

# A HISTORY OF THE GERMAN SETTLERS IN WASHTENAW COUNTY

1830 to 1930

by:

Dale R. Herter and Terry Stollsteimer

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This is a brief history of a group of German immigrants who settled in Washtenaw County, Michigan. They are our ancestors, the ancestors of many families from Washtenaw County, and the ancestors of a number of people spread across the United States. These immigrants probably numbered over 1,500 families and emigrated from various portions of German-speaking Europe. They settled in Washtenaw County from 1830 to around 1900. Theirs is an American immigration story that has many parallels in other parts of the United States; one in which immigrants arrived in a strange land, spoke a different language from the majority, and therefore tended to form a cohesive community bound by a common language and customs. We often resist thinking of our own ancestors as poor, foreign-tongued immigrants, similar to many immigrant groups of today, who also tend to stay together in separate communities. This self-imposed isolation can have consequences, as these immigrants are sometimes on the receiving end of unflattering descriptions and even outright prejudicial taunts, but given their achievements, they are often admired as well. These were our ancestors too, at one time.

During the early decades of European settlement in Washtenaw County, from around 1820 to 1850, settlers consisted primarily of 4 groups: (1) Americans (Yankees) of primarily British descent from New England, New York, and the mid-Atlantic States, (2) English-speaking immigrants from Canada, (3) the Irish (who spoke English), and (4) the Germans. As stated by Jonathan Marwil in *A History of Ann Arbor*, referring to Washtenaw County of the mid-1800's:



*Michael & Christina (Armbruster) Luckhardt*

*“... the various immigrant groups were more or less absorbed into the Ann Arbor community within a few years.*

*Not so the Germans. They learned English but kept their native tongue and made sure their children learned it. They joined local groups and entered politics, but they prayed in their own churches, gathered in their own service organizations, formed their own band, and established their own volunteer fire company, which drew the admiration of their Yankee neighbors. Assimilated and much respected for their industry and public spirit, they nonetheless retained for decades a separate identity as well.”*

The relatively large population and common bonds of language and traditions kept this community cohesive, at least until World War I. From that time onward, two world wars fought with Germany encouraged the local German-speakers to mostly abandon their language and fully integrate into American Society. For many decades, sons of German immigrants tended to marry daughters of German immigrants, so that many Washtenaw County families can count themselves as being of full German parentage, even after 5 or 6 generations. This fact attests to both the size and cohesiveness of this group of settlers. The language was maintained as well, at least for a time. Fluent German speakers persisted in the area well into the 1980's, fully 150 years after the first group of immigrants had arrived.

These are our ancestors and we should try to learn something about them. In telling their story, we can learn a little more about ourselves and perhaps even foster greater tolerance for those in this country whose immigration story is just beginning.

### **The Early Years (1830-1860)**

To set the stage; from 1800 to 1820, Michigan Territory was a young, raw part of the western frontier of the United States. Although French traders had established a fort and townsite at Detroit since the 1600's, inland European settlements in Michigan were essentially non-existent until the 1800's. The French established the first settlement in what is now Washtenaw County in 1805 at an intersection of several major Indian trails on the banks of the Huron River called Woodruff's Grove (near present-day Ypsilanti). Washtenaw County at the time was essentially wilderness.

Explorers in the county, from around 1800 to as late as 1822 left various descriptions of their travels in the area and commented that they often got lost if they wandered away from well-used Indian trails. Although mostly forested, the Indians did create some openings in the wilderness, known then as "prairies". This was often done by igniting forest fires in the right places and right seasons. Explorers told of occasional dangerous encounters with hostile Indians (the most common local tribes were the Wyandotte and Pottawatomie), although the roving bands were largely friendly and traded regularly with the settlers. Pioneers were also forced to keep guard over their livestock from marauding packs of wolves. As late as 1834, wolves were still present in the county, as attested by the loss of 20 sheep to a wolf pack during a single night in Freedom Township (Figure 1).

In 1818 the U.S. congress sent a field party to Michigan territory to survey its potential for use as soldier's bounty lands (land given to soldiers for their service to the country). This survey party waded through the low swampy land in what is now Monroe and Lenawee counties, and deemed Michigan worthless for agricultural purposes! After that, much of the westward expansion of European settlers proceeded south of Michigan into Ohio, Indiana, and westward to Illinois.

Decades later, once the higher, drier ground found in the glacial moraines of Washtenaw and Jackson counties became known, settlers began to stream into Michigan territory. It

took almost 20 years after the French settlement at Woodruff's Grove before pioneers John Allen and Elisha Rumsey (American fortune-seekers from Virginia and New York, respectively) purchased a newly surveyed town site on the Banks of the Huron River. The year was 1824 and they called their town Annarbour, in honor of the first name of both of their wives (Ann) and "arbour" (arbor) a word incorporated as a marketing technique. They thought it would make settlers think of a serene, verdant place, and reflected the peaceful setting of the burr oak prairie where they built their cabins. They felt the time was right for settlement of the area and staked their fortunes on hopes that both Americans and foreign immigrants would arrive to purchase their lots.

Washtenaw County in 1824 constituted 6 homes built by the French at Woodruff's Grove, and 2 homes built by the Americans at Ann Arbor (Allen's and Rumsey's cabins with a tent set up for visiting land prospectors). A few additional homesteaders' and squatters' cabins were scattered around the area, which was otherwise unsettled. In the Midwest, westward expansion by Americans and foreign immigrants was proceeding rapidly, and taming of the wilderness did not take long. By 1830, a local writer noted that the townsites at Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor "...had become considerable, and many openings could be seen in the forest".

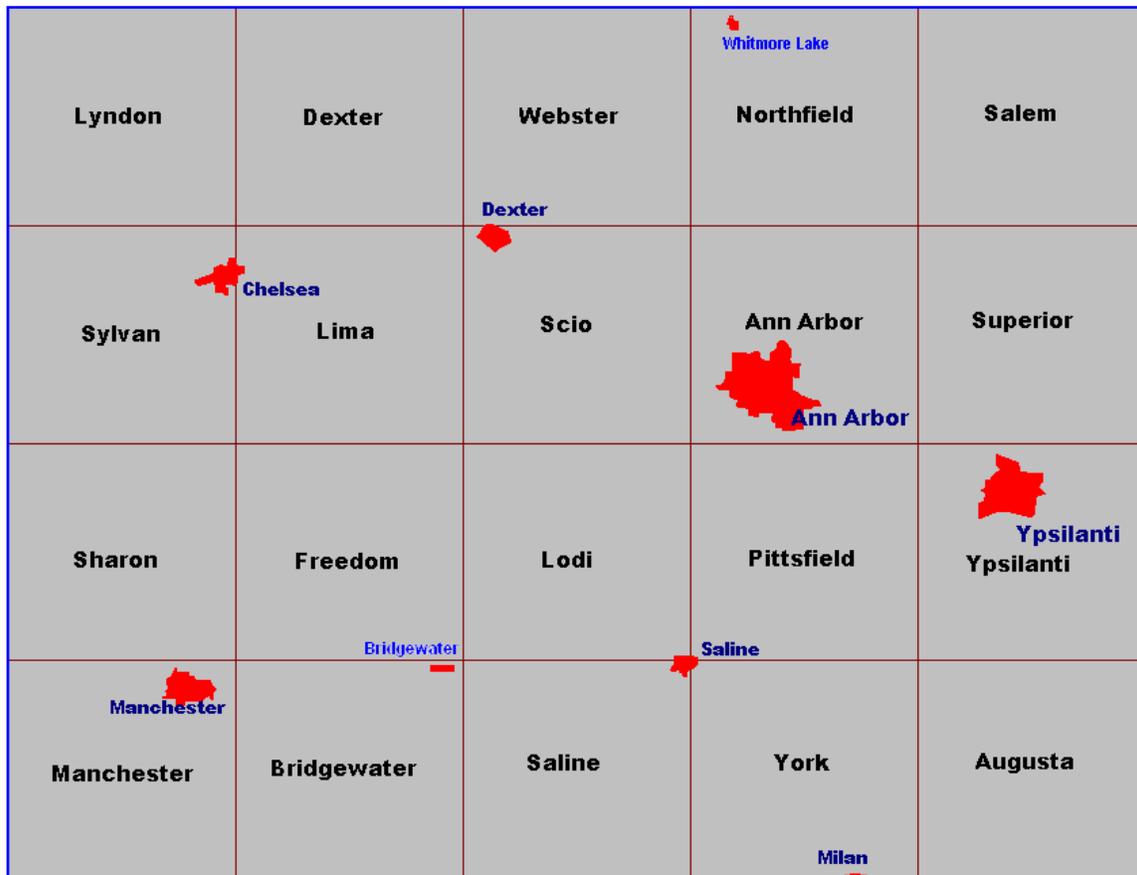


Figure 1. Cities, towns, and townships of Washtenaw County.

Most of the surveyed lots and homesteads in the county were originally purchased by Americans from New York, Pennsylvania, and New England. These settlers had come west as homesteaders and land speculators following the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. A few early German pioneer families also bought their lots directly from the government, but more often the Yankee settlers resold their lots to immigrants as soon as a tidy profit could be made. Immigrants fresh off of boats arriving in New York harbor and other ports were offered brochures describing the productive lands of Washtenaw County, so they too headed west. These included our ancestors, small groups of friends and relatives seeking larger plots and cheaper land to farm, all better opportunities than what could be had in the over-crowded villages and countrysides of Germany. The local Yankee population did not always appreciate such a large influx of foreigners, however.

From *The Making of Ann Arbor*, an on-line document:

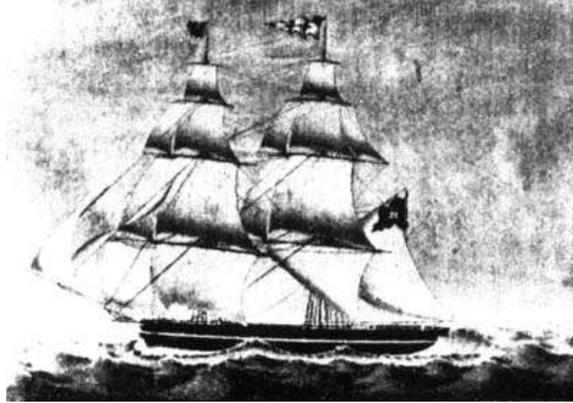
*Not all Ann Arborites welcomed the newcomers. The 1840's and '50's saw a flourishing of anti-immigrant [German] and anti-Catholic [Irish] sentiments in the county. Some of the town's citizens formed the "Native American Association of Ann Arbor" advocating a tax on incoming foreigners, a twenty-one-year residence requirement for naturalization, and a "certificate of good moral character" for entering aliens.*

## **The Trip**

German-speaking emigrants in the early-1800's typically began their journey by river barge or ox-drawn cart, leaving their home villages and traveling westward through France to LeHavre, through Belgium to Antwerp, or through Holland to Amsterdam in order to board schooners bound for America. By the late 1800's they more often made their way by river barge, steam train, or horse-drawn coach, traveling northward from their home villages to the ports of Bremen or Hamburg on the coast of northern Germany. Land journeys across Europe usually involved hiring a local agent to board passengers on carts, coaches, and barges, and then hiring of another agent to post emigrants to a ship. Many families were cheated out of money or possessions or severely overcharged along the way by unscrupulous agents. Some were simply robbed, such as Johann Peter Klein, who had almost all of his money (\$140) stolen on the ocean voyage, and he and his wife barely made it onward to Saline.

There is an interesting account of an immigration trip, undertaken by Gottlob Mast (b. 1818-d.1901). He wrote down recollections of his trip from Stuttgart to Michigan in 1841, which has been translated into English and can be viewed at the Ford Historical Library at the University of Michigan's North Campus. On his journey, the sail across the Atlantic Ocean took 2 ½ months. Their ship encountered several storms, which blew them off course, including as far south as the Azores, off Portugal. Food ran out and the emigrants were forced to catch fish to survive. It is amazing to think of these relatively poor farmers and laborers from inland Europe who had never even seen the ocean before, boarding a questionable ship to cross a great ocean, often with children and even infants in tow. Ships at that time consisted of sail-powered ships in the early 1800's, steam-boiler and sail-assisted ships in the mid-1800's, and steamers by the late 1800's.

One can only imagine the miseries of poor food, dirty water, seasickness, and the general over-crowded conditions they must have endured on the open Atlantic Ocean. Early trips were the most harrowing, as Daniel and Christiana Allmendinger encountered during their emigration in 1817, in which the trip took 8 months from Wuerttemberg to Pennsylvania!



*Ship: The 'Caroline', later renamed the 'Wilhelmine' (brought several Washtenaw Germans to America)*

But still they did it. Southern German convention at the time dictated that land owned by a married couple was divided equally among their children (at least among the sons) after the parents died. This resulted in smaller and smaller farms as the survival and longevity of children increased, thanks to the growing body of knowledge concerning sanitary practices and their effects on health. Land prices were also very high in Germany at the time, up to \$250 an acre. By the early 1800's, some farms were becoming too small to support a young couple and their family, so emigration to America and the vast amounts of cheap land it offered was viewed as a way to better one's life.

A yearning for freedom was a factor as well, for men of lesser means were rarely able to guide their own fates. Regional quotas were often established on how many journeymen (such as blacksmiths, bakers, and shoemakers) could practice in a local area. Ultimate control of a worker's destiny was often out of his hands. Political strife was also common in Germany at the time. This often took the form of armed uprisings against local dukes and landlords by the common people, who desired land reform and the abolition of unrepresented taxation. If such an uprising failed, insurgents often fled their homes and came to America to avoid prison terms.

Immigrants sometimes consisted of single men or even single women, traveling on their own to America. More typically, two or three brothers, a young married couple, an older couple with children, or even whole families and extended families made the voyage together. Often, 1 or 2 grown sons were sent over first to purchase land. They then sent letters home to call the rest of the family over after a homestead had been established.

### **The First Settlers**

Not only whole families, but often a sample of the whole community emigrated to the same area of the United States, particularly for non-English speaking immigrants. Listed below are the surnames of the first German families that settled in Washtenaw County. They were all from a few small villages to the south and west of Stuttgart, Kingdom of Wuerttemberg (now part of Germany). First arrival dates for permanent settlement were

in the year 1830. Some of these families moved temporarily to New York, Pennsylvania, or New Jersey for a few years (where many had relatives) before coming to Michigan.

*Table 1. Surnames of the first German-speaking families known to have settled in Washtenaw County (1830-1832). All were from the Stuttgart area of Wuerttemberg.*

Allmendinger	Haab	Maeyle	Schneeberger
Aprill	Haas	Mueller (Miller)	Staebler
Auch	Hornung (Horning)	Osius	Stollsteimer
Beck	Kaercher	Paul	Wildt (Wild)
Bissinger	Koch	Roth	
Grauer	Laubengayer	Ruehle	
Gross	Mann	Schilling	

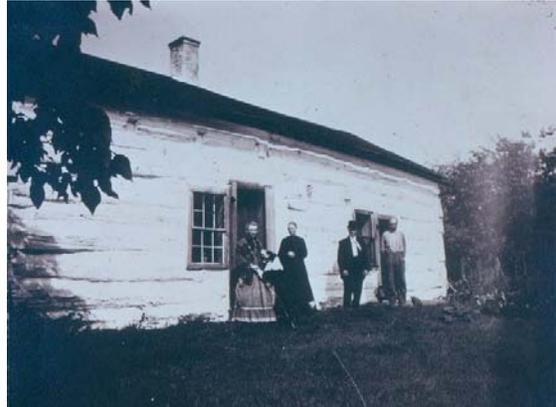
But how did they end up in Washtenaw County? According to Emanuel Mann (b.1814-d.1887), in the late fall of 1829, his father (Johann Heinrich Mann) was traveling from his temporary home in Pennsylvania, to Michigan to look for better farmland. During the journey he met Daniel Allmendinger, who was on his way back from Michigan. Mr. Allmendinger was also from the Stuttgart area, and had already purchased land in Lodi Township that same year. He convinced Mr. Mann and his friend, Peter Schilling to also settle in Washtenaw County. From *A History of Washtenaw County* (1881):

*“On his return to Pennsylvania, he [J.H. Mann] wrote a letter to his brother-in-law, Emanuel Josenhans, in Stuttgart, giving a very favorable account of what he saw of the new Territory and the route by which it could be reached by immigrants from Germany, from New York via Erie Canal and Lake Erie. Mr. Josenhans circulated the letter amongst the peasantry in the neighborhood of Stuttgart. The consequence was that numerous immigration was started for Michigan by a class of small farmers and mechanics who had very limited means.”*

Johann Heinrich Mann has been described as the spokesman of this early group, and he also sent the letter to the seminary in Basel, Switzerland in 1832, requesting an Evangelical Lutheran pastor to tend to the social needs of this small but growing group of settlers in the wilderness of Michigan. Following that request, the young, newly-ordained reverend Friedrich Schmid was sent to Washtenaw County and arrived in the summer of 1833. He has become locally famous as the founder of many of the Lutheran and Evangelical & Reformed (now the United Church of Christ or UCC) churches in the area. He also traveled across the State to minister to other German immigrant groups and established additional German churches, reaching as far west as Grand Rapids, eastward to Detroit, and north as far as Sebawaing on Saginaw Bay.

As faced by many pioneers in America in the 1800’s, life in Washtenaw County at the time was often neither pleasant nor easy. Families cut down trees and hewed logs to build cabins, with only the help of hand tools and their oxen and horses. Sawmills were soon established along flowing rivers, which helped the pioneers produce lumber for

framing windows, doors, and roof rafters. Windows were generally kept to a minimum to avoid the high cost of window panes and to minimize heat loss during the long winters. As mentioned by Gottlob Mast, German immigrants complained of the heat during the summer and the cold in the winter, both of which were slightly more extreme than what they were used to in the old country. Fields had to be carved out of the oak-hickory forests, and the stumps pulled before any farming could be done. Early years on a homestead often meant little food and a general lack of luxuries, such as beer or wine, something they had become accustomed to after living near the long-established grain fields and vineyards of southern Germany.



*Log home of Johann Jacob Spathelf, built in 1848.*

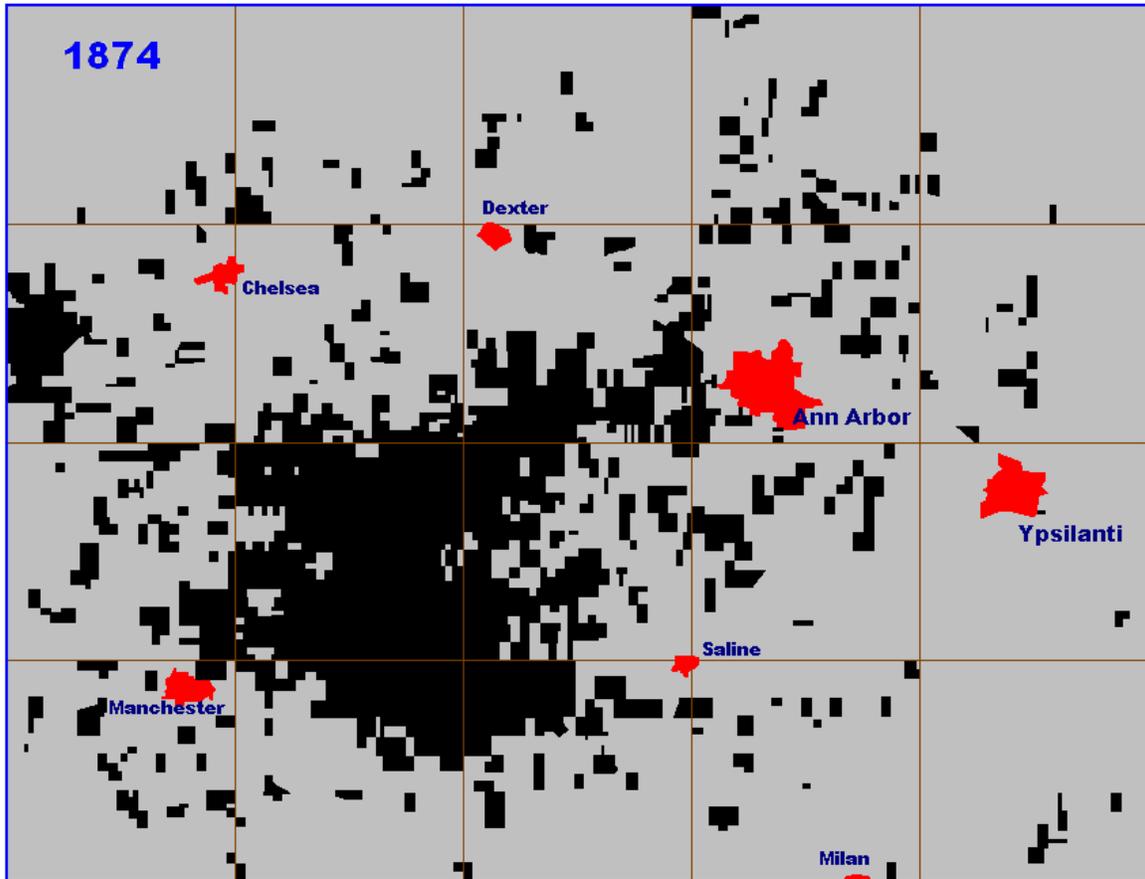
### **Where They Settled**

The earliest German settlers moved to the rolling plains southwest of Ann Arbor and purchased land in southern Scio Township, northern Lodi Township, southeastern Lima Township, and northeastern Freedom Township. This established the pattern of settlement for Germans in the County, who preferred to purchase land adjacent to other German-speakers. These townships were later to become populated largely by German-speaking farmers.

Again, from *A History of Washtenaw County* (1881), the authors said of Freedom Township, the center of the German community in the 1870's:

*"Americans settled the township. To-day there is not one American family occupying a home there. It is a German community, living under and enjoying the blessing of American laws."*

Figure 2 shows the farmsteads with German surnames present at the time of publication of the 1874 atlas of Washtenaw County. The cohesion of the community and its general geographic extent can easily be seen. The Germans settled mostly to the southwest of Ann Arbor within the ring formed by Ann Arbor, Dexter, Chelsea, Manchester, and Saline. Exceptions to this pattern were a number of German families in northern Ann Arbor Township and adjacent Northfield Township and in Sylvan Township southwest of Chelsea. Although German immigrants settled throughout the region, the edges of the county contained only scattered German farms. The one exception occurred along the western edge where the community extended into Waterloo and Grass Lake townships in Jackson County.



*Figure 2. Farmsteads in Washtenaw County with German surnames as of 1874.*

Families were large in those days, and the population of German immigrants and their descendants grew rapidly. Figure 3 shows the farmsteads with German surnames as of 1915, about 20 years after the bulk of emigration from Germany had ceased. The extent of influence the German immigrants and their offspring had made in the county can easily be seen, where by then, over 1/3 of all farms in the county were households with German surnames. Again, since German was spoken regularly by all of these farmers well up to 1915, they tended to purchase farms near one another rather than spread too far afield.

Masked in this illustration are the farms in which a daughter of German immigrants may have married a Yankee or another immigrant of non-German descent, indicating additional German influence. Examples of well known families in which this occurred early-on include the Morse and Sweetland families of Lodi, the Burns family of Freedom, the Boyden family of Webster, and the Notten family of Sylvan Township.

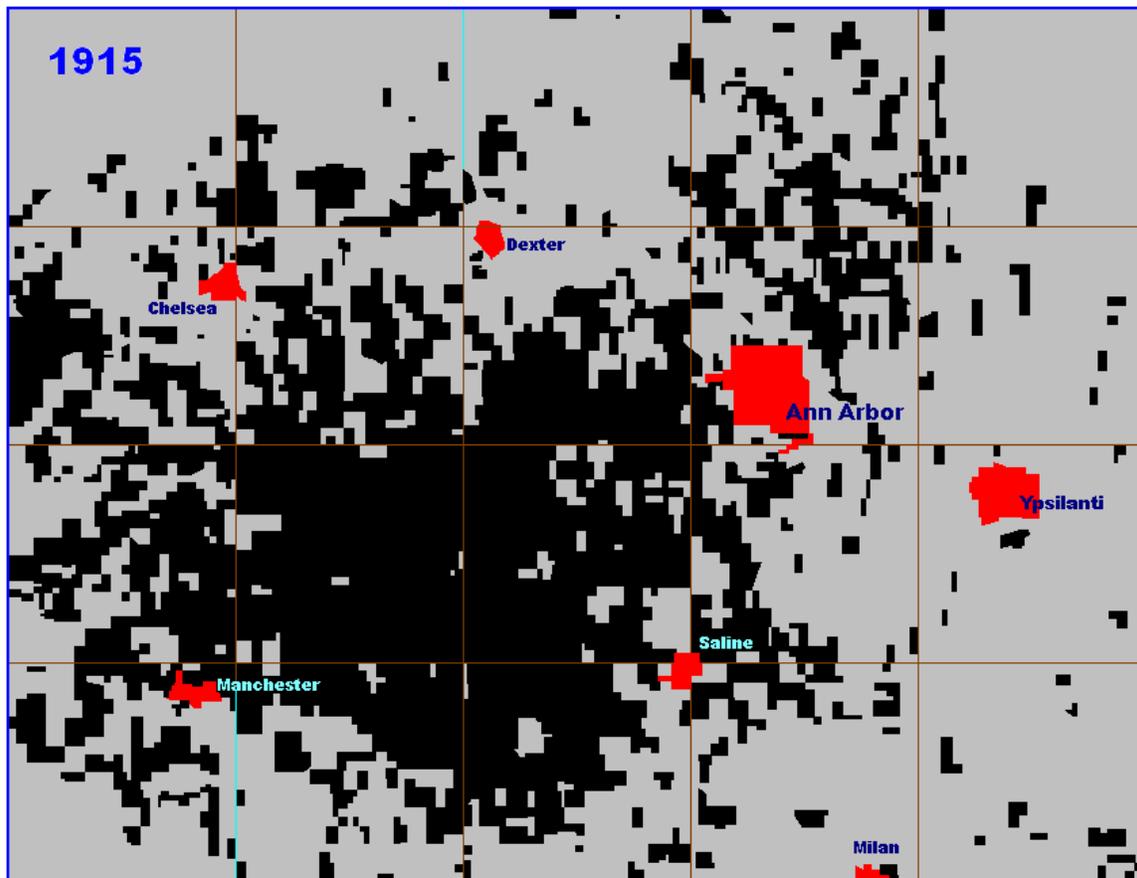


Figure 3. Farmsteads in Washtenaw County with German surnames as of 1915.

In Ann Arbor itself, once urban opportunities for shopkeepers, craftsmen, and service people opened up, German immigrants filled the need and their children continued the same pattern, living side-by-side and settling mostly in the southwestern part of the city; primarily in the old 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward (south of Huron Street and west of Main Street). The locations of the German churches in the city attest to the community that had developed in this part of town. Businesses owned by Germans sprung up mainly downtown and to the southwest of the city center as well.

### Where They Came From

The Germans who immigrated to Washtenaw County came from many portions of the German-speaking areas of Europe (Figure 4). Some immigrants arrived from regions adjacent to what is now considered Germany, such as eastern France (Alsace), Luxemburg, Switzerland, Austria, and from former Prussian states that are now a part of Poland (e.g., Pommerania, Posen, Silesia, West Prussia, and East Prussia). In western Poland, Germans had been encouraged by the Prussian kings to settle into regions already sparsely populated by Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians) during medieval times (a period known as the Eastward Colonization). The two groups often remain in adjacent but separate villages and married amongst themselves. This often led to social tension, and many Germans from modern-day western Poland left for America during the 1800's.

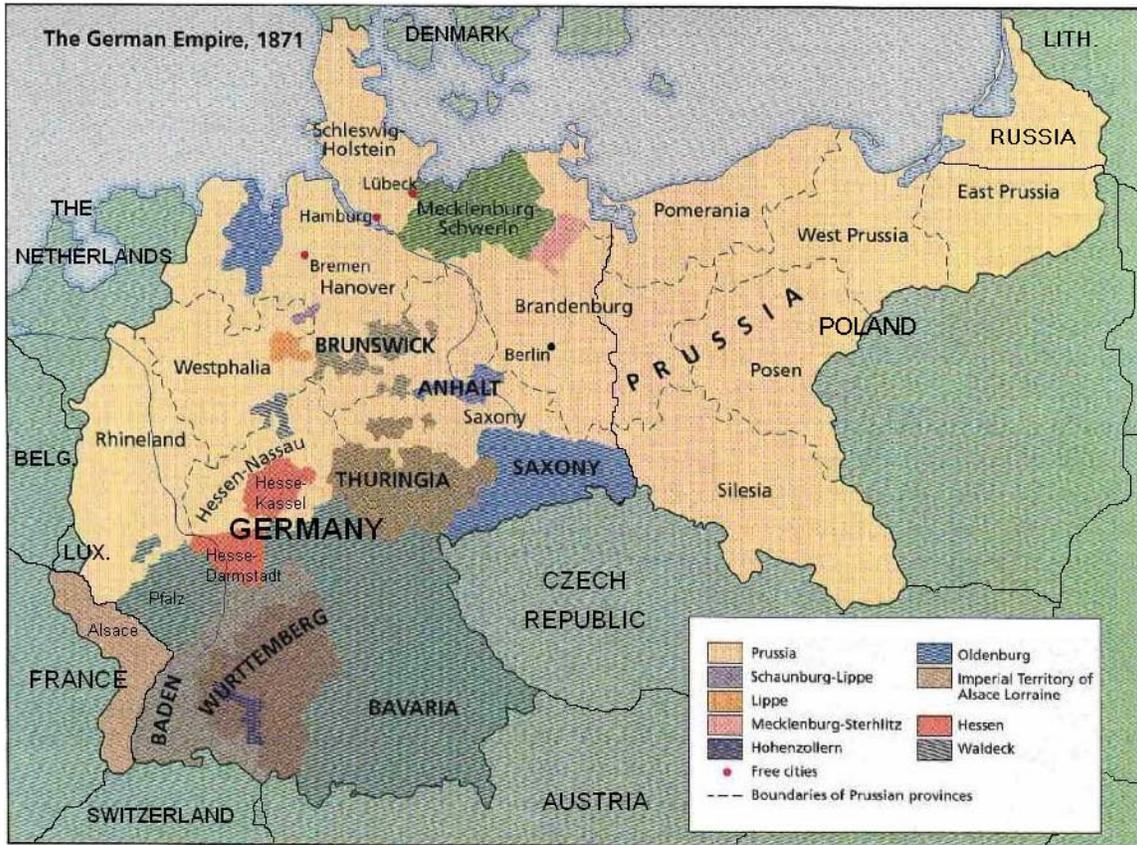


Figure 4. Map of the German Federation in 1871 showing the major states and provinces. Outlines and names of present-day countries are also shown.

Some Germans also came from the Ukraine, far to the east, where German immigrants had initially been welcomed during the very early 1800's, but prejudicial pressures soon developed. Ultimately left with little political support and facing the declaration that all young men had to join the Russian army, many immigrants decided to move onward to America and other frontiers.

The German settlers in Washtenaw County included the Swabians from Wuerttemberg and eastern Baden, the Allemanians from the Rhine River Valley of western Baden and Alsace, Palatines from the Pfalz region just north of there, the Hessians from Hesse in central Germany, as well as the Prussians, coming from many of the provinces united under the Prussian kings in northern Germany (yellow areas of the map above). As far as we know, Bavarians from the main kingdom of Bavaria in southeastern Germany were almost unknown among the immigrants to our county. This is curious because Bavarians made up the majority of German-speaking settlers in the Frankenmuth area of Saginaw County, but are virtually absent as immigrants to Washtenaw County. Although they came from almost all regions of Germany, fully 70% of the immigrants to Washtenaw County were Swabians from the kingdom of Wuerttemberg and the mountainous areas of Baden, in southwestern Germany.

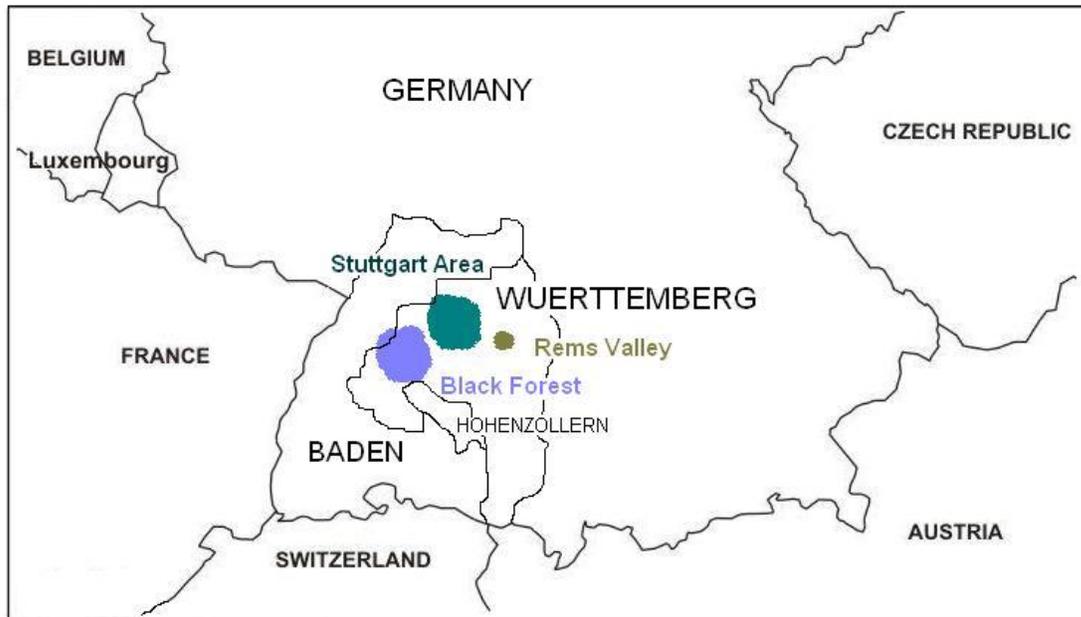
During the early to mid-1800's, this region had been ravaged by the Napoleonic wars and was economically depressed due to high taxation, religious (Catholic/Protestant) battles, the arbitrary rules of local dukes and landlords, as well as a series of failed harvests. Emigration was often the easiest solution to a tough situation and represented freedom and hope for future generations



*Black forest village scene.*

The term 'Swabian' (*Schwäbisch* in the German language) defines a group of Germanic peoples living in southwestern Germany, from the low mountains east of the upper Rhine River known as the Schwarzwald (Black Forest) across an elevated plain to the Swabian Alps, the low hills forming the border with Bavaria to the east. They speak a dialect that is distinctive to this day. Swabians tend to be of short stature, often stout, and darker-haired, in contrast to the taller and often more slender and fair-haired northern Germans.

During the 1800's, three relatively small regions of Wuerttemberg provided the bulk of the Swabian immigrants to our county (Figure 5). The earliest settlers (see Table 1), were mostly from villages on the outskirts of the city of Stuttgart. As seen in Figure 6, these 'Stuttgart Swabians' primarily settled just to the southwest of Ann Arbor, but later arrivals (Table 2) settled throughout the county. Many of the older surnames in the Salem (Scio) and St. Thomas Lutheran Church cemeteries are from this group of Swabians.



*Figure 5. Portions of Wuerttemberg that contributed most of the Swabian immigrants.*

Table 2. Additional families (not found in Table 1) from the Stuttgart area, who also settled in Washtenaw County.

Andress	Fritz	Kalmbach	Stierle
Bahnmilller	Gall	Loeffler	Strieter
Barreith	Graf	Luick	Toney
Birkle	Guenther	Mack	Trinkle
Blumhardt	Haeussler	Mast (some)	Uckele
Bollinger	Hanselmann	Niebling	Ulrich
Burkhardt	Heimerdinger	Pfitzenmaier	Vogel
Eberbach	Heller	Rehfuss	Wagner
Eckert	Henes	Reichert	Walker
Eisele (some)	Hertler	Reimold	Weber
Elsasser	Heusel	Scherdt	Zahn
Fiegel	Hieber	Schlanderer	Zeeb
Frey	Hutzel	Seybold	Zwinck

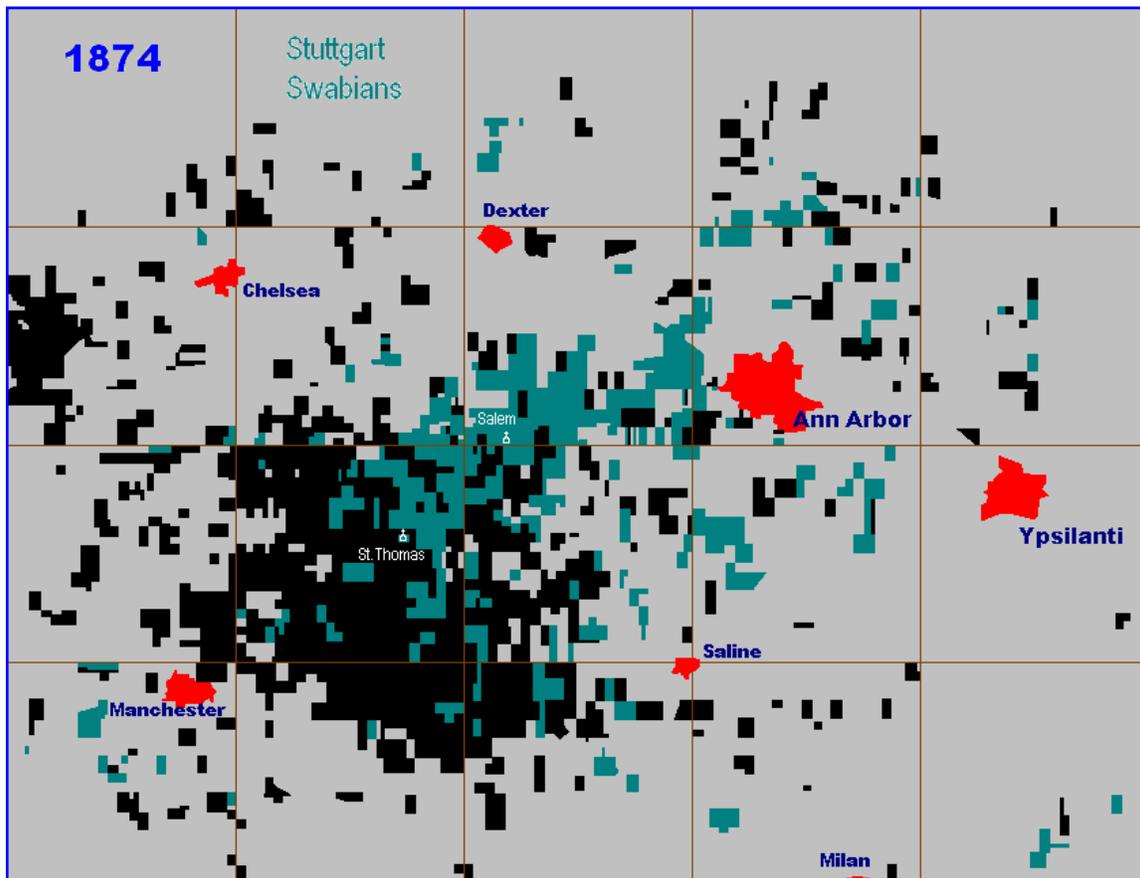


Figure 6. Farmsteads as of 1874 bearing surnames from the Stuttgart Area.

The other major group of Swabians that settled the area came from the heart of the Black Forest region farther southwest of Stuttgart. They mostly came from villages in the southern portions of Kreis Calw and the northern portions of Kreis Freudenstadt in Wuerttemberg, as well as adjacent parts of Baden (a *Kreis* is a political unit similar to our county). These 'Black Forest Swabians' began arriving in Washtenaw only slightly later (beginning in the mid-1830's), and if anything, overwhelmed even the large numbers of emigrants coming from the Stuttgart area. Their connection to the county was probably Reverend Schmid himself, who came from the village of Walddorf in southern Calw.

The Black Forest Swabians settled throughout the county as seen in Figure 7, but tended to concentrate, at least initially, in the western portions of Lodi Township, northwestern Saline Township, and throughout Freedom Township. It was joked at the time that they didn't mind farming the low hills in these areas, because they were more familiar with steep slopes (similar to the Black Forest region) than were the other Germans. Modern visitors to villages in the central Black Forest (now in the State of Baden-Wuerttemberg) will recognize many family names from Washtenaw County. In some villages, fully  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all surnames in the local cemeteries may be recognizable from our county! Although they made up portions of all local church congregations, the majority of the older names in the Bethel and St. James UCC cemeteries are from this group of Swabians.

*Table 3. Surnames of some of the settlers from the Black Forest region.*

Alber	Glatz	Klumpp	Schaible
Barth	Goetz	Kohler	Schairer
Beuerle	Grosshans	Kuebler (some)	Schettenhelm
Blaess	Grossman	Lambarth	Schiller
Bohnet	Gutekunst	Larmee	Schmid
Braun	Haarer	Lehman	Schnierle
Breining	Hack	Lutz	Schumacher
Bristle	Hartmann	Marquardt	Seeger
Broesamle	Haselschwerdt	Mast (some)	Seitz
Bross	Hauck	Maulbetsch	Seyfried
Dieterle	Helber	Meyer (some)	Spathelf
Dietle	Herter	Morlock	Steeb
Diuble	Heydlauff	Niethammer	Stein
Egeler	Hirth	Nissley	Theurer
Ehnis	Hoelzle	Ottmar	Traub
Fahrner	Huber	Pfeifle	Volz
Feuerbacher	Jedele	Raus	Wackenhut
Finkbeiner	Kalmbach	Rauschenberger	Wacker
Furthmiller	Kapp	Rentschler	Wahr
Gartmann	Kappler	Renz	Walz
Geiger	Keck	Reule	Waidelich
Geisel	Kempf	Roehm	Welker
Gensley	Keppler	Roller	Wiedmayer
Girbach	Klager	Rothfuss	Wurster

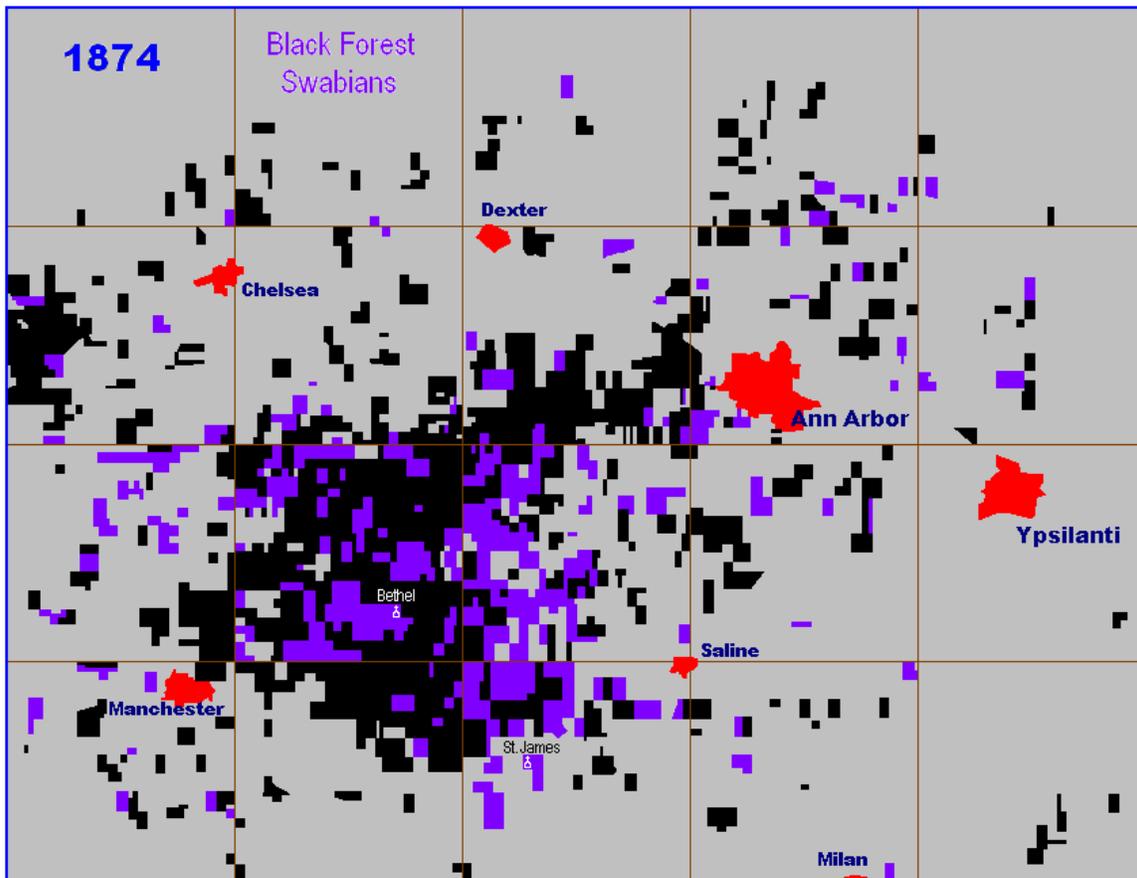


Figure 7. Farmsteads in Washtenaw County as of 1874 bearing surnames from the Black Forest region.

A third, rather small group of Swabians came from the Rems River Valley, well east of Stuttgart. This group arrived later than most other Swabians and tended to settle as a group in the northern portions of Freedom Township and southern portions of Lima Township (Figure 8). Smaller groups of German immigrants from adjacent villages often traveled together on the same ship and most of these families were related and must have been in contact with one another prior to arrival in our county. Table 4 provides a partial surname list of these ‘Rems Valley Swabians’. Many of the older families who formed the St. John’s UCC church at Rogers Corner were from this group of Swabians.

Table 4. Surnames of German immigrants to Washtenaw County from the Rems Valley region of Wuerttemberg.

Bareis	Eiseman	Koengeter	Paul
Eisele (some)	Hinderer	Lindauer	Wahl

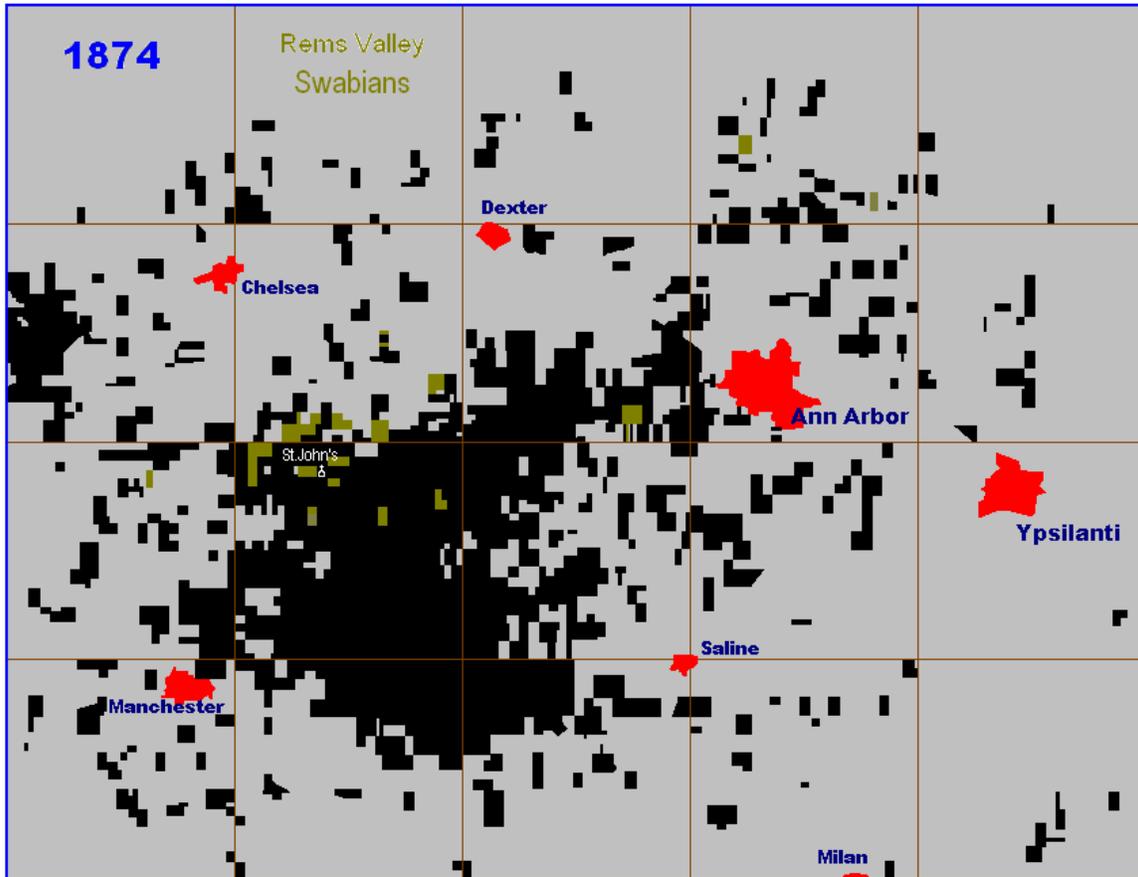
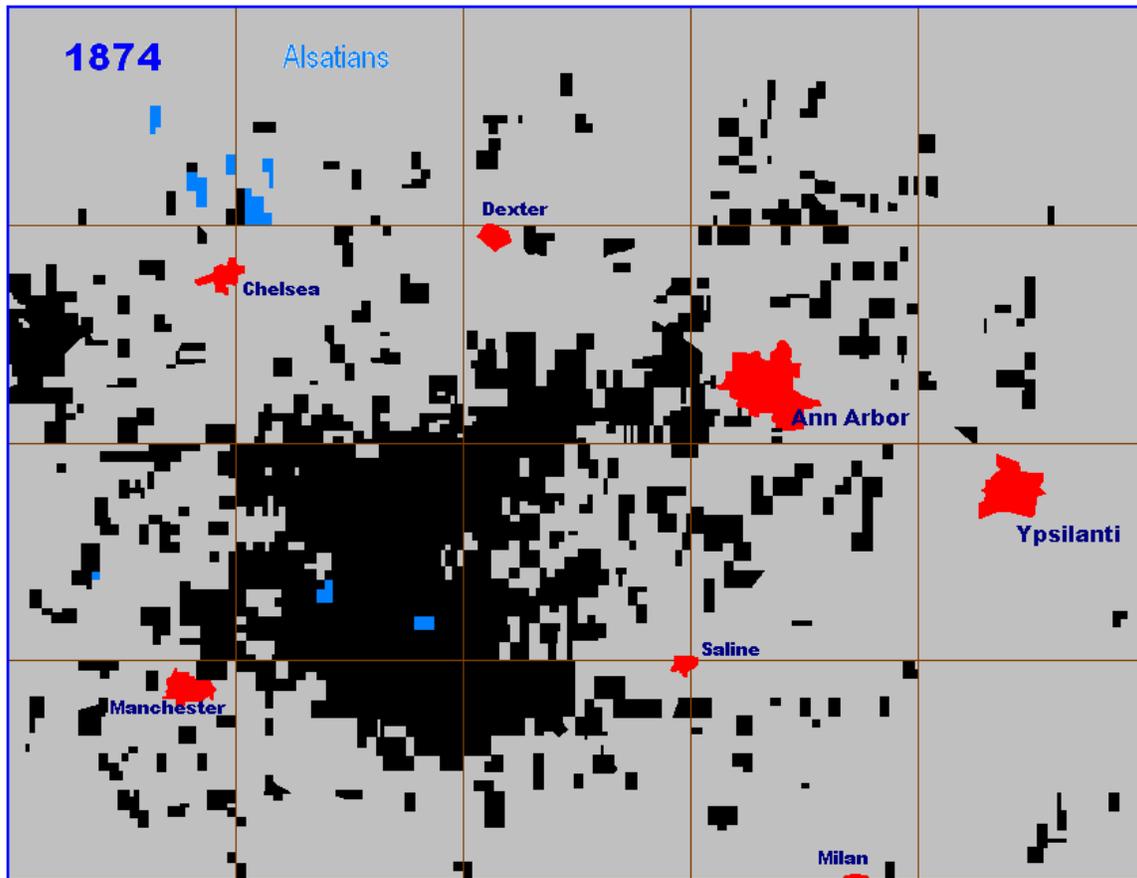


Figure 8. Farmsteads in Washtenaw County as of 1874 bearing surnames from the Rems Valley region of Wuerttemberg.

Non-Swabian groups also chose to settle in the county and sometimes remained close to each other as well as to their fellow German-speakers. For example, a small group of mostly Catholic settlers from Alsace, in eastern France settled in, and just north of, Chelsea (Figure 9). On census rolls they listed France as their homeland but referred to themselves as Alsatians (*'Elsassers'* in German). The Alsace region of France is made up of mostly German-speakers living on the west bank of the Rhine River, which forms the border with Baden, Germany. The area has been battled over for generations by Germany and France. Now a part of France, many Alsatians speak German to this day, and German influence can be seen in the names of the villages and in the surnames of the region.

Table 5. Surnames of German-speaking immigrants to the Chelsea area of Washtenaw County from the Alsace region of France.

Bersuder	Fritz (some)	Kraemer	Romelhart
Eder	Hindelang	Lustig (Lusty)	Staffan
Eisele (some)	Hummel	Neiss	Stapish



*Figure 9. Farmsteads in Washtenaw County as of 1874 bearing surnames from the Alsace region of France.*

The Hessians are also represented in our county, arriving mostly from Hesse Kassel and Hesse Darmstadt in central Germany. A portion of Hesse; Hesse-Nassau, had joined the Prussian federation, but Hesse-Kassel and Hesse-Darmstadt remained independent for a long while. Unlike the Nassau Hessians, immigrants from the latter two portions of Hesse identified themselves as Hessians, not as Prussians. Immigrants also arrived from the Bavarian-ruled Pfalz region, a small area west of the Rhine River, north of France, and immediately south of Hesse. These Rhineland Bavarians (also known as Palatines) and the Hessians shared a similar dialect. The Pfalz region at the time was ruled by Bavaria, and immigrants generally referred to themselves as Bavarians.

Palatines and Hessians settled in most parts of Washtenaw County, however a relatively cohesive group settled near Bridgewater (Figure 10). Several from this group came to Washtenaw County quite early, as early as the mid-1830's from both Pfalz and Hesse. Their numbers were so significant around Bridgewater that the Swabians living near them heard only the Hessian dialect in that village and nick-named it "Kassel" in reference to the largest city of northern Hesse bearing the same name. Their surnames are found on

most of the older gravestones in the cemetery at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Bridgewater and a number can be found in the Bethel Church cemetery as well.

Table 6. Surnames of Hessian and Palatine immigrants to the Bridgewater area of Washtenaw County.

Armbruster	Buss	Mandt	Schroen
Bauer (some)	Fliehmann	Raab	Stautz
Blum	Guthardt	Reyer	Steinbach
Blumenauer	Hasenpflug	Rheinfranck	Teepe
Boettger	Kulenkamp	Riedel	Uhr
Boettner	Lindenschmidt	Schlegel	Westphal
Burg	Luckhardt	Schneider (some)	Wirth

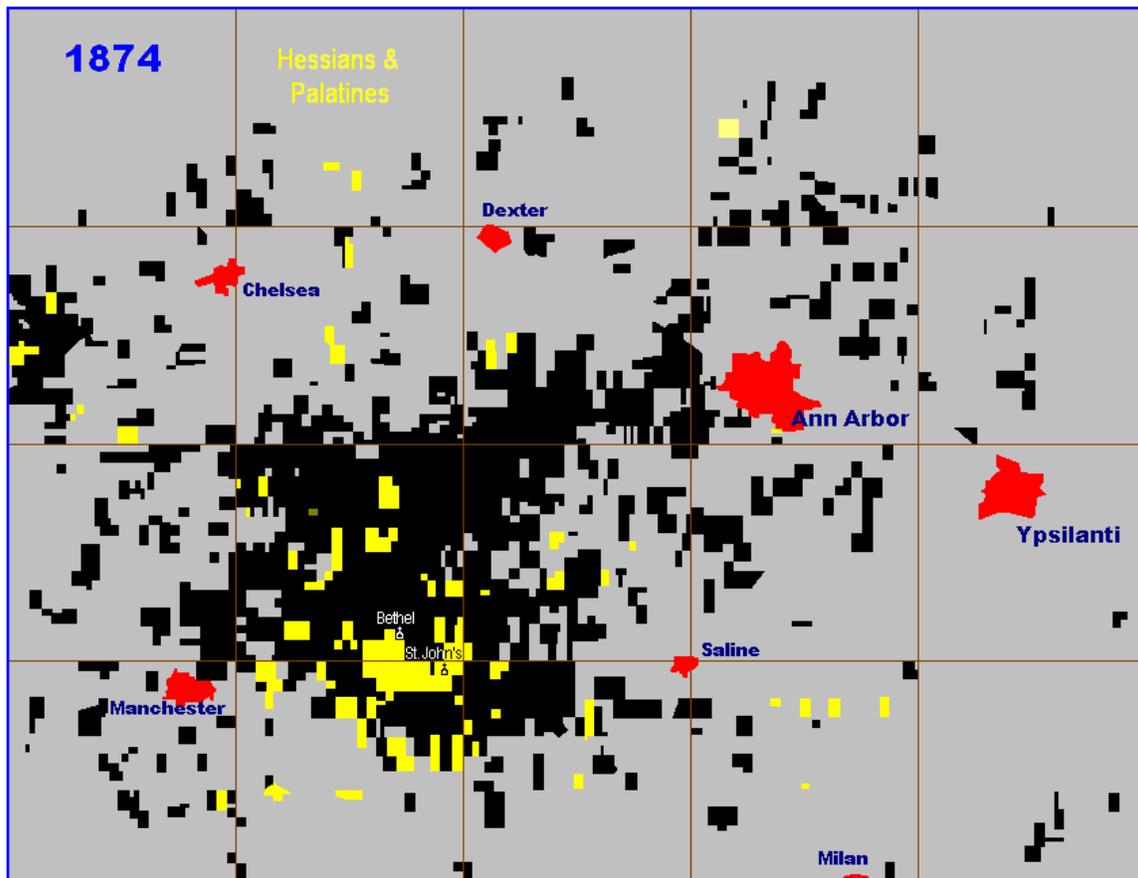


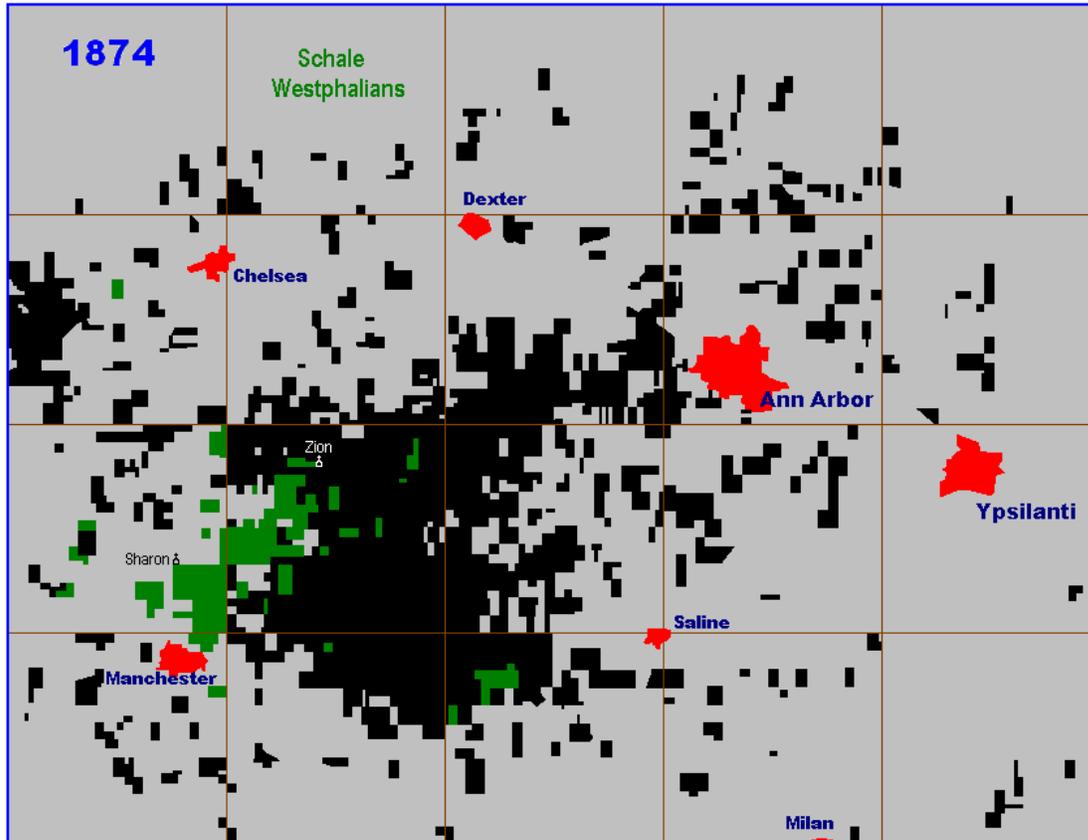
Figure 10. Farmsteads in Washtenaw County as of 1874 bearing surnames from Hesse and the Pfalz region of Germany.

Another group of German immigrants mostly came from a single village; *Schale*, in the far north of Westphalia, in northern Germany near Holland (Figure 4). These ‘Schale Westphalians’, like other groups, probably represented extended family members and neighbors who traveled together. From arrival dates, it appears that a few “scouts” may

have been sent ahead (e.g., Bernhard List who arrived in Freedom township in 1833), followed by the rest of the families, many of whom came during the early 1850's, although arrival dates extend even into the 1870's. This was an unusually cohesive group of Prussian immigrants, settling largely in western Freedom Township and eastern Sharon Township (Figure 11). They made up many of the older family names at the Sharon Methodist Church cemetery and at Zion Lutheran Church at Rogers Corner.

*Table 7. Surnames of Prussian immigrants to Washtenaw County from the village of Schale (and adjacent villages) in Westphalia, northwest Germany.*

Bertke	Gieske	Kuhl	Schulte
Breitenwischer	Hagen	Landwehr	Sodt
Davidter	Hartbeck	Meyer (some)	Steinaway
Dresselhouse	Huehl	Niehaus	Tirb
Esch	Kleinschmidt	Reno	Uphaus
Feldkamp	Koebbe	Schlicht	Voegeding



*Figure 11. Farmsteads in Washtenaw County as of 1874 bearing surnames from Schale (and neighboring villages) in Westphalia.*

A number of other settlers also came from the level plains of northern Germany. They referred to themselves as Prussians, and came from the provinces of Brandenburg, Hamburg, Hanover, Hesse-Nassau, Lippe, Mecklenburg, Pommerania, Posen, Saxony,

Silesia, Schleswig-Holstein, Thuringia, the remainder of Westphalia, West Prussia, and probably other provinces. Most of the Prussians who emigrated to Washtenaw County probably made the trip on their own, or in small groups, since they settled on farms and towns scattered across the county (Figure 12). Most arrived rather late in the period, mainly from 1860-1900, but integrated quickly into the surrounding German-speaking community. Many of the older names at the Salem Grove Methodist Church cemetery in Sylvan Township (many from Hanover), and the St. John's Lutheran Church cemetery in Northfield Township (many from Posen) are from this group of immigrants.

Table 8. Frequent surnames of the various Prussian immigrants to Washtenaw County.

Ahrens	Goeltz	Lindemann	Podewils
Altenbernt	Greve	Ludwig	Pommerening
Bagge	Hanke	Marx	Prochnow
Benter	Hoeft	Meinhardt	Rohde
Bredernitz	Hoffmann	Mensing	Schoen
Burmeister	Hoppe	Navroth	Schweinfurth
Donner	Jahnke	Nimke	Steffe
Dorow	Kolander	Nordmann	Tessmer
Fahner	Lesser	Ortbring	Ullrich
Fritz (some)	Leutheuser	Pardon	Webber

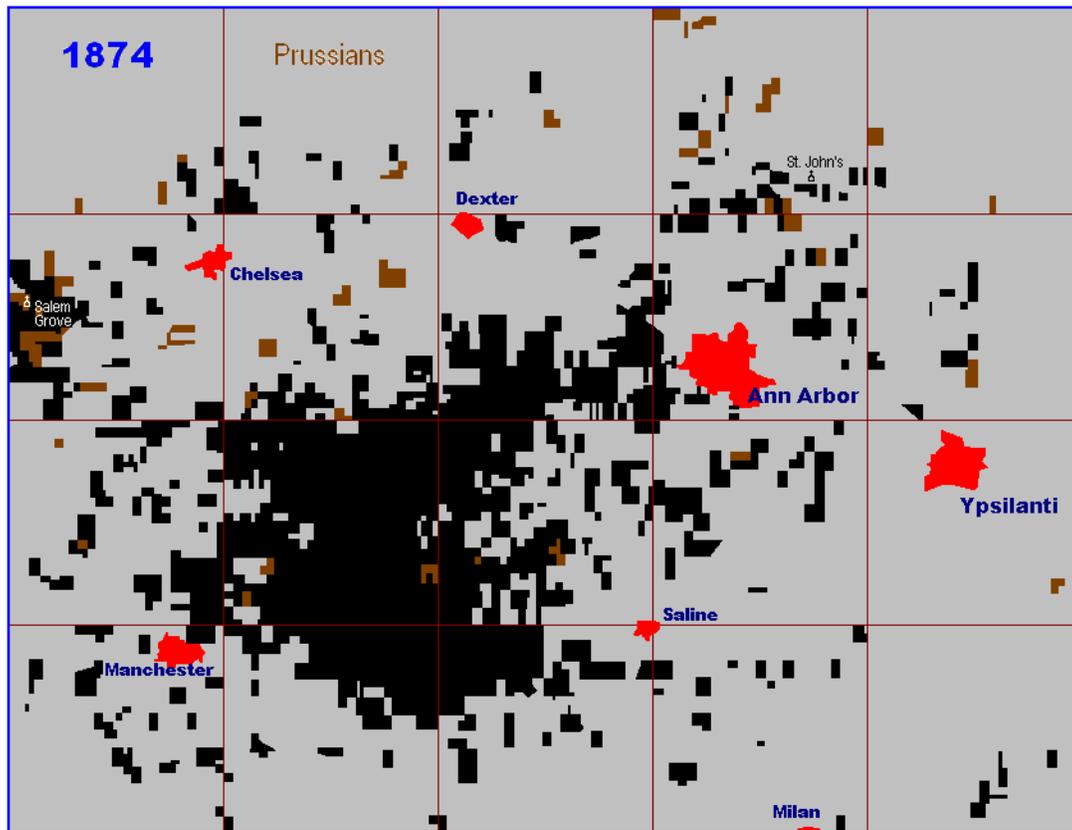


Figure 12. Farmsteads in Washtenaw County as of 1874 bearing surnames from the various provinces of Prussia, northern Germany.

Likewise, the dozen or so families from Switzerland apparently emigrated quite independently, as no pattern of settlement could be found within this group. Several were ministers, probably studying at the evangelical seminary in Basel, Switzerland before being assigned as missionaries to America. These immigrants came from the German-speaking northern portions of Switzerland near the border with Alsace and Baden.

*Table 9. Surnames of some Swiss immigrants to Washtenaw County.*

Bauerly	Hanselmann (some)	Kuenzler	Schneeberger
Baumann	Heininger (some)	Rosser	Schneider (some)
Bucholz	Kirchhofer	Schellenberger	Schwab (some)

A few families emigrated from what was then known as Bessarabia, but is now part of the present-day countries of Moldova and Ukraine. Beginning in 1812, Germans were encouraged to emigrate to Bessarabia. These families were originally Swabians and arrived in America from the town of Gnadenthal, Ukraine in 1874-1876 (to avoid mandatory service in the Russian army); and most settled just west of Bridgewater.

*Table 10. Surnames of Germans that arrived in Washtenaw County from the German settlement at Gnadenthal, Ukraine.*

Bihlmeyer	Ernst	Layher	Weidmann
Dayss	Gebhardt	Merz	

Some of the German settlers in Washtenaw County remained for a while but then moved on to other parts of Michigan or to other states. Several forged westward once gold was discovered in California, while others moved west to better farming opportunities in Missouri, Iowa, and Kansas. Quite a number of families resettled farther north, many to western Huron County near the town of Sebewaing on Saginaw Bay where a community of Germans had settled to serve as missionaries to the Indians, under guidance from Reverend Schmid. Also, the allure of cheaper, flatter, probably more productive farmland in many of these areas induced many of them to move onward from our county.

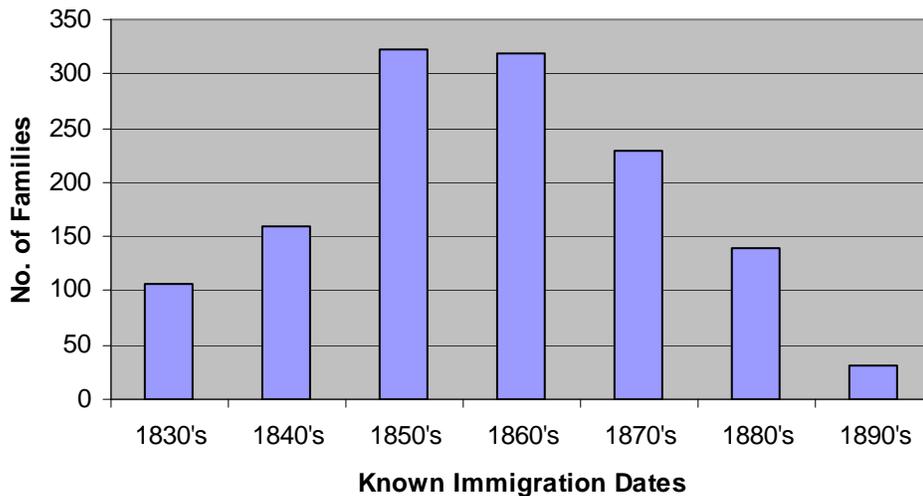
Ties to the homeland in Germany remained strong among the first generation of immigrants. Wealthier individuals even sent their sons back to Germany for an education. More often, the classic German fables and songs were taught to the children in this country to remind them of their roots. As the generations continued on, however, familial links to the old country faded, and were often lost altogether by the time the third or fourth generations had been born.

Stories of the homeland were sometimes written down, and a few letters back to Germany can be found, as well as recollections of the trip to America, or pioneer life, although most of these are difficult to access for today's genealogists and historians.

## The Middle Years (1860-1890)

While German immigration to Washtenaw County began in 1830, most of the immigrants did not arrive until the middle of the century. Figure 13 illustrates the pattern of settlement by decade during the 1800's. By 1850, just over 250 German-speaking families were present in the county. The bulk of the immigrants arrived in the 1850's and 1860's. Immigration rates decreased steadily thereafter, with only a few families continuing to arrive by the 1890's.

**Figure 13. German-speaking Immigrants to Washtenaw County (1830 -1900)**



Again from *A History of Ann Arbor...*

*“Ann Arbor’s population grew almost 50 percent during the 1860’s, from a little over 5,000 to almost 7,400, partly through the influx of new people, including almost a doubling of German immigrants. ...the group with the most dynamic sense of themselves as a community were the Germans, whose numbers, as a result of a post-Civil War wave of immigration, were steadily increasing.*

*...While still clinging to the customs and language of the old country, Germans worked hard to make good in the new. Many did very well, establishing businesses, figuring largely in the building trades, and operating most of the saloons...the Germans in Ann Arbor (as elsewhere) enacted the American dream of success. Few wound up wealthy, however, or even imagined doing so; most of the largest tax-payers in 1887 were Yankees.*

*Culturally the Germans were no less visible. By 1880 Ann Arbor had a German newspaper, three German churches, a German Workingman’s Association [an aid society], a German Shooting Club (with its own grounds), a German Athletic Society (with its own grounds), two German choirs, a German cornet band, and a large German-owned park [German Park] that was used for German as well as American patriotic and ceremonial occasions.”*

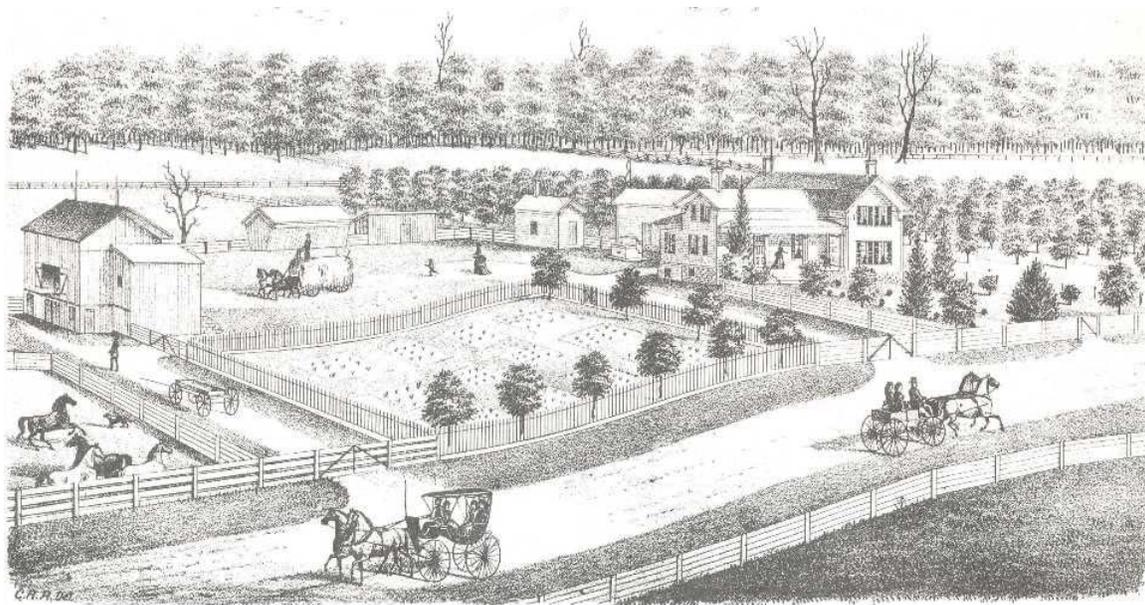
In fact, the Germans attracted some notice when they celebrated their own traditional events, such as Oktoberfest. In 1890, one local newspaper reported:

*“Never have our streets presented such a gala appearance...not even [during] our own national holiday, which fact ought to be remembered by our citizens, and a little more enthusiasm displayed at such times.”*

Perhaps it was partly the gusto with which the Germans celebrated. The Prohibition Movement drew speakers and rallies to Ann Arbor from the late 1880’s through 1920 when national prohibition of alcohol was eventually enacted. Factions of students from the University of Michigan sometimes echoed the chant and joined in the marches. In 1888 when students entered the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward to protest the many saloons, ‘a few heads were broken’ by the local Germans who didn’t like being told they shouldn’t have their beer!

But the Germans were best known for their hard work and sense of community. By the early 1880’s when the first history of the county was written by The Pioneer Society, they necessarily wrote it from a mostly Yankee viewpoint (no German-Americans were on the committee). In reading it, one can see that the authors alternated from opinions that the Germans were somewhat unwanted invaders, to one of admiration for their spirit and industriousness. In reference to Lodi Township they wrote:

*“About this time [1830’s], the Germans established a settlement in Freedom, which adjoins us on the west, which has spread in several directions and now it covers several townships. Three-quarters of the soil in Lodi Township is today in German hands. They have not retarded, but accelerated, the improvement of the soil. Industry and frugality are their cardinal virtues. Their strong hands have subdued and made productive the most forbidden and barren places.”*



RES. OF L. BLAESS, ESQ.  
SEC. 13, LODI TWP. MICH.

This general pattern of hard work and a strong, if not isolating sense of community marked German-American farmers across the United States. The contrast between Yankee and German farm communities has been studied by sociologist Sonya Salamon and presented in her book: *Prairie Patrimony: Family, Farming, and Community in the Midwest*. Paraphrasing her work heavily, she notes that the Germans introduced the techniques of manuring fields and rotating crops to maintain productivity on the same acreage for generations, and tended to pass the family farm down from one generation to the next. Early Yankee settlers often farmed for a while and then moved on farther west, selling their spent fields to the growing German community. German neighbors regularly helped one-another; all family members, even women and children, were expected to help with any aspect of farm work, including fieldwork. Likewise, at social events the whole family could be seen sitting at the beer table with the men, all laughing, singing, and joking together. Yankee women were rarely expected to work in the fields, and drinking with the men-folk was highly frowned upon. Church life for the Germans tended to be more social in nature and not necessarily so sternly religious. Yankee families used the threat of ‘hell and damnation’ over their errant members to exact social control. The Germans relied more heavily on gossip and individual punishment; “Everyone knows you are Gottlieb’s son, you just don’t do that” and kept the switch close just in case!

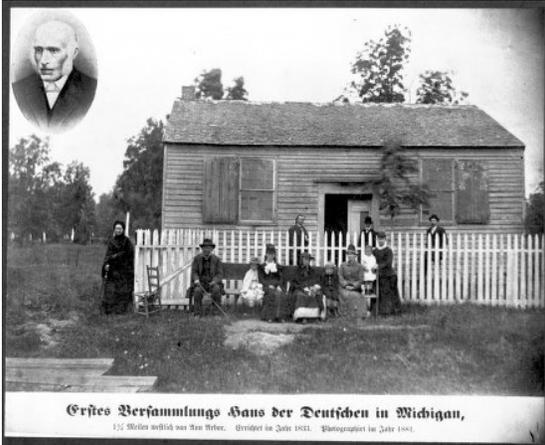
Not only were the Germans in Washtenaw County hard-working and close-knit, they were also politically minded and quite literate. A German-language newspaper, *Die Washtenaw Post* began publication in 1879, starting small but growing rapidly. Again from *A History of Washtenaw County* (1881):

*“...being one of the largest German papers in the country. The large and intelligent German population of this county demand a paper in their language that will take rank with the best papers published in the English language. This they undoubtedly have in the Post, and few country papers have ever attained the success of the Post in so short a time.”*

With the combination of the German community and the presence of the university, with its many students and a large population of “house-mothers” to board and feed these students, Ann Arbor was not your typical Midwestern town of the late 1800’s. German could be regularly heard on the streets of the town and many public speeches and lectures were also given in this language.

The Germans did not shirk their responsibilities to their adopted country, either. A local German military company was organized in 1859, in the tense years prior to the Civil War. They called themselves the ‘Steuben Guards’, after Baron von Steuben, a valiant German-born commander who served under General Washington at Valley Forge. In 1861 when the Civil War finally began, the local crowds cheered this regiment on, as they marched through town, sending a contingent of 75 men to rendezvous in Detroit with the rest of the First Michigan Regiment. The Steuben Guards were among the first Union soldiers organized in the nation and were involved in the first battles at Bull Run. Several German immigrants from Washtenaw County died for their adopted country in this war, even though they had only been in America for a decade or two.

## German Churches



*The first German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Scio Township (inset: Reverend Friedrich Schmid).*

Once Reverend Schmid arrived from Germany, he wasted no time in establishing the first Lutheran church in the county (and in the State) in the fall of 1833. The first church building was a simple log structure with large windows located near the homesteads of the earliest settlers just west of Ann Arbor. The church was called “The First German Evangelical Society of Scio Township”, which later became Bethlehem UCC. After most of the congregation moved their place of worship to Ann Arbor, the church in Scio, termed the “Second German Evangelical Society of Scio Township”, later became known as

Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church and moved to the town line between Scio and Lodi Townships on Scio Church Road.

Later, as German settlers (who were mostly farmers, at least in the early years) continued to move southwestward from Ann Arbor, two additional German churches were established by Reverend Schmid near the growing rural populations in Freedom Township (Bethel Evangelical & Reformed [now UCC]-1840 and St. Thomas Lutheran-1842). As families grew and more immigrant farmers arrived and spread out into surrounding townships, country churches were established in Bridgewater Township (St. John’s Lutheran-1854), Saline Township (St. James UCC-1883), two at Rogers Corner in Freedom Township (Zion Lutheran-1865, and St. John’s UCC-1892), and one in Northfield Township (St. John’s Lutheran-1875).

Reflecting the diversity of the settlers arriving from Germany, immigrants from southern Germany established a German Catholic church in Freedom Township (St. Francis-1842) which later joined with St. Mary’s Church in Manchester. Some of the Prussian immigrants established Methodist churches in Sylvan Township (Salem Grove Methodist-1853) and at Rowe’s Corner in Sharon Township (Salem Methodist-1874).

Many immigrants were not farmers but entrepreneurs, tradesmen, and general laborers who initially found work in the growing city of Ann Arbor. They established three German churches there (Bethlehem UCC- [some congregants of the original church established in 1833 by Rev. Schmid], West Side Methodist-1847, and Zion Lutheran-1875 [congregants who had split from Bethlehem Church]). Later, as the smaller towns grew and the emigrants’ sons and daughters moved off of farms to village settings, German churches were organized in Ypsilanti (Emmanuel Lutheran – 1859), Manchester (Emanuel UCC-1862), Saline (Trinity Lutheran-1865 and St. Paul’s UCC-1906), Chelsea (St. Paul’s UCC-1868), and Dexter (St. Andrew’s UCC-1883).

The styles of the eventual church structures often reflected churches seen in Germany at the time, with prominent steeples and intricate and colorful stained glass windows (if enough money could be raised by the congregants). Early churches were often initially log structures in the early days, followed by a wooden frame building, and sometimes eventually by stone or brick buildings. Stones gathered and hauled in from the fields of the local farms went into the building of some churches. Stained glass windows were often ordered with verses written in German, and many of these features persist on the older buildings to this day.



*Bethel Church in Freedom Township.*

Many of the immigrants probably felt homesick for their homeland, and they surrounded themselves with frequent reminders. Most of the German church cemeteries present in Washtenaw County have a distinctive, tidy row of Norway spruce trees bordering the grounds. Norway spruce is the dominant forest tree in the low mountains of Wuerttemberg. The darkness of the shade under its dense canopy gave the name ‘Black Forest’ to that region. Planting of these trees around cemeteries and farmsteads probably reminded the settlers of their childhood homes. They also honored their former homeland by planting a linden tree (or the local version, the basswood), which is the national tree and symbol of Germany. A large old basswood can still be seen today between the church and parsonage on the Bethel Church grounds, for example.

### **The Local German Dialect**

We can see the influence of the Swabians in the dialect of German that was eventually spoken in Washtenaw County and in the customs and food of the descendants. Because the Swabians were such a majority in the county, by the second or third generation, most children of German descent began speaking a form of this Swabian dialect. Anyone who heard this dialect spoken in Washtenaw County can attest to its emphasis on the “sh” sound, as well as the pronunciation of a ‘w’ as an English ‘w’, not as a ‘v’ as in proper German. For example, surnames such as Stierle and Stollsteimer were pronounced “Shteerly” and “Shtollshtymer”, while the proper German pronunciation of Wild (“Vilt”) and Wiedmayer (“Veetmyer”) were here pronounced “Wylt” and “Weetmyer”.

Swabian was originally termed a High German dialect (*‘Hochdeutsch’*), referring to the high elevation of the lands (foothills of the Alps) in which it was spoken in southern Germany. Later it was referred to as Low German (*‘Plattdeutsch’*) following adoption of the northern German dialect (the original Low German) as the official form of the German language by the German federation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Most of the Swabian

residents of the county referred to their speech as Low German, to differentiate it from the dialect spoken by the later-arriving Prussian immigrants from northern Germany.

Local German-speakers in Washtenaw County often adopted English words and mixed them in with German words, or formed new words that were halfway between. This mirrored other German settlements in America, like the Pennsylvania Dutch (who were also Germans or '*Deutsch*'). A famous phrase illustrating this phenomenon goes something like: "*Die cow hat über der fence gejumped, und hat alle die cabbages abge-eaten.*" which is understandable to both German and English speakers!

Children of German immigrants in the county during the 1800's and the first decade or two of the 1900's learned English in public school (which they called "English School"), but regularly spoke German at home and in their churches and church schools ("German School"). According to recollections written down by Emerson Hutzel (1890-1975), children of German descent in rural one-room schoolhouses at the time would learn and speak proper English in class, but erupted into their favored German once their feet hit the grass of the schoolyard! Pressure from anti-German sentiment in the U.S. during the First World War swayed the Americans of German descent in Washtenaw County to largely switch to English as the language spoken both at home and at church. Some local churches continued with occasional German services for their bilingual congregants, even into the 1950's.

German speakers persisted in the population of the descendants through at least the third, and sometimes the fourth generation following immigration to Washtenaw County. At least through the 1970's, the old folks of our community delighted in talking to one another in German upon meeting up at a family reunion, in the tavern ('*beergarten*'), or after the service in church. There, they would chatter away, exchanging pleasantries and gossiping in their childhood language, which even their own children (who had grown up during the World Wars), could not fully understand.

### **The Later Years (1890-1930)**

German-speaking settlers continued to arrive in Washtenaw County into the mid-1890's. However by that time, the tide of immigration in the area had slowed to a crawl, as the farmsteads became well-established and the local towns and cities had come into their own. German immigration to America continued, but the movement generally passed by Michigan and continued on to less settled regions with cheaper land, such as Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas, as well as the prairie provinces of Canada.

The German-American community in Washtenaw County probably reached the peak of its development from 1880 to about 1920. The large family sizes seen in the mid- to late 1800's among the immigrants and their offspring resulted in a large, flourishing community of German-speakers in all of the major cities and towns of the county, with the possible exceptions of Ypsilanti and Milan. Because of its size, reaching several thousands to tens of thousands of individuals, integration into the surrounding English

speaking community was slower than in other, smaller German immigrant settlements in the U.S. Even after three or four generations, descendants of German immigrants in Washtenaw County were more likely to marry other German descendants than those of other nationalities. This was particularly prominent in rural portions of the county where church, social, and business connections were largely with others of German descent.



*George & Louisa (Stollsteimer) Herter family-1905*

Dozens of local businesses as well as many productive farms were run by German-American families throughout the county during those years and still are today. Descendants of German immigrants reached some of the highest political offices in the county (e.g., several mayors, county commissioners, etc.) and some were sent to Lansing and even Washington D.C. to represent the area as State and Federal legislators. Significant percentages of early graduating classes at the University of Michigan were also descendants of Washtenaw County German immigrants, with the result that many local scholars ended up moving away from the area to other parts of Michigan and throughout the U.S.

The Germans in Washtenaw County were always a minority, however, and increased attention was focused on them once America appeared to be heading to war with Germany and its allies in the mid-1910's. At this time, German-Americans across the U.S. were starting to come under some suspicion of mixed loyalties between their adopted homeland and their place of birth. Again from *A History of Ann Arbor*, referring to the pre-WWI years:

*"...not everyone in Ann Arbor supported the national cause (the pending war with Germany and the Axis powers). For those who could read German, the editorials in Eugene Helber's Die Washtenaw Post sounded almost treasonous, while those who heard Germans speak of the war sometimes detected divided loyalties, or worse. To be sure, the majority of the German community accepted themselves and spoke of themselves as Americans, however firm links to family and friends in Germany might still be. But a significant minority had not been able to break faith with their heritage when Congress declared war on April 6, 1917. If few publicly trumpeted their support for Germany, many more were genuinely torn in their allegiances and said so in words or deeds, usually in a reluctance to purchase war bonds."*

Anti-German pressure continued to mount after the war began. Eugene Helber was called to a hearing in Washington D.C. for publishing pro-German views. The result was

his resignation from the newspaper. The paper was allowed to continue publication, but only by his son, and only in English. After a pro-war bond rally in Ann Arbor on the evening of April 15, 1918, several German-owned businesses and offices were smeared with yellow paint, supposedly to identify the disloyal Americans. Even churches came under suspicion of disloyalty during and just after World War I. In 1919, West Side United Methodist Church in Ann Arbor was forced to close for a few months. Upon reopening, the congregation gave up German language services and changed its name to West Side Methodist Episcopal Church for a while. Loyalty toward America was high, however, and many German descendants in Washtenaw County went off to the war in Europe, serving their country along-side their fellow Americans.

With the end of the war, pressures on German-American citizens in the Washtenaw County lessened, but the community was changed forever. English became the language of everyday use, so that children of German-American families no longer learned German, even at church schools. Children born during and after WWI could not fully understand their historic tongue, even though their parents often used it at home or among other descendants. The community was becoming part of mainstream America now, and most neither knew nor remembered relatives in Germany, and had never seen, nor now felt great passion for the land of their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents. These feelings were only heightened during WWII, when Germany was only thought of as the enemy. As in previous wars, many Americans of German descent from Washtenaw County served and died for the U.S. in this war.

### **Foods and Customs**

While we all speak English now and think of Germany as perhaps just another foreign land, inklings of our German heritage have been passed down to us in several ways. The foods we eat can easily reveal our original heritage, and favored dishes often survive long after other customs and traditions have vanished over the generations.

For example, many of the smaller towns and villages in Washtenaw County have monthly or at least annual ‘sauerkraut suppers’, benefit events that began with our German ancestors. At a typical sauerkraut supper, sausages (or more appropriately *wurst*, pronounced “vurst” in proper German, or “woosht” in the local German dialect) are served with *sauerkraut*. Sauerkraut was often made in large crocks at home as part of the annual fall harvest activities. At least historically *knockwurst*, *bloodwurst*, *liverwurst*, or *wieners* were present. And of course, the meal would not be complete without *knoepfles* (pronounced “niffleys”). This side-dish originated with the Swabians, who seem to have convinced all the other Germans in the county to eat it regularly. More universally known as *spaetzles* (‘little sparrows’), the older term *knoepfles* (‘little buttons’) remained more popular in Washtenaw County. Sometimes known as ‘German pasta’, *knoepfles* are small flour and egg dumplings cooked in boiling water, then often mixed with browned butter and fried bread-crumbs before serving.

Christmas-time also brought out the traditional fare, as our mothers and grandmothers filled their tins with *schnitzbrod* (dried fruit bread) and several varieties of cookies. A seasonal gathering was thought to be incomplete if a plate of German Christmas cookies was not present on every serving table. *Lebkuchen* (honey or molasses cake cookies) were made, often with the distinctly American addition of a hickory nut on top. Also served were *pfeffernuesse* (locally *pfeffernuessles*), or ‘little pepper nuts’, dense sweet cookies seasoned with black pepper. Others included *zimsterne* (cinnamon stars) made with ground almonds and a meringue icing, and *springerles*, anise-flavored picture cookies pressed into traditional molds before baking. In our local churches, Christmas carols were often sung in German, and sometimes still are.



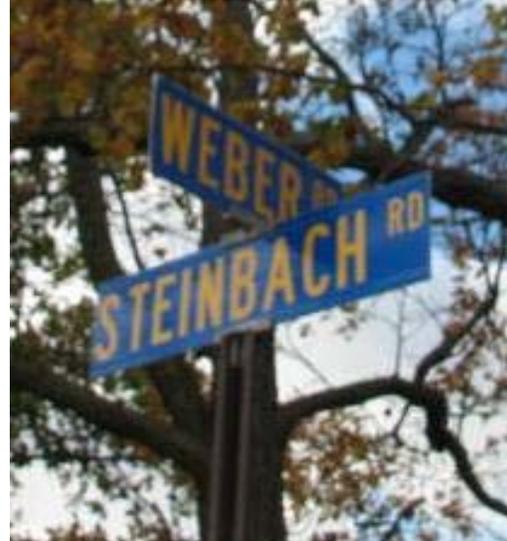
German Christmas cookies [from left: *Zimsterne*(top), *Pfeffernuessles*(bottom), *Lebkuchen*, *Springerles*].

Birthdays were often celebrated with cakes, one of which, the *blitzkuchen*, was a favorite, made of layers of yellow cake, meringue, cinnamon, and almonds, with a cr me filling. Breakfast also had its German influence, with *stierum* and *pfannekuchen*, which could also be served at suppertime. Either of these dishes can best be described as half-way between scrambled eggs and pancakes, in which a flour, milk, and egg batter was either scrambled (*stierum*) or fried whole into thin pancakes (*pfannekuchen*) and often served with spicy *bratwursts*. For dessert, home-made doughnuts were regular, particularly *fastnachts* (locally *fastnachtskueche*); raised doughnuts deep-fried and then shaken in a bag with sugar and eaten warm (anyone getting hungry?).

Another custom passed down and continued at least into the 1960’s or 1970’s was that of a *horning*, a rousing party with square-dancing, polkas, card-playing, and plenty of beer and home-made soft *pretzels*. Hornings were held after the more solemn events of a church wedding and reception, and often took place in a cleaned barn or outbuilding on the parents’ farm. Even the locally popular card game of euchre (“*jucker*” in German, and pronounced the same) originated with our southwest German ancestors. Those old Germans taught us to work hard, but they also knew how to have fun when the work was done!

## Geographic Names

Because American settlers usually preceded the Germans into Washtenaw County, none of the towns in the county are based on German names (unlike Frankenmuth in Saginaw County, where the Bavarian immigrants preceded other groups into the area). Local names did spring up, however, such as “Kassel” for Bridgewater, described earlier. German geographic names survive now only in the names of local lakes (e.g., Arnold Lake, Birkle Lake, Lambarth Lake, Lehman Lake) and roads, which were often named for a prominent family or sometimes the only family living on that road. The following table lists German surnames for which roads in Washtenaw County were named in the early decades of the 1900’s.



*Road sign in Freedom Township.*

*Table 11. Roads named after German families in Washtenaw County (with alterations or misspellings noted in parentheses).*

Alber	Haab	Lehman(n)	Roepke
Altenbern(d)t	Hack	Liebeck	Sager
Boet(t)ger	Haist	Lindeman(n)	S(c)hellenberger
Boettner	Hartman(n)	Lohr	Schill
Brassow	Hashley	Luckhardt	Schleweiss
Braun	Hazel(shwerdt)	Loeffler	Schmitz
Burmeister	Heim	Mahrle	Schneider
Buss	Hellner	Marshall	Schwab
Diuble	Herman	Mast	Spies
Donner	Hieber	Merkle	Staebler
Eis(e)man(n)	Hoelzer	Mertz	Stein
Ernst	Hoppe	Morhart	Steinbach
Esch	Jacob	Muschbach	Strieter
Fahrner	Kaiser	Osius	Tessmer
Feldkamp	Kalmbach	Pfaus	Trinkle
Gensley	Klager	Rank	Trolz
Gieske	Klinger	Reiman(n)	Wagner
Gross	Koebbe	Reno	Walker
Grossmann	Kothe	Renz	Weber
Guenther	Kuhl	Roehm	Zeeb

## Family Names

Sometime around the 1200's to 1300's in central Europe, populations of local towns and villages reached such levels that having only single names (such as 'Hans' or 'Maria') became too confusing. At that time, local dukes, princes, or clergy required all citizens to adopt a second name to clarify tax and social records. Thus, surnames came into regular use and were passed down through generations typically (although not always!) via male heirs. Surnames were diverse, but in Germany at the time, many citizens adopted names that had either already been given to them by their neighbors as nicknames, or names adopted by themselves. For example, if someone named Hans had moved into town from a distant village, say from Heimerdingen, northwest of Stuttgart, that man might be called 'Hans the Heimerdinger', later becoming Hans Heimerdinger when surnames became mandatory. Or, if they were known by their job, 'Friedrich the Meyer', or, 'Fred the farmer', became Friedrich Meyer. Thus many of the surnames we see today are those that reflect the original location or occupation of the head of the household at the time surnames were required.

Certain naming patterns tended to be regional. For example, in Wuerttemberg, the addition of an 'er' after a name typically signified an occupation, such as Fischer (the fisherman) and Helber (the thresher) or the place they lived, either a situation or town, such as Egeler (the guy living on the corner, or 'Ege'), or Feuerbacher (the guy from the village of Feuerbach). Farther north in Germany, the ending '-mann' was often added to a man's occupation or living situation, thus we have Gartmann (the gardener) and Lindemann (the guy living under the linden tree). Sometimes both occupation and location were combined, giving us Furthmueller (the miller by the ford) and Pfitzenmaier (the farmer by the pond).

Diminutives were often used to end a surname, typically as a term of endearment or familiarity, similar to how we now use them on given names, like Mikey or Margie for a Mike or a Margaret that we know and like well; or as we might use the term 'junior'. In Germany it was applied to the surname, and again, these diminutives were regional. In southwest Germany, the 'le' ending became the typical diminutive, thus Schaible (the roof thatcher) and Mahrle (the guy by the swampy lake) developed. In east-central Germany, the ending used was 'ke', giving us Dahlke (the valley dweller) and Nimke (the man living by the swamp).

Besides occupational and location-based surnames, many other types of names were adopted, such as using the first name of the father as the last name for the sons, like the surnames Friedrich, Paul, Walter, and Hermann. Sometimes names were derived from nicknames or shortened first names, such as in Fritz (for Friedrich). Some even added a diminutive, such as Dieterle (after the first name Dieter, the short form of Dietrich) and Gieske (a short form of Giesebrecht, a common first name at the time).

Characteristics of the person were often used as well, either taken on by their owner, such as Lang (for tall), and Schwartz (for a dark-haired man), or given by so-called friends,

which might include less flattering epithets such as Pfaus (the boastful one) or Visel (the skirt-chaser)! Other creative names included such traits as how they wore their clothing, such as Schittenhelm (shake the helmet) and Wackenhut (wobble the hat), or even more imaginative names like Nuebling (child of the mist).

We also notice a few French names among our German pioneers. Names such as Bohnet and Larmee (originally Talmon L'Armee) represent descendants of a Frenchman by that name who somehow ended up in Wuerttemberg. These were often political or religious refugees who resettled in Germany, or sometimes itinerant workers or traveling salesmen from France who married local women, settled down into the community, and passed their French names on to their descendants.

Once in America, German surnames were sometimes changed, either to make the name easier to pronounce, such as Steinigeweg to Steinaway, and Gaensle to Gensley, or to Anglicize the name, such as Mueller to Miller, and Bischoff to Bishop. Occasionally they were changed because they contained perceived unpleasant or even vulgar words in English, such that Ugele became Ukele, Schittenhelm became Schettenhelm, and Assenheimer became Heimer. Below is a list of some name changes among local families. The older form of the name is important to know since it often appears in church or county records, on gravestones, and in other genealogical sources.

*Table 12. Original spellings and present spellings (or name changes) of some common German surnames in Washtenaw County.*

<b>Original Spelling</b>	<b>Changed Spelling</b>	<b>Original Spelling</b>	<b>Changed Spelling</b>
Altenberndt	Altenbernt	Köhler (Koehler)	Kohler
Assenheimer	Heimer	Talmon L'Armee	Larmee
Bahnmueller	Bahnmilller	Mohrlock	Morlock
Bürkle (Buerkle)	Birkle	Nüßle (Nuessle)	Nissley
Däuble (Daeuble)	Diuble	Renau	Reno
Dreßelhaus	Dresselhouse	Romelhardt	Romelhart
Eisenmann	Eiseman(n)	Schellenberger	Shellenberger
Fügel (Fuegel)	Fiegel	Schittenhelm	Schettenhelm
Furthmueller	Furthmiller	Seybold	Seabolt
Gänsle (Gaensle)	Gensley	Spieß (Spiess)	Spies
Gengenbach	Gengenbaugh	Steinigeweg	Steinaway
Hönes (Hoenes)	Henes	Strähle (Straehle)	Strahle
Hornung	Horning	Thoni	Toney
Eicheldinger	Icheldinger	Walz	Waltz
Kläger (Klaeger)	Klager	Wiedmayer	Weidmayer

We can see from several of the changes made that they simply either did or did not include the Anglicized version of the *Umlaut* (oom-lowt), those two little dots over vowels a, o, and u. Typically, if not using the umlaut, German language conventions

allow the addition of an ‘e’ after the vowel. Common local names such as Jaeger, Boettner, and Kuebler are spelled in proper German as Jäger, Böttner, and Kübler. Spelling reflects the rounding of the lips to pronounce the umlaut in German.

Although very consistent in proper German of today, the pronunciation of umlaut combinations became variable in Washtenaw County, particularly for ‘oe’. This combination can be pronounced in Roehm as “Reem”, but in Koebbe as “Kibby”, in Oesterle as “Ohsterly”, in Hoeft as “Heft”, and in Schroen as “Shrane”! Names such as Klager (Kläger), Kohler (Köhler), and Kruger (Krüger) never added the ‘e’ after the vowel topped by an umlaut, perhaps because the pronunciation (as a long vowel) was essentially the same either way, and adding an ‘e’ would have only made spelling and pronouncing the name more confusing for Americans. Similarly, Old German contained umlauts over some ‘y’s as well, but in that case, an ‘h’ was added to clarify a lack of punctuation, thus Deyle became Deyhle, and Layyer was sometimes changed to Layher.

Other German grammar rules can also trip up the genealogist. One is the *Eszet* (ß), which looks like a capital ‘B’ in the middle or end of a name, but generally represents a double ‘s’. Surnames such as ‘Leßer’ and ‘Spieß’ were later changed to Lesser and Spies, in which the double ‘s’ was either carried through or not in America. This grammatical feature should be watched for on gravestones and old church documents, as names like ‘Groß’ (Gross) could be mistaken for ‘Grob’, and, with Americanization of the name added in, ‘Nüßle’ only barely resembles its modern counterpart ‘Nissley’.



1915 Washtenaw County Atlas Advertisements.

Another German convention of the time (generally pre-1880), frequently added an '-in' or sometimes '-ine' to the maiden name of wives and mothers. Thus old church records and gravestones that list 'Agatha Reimoldin' or 'Maria Schaiblin' represent women born as 'Agatha Reimold' and 'Maria Schaible'. Sometimes this 'in' ending was carried through as the family name in some areas but not others, thus we have both 'Oesterle's and 'Oesterlin's in our county.

Some letters are also pronounced differently in German than in English, and surnames bear some changes because of it. Frequent examples are the letters 'b', 'd' and 'z', particularly at the end of a name. In German, an ending 'b' is pronounced more like a 'p', and an ending 'd' is pronounced more like an English 't'. The name Zeeb, pronounced properly in German, becomes 'Tseep'. Names like 'Schmid', or 'Burkhard' may (or may not) add a 't' (Schmidt, Burkhardt), to enhance their original pronunciation. However, some names, such as Dold ('Dolt') were not changed, probably due to otherwise negative English connotations. Likewise, a 'z' in German is more like the English combination 'ts', changing 'Kaz' to 'Kotts', or 'Merz' to 'Mertz'.

Overall, it is impressive that so few German surnames in Washtenaw County were changed. This probably reflects the long period of time in which the Germans lived in our county without using English except when absolutely necessary, such as for commerce at English-speaking businesses. Even some fairly complicated or easily mispronounced names, such as Haeussler ("Hysler"), Jedele ("Yadely"), Leutheuser ("Light-hyzer"), Spathelf ("Spot-helf"), and Theurer ("Tyrer"), made it through without changes. To change or not to change the family name sometimes caused a small rift, and resulted in several families using two, or even three different spellings depending on which patriarch you were descended from. For example, three different spellings of Haselschwerdt (Haselschwerdt, Haselschwardt, and Heselschwerdt) can be seen in the same Sharon Township cemetery!

Every name has a unique meaning and history. Meanings of most of our local German surnames are listed in the **Appendix** found along with this document.

### **Given Names**

Prior to the year 1900 it was a common convention among the Germans to have anywhere from 1 to 3 or even 4 given names placed before the surname. At least 2 given names was the usual case for both men and women. Most often, individuals referred to themselves by the last of these given names, therefore, usually by what we now consider their middle names. Thus, if you see the name *Johann Georg Mayer*, this man, if born before the 1880's or possibly as late as 1900, would have, in every-day use, typically gone by the name *Georg Mayer*. This can be confusing for those attempting to do genealogical research on German ancestors, because in America, the point in time when families decided to address an individual by the first name and not by the middle name was variable.

In addition, the very common male first name *Johann* (or John in English) was frequently given by some families as the first name to every son, each of which was then known commonly by their (different) middle names (e.g., *Johann Martin*, *Johann Emil*, *Johann Michael*), and not as *Johann*. If a family wanted to call one son *Johann*, they usually named him *Johannes*, often meaning *Johann Johann*.

German given names were frequently changed slightly as the immigrants spent time in the new land and desired to fit in with their surrounding English-speaking neighbors. Many were known by their German name, such as *Georg* (pronounced “Gay-org”) or *Katharina* to their fellow Germans, but as George or Kate to their Yankee neighbors.

When these Anglicized names are found, they can be confusing to later-day researchers. Some names did not change at all or only a letter or two was changed and can easily be tracked, such as *Konrad* to Conrad, *Philipp* to Philip, or *Karl* to Carl, while many changed more significantly, but were still often recognizable in either form, such as *Andreas* to Andrew, *Bernhardt* to Bernard, *Christhoff* to Christopher, *Ernst* to Ernest, *Friedrich* to Fredrick, *Gottfried* to Godfrey, *Heinrich* to Henry, *Matthias* to Mathew, and *Wilhelm* to William.

Other names changed significantly, to the point where it may be difficult to see the derivation, but the adaptation was quite standard at the time. Examples of the latter include *Karl* to Charles, *Erhardt* to Aaron, *Emil* to Amos, and *Ludwig* to Louis. Women’s names in particular were commonly shortened, thus *Adelheid* became Delia, *Henrietta* became Etta, *Magdalena* became Lena, and *Heinricka* became Ricka. A general rule of thumb remained, however, that most of our German ancestors were known by their middle names, not their first names, prior to about 1900.

## Genealogy

Accompanying this document is an **Appendix** in which we have compiled the surnames of the known German pioneers of Washtenaw County (those arriving from 1830-1900) along with evidence for their inclusion, their village and province of origin, if known, alternate name spellings, and at least one published interpretation of the family name. The **Appendix** includes surnames of German settlers known to have emigrated directly (or with only brief stops) from the German-speaking regions of Europe to Washtenaw County, from 1830 to 1900. In many cases, but certainly not all, the families were relatives of one another and often arrived from the same or nearby villages. So far we have listed the names of family patriarchs only. Wives, widows, single women, or single men who emigrated but did not leave descendants are usually not (yet) included.

Most of the evidence we relied upon comes from the 1870 and 1880 censuses of the county (available on-line at this website and at [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org)), the 1874 and 1915 atlases of the county, the 1892 directory, the International Genealogical Index, as well as county, church, and cemetery records. A surname with only minimal evidence was not included in the appendix, and many of these families will probably be included once

more evidence is found. We could not check all records for all names so your help in amending or correcting the appendix is welcomed.

Not included in the appendix are those surnames for which we may have originally thought represented German settlers, but which were later found to have either been American settlers with German surnames (settlers born in the U.S. who later moved to Washtenaw County) or were surnames with origins in non-German speaking portions of Europe. Known Jewish families with German surnames were also not included, and are better listed in a compilation of the small but vibrant Jewish community in our county.

Much of the family data was originally compiled by Terry Stollsteimer, who maintains an extensive database on the genealogy of many of the German settlers of Washtenaw County. If you would like more information on your ancestors, Terry may be able to provide details of family trees, birth, marriage, and death records, etc. His email address is [terry.stoll@comcast.net](mailto:terry.stoll@comcast.net). Once provided with data on your family, Terry only requests that you review the information he provides and respond back with any corrections and additions you may have for him, including recent marriages, births, deaths, etc. This will increase the accuracy of those entries and provide a comprehensive record of the genealogy of our German ancestors.

This summary and the attached lists, represent a compilation of a large amount of information from various sources. While we have tried to double-check much of the information presented, it almost certainly contains numerous errors. If you have any additional information, corrections, or comments on this history or the appendix, please contact Dale Herter at [drherter@hotmail.com](mailto:drherter@hotmail.com). Updates will be provided periodically on this web page as information is made known to us. Particularly important are additions and corrections to the appendix we provide. We hope this has been of interest to you and we encourage you to help make this summary as complete as possible.