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11/2/15

GER 3410

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The History of German newspapers in Michigan



To start with, German immigration in America made a big influence on its culture, because first of all, Germans form the largest ethnic group comprising about 50 million people in the United States, and second of all, the diversity among German-Americans is much greater than among immigrants in other ethnic groups. In the 1670s the first noteworthy gatherings of German immigrants landed in the British provinces, settling principally in New York and Pennsylvania. Migration proceeded in extensive numbers throughout the nineteenth century, with eight million landings from Germany. Historically Chicago had an ethnic German population. As of the 2000 U.S. Census 15.8% of individuals in the Chicago territory had German lineage, and those of German family were the biggest ethnic group in 80% of Chicago's rural areas. As of that year those of German family were the biggest European ethnic gathering in Chicago.

Talking about German immigration in Detroit, In 1830 the first German immigrants – all Catholics and mostly farmers – arrived in Detroit from Neustadt, a small country town of about 2,000. Led by a man later remembered only as “Victor, the Hessian Columbus”, they had traveled by wagon to the port city of Bremen, sailed to New York City, and then jostled by covered wagons to Buffalo. The final leg of the trip was made in steamboats – a total journey lasting three months. In a city of over 2,000 Frenchmen, the Germans were grateful for one special consideration they had for their worship – a monthly service in German conducted at St. Anne’s by a French priest. But that couldn’t satisfy them for long.

Detroit was the center for the clerics who started on their missionary excursions. Priests were scarce, their duties trying, and they had to be constantly on the move to help out in case of need. Early in 1833 Father Martin Kundig, a German Swiss priest, was sent from Cincinnati to aid Father Badin at Detroit. He spoke English, German, French, and Italian and he lost no time in bringing the strays back into the fold. An early record shows that John Henry Gies, a Neustadter, assisted Father Kundig as acolyte, and introduced him to the Germans. A plan was formulated to use a rear room of St. Anne's Church as a chapel, and services were conducted in the morning, and occasionally evening devotions were held as well. Father Kundig preached to his congregation in their native tongue and soon had a record attendance at all church services. A separate baptismal register for them was opened in 1835. Still, as the Germans increased in number, they longed to have a church of their own. [1]

The German press demonstrates the typical cycle of foreign language publications. As German immigrants began to arrive in Michigan enterprising printers soon found a ready-market for German language publications. In the fall of 1844 Michigan's first German language publication, *Allgemeine Zeitung von Michigan* appeared in the streets



of Detroit. Like so much of the English-language press, this first German paper was intensely partisan, vigorously defending the interests of Michigan's Democrats. One paper, however, was hardly enough for the rapidly expanding German population, that also had a strong Republican element. In 1866 it was estimated that about twenty percent of the state's population had been born in Germany (200,000 out of 1 million). With such a large audience the number of German papers expanded rapidly. Between 1875 and 1900 German language newspapers peaked, with over 40 new newspapers founded in 15 communities. Detroit and Saginaw were particularly important as homes for the German press. [2]

World War I demonstrated a defining moment from which the German press in Michigan never recuperated. Obviously, at the war's beginning the vast majority of the German press supported the cause of Germany. The Germania of Grand Rapids gladly declared "Deutschland, Deutschland, uber Alles." As the war continued, German papers

whined more sharply about "English purposeful publicity" imprinted in the standard press. The overall population, however, had a tendency to accept as genuine what the German press named as publicity. Therefore, German papers became progressively disengaged furthermore started to lose publicizing. When the war started, the number of German papers had already begun to decline for financial reasons from their peak years, but the war greatly accelerated this trend. Grand Rapids Germania printed its last issue in March 1916. The final financial blow came in an Act of Congress passed in 1917 that required that foreign language papers supply exact translations of their war coverage to the local postmaster, until such time as the postmaster was convinced of the paper's loyalty. The additional cost of filing English translations with the post office soon drove most of the remaining German papers into bankruptcy. By 1919, except for a few religious publications, only three German language newspapers continued to be printed in Michigan. [3]

Despite the fact that the German press was the state's biggest foreign language presence, the Dutch press of western Michigan offers foreign language presence, the Dutch press of western Michigan offers a decent illustration of how the ethnic press was distinctive, yet the same as the English dialect press. Beside the undeniable contrast of printing in a language other than English, the Dutch press included large sections of news about "the old country." These sections were often filled with long passages reprinted from papers published in the homeland, coupled with nostalgic local writing. Both firmly recommended a continuous association with the old area and "the old ways." Dutch papers were more likely than English productions to blue pencil advertising discovered conflicting with community values. Promotions for carnivals, plays, or films are obviously missing from Michigan's Dutch newspapers before 1916, when one paper finally began to print ads for movies. Ads for liquor were treated deliberately, with the advertisement often noting the product was for "medicinal use." [4]

First of all, I'm going to be talking about German-language newspaper called *Abendpost* distributed in Detroit and accessible at different archives. I can't stress enough what a valuable research device the

