

University of North Carolina at Asheville

A New Home In The South:  
A Look At German Immigrants and Their Responses To  
Southern Institutions On The Eve Of  
The American Civil War.

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On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1864 German immigrant and Confederate soldier, Charles A.

Leuschner wrote in his diary of the devastation of Atlanta:

As we were marching through the City, I thought to myself: who would not fight for a place like this, 'A city so fine and a people so kind.' Who would want to see this place burned down to ashes. No, never but where is this beautiful City now? Perhaps it is scattered all over the world. Yes Gen. Sherman that never showed any mercy to any human being laid it down to ashes down to a levell [sic].<sup>1</sup>

This statement by Leuschner is surprising considering the Revolution that Germany underwent in 1848 before Leuschner immigrated to America. The fruitless struggle of the German population to establish a Republic that occurred in the 1840's filled much of Germany with enthusiasm for the possibility of "the triumph of the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the realization," of a "cosmopolitan humanitarianism based on natural law and the inalienable rights of man which transcended all national and racial boundaries."<sup>2</sup> Once in America some German immigrants left the South on the eve of the Civil War, yet there were also those who stayed and fought for the Confederacy and its "peculiar institution" which was inherently in conflict with the ideals of freedom and equality they had championed in the revolution of their homeland.

Many Germans who immigrated to the South in the decade prior to the Civil War faced difficult decisions. They had fled their homeland during the Revolution of 1848 only to be faced with more political turmoil in their newly adopted country. The immigrants of this revolution often identified themselves as "Forty-Eighters" which was

<sup>1</sup> Charles D. Spurlin ed., *The Civil War Diary of Charles A. Leuschner* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1992), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution: The German Forty-Eighters in America* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970), 18.

a group that embodied the liberal ideals of their lost revolution in Germany. Until recently little attention has been paid to the relationship between the European liberal beliefs often held by these immigrants and systems of slavery of the Confederate South. Early scholars often wrote in detail about the contributions made by "Forty-Eighters" living in the North and the connection between their liberal revolutionary ideals and the struggle of the Union to end slavery. While historians who study German immigrants in the South agree upon the fact that revolutionary ideals were inherently in conflict with the idea of slavery, little investigation has been done as to the reason for their loyalty to the South and support of secession.

In an article entitled "The Forty-Eighters in Politics" written by Lawrence Thompson and Frank Braun, the authors briefly mention that "Forty-Eighters" living in the South irritated southern politicians because they "were freethinkers, they also believed in universal suffrage, abolition of the Sunday laws, taxation of church property, establishment of the eight-hour day, government ownership of railroads, and a number of other equally pernicious heresies."<sup>3</sup> This is as far as the discussion goes however, regarding the conflict between southern "Forty-Eighters" and their American-born neighbors. Similarly, George Von Skal makes a brief mention of Germans in the South during this time as consisting of only a "few Germans who took a prominent part in the Civil War on the other [Confederate] side. They were without exception Unionists at heart and opposed to secession, but felt constrained to follow their states when the

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence S. Thompson and Frank X. Braun, "The Forty-Eighters in Politics," in *The Forty-Eighters: Political Refugees of the German Revolution of 1848*, ed. A.E. Zucker (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 115.

Confederacy was established."<sup>4</sup> Carl Wittke added an even broader assumption when he wrote, "it would be difficult to find in the entire German group even a small minority who were ready to defend the institution of human slavery as such, although there were Germans in Charleston, New Orleans, Texas, and other parts of the South.. ."<sup>5</sup> Frederick Douglass was quoted as saying, "a German has only to be a German to be utterly opposed to slavery."<sup>6</sup> While "Forty-Eighters" living in the North were often abolitionists, these historians overlooked social, economic and religious factors in play on those Germans who immigrated to the South.

Other historians have discovered however, evidence that supports a more complex set of ideals involved in the political and social choices made by these German immigrants who settled in the South. In Ella Lonn's extensive study of foreigners in the Confederate South she finds in German newspapers comments "bitterly opposed to any recognition of the Negro."<sup>7</sup> Another German paper "intimates that the abolition of slavery, combined with civil war, would bring upon the South the horrors of Santo Domingo." Anne J. Bailey claims that in order "to prosper and become part of the larger community," German immigrants living in Texas, "generally accepted the existing state government and some even became proponents of the institution of slavery and states'

<sup>4</sup> George Von Skal, *History of the German Immigration in the United States and Their Descendants* (New York: F.T & J. C. Smiley, 1908), 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution*, 192.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Douglass, "Adopted Citizens and Slavery," *Douglass's Monthly* (August 1859) in Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

rights."<sup>9</sup> Klaus Wust wrote in his study of German immigrants living in the South, "in their attitude toward the issues leading to secession, the Germans in Virginia were far from being unanimous," and "the German population in Virginia belonged to many divergent factions and consisted of such differing individuals as to reflect virtually every shade of opinion within their ranks."<sup>10</sup>

Another more recent historian Werner Steger looks closer at "Forty-Eighters" living in the South and finds evidence of "many German Richmonders who dabbled in radical politics in Germany and subsequently found a new political home in the Jacksonian wing of the Democratic Party."<sup>11</sup> Steger claims "German immigrants must have found a referential framework in the republican ideology of the antebellum, Southern wing of the Democratic Party which made the institution of slavery less offensive to or even compatible with their own liberal tradition."<sup>12</sup> Steger cites as evidence for these claims the idea that because of their experience in the Revolution of 1848 "many German immigrants could identify with the rising sentiments of Southern nationalism that stressed such rights as national sovereignty and self-determination."<sup>13</sup> Another piece of evidence for his argument is the formation of "an ethnic militia company for the defense of the city," which Steger claims "showed both pride in their

<sup>9</sup> Anne J. Bailey, *Invisible Southerners: Ethnicity in the Civil War* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Klaus Wust, *The Virginia Germans* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1969), 218.

<sup>11</sup> Werner H. Steger, "German Immigrants, the Revolution of 1848, and the Politics of Liberalism in Antebellum Richmond," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 34 (1999): 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

heritage and loyalty to the larger Richmond community."<sup>14</sup> Contrary to the early belief that revolutionary German immigrants were inherently Unionists, Steger's research shows that indeed many German immigrants who participated in the Revolution of 1848 strongly identified with the South's struggle for independence from the tyranny of the Federal Government.

While historians have considered German immigrants of the Revolution of 1848 living in the South to be either opposed to slavery or conversely in line with Southern ideals, little consideration has been given to the individual experience of these immigrants during the decade before the beginning of the American Civil War. What seems to be absent from previous observations is a comparison of southern German immigrants who took different actions as the Civil War approached. There were large communities of German immigrants scattered throughout the South during this time and their experiences were far from uniform. In some cases these individuals were representative of their larger community and in others they defied the generalizations of early historians. Either way their stories provide a different perspective from which to view the experience of German immigrants in the South before, and during the American Civil War.

During the two decades prior to the Civil War, German immigration to the United States reached its highest numbers with almost 60,000 Germans arriving per year in the second half of the 1840's. By the 1850's, that annual rate more than doubled to reach 130,000 per year.<sup>15</sup> In Germany, political, social, and economic systems were

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 15.

undergoing major upheavals which culminated in the Revolution of 1848. This revolution followed the popular uprising in France in the early part of that same year which began a wave of liberal uprisings that reverberated through most of Western Europe. The Revolution in Germany centered around the ideas of "national unification, individual freedom, greater economic opportunities, and popular self-government" that were echoing across Europe during the 1840s.<sup>16</sup> However, the Revolution of 1848 proved to be unsuccessful and only provoked a strong military reaction that crushed the spirit of liberalism and democracy. Many revolutionaries either fled, or were exiled, from Germany yet the bulk of Germans who left around the time of the Revolution did so to escape dire economic conditions and oppressive leaders as well as their strong

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attraction to the economic and political conditions of America.

Some of these refugees of the Revolution of 1848 who came to the United States identified themselves as "Forty-Eighters." Carl Wittke gives the definition of "Forty-Eighters" as "those who in some way actually participated in the liberal movements and the Revolutions of 1848 and 1849, and left their homes because of a conflict with the established authorities, or because they realized that henceforth it would be either too dangerous or too intolerable to remain in a land in which a reactionary regime would be

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in the saddle for a long time to come." However another historian Carol Poore divides the "Forty-Eighters" into four groups: "(1) radicals who wanted to extend American democratic institutions while remaining free of socialism; (2) supporters of the Free Soil movement and land reform; (3) Utopian communists who agitated for cooperatives,

<sup>16</sup> Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

frequently in the form of organized labor; and, (4) socialists who mobilized labor into a political force for change on a grand scale."<sup>19</sup>

However they classified themselves, the German born "Forty-Eighters" living in the North became avid supporters of abolition and the Republican Party on the eve of the Civil War. One of the most famous refugees of the Revolution, Carl Schurz became a prominent figure in American politics. As an avid participant in democratic uprisings of the Revolution of 1848, Schurz was facing a potential death sentence before he fled to

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America in 1852. Schurz settled in Wisconsin where he campaigned "for the young Republican party, which he had joined in 1854 to further the cause of anti-slavery and the

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preservation of the Union." Schurz spent his days touring the country giving speeches and in a letter to his wife Schurz commented, "The Germans almost everywhere after my

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speeches have come over to our side in large numbers." While on one of his many diplomatic trips to Eastern Europe, Schurz echoed the sentiments of "Forty-Eighters" regarding slavery in America:

With what delightful assurance I turned from this cloudy puzzle to the 'New World' which I had recently made my home—the great western Republic, not indeed without its hard problems, but a Republic founded upon clear, sound, just, humane, irrefragable principles, the conscious embodiment of the highest aims of the modern age; and with a people most of whom were full of warm sympathy with every effort for human liberty the world over, and animated with an enthusiastic appreciation of their own great destiny as leaders of mankind in the struggle for freedom and justice, universal peace and good-will! How I longed to go 'home' and take part in the great fight against slavery, the only blot that sullied the escutcheon

<sup>19</sup> Carole Poore, "Changing Visions of the Future: Radical Forty-Eighters Encounter American," in *German Forty-Eighters in the United States*, ed. Charlotte L. Brancaforte (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 105.

<sup>20</sup> Rudiger Wersich, ed., *Carl Schurz: Revolutionary and Statesman, His life in Personal and Official Documents* (Munich, Germany: Heinz Moos Verlag, 1979), 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Schafer ed. and trans., *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz 1841-1869* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1928), 216.

of the Republic, and the only malign influence, as I then conceived, that threatened the fulfillment of its great mission in the world!

Many groups of "Forty-Eighters" also published radical newspapers in the North, which "played an important role in introducing concepts of free labor and antislavery to the German-American working class."<sup>24</sup> German newspapers in the Union States called for Germans to join the Union cause and "stressed ethnic pride" as a motive for

enlisting. The *Louisville Anzeiger* proclaimed in 1861: "Whenever and wherever the Germans have participated in the holy war of justice against injustice, they have proven their innate talent to be exceptional warriors.. .Certainly Kentucky's Germans want to have a part in this glory.. .and follow their brave brothers [in other states] and help drive out these thieving hordes." This appeal to German immigrants implies that the cause of the Union was one of justice against the injustice of the Confederacy.

However, the North was not the only area German immigrants called home, and among the Confederate states, Texas and Virginia both had significant German populations. The German community in Richmond was large enough to warrant observation by both foreign travelers and Richmond inhabitants. Comments made about Richmond's German population reflect some of the anti-immigrant sentiment of the Know-Nothing Party in the South as well as give a glimpse at the extent to which

<sup>205</sup> <sup>24</sup> *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz 1852-1863*, 3 vols. (New York: McClure Company, 1907), II, 56.

<sup>24</sup> Elliot Shore, Ken Fones-Wolf, and James P. Danky eds., *The German-American Radical Press: The Shaping of a Left Political Culture, 1850-1940* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph R. Reinhart trans, and ed., *Two Germans in the Civil War: The Diary of John Daeuble and the Letters of Gottfried Rentschler; 6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Volunteer Infantry* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), xxix.

<sup>26</sup> *Louisville Anzeiger*, Oct. 11 and 24, 1861 in *Ibid.*

German societies flourished in the South. An English journalist reported on the Germans living in Virginia:

A large proportion of the inhabitants are Germans, who either keep lager-beer saloons, or clothing stores. They occupy the lower part of the city, support their own private theatres, "Volks Garten"—a favorite resort on Sundays—two newspapers, and a few churches. The German population is not liked in Virginia; they seldom associate, and never assimilate, with the regular citizens, and are generally dirty and untidy in their habits. In some parts of Richmond more German than other names appear over the doors.<sup>27</sup>

While this observation shows how German immigrants were a significant part of Richmond, and to some an undesirable part, Samuel Mordecai a resident and chronicler of Richmond in the 1850's however, wrote of the German population and its cultural influence on Richmond:

Lager has raised its head and a strong one it is, as are those of its countrymen. Lager has gone ahead of all other beverages. The number of "Saloons" that bear its name, is scarcely exceeded by that of clothing-shops, kept also by Germans. They are a valuable acquisition to our city, in many useful trades. They are also our gayest citizens, and enjoy their hours of relaxation. They have their Musical and Turner's Societies, their private theatres, though last, not least, Churches of different denominations. This is a new and pleasant phase in the aspect of our city. More German names than any other appear over the doors in some parts of it, and to judge by the conversation heard in the streets, one might be at a loss to know whether German or English is the language of the country.<sup>28</sup>

Not only did the South have a significant German population, but as Mordecai's observation shows they also participated in the liberal politics of the Turner Societies. German Turner Societies were among the most influential groups in the Revolution of 1848, and "when the revolution collapsed, they paid a heavy price for their rebellion

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Phillips Day, *Down South; An Englishman's Experience at the Seat of the American War* (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 1862), 139.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Mordecai, *Richmond in By-Gone Days* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1860 and 1946), 246.

against the reigning princes."<sup>29</sup> Turner societies were popular among the German immigrant population due to the fact that most German immigrants who were not of the aristocratic minority sided with the revolutionaries even if they were not a part of a radical society.<sup>30</sup> In the German-American press, both North and South closely followed the events of the Revolution and among them "there was not a single voice raised in.. .defense of kings and the status quo."<sup>31</sup> The existence of the popular German liberal societies such as the Turners in Richmond indicates the likely possibility that tensions increased between members of these immigrant communities and conservative southerners as the Civil War approached.

Indeed as the political situation between the North and South intensified, there were many in the South who became very skeptical of German immigrants and fearful of their radical European ideals. Anti-immigrant sentiments may have led German immigrants into the Democratic Party despite its pro-slavery stance. The Know-Nothing Party in the South that opposed the Democratic Party was founded upon the idea that "foreigners taught from infancy to hate and abhor American institutions, lacking correct ideas of rational liberty, social virtue, or political subordination, and habituated by education to tumult and insurrection, would be dangerous recipients of hasty enfranchisement."<sup>32</sup> However, the Democratic Party in the South made an effort to attract foreign votes and prominent "Forty-Eighter" Carl Schurz claimed that German immigrants living in the South:

<sup>29</sup> Carl Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution*, 148.

<sup>30</sup> Levine, 41.

<sup>31</sup> Carl Wittke, *The German-Language Press in America* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 63.

<sup>32</sup> W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 6.

drifted into the Democratic Party, which represented itself to them as the protector of the political rights of the foreign born population, while the Whigs were suspected of 'nativistic' tendencies... The attachment of the foreign born, and among them the Germans, to the Democratic Party was therefore, not at all unnatural, and although the Germans were at heart opposed to slavery, yet their anxiety about their own rights outweighed for the time all other considerations, and seemed to keep them in Democratic ranks.<sup>33</sup>

Whether or not German immigrants were "at heart opposed to slavery" is debatable, and seemed to be an opinion only expressed by "Forty-Eighters," or other German immigrants living in the North. Another "Forty-Eighter," Private Dietrich Gerstein expressed concern for German immigrants living in the South who faced the choice between the Know-Nothing Party and the party of the slaveholders:

The other party [Democratic] consists of the slaveholders, the Irish (Catholics), the bulk of the German riffraff, certainly all the Catholics, and everyone who is entangled in the Bible and believes the Negroes are the descendants of Ham. A rational German is in a difficult position, beset on the one hand by slavery and its corruption of everything, all morality, the shameless impudence of Christian preachers, etc. and, on the other hand, by the probable infringement of immigrant rights.<sup>34</sup>

Gerstein echoed the classic "Forty-Eighter" disdain of Catholicism and religious justification of slavery, which he saw as being in opposition to rational thought. Yet, another German who settled in the South when asked about his feelings toward his new home and slavery, echoed Gerstein's "Forty-Eighter" sentiments towards organized religion, but it seems he had less concern about the institution of slavery:

He [a German butcher] had been in this country eight years. He liked it [Texas] very much; he did not wish to go back to Germany; he much preferred to remain here. The Germans, generally, were doing well, and were contented. He knew but one German who had bought a slave; they did not think well of slavery; they

<sup>33</sup> *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz 1852-1863*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Private Dietrich Gerstein to his sister, 10 Sept 1856, *Germans in The Civil War; The Letters They Wrote Home*, ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich, Susan Carter Vogal trans., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 277.

thought it better that all men should be free; besides, the negroes would not work so well as the Germans... He was no friend to priests, whether Catholic or Protestant. He had had enough of them in Germany.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed slavery was not an issue for many German immigrants living in Texas, the majority of which belonged mainly to the Democratic Party. Rudolph Leopold Biesele in his study of German settlements in Texas finds that "the German settlers in Texas generally affiliated themselves with the Democratic Party, because the principles and tendencies of that party appealed to them."<sup>36</sup> In 1848 in the mostly German area of Comal County, Texas the Democratic electors received 106 of the 120 votes cast. While the idea of human bondage repelled many German immigrants, "the fact that the Democratic Party in Texas supported slavery did not especially disturb the German settlers." As the Civil War approached some German immigrants broke with the Democratic Party, yet Biesele claims "their vote against secession did not mean that they were in favor of abolition but they wanted to preserve the Union."<sup>39</sup> Indeed many German Democrats in the South saw slavery as institution that they may not agree with, but also an institution that was not to be regulated by the Federal Government.<sup>40</sup>

In the years that preceded the Revolution of 1848 many Germans fled to America, which offered a refuge from the social unrest that was building in Germany.<sup>41</sup> One such

<sup>35</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Slave States*, ed. Harvey Wish (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), 129.

<sup>36</sup> Rudolph Leopold Biesele, *The History of the German Settlements in Texas 1831-1861* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones Press, 1930), 195.

<sup>37</sup> *Texas State Gazette*, September 1, 1849, p 13, col. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Rudolph Leopold Biesele, 196.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>41</sup> Jon Heinrich Tolzmann ed., *The German-American Forty-Eighters* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 31.

German, Viktor Bracht who in 1845, "when political conditions in the German states were so unsettled," immigrated to Texas, "which held out many inducements to liberty-loving and enterprising persons."<sup>42</sup> Viktor Bracht wrote a book titled *Texas in 1848*, "to give to those of his former countrymen who were looking forward to the time when they too, would come to Texas as true a presentation as possible of this country with its advantages and disadvantages."<sup>43</sup> Bracht reported that "among the white population of Texas, almost all of the European nations are represented; but the most numerous are the Germans," and Bracht adds "three years ago every tenth person of the white population of the entire country was a German; now every sixth person is one."<sup>44</sup> Bracht heaped praises on the people of Texas and the political freedom in America:

Moreover, it should be remarked here that the rough and clumsy farmer, who may still be seen in many communities of Europe and Germany, is an impossibility in this flower of political freedom and social independence. It is to this political freedom and social independence that America owes the rapid development of her present power and greatness.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps no other country in the world with as small a population as that of Texas can boast of so large a percentage of thoroughly, scientifically and liberally educated men of the upper and middle classes as can Texas..<sup>46</sup>

Viktor Bracht, like many other German immigrants living in the South easily overlooked the institution of slavery and its apparent contradictions with the democracy he praised. Bracht mentioned the "negroes" as making up only a minority of the population in Texas, and claimed that "they are well treated, and aside from the thought

<sup>42</sup> Viktor Bracht, *Texas in 1848*, trans. Charles Frank Schmidt (San Antonio: Naylor Printing, 1931), XI.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

of perpetual slavery, their lot is undoubtedly far better than that of many servants and most factory workers of Europe."<sup>47</sup> After he mentioned the fact of "perpetual slavery" Bracht continued by praising Texas for its freedom and toleration of "all creeds" and that in "the entire state there is but one political creed, and that is pure democracy."<sup>48</sup> For Bracht, Texas was a land of freedom and in his words:

If the time should come in which the liberty of the country is endangered, the courageous Texas militia will be ready to a man..<sup>49</sup>

Another one of the many German families who settled in Texas, the Coreth family, arrived in 1847 a year before the Revolution in Germany. At this time the head of the family, Earnst Coreth did not believe Germany to be a prosperous place to start a family and his wife had given birth to three babies in three years.<sup>50</sup> Texas was home to the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants which offered a new beginning for over 7,380 German settlers in 1844, 1845, and 1846.<sup>51</sup> Earnst Coreth knew members of the Society "which may have seemed to offer a possible solution for a family expanding so rapidly in a land of diminishing hopes."

The members of the Coreth family were not involved in revolutionary activities while in Germany, yet many known associates of Earnst Coreth were considered radical. In 1848 Earnst left Texas for Germany where he was to meet with an old friend who was

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Ibid., 74.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>50</sup> Minetta Altgelt Goyne, *Lone Star and Double Eagle; Civil War Letters of a German-*

*Texas Family* (Austin: Texas Christian University Press, 1982), 7.

<sup>51</sup> John O. Meusebach, *Answer to Interrogatories*, In Case No 396 (District Court of McCulloch County Texas, 1893), 16.

<sup>52</sup> Minetta Altgelt Goyne, 8.

a prominent Revolutionary.<sup>53</sup> When Earnst returned to Texas in 1850, "rightly or wrongly, many of his fellow settlers looked on him as a 'forty-eighter.' Actually he found himself in the situation of being neither a "gray" (basically conservative early settler) nor a "green" (liberal, intellectual late arrival) in the parlance of some American Germans."<sup>54</sup>

However, Earnst Coreth's radical associations were enough to draw attention from local authorities in Texas. The Coreth family became close with a radical refugee of the Revolution, Dr. Earnst Kapp who in 1854 was elected president of the "Free-Society" in Sisterdale, Texas.<sup>55</sup> This group had drawn negative attention when, under the leadership of Kapp they made a "public declaration that the practice of slavery was incompatible with democratic principles."<sup>56</sup> Possibly due to the negative backlash against German immigrants that ensued "Ernst Coreth swore to renounce allegiance to all foreign lands and sovereigns," and in 1858 two of his sons, Rudolf and Carl followed suit.<sup>57</sup>

German immigrants who lived in the North were able to prove their loyalty to their new country by expressing their natural disapproval of slavery. Quite possibly for German immigrants like Vicktor Bracht and the Coreth family, who settled in the South they could express their loyalty by not challenging the rights of others to do as they please. The Coreth family it seems tried to avoid trouble in Texas once the war started by swearing allegiance to the Confederacy and offering themselves as volunteers for the army. While nearly every aspect of the war was discussed in the letters between the

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 15.

Coreth family, the issue of slavery and secession were never mentioned. Like many other German immigrants in the South, they very likely held ideals that were in conflict with the goals of the Confederacy yet the Coreth family chose to stay and fight in the South.

Among German immigrants living in Texas "the 'silent majority' were loyal to Texas, whatever misgivings they may have had about its seceding from the Union. The Coreths evidently belonged to this group and are, therefore, to a degree representative."<sup>59</sup> Once the Civil War arrived in Texas the oldest two Coreth sons enlisted in the Confederate army, despite the seemingly radical leanings of the family. The oldest son, Carl Coreth wrote to his brother Rudolph:

Father writes you want to present yourself if the militia is called up. I will do it too if necessary. There are people here who say they would not leave, they had not started the thing, etc. I felt duty bound to do it though..<sup>60</sup>

In another letter from Rudolph to his family he echoed the interest of his brother to enlist, yet Rudolph had trouble finding a suitable company to join and hints that he may have been enlisting partially due to the pressure of his family:

Therefore we want to go back to the mainland and see whether there is a place for us in Victoria. If we don't find a better place there, I am giving up the intention of going to war as a volunteer.. I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done; anyway there was nothing else I could do.<sup>61</sup>

Four years later however, the tone of the letters between Earnst Coreth and his sons changed to reflect the skepticism and weariness experienced by the whole family. Earnst wrote to Rudolph that he hoped his son would soon get his "freedom" from service, and

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., ii.

<sup>60</sup> Carl Coreth to Rudolf Coreth, 6 May 1861 in Ibid, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Rudolf to family, 6 November, 1861 in Ibid, 21.

he recounted an event where a deserter from their community was shot. He also took somewhat of a risk when he wrote of his knowledge of other friends of the family who he knew had deserted and were hiding somewhere on the frontier of Texas:

The Seguin reserve [Confederate] recently made raids on the Santa Clara and Cibolo. They caught several [deserters] among others a Schlather. Four deserters, among them two named Trebess, wanted to free him but when it got to that point, three ran away. The fourth, the younger Trebess, did not, however, and for that he got a shot in the forehead, which killed him. On Jakob Creek there are said to be a couple of camps of organized deserters that have been lying low up to now. Burn this letter when you have read it. It could perhaps get into the wrong hands.<sup>62</sup>

Before he received this letter Rudolf had written to his father somewhat echoing his father's skepticism yet he still seemed to mourn the lost cause of the Confederacy.

Rudolf wrote of his disappointment that his remaining in the war would not "bring any positive results, because our cause is as good as lost."<sup>63</sup> Yet in his disappointment he never explained what the cause of the Confederacy was, or what he would keep fighting for. In everything he wrote home, Rudolf was a loyal Confederate soldier, but once he believed the war to be lost, he disobeyed orders to search for deserters and told his father, "we did not find any deserters and didn't make any effort to find any either."<sup>64</sup>

Rudolf also reported to his father of the frustration held by all the soldiers that so much had been lost and again made it clear that he would gladly keep fighting if he thought they could win:

It is horrifying that such great sacrifices have been made in the firm belief that something would be attained, and that it is now clear everything was in vain... If I thought that there were still hope for us, I would be glad to hold out still longer in order to be paid for our sacrifice in lives and lost time. But I am at the firm

<sup>62</sup> Earnstto Rudolf, 19 May, 1865 in Ibid, 172-173.

<sup>63</sup> Rudolf Coreth to family, from Camp near Richmond, 19 May 1865 in Ibid, 174.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 174.

conviction that everything is over.<sup>65</sup>

While the Coreth family chose to stay in Texas after secession, another German immigrant Dr. Hermann Nagel could not bring himself to stay in a place that supported and fought for the existence of slavery. Dr. Nagel loved the "climate and countryside," but it was worthless to him "when the people who live there are like they are."<sup>66</sup> Nagel claimed that he didn't "need to leave Germany just to watch" his "fellow human beings in Texas become increasingly depraved and stupid."<sup>67</sup> Dr. Nagel wrote to his brother in Germany that he believed people living in the North were more intelligent, and he had given up on the hope that the intelligence of the North would spread to the people of the South.<sup>68</sup> He had loved Texas, but he could no longer live there, because in his words:

Ever since I witnessed this outbreak of brute force, viciousness, fanaticism, and the unbelievable perversion of notions of justice that I have seen in the South in the past 3 years, I've become apprehensive of living there any longer.<sup>69</sup>

Dr. Hermann Nagel left Germany a year before the Revolution of 1848 yet he "had much in common with the typical Forty-Eighter."<sup>70</sup> In Germany Nagel was active in a student radical association and as his son reported in his autobiography his father was rarely interested in a book "unless the Government had denounced it."<sup>71</sup> Nagel lived in the Cat Spring-Millheim election precinct where only eight out of one hundred and seven voters voted in favor of secession.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 174

<sup>66</sup> Dr. Hermann Nagel to his Brother, 5 August 1864, *Germans in the Civil War*, 399.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Nagel, *A Boy's Civil War Story* (St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1935), 67. *Germans in the Civil War*, 395.

Despite his feelings about the South, secession, and the institution of slavery Nagel found it more difficult to move away than he had previously thought. Nagel called secession "the most unprompted rebellion there ever was," yet he revealed in a letter to his brother that he may himself "go off to fight against the so-called invasion of the so-called abolitionists."<sup>73</sup> At the sight of so many men leaving their families to enlist, Nagel wrote to his brother that he felt ashamed for staying home "just because he doesn't want to fight for something that is against his principles."<sup>74</sup> Nagel was kept back "by a certain sense of shame, for leaving a country just at the moment it is overcome by misfortune, after having shared" his "lot with it so happily and willingly in better times."<sup>75</sup> He wrote that he was planning on leaving Texas when the confusion ended, and although he was going to be sad to leave he would have no choice because:

I will never be able to reconcile myself with the belief that slavery is not merely a temporary necessity but the true essence and basic principle of the state, without which civilized society cannot exist.<sup>76</sup>

Nagel ended up fleeing the South and conscription with his older son, but Heinrich Stahler another German living in the South had mixed feelings about secession and yet he stayed and witnessed the war from his home in Ducktown, Tennessee. Unlike Nagel, Stahler remained in Germany during the Revolution and did not come to the United States until 1860. Little is known of his participation in Revolutionary activities however he "tended toward European liberalism," as he "sympathized with the Garibaldi

<sup>73</sup> Dr. Hermann Nagel to his brother, 28 April 1861, in *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 395-396.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 395-396.

movement in Italy."<sup>77</sup> At the outbreak of the Civil War Stabler claimed his "sympathies are more for the Union," yet he did not agree with the "ways and means used by the northern government" which he claimed caused his "interest in their fate to wane."<sup>78</sup>

As the war continued, Stabler wrote to his family of his growing respect for the Confederate soldiers despite his misgivings about their cause. He admitted to being mistaken about "these people" who he had believed were "cowards," yet he thought it was a shame that such bravery was "based on such false principles."<sup>79</sup> Stabler did not agree with the cause of the Confederacy yet he did not oppose slavery either. Stabler was representative of those German immigrants who had adapted to their surroundings in Southern society, but still maintained their distance from the politics of the Civil War once it began.

Although Stabler did not seem to sympathize with the cause of the Confederacy, he was a friend of an earlier German immigrant and plantation and slave owner named Mr. Traun. In a letter home, Stabler told his family of the shortages caused by the war and recapped a letter he received from Mr. Traun in which he wrote: "we make the clothing and shoes for our Niggers ourselves and will soon have to make our own as well." Stabler later echoed the language of Mr. Traun in a letter home again describing the shortages: "Rye is our substitute for coffee, corn—which used to be used only for Niggers and livestock—is used in place of wheat."<sup>80</sup> While his sympathies may have

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>78</sup> Heinrich Stabler to family, 10 November 1861, in Ibid, 377.

<sup>79</sup> Heinrich Stabler to family, 7 November 1862, Ibid, 381.

<sup>80</sup> Heinrich Stabler to family, 10 November 1861, Ibid, 377.

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich Stabler to family, November 1862, Ibid, 382.

been more for the Union, his comparison of slaves with livestock shows that it was not out of sympathy for African Americans that he would have sided with the North.

Although Heinrich Stahler was unsupportive of the Confederate cause, the before mentioned German immigrant, Charles A. Leuschner enthusiastically enlisted in  
 Company B, Sixth Texas Infantry Regiment. Leuschner lived in Germany through the Revolution of 1848 before coming to the United States. In Leuschner's diary he never mentioned his feelings about the Revolution or the politics of the American Civil War yet he became a devoted confederate soldier. Leuschner became close with his fellow soldiers, and after one was killed in a battle he claimed he was "as brave and good a man  
 as ever walked on the face of the earth."

In addition to being a loyal soldier, Leuschner strongly believed in the cause of the Confederacy and mourned the defeat of the South. Leuschner was devastated as he marched through the burnt city of Atlanta, and he had nothing but disdain for the "miserable yankeys."<sup>84</sup> Leuschner along with his company had been captured and taken prisoner. Leuschner explained in his diary of the horrible way they were treated and the torture they endured at the hands of the Union soldiers and how it served to only reinforce his loyalty to the Confederacy: "If a man never was a rebel, he got to be one of  
 the best in that prison. I can never forgive what I have seen there."

For Leuschner the war he was fighting was to gain the independence of the South, and he never mentioned the institution of slavery. He claimed that "had we gained our

<sup>83</sup> Charles D. Spurlin ed., *The Civil War Diary of Charles A. Leuschner* (Austin: Eakin Press: 1992), vi.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

Ibid., 52.

independence, I would have bin [sic] happy. My heart would have leaped for joy, but  
 now it is not so." It may be argued that from Leuschner's position and many others like  
 him, the fight for southern "independence" was not so contradictory to the Revolution  
 that occurred in Germany in 1848.

Germans who immigrated to the South in the revolutionary years of the late 1840's brought with them their own personal experience of revolution that shaped the different ways in which they viewed the oncoming Civil War and the institutions of the South. The Coreth family was among the majority of German immigrants in Texas who at one point held European liberal ideals, yet remained silent in order to avoid persecution. Viktor Bracht like, Dr. Hermann Nagel loved Texas yet Bracht failed to see the contradictions inherent in the democracy he praised, while Dr. Nagel could not overlook them. Heinrich Stabler and Charles Leuschner were more supportive of the South and its institutions. Although Stabler maintained his reservations about entering into war, Leuschner fought proudly for Southern independence and never mentioned the institution of slavery. The broad range of the German immigrant experience points to the existence of a more complex immigrant history in the South that cannot easily fit into the categories given by early historians. German immigrants living in the South who fled the failed Revolution of 1848 it seems took actions to best preserve their own interests and values. In many ways their experience was not unlike their American-born neighbors who took many different paths in order to survive emotionally and physically when civil war threatened to tear their country apart. A German newspaper in Kentucky read on February 17, 1863, "abolitionists and secessionists were *"Zwillingsbruder"* ["twin

brothers"] in splitting the Union."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Louisville Anzeiger*, Feb. 17, 1863 in Reinhart, *Two Germans in the Civil War*, xxxi.

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