



German Village Germans in the Civil War German Village in the Late 1800s

Historical Context and Overview

When President Lincoln visited Columbus in 1859, the city was already participating in debates about what the country should do with slavery, what would happen to the existing Whig Party in light of the emerging new Republican party, and if war came, how would Columbus, as the capital of Ohio, respond. While it was the capital of a state that was totally committed to the Union, the city occasionally showed its older immigration roots. The west side and old Franklinton neighborhood had been founded by immigrants from Kentucky and Virginia while the north side and Worthington had been founded by migrations from New England and the Western Reserve.

Many of the recruits were the most recent of immigrants to Columbus from Germany and Ireland. Why did German and Irish immigrants volunteer? As immigrants to a new home, it was a chance to show patriotism, especially for people who had seen tyranny and despotism of Europe's old orders or even serfdom in Russia. It was also a chance to prove that one was a real American. Nativist political groups who favored those with older Anglo-Saxon roots, opposed immigrants (and Jews and Catholics in particular).

An example of the "coming of age" of the German community was evident when one looked at how many Germans were on city council or who became mayor, but the physical evidence that remains is the Great Southern/Westin Hotel, the Southern Theater, and the commercial block that runs on the east side of South High from Main to Mound Streets. Financed by German Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish business interests, working together (but with an Irish contractor), the Great Southern Hotel, built in the late 1890s was the crown jewel of the city, visited by famous dignitaries and stayed in by U.S. Presidents--and it was fireproof. The Chittenden Hotel had burned down a year before, and Columbus Germans wanted to build the first fireproof hotel with all amenities—an adjacent theater that sported the new bare electric lights (as did the hotel's ballroom), a rooftop beer garden, an oyster ball, and a discreet ladies' entrance on the north side of the hotel lobby.

With four German language newspapers, German public schools, well-known and respected German businessmen (Lazarus, Schlee, Hoster, Born, Hartman, Schoedinger, and others), a Lutheran college, Germans hotels and commercial buildings, four German singing societies, Germans had proved that their industriousness and frugality had helped create a city on the verge of modern times.

Standards Alignment

Ohio's New Learning Standards: K-12 Social Studies

Grade 3, Content Statement 9: Members of local communities have social and political responsibilities.

Grade 8, Content Statement 8: The movement of people, products, and ideas resulted in new patterns of settlement and land use that influenced the political and economic development of the United States.

Grade 8, Content Statement 11: disputes over the nature of federalism, complicated by economic developments in the United States, resulted in sectional issues, including slavery, which led to the American Civil War.

HS American History, Content Statement 10: The rise of corporations, heavy industry, mechanized farming, and technological innovations transformed the American economy from an agrarian to an increasingly urban industrial society.

HS American History, Content Statement 12: Immigration, internal migration, and urbanization transformed American life.

Learning Objectives

- Explain why German immigrants participated in the Civil War.
- Discuss how Germans played a role in the post-Civil War prosperity of Columbus.
- Explain how Columbus benefited from the Civil War.
- Discuss how German contributions of the 19th and early 20th century helped to transform American life

Discussion Questions

1. What role did German Americans from Columbus and Ohio play in the Civil War? Why would the German-born Americans fight in the Civil War?
2. Why did Columbus grow after the Civil War? How did Germans play a role in the post-Civil War prosperity of Columbus?
3. How might life in American been “transformed” between the start of the Civil War in 1861 and life thirty years later in 1891? What would transformations look like?

Extension Activity

Create a diary entry or letter from a Columbus German immigrant to his grandchildren on the occasion of his 70th birthday in 1925. He was born in Berlin, came to Columbus with his family, was 16 when he joined the Union troops, fought in Kentucky, survived the war, came home and married—what might he have seen? Done for a living? Contributed to the growth of Columbus? What advice might he give to the younger generation?

Create a graphic organizer (could be a web) that shows the influence of Germans in the 19th century Columbus in politics, manufacturing, and leisure time. Create an organizer that might include branches from these themes that include specific examples.

Additional Resources

Teaching Columbus: German Village <http://www.teachingcolumbus.org/neighborhoods2.htm>

Funding provided by:

