

❖ Turn-of-the-century virtuoso Edward J. Kemper, right, was the first man in Hermann with a camera. Between 1895 and 1920, he photographed farm, family and civic life in this mid-Missouri town. These and other photos are on display in Hermann through October as part of an historical exhibit.

❖ Kemper's daughters, below right, celebrate Christmas around 1910. Anna Kemper Hesse, center, donated the glass plates to MU. The sign reads, "Today the Savior is born to you."



# Never broke, rarely rich

## Missouri inherits German values

BY DALE SMITH

❖ While riding west from Franklin County in the fall of 1848, German-American writer Gert Goebel heard the town of Hermann long before he saw it. He later wrote that cannons were firing "six-pounder" salutes in gratitude for Hermann's first grape harvest, only 11 years after settlers arrived on the bluffs.



Edward J. Kemper photos printed from glass plates by Oliver Schuchard, professor of art

Goebel got his last-minute directions to Hermann "by ear" just as most modern Missourians probably hear about German-Americans in connection with wineries, breweries and with celebrations such as the *Strassenfest*, *Oktoberfest* and *Maifest*. Lederhosen and oom-pah bands are perhaps the most obvious remnants of Missouri's 192 years of German

heritage. Even though four in 10 Missourians claim German ancestry, not much more of obviously German culture remains beyond leather shorts and brass basses.

"The world was strongly discouraged the use of German in public and taught Germans not to be different from their Anglo-American neighbors," says Dr. Adolf Schroeder, pro-

fessor emeritus of German at MU.

But the Germans go back to 1800 in Missouri. They were one-third of St. Louis' population by 1850. They've settled in most of the state and virtually own several counties along the Missouri River. Many German values, such as higher education, have become mainstream.



At MU, the master's degree program in German has been training students for a century. "Everybody who was somebody in German scholarship was here for a while," says Schroeder, who was awarded the German government's Cross of Merit 30 years ago for promoting German language and culture in America.

Dr. Walter Kamphoefner, MA '72, PhD '78, a native Missourian from St. Charles County, wrote his history dissertation on immigration as well as a book, *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri*.

"These projects started one day when I was looking at a map to see the German predecessors of towns near where I grew up," says Kamphoefner, who now teaches at Texas A & M.

To his surprise, two nearby Missouri hamlets, New Melle and Cappel, are named for German towns only 20 miles apart. These were not merely transplanted names. In 1850 census data, 70 percent of New Mellians were from Melle, Germany, and surroundings.

Before Kamphoefner's work, scholars assumed most German immigrants moved because they read Gottfried Duden's 1829 book, *Report*, which romanticized the author's three years of frontier life in Warren County. Duden did warn of dangers such as risking cholera by traveling through New Orleans in summer.

His warnings were whispers compared to his praises.

"All in all there is no European penuriness in this country, where a day laborer earns as much in one day as he consumes in a week, with the best appetite, of meat, bread, vegetables, butter, milk and brandy," wrote Duden according to a 1919 translation by Dr. William G. Bek, a former MU professor of German. That's just the beginning.

According to Duden, roads to Missouri in the 1820s were smooth and safe. Missouri's soils could support

farms for decades without fertilizers. Native grapevines grew more than a hundred feet high. Game was so plentiful that turkeys smaller than 15 pounds weren't worth hauling home, and deer hunters took hide and hind-quarters, leaving the rest for their neighbors.

Some of the many Germans who read *Report* formed societies with as many as 600 migrants. The German Settlement Society of Philadelphia laid out and sold lots for the city of Hermann to members before leaving the East. Other such groups formed before crossing the ocean.

"Throughout German speaking countries emigration societies were formed for the purpose of establishing a new German state on American soil," Schroeder says.

Duden dreamed of a new Germany — "... a little city," Duden wrote, "founded for the purpose of making it the center of culture for Germans in America ... a second homeland."

Kamphoefner agrees that there were good reasons to leave Germany. "Most immigrants from Westfalia, Germany, were economic immigrants," Kamphoefner says. During the 1830s and '40s, linen weaving, a large-scale cottage industry, was collapsing in the face of competition from more efficient and more mechanized urban manufacturers.

"This was exacerbated by harvest failures and record-high grain prices during the 1840s and '50s," Kamphoefner says. "Also, there was the perception that things were better in America. The chance for the landless to get land in America was a major factor."

Political reasons also figured in.

"Many immigrants were from the tenant farmer class, which had no say in village self-administration," Kamphoefner says.



Contrary to commonly held ideas that newcomers were cut off from cultural and economic lifelines once they reached America, Kamphoefner discovered that many 19th century immigrants were far from isolated. He describes chains of German kith and kin arriving in Missouri and finding many familiar faces and plenty of help getting started in a new place. Although some of the first migrants in his study

were spurred by Duden, most were links in the long chain that followed.

"The information they were most likely to trust was what they got from people they knew personally," Kamphoefner says. German-Americans sent information back home to relatives and friends, who followed by the thousands.

"These later immigrants were welcomed into Missouri communities like the prodigal son was welcomed home," Kamphoefner says.

The first travelers met pioneer conditions, Schroeder says. "It was rough and tumble woods and forests and prairies. Most Germans bought plots from the state or from private

## Outfitters, not outsiders

A real-life Lone Ranger traveling through any Midwestern hamlet probably would have bought his white hat from a German-Jewish storekeeper. But neither Hollywood nor most scholars have given demographically correct roles for Jews in accounts of 1800s small-town life.

Because 1990s Jews mostly are big-city people, few remember their piece of the American Dream in hundreds of town squares during last century's boom.

Westward expansion was not just geographic growth, says historian Anne Hessler, MA '91, of Columbia. "There was a feeling of unlimited opportunity, of 'live and let live.' In many ways these towns were more cosmopolitan than they are now."

Jews were respected in this era of accents and foreign-language newspapers, says Hessler, whose master's thesis documents the place of small-town Jews in Missouri from 1850 to 1900.

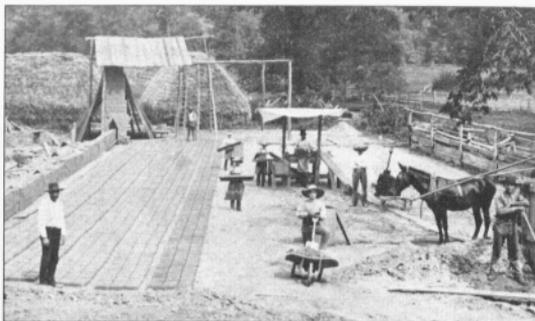
What was their place? Hessler describes Jews as integrated in local civic and economic life. Often successful dry-goods business owners, they were thrifty and took care of their own. Many were invited into service organizations such as the Odd Fellows — the 19th century equivalent of Kiwanis.

Even so, Hessler says, "They were still known as 'the Jew in town.'" Although the label was not derisive, it was a sign of sometimes self-imposed ethnic isolation for the usual handful of families in a town. Few first-generation immigrants married Gentiles. But these ethnic outposts were well connected.

"Huge family networks offered business support nationally," Hessler says. "Networks of friends within a 200-mile radius often provided marriage partners." If you were a Lowenstein in Marshall, Mo., during the 1890s, she says, you knew who was marriageable in Lawrence, Kan.

## Books by faculty and alumni

- ♦ *Hold Dear, As Always: Jette, a German Immigrant Life in Letters*, edited by Adolf E. Schroeder, professor emeritus of German at MU, and Carla Schulz-Geisberg; translated from German by Adolf E. Schroeder
- ♦ *News from the Land of Freedom, German Immigrants Write Home*, edited by Walter Kamphoefner, AB '72 PhD '78, Wolfgang Helbich and Ulrike Sommer; translated by Susan Carter Vogel
- ♦ *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri* by Walter Kamphoefner, AB '72 PhD '78
- ♦ *The German-American Experience in Missouri: Essays in Commemoration of the Tricentennial of German Immigration to America, 1683-1983*, edited by Howard Wight Marshall, director, Missouri Cultural Heritage Center, and James Goodrich, MA '74, director, Missouri Historical Society.



citizens, who had "improved" some land. This probably meant that there was an acre or two that was tillable and perhaps fenced.

♦ **Many Germans** learned the basics of homesteading — clearing land, building log cabins and fences — from their Anglo-American neighbors.

Although they couldn't transplant all of their skills, Germans came well equipped in other ways.

Among the immigrant's values, Kamphoefner says, was a frugal and conservative national character.

"German stock is probably less likely to go broke or strike it rich than any group in the country. They are averse to risk, less speculative, less

willing to go into debt," Kamphoefner says. "Another characteristic in great supply is "stick-to-itiveness."

German families living in predominantly German counties — Warren, Franklin, Osage and Gasconade — in 1870 were twice as likely to be living there a century later as Anglo-American families.

This character is consistent from farmers to urban artisans. They'll start the business and stay put. But, Kamphoefner says, "They're not trying to franchise it."

Even so, Germans have managed to float many parts of their culture into the mainstream. Examples include our current emphasis on exercise, music and language in and out of schools, Schroeder says.

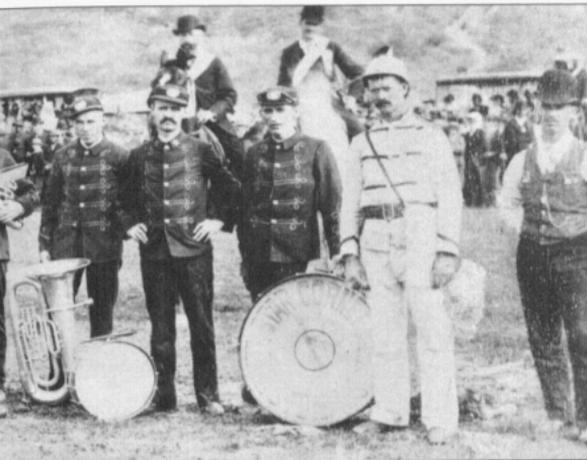
The Turner movement in early 19th century Germany cultivated physical strength in men. This idea crossed the ocean in the form of physical education classes and as Turner health clubs, which still exist in St. Louis, Lexington, Jefferson City and Kansas City, Schroeder says.

Although these early athletes lacked Walkman radios, they may have been moving to melodies. Musical training started in homes and schools, and many musicians later took their sounds to the town square.

"Music is inseparable from German life. Any town that had any self-respect had a band. Bethel, for example, has had a town band since the 1840s," Schroeder says. Bands became symbols of democracy because



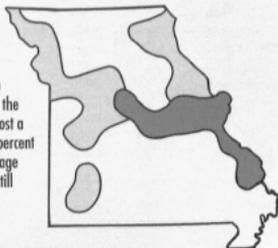
- ❖ Far left, the Westphalia brick yard was one of many ways Germans added to Missouri's economy and growth. Germans preferred the permanence of brick and stone buildings.
- ❖ A century before spandex, Turner athletic clubs, such as this late 1800s group from Hermann, at left, were building sound bodies to carry sound minds. The German enthusiasm for fitness found its way into schools in the form of physical education classes.



- ❖ The Lexington, Mo., band and Charles Geyer, in snake costume, celebrate the opening of a pontoon bridge over the Missouri River in 1889. Bands and singing groups were a mainstay of German-American culture.

Western Historical Manuscript Collection photos

- ❖ This map by Walter Schroeder, assistant professor of geography, shows that although German immigrants settled all over Missouri in the 1800s and 1900s, the heaviest concentrations were along the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, indicated by the shaded areas. In 1860, Germans owned more than 90 percent of the land in Gasconade County, located in the darkest area. Almost a century later, 71 percent of neighboring Osage County residents still claimed German heritage.



German custom had restricted recruitment to the middle class.

"But in America, everyone could participate because all were free to mingle," Schroeder says. "So, for the first time, the doctor would play next to the butcher and the school teacher."

❖ **Until the late 1800s,** many of these teachers were conducting half or more of their class time in German, Schroeder says. Many Catholic and Lutheran schools continued well into the 1920s. After that, parents passed their language down at home and through organizations and churches.

"The German language hangs on much longer in chain migration communities, particularly isolated rural

communities," Kamphoefner says.

In 1940, three-fourths of second-generation Germans in several rural Missouri counties still claimed German as their mother tongue. A German language newspaper in Hermann, the *Volksblatt*, lasted until 1928, serving third- and fourth-generation Germans. And a few churches in Augusta, Hermann, Concordia and New Melle conducted at least some of their services in German until the 1940s and 1950s.

"To this day there is a dialectic tinge," Schroeder says, in heavily German counties such as Perry.

These Lutherans might say "Vaber" for "Weber." Or, instead of stopping off at their grandmother's house, some German-Americans

might "go by grandmother" on the way home.

In 1937, William Seabrook visited New Melle in Kamphoefner's native St. Charles County, only 30 miles from St. Louis: "I walked into a general store," Seabrook wrote, "and for a moment passed unnoticed while a group of farm children, some of them barely toddling, were buzzing to each other and to the storekeeper in German, not one word of English — not even English slang."

One of the "more progressive" New Melle farmers Seabrook spoke with forbade his children to speak German at home. "They are going to be Americans," the farmers said, "even though we do live in St. Charles County!"