotes a pastor who served a German church in Michigan from the 1920s to 1950: "I came to your church when I was frowned upon if I dared to speak English, and stayed long enough to find myself disapproved of when I spoke German upon occasion!" Davis, Box 11, file 42.

EPILOGUE

From this point on, the story of the German churches becomes the story of all American churches affected by the Great Depression and another World War, then by the church boom of the 1940s and 1950s, the new age of mobility and suburban growth. Some churches followed their middle-class members in the exodus to suburbia, flourishing there as thoroughly Americanized, typically suburban congregations. Other churches stayed in their city locations, attempting to bridge the cultural gaps that separate the children of the German immigration from the latest wave of immigrants to the inner-city---the rural Appalachians.

On a world-wide scale, the great factor in Protestantism over the past decades has been the ecumenical movement. Denominational mergers have taken place as doctrinal differences were overcome and cultural differences were transcended. The conciliar movement brings churches of many traditions together. The search for unity has moved forward on the basis of covenants between congregations and denominations ". . . to provide a means of continuing relationship . . . so as to be able to collaborate regularly in matters of common concern, and to render a common witness wherever possible."[32] Locally, a Protestant Association was formed in the 1950s, giving way to the Northern Kentucky Interfaith Commission in 1969---uniting Protestants and Catholics in cooperative programs.

Interfaith cooperation became possible because of the tremendous event in Catholicism during this period: the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s. Among the sweeping changes effected in that Church was a re-establishing of the role of the laity (perhaps not far-reaching enough to satisfy the old trustees of Mother of God Church in regard to "temporal matters," but nevertheless returning to the laity a much greater voice in the work of each parish). Also of interest is liturgical reform, particularly the return to hymn-singing, which had been practiced regularly in German Catholic Churches before World War I.[33]

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[32] Dr. W. A. Visser't Hooft, former general secretary of the World Council of Churches, quoted in William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America, pp. 438-439.

[33] Fr. Henry Hanses, long-time pastor of St. John's Catholic Church, Covington, tells about an old German lady who cried with joy the first Sunday that the liturgical changes took effect: she had learned one of the hymns sung that day as a little girl---in German!

The community has only recently rediscovered its German roots. Covington in 1977 boasts of a new German restaurant and "Bierstube." It looks forward to the restoration of a "German Village"---"Mainstrasse"---in the Westside. It celebrates at its annual "Oktoberfest" (held for several years, strangely, in September!). All of this reflects a general change in the country from a "melting pot" mentality to recovered pride in ethnic origins: It is "OK" to be ethnic once again!

Where are the German-background churches now? The language is lost, save for a few inscriptions on our older churches. But the culture has produced some lasting contributions that are safe: a heritage of art, and architecture, and music---and a sturdy faith that has met the challenges of hardship and change. The churches are fully American now---no hyphen--- but they draw from the richness of their roots.

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