

Public Abstract

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Title:Shaping A True German Identity: Narratives in Hermann, Missouri, 1837-1857

Often immigrants are viewed from a stereotypical perspective where all persons sharing an ethnicity, heritage, and language are thought to act in a similar manner. This does not account for variations among individuals. From an historical perspective (e.g.; 1837-1857), I reviewed personal and public documents in Hermann, Missouri so to understand how the immigrants shaped what they considered to be a true German identity. I outline three types of narratives (e.g.; Yankeeedom, Old Prejudice, Authentic Germans) that the immigrants used to define acceptable and unacceptable behaviors for a proper German. I found that the true German identity among the Hermann immigrants was not tied to any innate or national characteristics shared by the individuals. Exhibiting what were considered to be proper behaviors and values was most important for being considered a true German. This research questions stereotypical assumptions about immigrant identity. The findings show that individuals take an active approach in shaping their identity. This challenges perceptions for reasons why some individuals may emigrate and how they see themselves in their new homeland.