

The Assimilation of German Immigrants into a Pennsylvania German Township, 1840–1900

CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE in the field of German American immigration history since Kathleen Neils Conzen lamented in 1980 that “almost no attention has been paid to the large numbers of Germans who settled in rural areas.” Excellent studies of pioneering settlements on the agricultural frontier have subsequently appeared.¹ Not all rural German settlements, however, were found in the newly developed lands of the Midwest and the Great Plains. This article examines an exception of the sort Conzen has called a “side channel” of the nineteenth-century immigration tide—namely, those German-speaking immigrants who settled in Nockamixon Township, a lightly populated, rural Pennsylvania Dutch township of northern (“Upper”) Bucks County in southeastern Pennsylvania.² It tells the story of their adaptation to

The author wishes to thank Philip Gleason, Walter Kamphoefner, Roy Domenico, and the two anonymous *PMHB* reviewers for insightful suggestions that contributed to the improvement of this article.

¹ Kathleen Neils Conzen, “The Writing of German-American History,” *Immigration History Newsletter* 12 (Nov. 1980): 8; Walter D. Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri* (Princeton, NJ, 1987); Terry G. Jordan, “A Religious Geography of the Hill Country Germans of Texas,” in *Ethnicity on the Great Plains*, ed. Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln, NE, 1980); Linda Schelbitzki Pickle, *Contented among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Urbana, IL, 1996); Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830–1917* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997); Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Making Their Own America: Assimilation Theory and the German Peasant Pioneer* (New York, 1990); Carol Coburn, *Life at Four Corners: Religion, Gender, and Education in a German-Lutheran Community, 1848–1945* (Lawrence, KS, 1992); David Peterson, “From Bone Depth: German-American Communities in Rural Minnesota before the Great War,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11 (Winter 1992): 27–55.

² Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Mainstreams and Side Channels: The Localization of Immigrant Cultures,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11 (Fall 1991): 5. In 1850, Nockamixon Township included a sector abutting the Delaware River known as the Bridgeton District. This study includes that area, even after 1890 when it became an independent township. *Bucks County Intelligencer*, May 29, 1855; *Doylestown Democrat*, Apr. 1, 1890.

America, which was unusually rapid and successful because of the special environment in which they settled.

Through the lens of assimilation theory, the experience of these newcomers and their progeny suggests a cultural-pluralist paradigm. However, they did not create a local, pluralist society by establishing a non-Anglo-American immigrant subculture (as was possible, for instance, on the frontier with Conzen's Stearns County, Minnesota, Germans³), but rather they melded into and reinforced one element in a pluralist culture already extant among Bucks County natives. More specifically, these emigrants from Germanic Europe, in what might be called cognate assimilation, blended into a predominantly "Pennsylvania Dutch" society, one with which they shared many values and customs, including religious affiliations and traditions, occupational and political orientation, and, most noticeably, facility in a non-English language. Thus, they found it unnecessary to create an ethnic subcommunity with its typical array of institutions. Instead, they integrated rapidly into the local community, quickly moving through Elliott Barkan's six stages, "From Contact to Assimilation," in one generation.⁴ This "Dutch" "core culture," however, was itself in flux and slowly and reluctantly anglicizing, a process promoted by a minority in the township and by the "English" elements from the more southerly part of the county that dominated county government.⁵

More partial to the plow than the pen, Nockamixon people were not inclined to speculate about the ethnic nature of their community. But, William J. Buck, a township native, descendant of colonial Rhineland immigrants, and an enthusiastic amateur local historian, did express his opinion on the role of Bucks County "Germans" (by which he meant primarily indigenous residents of German ancestry) in the wider society, a belief that can be transposed into modern assimilation theory.

³ Conzen, *Making Their Own America*.

⁴ Elliott Barkan, "Race, Religion, and Nationality in American Society: A Model of Ethnicity—From Contact to Assimilation," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 14 (Winter 1995): 51–64. Barkan's six stages of accommodation are: contact, acculturation, adaptation, accommodation, integration, and assimilation. "Assimilation" implies that an ethnic group's "political and cultural norms, cultural and social activities, language usage, residential locations, friends, associates, spouses, identities, and loyalties have by and large become indistinguishable—or insignificantly different—from those aspects of [the ambient] general society and core culture" (47–48).

⁵ On the persistent pull of an Anglo-American core in the wider society (and the nettlesome modern problem of identifying it), see Russell A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 437–71.

Uninfluenced by the social scientific labels of the twentieth century, he vigorously rejected what we would call “Anglo-conformity” for his people and, in an 1882 article, posited a version of the “melting pot” theory. Yet, this was a melting pot that simmered so slowly that it might reasonably be labeled a version of the rather elastic concept of “cultural pluralism.” He noted that Bucks County “has now been occupied fully two centuries by different European nationalities” and that these raw materials were “harmoniously blending to form our American citizens.” Nonetheless, he advocated the preservation of the “German” language in America (a variety of which he had learned growing up in Upper Bucks and still spoke), expressed admiration for certain German American personality traits, and seemed in no hurry to promote the blending process. His concluding remarks suggested that “*two more* centuries of amalgamation will leave but few of pure German, English or other nationality.”⁶

The phenomenon of immigrants merging readily with a native culture rooted in prerevolutionary America is unusual but not entirely unique. It has long been recognized that many British newcomers (the “invisible immigrants”) assimilated seamlessly. Among the non-British, the clearest parallel is found among French-speaking immigrants to Creole New Orleans in the early nineteenth century, although their culture crumbled more quickly than that of the Bucks County Dutch. Pre-1880 German migrants to New Mexico also confronted a non-Anglo way of life, derived from the Spanish heritage of the area. They acculturated to this base society to a degree, which obviously required that they move beyond their ethnic heritage, but, when supplemented by reinforcements from the Old Country after 1880, they became more ethnocentric.⁷ The clearest replication of the Nockamixon experience can almost certainly be found

⁶ “The German Population in Bucks County,” in *A Collection of Papers Read before the Bucks County Historical Society* 1 ([1908]): 59–65. Quotations from page 65. Italics added. Thus, perhaps, Buck describes an example of the pre-Horace Kallen “vernacular” pluralism discussed in a recent article by Russell A. Kazal. See “The Lost World of Pennsylvania Pluralism: Immigrants, Regions, and the Early Origins of Pluralist Ideologies in America,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 27 (Spring 2008): 1–18.

⁷ Paul F. Lachance, “The Foreign French,” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge, LA, 1992), 101–2, 105, 112, 118–20, 130; Tomas Jaehn, *Germans in the Southwest, 1850–1920* (Albuquerque, NM, 2005), 1–3, 33, 108, 113, 116–17, 140–41. A curious variation of this phenomenon can be found in the experience of many Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Though they constituted the base culture (and thus were not “immigrants”), they were partially Americanized in situ by European Jesuit missionaries, who (bicultural themselves) did so with considerable concern for the preservation of native languages and culture. Gerald McKeivitt, *Brokers of Culture: Italian Jesuits in the American West, 1848–1919* (Stanford, CA, 2007), chap. 7.

among the smaller numbers of German immigrants scattered about the other Pennsylvania Dutch townships of Upper Bucks County in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Perhaps researchers will find other such instances in the greater Dutch community of Pennsylvania.

German immigration to Nockamixon Township was slow in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, increased slightly in the 1830s, peaked in the 1840s and 1850s, and tapered off to scattered instances in the final three decades of the century.⁸ While not large in absolute numbers, these immigrants did constitute a substantial minority in the township. German-born heads of household (including several Alsatians) totaled 8.4 percent of all household heads in the township in 1850, 13.1 percent in 1860, 11.8 percent in 1880, and 7 percent in 1900.⁹

The vast majority of these immigrants came from the Upper Rhine region, and a majority of those came from Baden. Furthermore, most of the Badener derived from Oberhausen and Niederhausen, two small villages located less than a kilometer apart on the Rhine River. Chain migration, now recognized as normative in migration history, largely accounted for the clustering of these newcomers in America. The pioneer from Oberhausen/Niederhausen was Xaver Meyer (“John X. Moyer” here), who arrived in 1841; he was followed by Landolin Frueh (“Freeh” here) and his family in 1842. Many of their relatives and neighbors, including, prominently, members of the Fleck, Stehlin, Phillip, and Schwer clans, emigrated soon after. Other, smaller chains emanated from Koenigsbach, Baden, and several small towns on the other side of the Rhine in Alsace.¹⁰

⁸ German born were identified primarily from census records. These names were then matched with names in the Nockamixon Township tax records, yielding the following totals of new, taxed, German-speaking immigrants into the township by decade: 1830s—2; 1840s—22; 1850s—49. Since the vast majority of these individuals were heads of household, the grand total of German newcomers far exceeded the above numbers. Manuscript tax records and microfilmed Bucks County census records are available at the Spruance Library of the Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, PA.

⁹ These and subsequent statistics and cross-tabulations in this paper were provided by Vincent F. Merkel, senior consultant at the University of Scranton’s Desktop and Instructional Resources Center. His skilled and persevering assistance was critical to the completion of the project. He built upon the data entries and preliminary calculations done by a series of student assistants over the years: Donald Reed, Robert Kleck, Wendy Cimocho, Michael Sebastian, Gregory Boyle, Joseph Yessen, and Dawn Daria. All statistics in this study are based on 100 percent samples.

¹⁰ Family connections and times of arrival are derived from the following: S. B. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Aug. 28, 1985; L. F. (M), interview, Bursonville, PA, June 8, 1999 (These and all subsequent interviews were by the author. All interviewees cited in this paper were born between 1885 and 1930 and were either brought up and/or lived substantial portions of their lives in Nockamixon Township or the immediate vicinity. To protect their privacy, I will refer to them only by their ini-

Regardless of how they got there, German-speaking immigrants concentrated in only one specific section of Bucks County. As of 1880, while 11.8 percent of heads of families in Nockamixon Township claimed Germanic birthplaces, fewer than 1 percent did so in Solebury and Lower Makefield Townships in Lower Bucks County. Interestingly, these areas were like Nockamixon in their agrarian character and location on the Delaware River and Canal. Even the other Dutch townships on Nockamixon's borders recorded much lower percentages of German immigrant families, except for Tinicum Township (8 percent in 1880) to the immediate south, where (for reasons to be noted) the environment was similar.

In considering why the Rhinelanders gravitated to this particular area of southeastern Pennsylvania and why they subsequently remained there in large numbers (over 40 percent of the immigrant family heads in the 1860 census were still heads in 1880),¹¹ one must first consider the economic motives behind their emigration. By the mid-nineteenth century, several factors threatened livelihoods in the small villages of the Upper Rhine. Families found that their traditional methods of sustaining themselves through a combination of agriculture and handicrafts became less viable because of a burgeoning population, partible heritage, and deteriorating opportunities in the skilled trades, attributable in part to the impact of the industrial revolution. Spinning and weaving were especially hard hit.¹² The practice of subdividing property among offspring and the ero-

tials, noting also whether they were male [M] or female [F].); Fay Schwar Cox, "The Ancestors and Descendants of Sebastian Schwar and His Wife Theresia Philipp and Melchior Free and His Wife Magdalena Fleck Who Emigrated to America" (unpublished typescript, Allentown, PA, 1982), ii, v-vi, 11, 16, 42, 60, 159-60, copy in the possession of William J. Reinbold, Ottsville, PA; parish registers of Catholic churches in Niederhausen, Oberhausen, and Rust in Baden and Zinswiller and Rheinau in Alsace (available on microfilm at libraries of the Church of the Latter Day Saints); parish register, St. John the Baptist Church, Haycock, PA, microfilm, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; parish register, St. Joseph's Church, Easton, PA; Nockamixon Township tax records, manuscript, Spruance Library; Daniel F. Mergenthaler, "Descendants of Daniel and Katrina Stoeckel Trautz" (unpublished typescript, Doylestown, PA, 1938), 5-6, 22, Spruance Library.

¹¹ The percentage of persisters would be about 50 percent if nonhead persisters in the 1880 Nockamixon Township census and persisters who had drifted into neighboring townships were included. Nockamixon German twenty-year persistence rates notably exceed even the decennial rates found among Germans in nineteenth-century Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and South Bend, Indiana. Dean R. Esslinger, *Immigrants and the City: Ethnicity and Mobility in a Nineteenth Century Midwestern Community* (Port Washington, NY, 1975), 42-43; Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836-1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge, MA, 1976), 42.

¹² Wolfgang Koellmann and Peter Marschalck, "German Emigration to the United States," *Perspectives in American History* 7 (1973): 528, 532n; Lesley Kawaguchi, "The Making of

sion of artisans' prospects doubtlessly contributed to the "famine" reported in the Niederhausen town records in 1853. A few years later, Achaz Fleck, in his petition for permission to leave the village and join his sister's family in Bucks County, noted that he had six children to provide for and added that "here there is no outlet for better pay since the mechanics position is overfilled."¹³

Nockamixon Township, then, offered people such as Fleck an opportunity, unique in some respects, to salvage their economic status and to do so in a familiar manner; it provided them an opportunity to own their own farmland and, to some degree, to practice their Old World crafts. Yet, given that German immigrants, in general, came to America "less to build something new than to conserve something old,"¹⁴ it seems odd that the Nockamixon Township settlers' major entrée into the local workforce was canal work, which seemingly neither required Old World craft skills nor appeared readily compatible with farming. Nevertheless, in the 1850s and 1860s, more than one-half of all employed male Germans in the township over the age of fifteen worked as boatmen (see table 1). This was more than three times the ratio among native-born males and represented a sharp contrast with the general pattern among German immigrants in America. Hutchinson's analysis of the 1870 U.S. Census found the German-born drastically underrepresented in this occupational area.¹⁵

The Nockamixon anomaly can be explained largely by the presence of the Delaware Canal near the township's eastern border and by the special character and needs of the immigrants. This waterway, constructed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was completed in the early 1830s and became the major avenue for commerce in Bucks County. Paralleling the often unnavigable Delaware River, it ran from Easton, in adjacent Northampton County, on the north, where it connected with the Lehigh

Philadelphia's German-America: Ethnic Group and Community Development, 1830–1883" (PhD diss., UCLA, 1983), 96–101, 105–6; Robert E. Dickinson, *The Regions of Germany* (New York, 1945), 110–11.

¹³ Quotation is found in Cox, "Ancestors and Descendants of Sebastian Schwar," v. The rest of the information on Niederhausen is from Cox, p. vi, and from Anton Wild, "Zur Geschichte der Doerfer Ober- und Niederhausen," in *Ortssippenbuch Rheinhausen* (Ober- und Niederhausen): *Landkreis Emmendingen in Baden*, by Albert Koebele and Margarete Kirner (Grafenhausen bei Lahr, Ger., 1975), 12–13.

¹⁴ Mack Walker, *Germany and the Emigration, 1816–1885* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), 69.

¹⁵ See table 21 in E. P. Hutchinson, *Immigrants and Their Children, 1850–1950* (New York, 1956), 82.

Canal and thus the lower anthracite coal fields, through the length of Bucks County to its southern terminus at Bristol, whence goods were shipped through the tidal head of the river to and from Philadelphia. The enterprise flourished in the antebellum era, though it very gradually lost out to the growing network of railroads after the Civil War.¹⁶ By 1850, canal boating had become the second-most-popular occupation among employed male heads of household in the township—but still a distant second to farming—and would remain second or third for the rest of the century.¹⁷

	1850	1860	1880	1900
American-born	11.6% (N55)	15.7% (N98)	13.9% (N98)	20.8% (N113)
German-born	58.8% (N30)	54.7% (N47)	15.7% (N11)	11.1% (N3)
All	16.7% (N91)	20.8% (N153)	13.9% (N109)	20.3% (N117)

Though atypical, the Nockamixon Germans' gravitation to this line of work did not necessarily represent a radical departure from Old World experience. Oberhausen and Niederhausen, which provided the core of the German community in the township, had the Rhine River nearby to their west and the Elz River even closer to their east, where it flowed northward to confluence with the Rhine. The Leopoldskanal, which connected the two rivers, ran east-west just south of the villages. Surely residents of the two towns were familiar with canal life, and some, in fact, did make their living by fishing and hauling freight on the rivers and, most likely, on the canal as well. John Moyer had been a *Schiffknecht* (ship worker) in his home village. This experience may explain, in part, why he became the first from his hometown to settle his family in Nockamixon Township, where he and his oldest sons made their living as boatmen. Several subsequent immigrants from the Niederhausen area were the sons of fathers who made their livings on the water (a fisherman and a ship

¹⁶ Willis M. Rivinus, *A Wayfarers Guide to the Delaware Canal along the Delaware River between Bristol and Easton, Pennsylvania*, 4th ed. (n.p., 1964), 5–8.

¹⁷ Based on computer-generated statistics derived from information in 1850, 1860, 1880, and 1900, Nockamixon Township microfilmed U.S. Census records.

captain), which apparently facilitated their adoption of the boatman's occupation here.¹⁸

The larger reason for the Rhinelanders' heavy concentration in canal work echoes the experience of so many immigrants in all eras: it provided an available niche. Boating on the canal did not attract native-born laborers in sufficient numbers. It was a rough occupation (fights among boatmen were common when vying for position at the locks), pay was minimal, and the work year was shortened by winter and occasional heavy rains, which caused breaches in the canal's earthen banks. Since a boatman's income usually could not sustain a family, a married man would often try to supplement the family income in various ways, either by working other jobs in winter (where possible) or by having his wife and children operate a small family farm, as was commonly the case in Nockamixon Township.¹⁹

While boating clearly constituted the dominant occupational opportunity for Rhinelanders in this area, the local economy also offered some of the newcomers opportunities in skilled labor commensurate with their Old World trades. Nockamixon Township provided a favorable environment because at midcentury it retained much of its preindustrial character. Although farming predominated in 1850, almost one-quarter of all employed males over the age of fifteen worked at a craft. Carpenters, shoemakers, masons, and blacksmiths were the most widely practiced trades throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.²⁰ Of seven immigrants whose European trades can be confidently identified, a majority found work here in their areas of expertise—a mason, a tile maker (who became a potter), a shoemaker, and a blacksmith. Each benefited from local circumstances—the mason (whose sons did similar work here and eventually opened a stone quarry) from the local preference for stone houses and the need for curbing in nearby towns, the tile maker from the existence of potteries in certain clayey areas of the township, the shoemaker from the widespread need for custom-made shoes, and the blacksmith from the canal boat traffic. Two of those who did not find compatible work opportunities here practiced the weaving trade, which,

¹⁸ Catholic church register, Niederhausen, Church of Latter Day Saints libraries; Wild, "Zur Geschichte," 12–13.

¹⁹ *Doylestown Democrat*, Apr. 8, 1846; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Apr. 19, 1853, Dec. 24, 1854, Oct. 24, 1877, Dec. 11, 1886; C. P. "Bill" Yoder, *Delaware Canal Journal: A Definitive History of the Canal and the River Valley through Which It Flows* (Bethlehem, PA, 1972), 159–60, 167–68, 185; S. H. (M), interview, Rupletown, PA, Aug. 26, 1982.

²⁰ Based on calculations from 1850, 1860, 1880, and 1900 U.S. Census records.

though viable in 1850, had virtually disappeared by 1880, thus mirroring the early deleterious impact of the industrial revolution on the textile business in the Rhineland.²¹ Whether related to talents brought from the Old World or not, as table 2 indicates, an increasing number of German immigrants entered the skilled workforce after 1850; in 1860 and 1880, now mostly well established, they did so in proportions comparable to those of the native population.

	1850	1860	1880	1900
American-born	25.0% (N119)	18.4% (N115)	14.8% (N105)	13.6% (N74)
German-born	9.8% (N5)	15.1% (N13)	15.7% (N11)	7.4% (N2)
All	23.3% (N127)	17.8% (N131)	14.9% (N117)	13.4% (N77)

The Old World tradition of mixing agricultural and nonagricultural employment persisted to a degree in the Nockamixon area and would have been familiar to the Rhineland immigrants. In an 1871 county directory, over 20 percent of all the tradesmen and businessmen in the township also appear in its list of farmers. That this statistic might reflect the Germanic traditions of the area is suggested by comparing Nockamixon with Upper Makefield Township, a non-Germanic Bucks County jurisdiction of comparable size, economy, and location, where the crossover was less than 1 percent.²²

Another economic incentive for settling in Nockamixon Township, and certainly a major inducement to remain there, can be found in the prospects for farming and for owning farmland. Coming from rural villages where land was becoming increasingly scarce, most of the Bucks

²¹ Catholic church register, Niederhausen, Church of Latter Day Saints libraries; Nancy D. Singer, "The Simon Singer Pottery," *Mercer Mosaic* 3 (May/June 1986): 61; U.S. Census, 1880, for Nockamixon Township; M. K. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Dec. 25, 1991; Mergenthaler, "Descendants of Daniel and Katrina Stoeckel Trautz," 28.

²² Also note that about twenty household heads identified as boatmen in the 1870 U.S. Census were listed as farmers in the same county directory. S. Hersey, comp., *Business Directory and Gazetteer of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Containing the Names, Business, and Post Office Address of Merchants, Manufacturers, Professional Men and Farmers* (Wilmington, DE, 1871), 147–52, 216–21.

County Rhinelanders hoped to fulfill their traditional aspirations in America by acquiring “family farms.” As table 3 testifies, German immigrants to the township moved impressively into agriculture. Among all employed male German settlers over the age of fifteen, the percentage of farmers rose from 17.4 percent in 1860 to 54.3 percent in 1880 and remained above 50 percent in 1900. In 1880 and 1900, German-born were about twice as likely as native-born residents to be farmers.²³ Conversely, the German-born were dramatically underrepresented in the “farm laborer” category, although differences between them and natives in this occupation largely disappeared by 1900.²⁴

	1850	1860	1880	1900
American-born	32.6% (N155)	28.8% (N180)	30.0% (N212)	25.2% (N137)
German-born	11.8% (N6)	17.4% (N15)	54.3% (N38)	51.9% (N14)
All	30.0% (N163)	27.2% (N200)	32.4% (N254)	26.6% (N153)

German immigrant farmers also moved quickly to own their farmland, however modest the size. Even in 1850, in the early stages of the migratory movement when the numbers were small, 80 percent of the heads of household whose primary occupation was agriculture owned their own land. By 1860, ownership soared to 100 percent and would remain at 95–100 percent for the rest of the century. Thus, once established, the newcomers exceeded the high ownership rates of native-born Nockamixon farmers (see table 4).

The peculiar natural environment of Nockamixon Township permitted immigrants to own land. The better farmlands and the major transportation facilities could be found in the narrow Delaware River Valley along a segment of the eastern edge of the township and in the limestone-rich soil of the western third, which was served by the Durham Road and

²³ These percentages are derived from the relevant decennial U.S. Census records.

²⁴ The underrepresentation is consistent with Hutchinson's analysis of all German Americans in the 1870 U.S. Census. See table 21, *Immigrants and Their Children*, 82.

its branches. The land in between was largely undeveloped at the time the bulk of the newcomers arrived and uncongenial to farm use. Strewn with glacially deposited trap and granite rocks, the heavy, clay subsoil in many areas left the surface damp for extended periods of time and earned the region its popular local moniker, “the Swamp.”²⁵ Thus, it contained an abundance of trees and a paucity of inhabitants.

	American-born		German-born	
	Owned	Rented	Owned	Rented
1850	88.1% (N126)	11.9% (N17)	80.0% (N4)	20.0% (N1)
1860	93.6% (N117)	6.4% (N8)	100.0% (N10)	0.0%
1880	79.9% (N151)	20.1% (N38)	94.6% (N35)	5.4% (N2)
1900	79.4% (N104)	20.6% (N27)	100.0% (N13)	0.0%

The area, however, had a certain appeal to German-speaking immigrants. U.S. Census records and the names of property holders on local maps published in 1850 and 1876 demonstrate that the newcomers clustered, somewhat loosely but clearly, in this Swamp region of central Nockamixon, which extended, as did German settlement, across the southern border into adjacent Tinicum Township.²⁶ The pioneers—John Moyer, Landolin Freeh, and Nicholas Mich—put down roots in close proximity to one another along the only east-west road through this damp, rocky section at a site about four to five miles west of Upper Black Eddy, where the road met the canal and the Delaware River. Virtually all succeeding Rhinelanders settled nearby.

This land’s primary appeal was its price. Lots here clearly cost less than the largely treeless and rock-free parcels outside the Swamp. Unsurprisingly, tax records during the period of maximum immigration

²⁵ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Aug. 5, 1897; *Doylestown Democrat*, Jan. 8, 1889; *Combined Atlases of Bucks County, Pennsylvania: 1876* by J. D. Scott and *1891* by E. P. Noll and Co. (Mt. Vernon, IN, 1992), Noll map section, 108.

²⁶ The 1850 township maps are on file at the Spruance Library. The 1876 maps can be found in *Combined Atlases*. See also Robert K. Buehrle, “The Swamp of Tinicum and Nockamixon,” *A Collection of Papers Read before the Bucks County Historical Society* 4 (1917): 85.

reveal that Nockamixon Township could claim one of the two lowest average per-acre assessments in Bucks County. Thus, German immigrant landholders in the township generally started on the bottom rungs of the real estate ladder. In 1850, they held real property whose mean value was \$391, while that of native-born Americans was \$897; roughly the same disparity could be found in 1862, as the German settlement in the Swamp grew.²⁷ Even as late as 1897, a local historian could note that “for a few hundred dollars a man could buy enough land to keep a cow or two, and have enough timber to build a log house and barn.”²⁸ Consequently, immigrants, including a number of boatmen, could afford to own small farms while plying their trades.

The immigrants’ desires to replicate the small farming enterprises of their homelands are evidenced by the efforts they expended to clear their land holdings in the Swamp. This was no simple endeavor. Robert Buehrle, whose immigrant parents participated in this land clearing, recorded how the German settlers organized communal work projects, called “frolics,” and “transformed what had been practically a wilderness of rocks, morasses . . . and forests . . . into well-cultivated fertile lands well fenced in with stones taken from the land in the process of clearing.”²⁹

Since most of these small plot holders worked on the canal, the question naturally arises as to how they could work their small farms when the boating season coincided with the most demanding times of the farming calendar. And, of course, livestock required daily care. The traditional role of the German farm wife proved to be critical. The women of Oberhausen/Niederhausen had worked in the fields and barns, supplementing the work of the men, many of whom, as we have seen, were engaged to one degree or another in craft work. As Buehrle noted of farm life in the Swamp, “The women-folk, as might be expected, performed most of the little agricultural labor to which they had been accustomed in ‘the fatherland,’ and acted as managers for the heavier work—they hired

²⁷ “Triennial Valuation of Bucks County, for the Year 1855,” in “Election Returns of Bucks County 1812–1906,” comp. W. W. H. Davis, unpaginated scrapbook, Spruance Library. The numbers are based on information drawn from the manuscript Nockamixon Township tax records for 1850 and 1862 (Spruance Library) correlated with birth places found in U.S. censuses. The relevant tax records for 1860 and 1861 are not extant. Dollar amounts have been rounded off.

²⁸ *Doylestown Democrat*, Aug. 5, 1897, 2.

²⁹ Buehrle, “Swamp,” 85.

such help and teams as were needed from the owners of larger farms.”³⁰ Significant female participation in family agrarian endeavors, including harvesting the field crops, reflected not only Old World practices but also those of the Pennsylvania Dutch of the area and, in fact, persisted over several generations and well into the twentieth century. This imported custom thus presented no obstacle to assimilation into the local community.

Whether or not they engaged in their preferred occupation of farming, immigrants who remained in the Nockamixon area experienced significant economic gains over time. Of the thirty-one German-born family heads (all male) listed in the 1860 federal census for Nockamixon Township who could still be found as heads of household in the vicinity in 1880, twenty-two realized an increase in their county property-value assessment, an increase that averaged 85 percent. Of the nine whose property value declined, more than half (five) were over seventy years of age in 1880 and thus beyond their peak occupational years. Another, according to the 1880 census, was disabled with a spinal injury.³¹

The occupational patterns of the immigrants’ children suggest a continuing adaptation to the larger society, attended with something of their parents’ preference for farming. Computer-generated data for the 1880 and 1900 censuses show that, among second-generation male heads and their male children over the age of fifteen, the percentages employed in boating now only slightly surpassed those of men of native-born stock. As full-fledged farmers, they fell distinctly between the immigrant generation (over half of whom remained on farms) and those of native stock (of whom 25–30 percent farmed).

While similar economic opportunities existed in both the Rhineland and in Nockamixon Township, other, less tangible factors contributed not only to the immigrants’ initial settlement but also to their decision to remain. As they moved from boating and other transitional occupations to farming as a primary livelihood, they, to a considerable degree, stayed

³⁰ Ibid., 87. The rest of the paragraph is from Wild, “Zur Geschichte,” 12; Walter Rinderle and Bernard Norling, *The Nazi Impact on a German Village* (Lexington, KY, 1993), 28, 30; Benjamin Rush, “An Account of the Manners of the German Inhabitants of Pennsylvania,” *Essays, Literary, Moral, and Philosophical* (Philadelphia, 1798), 232; Pickle, *Contented among Strangers*, 29, 183; M. K. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Aug. 21, 1991; F. K. (F), interview, Kintnersville, PA, June 6, 1985; M. S. (F), interview, Harrow, PA, Jan. 11, 1984; L. R. (F), interview, Bridgeton Township, PA, Aug. 25, 1982.

³¹ Township tax records for Nockamixon Township in 1862 and 1880, Durham Township in 1880, and Tincum Township in 1880, Spruance Library.

in the area. Indeed, as noted earlier, over 40 percent of the German-born household heads present in Nockamixon Township in 1860 could be found among the heads there in 1880. Cultural issues, important to women as well as men, certainly played a role.

Significantly, as suggested above by the importance of women to agricultural labor, Rhinelanders found, in this corner of America, a Germanic culture that was, in many respects, recognizable. Originally lightly settled by British and Irish colonists, Nockamixon Township subsequently welcomed large numbers of Pennsylvanians of German ancestry, commonly labeled "Pennsylvania Dutch" by the English; they migrated into the township and other areas of northern Bucks County mainly in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, largely displacing or absorbing the earlier culture, except on its eastern rim along the Delaware River. This development placed Nockamixon on the eastern edge of the Pennsylvania Dutch region, an arc which extended from the Maryland border west of Philadelphia north and east virtually to the New Jersey border. It was thus situated among what the locals called the "German townships" of northern Bucks (in contrast with the rest of the county, where Anglo-Americans prevailed). Many of the relocating families became deeply rooted and, to a considerable degree, preserved their "Dutch" culture through the first half of the nineteenth century; indeed, they even expanded their area of settlement in the mid-nineteenth century southward into central Bucks County.³² These are the people who will be referred to as Pennsylvania Dutch throughout the rest of this paper. Here we have, then, an instance of an eighteenth-century, largely non-English community evolving into an ethnically distinctive, regional "American" base culture in the nineteenth century.³³

The Pennsylvania Dutch subculture, in general, derived from colonial immigrants who originated primarily in the Upper Rhine region; over time, it absorbed influences from some other parts of Germany and from

³² Warren S. Ely, "The Tohickon Settlers," *A Collection of Papers Read before the Bucks County Historical Society* 3 (1909): 296–97; T. A. McNealy and F. Waite, "Bucks County's Germanic Population 1775/8 and 1784," unpublished map, Spruance Library; William T. Parsons, *The Pennsylvania Dutch: A Persistent Minority* (Boston, 1976), 54.

³³ Conzen, "Mainstreams and Side Channels," 5–20, defines this theory. Steven M. Nolt makes the case generally for the evolution of Pennsylvania Germania into a self-consciously American ethnic subculture by the middle of the nineteenth century. *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic* (University Park, PA, 2002), 7–8, 28, and passim.

peoples of other European heritage.³⁴ While in some ways unique, this nineteenth-century subculture, owing to the tenacity of Germans (whether in Pennsylvania or the Rhineland) in preserving their mores, had much in common with that found in the Old World. Steven Nolt reports that one mid-nineteenth-century German tourist observed that the residents of Pennsylvania Dutch country, “in manners, dress, speech, and custom, . . . appeared to him to be Germans who had transported Old World ways of life to another continent.”³⁵ Nockamixon Dutchmen of this era, whose ancestors had arrived in America in the eighteenth century and whose lineage could be traced, all came from the Upper Rhine (a plurality from the Palatinate).³⁶ Although they were “church” people, and thus somewhat more open to assimilation than “sectarians” like the Amish and, uniquely, included a significant minority of Catholics, they also preserved many of the old folkways. As such, they helped buffer the transition of nineteenth-century immigrants.

More specifically, the presence of a Germanic culture meant that the newcomers did not need a crash course in English to cope with life in their corner of America. “*Pennsilfaanish*” or “Pennsylvania Dutch,” a blending of various Pennsylvania German dialects that had evolved in the late eighteenth century, persisted into the nineteenth century in Nockamixon Township (even among some families of Irish heritage who had intermarried with Germans) and was largely comprehensible to new arrivals who came from the same general area of Germanic Europe as had the ancestors of the Nockamixon Dutch.³⁷ Indeed, *Pennsilfaanish* was easier for them to understand than the dialect of many Old World countrymen who lived outside the Rhineland.³⁸ Thus, immigrants could com-

³⁴ Don Yoder, “The Palatine Connection: The Pennsylvania German Culture and Its European Roots,” in *Germans in America: Retrospect and Prospect: Tricentennial Lectures Delivered at the German Society of Pennsylvania in 1983*, ed. Randall M. Miller (Philadelphia, 1984), 93, 95, 107.

³⁵ Nolt, *Foreigners in Their Own Land*, 1.

³⁶ Families were traced in the following sources: John A. Ruth, scrapbooks, 3:65, 81, 86, 90, 95, 6:44, and 9:131, Spruance Library; *Doylestown Democrat*, Mar. 22, 1894; William W. H. Davis, *History of Bucks County Pennsylvania, From the Discovery of the Delaware to the Present Time*, 2nd ed. (Pipersville, PA, 1975), 2:151, 3:53; Donald M. Biehn, *Biehn/Bean Family of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and Ontario, Canada, 1700–1986* (Baltimore, 1987).

³⁷ Oscar Kuhns, “The German and Swiss Settlements of Colonial Pennsylvania: A Study of the So-Called Pennsylvania Dutch,” *Penn Germania* 1 (1912): 400; *Doylestown Democrat*, Sept. 23, 1879; M. K. (F), interview, Dec. 26, 1999.

³⁸ William W. Donner, “We Are What We Make of Ourselves’: Abraham Reeser Horne and the Education of Pennsylvania Germans,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 124 (2000): 523n; Juergen Eichhoff, “The German Language in America,” *America and the Germans: An*

municate immediately and effectively in their native dialects with many of their new American neighbors. Their children and many of their grandchildren initially learned German from the immigrant generation, but, curiously, in many instances they picked up some or all of the local patois as part of the assimilation process.³⁹ Though nonimmigrants had an easier time speaking German than reading it, the foreign born as well as the native born had access to German-language newspapers, the most important of which was the *Bucks County Express*, which circulated widely in Nockamixon Township and the rest of Upper Bucks in the 1850s and 1860s and remained in print until World War I. Germans of all stripes also used German-language voting tickets, at least in the early 1880s—and probably before.⁴⁰

Furthermore, it was through and with the established Pennsylvania Dutch community that the newcomers and their children learned English. The colonial English and Irish settlers of the area had established English as the base language; it was spoken by their descendants and by most Americans of German ancestry in the nineteenth century. By the 1890s, the Pennsylvania Dutch and most immigrants and their children were bilingual, though, for many, English was, in modern parlance, a “second language.” An 1896 traveler through Nockamixon and the adjacent townships of Durham and Springfield to the north concluded, with some exaggeration, that “the universal home language is the soft, musical Pennsylvania Dutch, although English . . . is spoken, read, and written with fluency by all.”⁴¹

As was the general case in the northern part of the United States in this era, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, through a series of laws

Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History, eds. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia, 1985), 1:230–34.

³⁹ K. S. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Mar. 24, 1990; C. F. (M), interview, Ottsville, PA, Jan. 29, 1990; Ch. F. (M), interview, Bucksville, PA, July 15, 1990; J. S. (M), interview, Ottsville, PA, June 29, 1999; S. R. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Dec. 25, 1991; G. R. (M), interview, Ottsville, PA, Dec. 25, 1981; M. S. (F), interview, Harrow, PA, Jan. 11, 1984; P. R. (M), interview, Bucksville, PA, May 24, 1999; A. W. (M), interview, Ottsville, PA, Jan. 8, 1981.

⁴⁰ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Nov. 11, 1856, Sept. 10, 1861, Mar. 11, 1876, Oct. 16, 1886; Ruth Salisbury, ed., *Pennsylvania Newspapers: A Bibliography and Union List* (Pittsburgh, 1969), 28; Buck, “German Population in Bucks County,” 61.

⁴¹ Reprint from the *American Agriculturist* in *Doylestown Democrat*, May 7, 1896. The rest of the paragraph is from William J. Buck, in *Doylestown Democrat*, Dec. 2, 1879; *Doylestown Democrat*, Nov. 2, 1905; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Aug. 11, 1885; F. E. Tourscher, ed., *Diary and Visitation Record of the Right Rev. Francis Patrick Kenrick, Administrator and Bishop of Philadelphia, 1830–1851* (Lancaster, PA, 1916), 85; John A. Ruth, scrapbooks, 2:43.

beginning in 1834, gradually created a tax-supported public school system. One of its main purposes was to inculcate American culture in the youth and to teach proper use of the English language. Pennsylvania Dutchmen and German immigrants alike lacked enthusiasm for this program, which jeopardized their cultural traditions. Consequently, they minimized the impact of the new system in several ways. For decades, township option allowed them to limit the school year to about five months, half the length of the school year in the many “English” townships in Lower Bucks. They also often implemented local bilingual public education, including the formal teaching of the German language, which lasted in some areas into the 1860s. The latter was not an accommodation to immigrants, though obviously appealing to them where available. Indeed, it persisted longest not in Nockamixon Township but in the more uniformly Pennsylvania Dutch areas on Nockamixon’s western borders. Though textbooks were in English and Anglo-American superintendents of schools in the county increasingly demanded exclusive use of English in formal lessons, its absorption, particularly in spoken form, came slowly in areas of Upper Bucks, where teachers conversed with students in Pennsylvania German into the 1880s.⁴²

Nonetheless, use of English inexorably gained ground in Nockamixon during the latter years of the century as the Americanizing impact of the schools was abetted by compulsory attendance laws and expanded school years. The introduction of modern transportation—the railroad in the nineteenth century and a trolley line and the automobile in the early twentieth century—all brought increased commercial and social interaction with English speakers and promoted the same end.⁴³ To this should be added the death of many of the large immigrant generation of the mid-nineteenth century, who had generally used their native tongue when speaking with their children and older grandchildren, but not with the younger grandchildren growing up around the turn of the new century. Still, German and Dutch dialects could be heard in the western part of

⁴² “Schools in Durham” (unattributed manuscript), George L. Laubach, scrapbooks, Spruance Library, 2:1–4, 28–29; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Feb. 26, 1856, Feb. 17, 1857, Mar. 12, 1858, Dec. 16, 1882; Intelligencer Clippings File, 1850–1900, “Bucks Co. EDUCATION-TEACHERS,” Spruance Library (see clippings for 1862 and 1863); Nolt, *Foreigners in Their Own Land*, 44. The preference for male teachers in Nockamixon and other German townships, persisting into the 1880s, echoed Old World customs. Pickle, *Contented among Strangers*, 82; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Mar. 23, 1875.

⁴³ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Oct. 16, 1886; *Doylestown Intelligencer*, Aug. 15, 1899; Davis, *History of Bucks County*, 1:426n.

the township until the 1930s—“till Hitler,” as one interviewee put it. The victory of English in Nockamixon in the early twentieth century did not differ significantly in its timing from that in American *Deutschtum* at large. Distinctively, however, it was a victory not only over the mother tongue of the few remaining immigrants but also over the indigenous Pennsylvania Dutch language, the presence of which had helped prolong the bilingualism of earlier first- and second-generation German Americans.⁴⁴

Even as English prevailed, the transition from German came somewhat more easily for immigrants and their offspring because the English they learned to speak had a distinctively compatible character. Both they and their fourth- and fifth-generation German American neighbors “talked Dutchy,” i.e., spoke with an accent and grammatical constructions derived from the Old World language. Substitutions of “Ws” for English “Vs,” as well as many other Pennsylvania Dutch usages, were common in Nockamixon well into the twentieth century.⁴⁵

Churches also played a vital role in assimilating immigrants and their children to life in Pennsylvania. For rural German Americans, generally, houses of worship were commonly “the major focus” of communal life.⁴⁶ In Nockamixon Township, this held true for both immigrants and native-born. Unlike the larger aggregations of German immigrants on the frontier or in the cities, which founded their own ethnic parishes, Nockamixon Germans blended rather readily into existing religious congregations. The majority of the church-affiliated newcomers belonged to the Catholic Church. Others, in descending order, identified with the Lutheran and the Reformed churches.⁴⁷

The only Catholic church in Upper Bucks County in 1850, St. John the Baptist, stood along Haycock Run in Haycock Township—and was thus commonly referred to as “the Haycock church”—just across the western border of Nockamixon. The church register of baptisms and mar-

⁴⁴ F. K. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Aug. 2, 1999; Ch. F. (M), interview, Bucksville, PA, July 15, 1990; R. T. (F), interview, Flemington, NJ, July 27, 1992; P. R. (M), interview, Bucksville, PA, May 24, 1999; M. S. (F), interview, Harrow, PA, Jan. 11, 1984; Heinz Kloss, “German-American Language Maintenance Efforts,” in *Language Loyalty in the United States: The Maintenance and Perpetuation of Non-English Mother Tongues by American Ethnic and Religious Groups*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (The Hague, 1966), 218–19; La Vern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston, 1976), 164–66.

⁴⁵ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Apr. 1, 1876, Dec. 16, 1882; author’s on-site recollections.

⁴⁶ Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Patterns of German-American History,” in *Germans in America*, 31.

⁴⁷ *Doylestown Democrat*, Aug. 21, 1913; author’s correlations of census and church records.

riages clearly indicates that most German Catholic immigrants in the area joined this parish. It surely provided a significant reason for settling and remaining where they did. Although its eighteenth-century founders and a number of its mid-nineteenth-century members were Irish, the fact that many of its native-born congregants claimed German ancestry and spoke the local German dialect appealed to German Catholic immigrants. Furthermore, between 1850 and the 1920s, the pastors at St. John's, with few exceptions, came from Germanic areas of Europe and could converse in German. In 1892, the church was still sufficiently ethnic to be listed in a national survey of German Catholic parishes.⁴⁸

accessible, and it is likely no coincidence that they concentrated in the western sector of the Swamp, which was nearer the Catholic church. Some later settled or resettled outside the Swamp on properties closer to the church. Nonetheless, the original "Swampers" had to travel at least four miles to get to St. John's Church. An energetic young German-born pastor, Rev. Henry Stommel, better met the needs of those in the western Swamp by overseeing the construction of a filial church there in 1872. St. Joseph's, with its simple Gothic edifice, was set amidst the rocks and woods along the east-west road that connected the thoroughfares in the western part of the township with the canal and river on the eastern edge. Father Stommel unofficially christened this desolate, boulder-strewn spot "Marienstein" (Mary's Stone), which became the common appellation for the church and the adjacent road as well as that whole region of the Swamp. By 1892, "St. Joe's" was well established, counting eighty families in its fold.⁴⁹

In 1863, local Catholics, predominantly, but not exclusively, German in name, founded the St. John the Baptist Society, a beneficial organization. It was arguably the local manifestation of the *Unterstützung-Vereine* found in some parts of the Rhineland and commonly associated with other German American Catholic parishes, although, in its financial purposes, it also much resembled the secular Doylestown Beneficial

⁴⁸ Johannes Nep. Enzlberger, *Eine Festgabe zum Columbus-Jubiläum. Schematismus der katholischen Geistlichkeit deutscher Zunge in den Vereinigten Staaten Amerikas* (Milwaukee, 1892), 235. Names of pastors are derived from the parish register. Their birthplaces are identified through the U.S. Census, Haycock Township, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1920, 1930 and *Bucks County Intelligencer*, May 29, 1880; *Doylestown Democrat*, June 2, 1892, Feb. 1, 1900.

⁴⁹ J. H. Fitzgerald, "Saint John the Baptist Church of Haycock," *A Collection of Papers Read before the Bucks County Historical Society* 4 (1917): 123–24; S. R. (F), interview, Harrow, PA, Nov. 24, 1988; Enzlberger, *Eine Festgabe*, 235.

Society, founded in the “English” part of the county in the 1830s.⁵⁰ In providing sickness and death benefits as well as communal religious exercises and socializing opportunities, the St. John the Baptist Society proved to be a stabilizing force for the Nockamixon immigrants and their descendants until the latter part of the twentieth century. Although dominated by German immigrants in its early stages, membership extended to a substantial number of native-born Catholics, some of them with non-Germanic names. Despite that circumstance, the constitution of the society required the minutes to be kept in the German language, further suggesting the Germanic character of the wider local community.⁵¹

The only German Protestant church edifice in Nockamixon in the mid-nineteenth century was St. Luke’s, near the village now known as Ferndale, in the center of the township. Lutheran and Reformed congregations, both established prior to the American Revolution, shared this house of worship, which they first constructed in 1813 and replaced, at the same site, in 1875.⁵² Such “union churches” had long been widely used among the Pennsylvania Dutch and may well have been familiar to the nineteenth-century immigrants, since parallel institutions had been established in Baden and surrounding jurisdictions in the 1810s and 1820s.⁵³ Protestants on the periphery of the township attended similar union churches over the borders to the north and south.

Regardless of creed, the Catholic and Protestant churches helped ease the assimilation of immigrants into local society and the sectarian subcultures thereof. They not only provided familiar forms of worship and spiritual solace but also pastors and native-born fellow parishioners who communicated with them in their native tongue. Abundant evidence suggests that over the latter half of the nineteenth century—and, to some degree, into the twentieth—immigrant members of the Lutheran and Reformed congregations, like the Catholics, availed themselves of services in German.

⁵⁰ Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York’s Irish and German Catholics, 1815–1865* (Baltimore, 1975), 80; “Constitution of St. John the Baptist Society,” Miscellaneous Docket Book No. 14, Recorder of Deeds Office, Bucks County Court House, Doylestown, PA; Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 1984), 30–32; “Constitution, By-Laws, and List of Members of the Doylestown Beneficial Society of Pennsylvania,” Bucks County Penna. Miscellaneous Papers, vol. 4, Spruance Library.

⁵¹ “Constitution of St. John the Baptist Society,” 462.

⁵² John A. Ruth, scrapbooks, 8:169–70.

⁵³ Kuhns, “German and Swiss Settlements,” 482; Joseph Michael White, “Religion and Community: Cincinnati Germans, 1814–1870” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1980), 64.

Though the Protestant pastors were American-born, they were bilingual, at least until World War I. They were preaching in German (probably a form of High German sometimes called “sermon German”) to their Pennsylvania Dutch congregations *before* the immigration waves of the mid-nineteenth century. Occasional use of English was introduced into Nockamixon Lutheran services in the 1820s and into Reformed services probably in the 1840s. By the 1870s, ministers in both congregations were delivering sermons in German and English on alternate Sundays. Thereafter, the latter gained ground so that on the eve of World War I, *Deutsch* was heard only infrequently.⁵⁴

The role of the German language in the assimilation experience of Catholic immigrants and their children roughly parallels that of the Protestants, though the details differ. Even in the 1830s, prior to the influx of Rhinelanders, the bishop of Philadelphia appointed a German-born priest to St. John’s because so many parishioners spoke some form of German. That experiment was short-lived, but from the 1850s on, German-speaking priests were able to meet the linguistic needs of immigrant Catholics (and, at least, some of the Pennsylvania Dutch Catholics) in such matters as hearing confessions and preaching. Though Masses, the primary form of Catholic communal worship, were in Latin, the clergymen delivered their sermons (as did itinerant priests at annual parish “missions”) twice, once in English and once in German, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century—and, inferentially, before that.⁵⁵ Thus, immigrants could worship comfortably, while at the same time subtly receiving a mini-lesson in English.

Bilingual sermons at the Haycock and Marienstein churches were encouraged by a smattering of newer German-speaking immigrants and persisted into the first decades of the twentieth century. English, however, did gain ground among the congregants, as evidenced by the revised 1909 constitution of the St. John the Baptist Society, which stipulated that henceforth its minutes should be kept in English and not in German. By the 1920s, German had largely disappeared from sermons, except for

⁵⁴ George L. Laubach, scrapbooks, 2:105–6, 119–22, 129–30; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, June 13, 1877, Sept. 19, 1919; K. S. (F), interview, Harrow, PA, Jan. 11, 1984; Yoder, “Palatine Connection,” 104; Thomas G. Myers, transcriber, *Church Records of St. Luke’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Nockamixon Twp. 1766–1921* (Doylestown, PA, 1996), 234; *Doylestown Democrat*, Aug. 21, 1913.

⁵⁵ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, June 18, 1879, Nov. 19, 1881; *Doylestown Democrat*, Feb. 2, 1900; M. K. (F), interview, Perkasic, PA, Jan. 2, 1997; Tourscher, *Diary*, 85.

special occasions such as Christmas.⁵⁶

The small parochial school that operated near St. John's Church from the 1860s to the early 1910s cushioned the transition of many of the immigrants' children into the local culture. The nuns that taught there, at least from the 1870s on, were almost all German-born and taught classes in their native tongue, almost certainly in conjunction with English. However, they abandoned formal instruction in German by the turn of the twentieth century, offering it subsequently on a voluntary basis.⁵⁷

Thus, Nockamixon's immigrants of all the major religious denominations—and their descendants—experienced a very gradual and relatively gentle transition from German to English usage in their religious institutions. Coming to the New World largely in the 1850s and 1860s, and though only a small percentage of the local population, they enjoyed the services of bilingual pastors and religious educators until well into the twentieth century, thanks, in good part, to the fact that many of their coreligionists spoke Pennsylvania Dutch as well as English. Conversely, it can be reasonably inferred that immigration, particularly in the case of the Catholic Church, reinforced the use of German in the parishes—and the concomitant choice of pastors—and helped delay its demise.

Certain familiar Rhineland religious and quasi-religious practices and customs also prevailed in nineteenth-century Nockamixon Township. Organ music was a central component of their worship services. Even among Catholics nationally, this predilection helped distinguish Germans from the predominant Irish.⁵⁸ Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed churches in Nockamixon and on its borders acquired organs before the major nineteenth-century immigration wave and, in some cases, upgraded them in the latter half of the century.⁵⁹ The church edifices themselves,

⁵⁶ K. S. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, July 27, 1990; S. R. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Sept. 20, 1989; M. K. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, July 27, 1990; Ch. F. (M), interview, Bucksville, PA, July 15, 1990; J. A. (M), interview, Ottsville, PA, Aug. 6, 1993; P. R. (M), interview, Bucksville, PA, May 24, 1999; A. K. (F), interview, Bucksville, PA, Apr. 21, 1999; R. T. (F), interview, Ringoes, NJ, July 26, 1990; *Constitution and By-Laws of St. John the Baptist Society* (Doylestown, PA, 1909), 21.

⁵⁷ Leo Gregory Fink, ed., *Buckingham Palisades of the Delaware River: Historical Symposium of the Catholic Church in Bucks County, Pennsylvania* (New York, 1960), 45–46; U.S. Census, Haycock Township, 1880; A. K. (F), interview, Bucksville, PA, Jan. 25, 1995; K. S. (F), interview, Harrow, PA, Nov. 3, 1981.

⁵⁸ Dolan, *Immigrant Church*, 79; Buck, "German Population in Bucks County," 64.

⁵⁹ Davis, *History of Bucks County*, 2:44; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Mar. 20, 1880; manuscript account book of Sybilla Beam (church organist), 1880s, in possession of author; George L. Laubach, scrapbooks, 2:127, 151, 155–58, 171, 177; *Doylestown Democrat*, Dec. 17, 1891.

done in Gothic or Romanesque styles popular on the Continent, certainly provided a clear and familiar contrast to the meetinghouses of the Quakers and Mennonites in other Bucks County townships. Stained-glass windows and interior decorations, including statuary in the case of the Catholics, also characterized these structures. For Catholics, bells rang out to call all within earshot to come to Mass, to pray the Angelus, or to attend a funeral. The construction of the churches immediately adjacent to graveyards also reflected both Pennsylvania Dutch and Old World tradition.⁶⁰

Newcomers from the Rhineland would have also recognized—or at least found acceptable—many folk aspects of religious practice in latter nineteenth-century Nockamixon Township. While newly arrived Germans largely maintained their distinctive denominational affiliations, the prevailing churches in the area—Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed—followed a similar annual cycle of liturgical observances, all with attendant social customs. Thus, they separated themselves, on some issues, from the “plain people” among the Pennsylvania Dutch—Amish, Mennonites, and related groups—who kept only Biblically sanctioned holy days, rejecting others added by the medieval Church. The Society of Friends, prominent in Lower Bucks County, went further and scuttled all holy days. Spearheaded by the Lutheran and Reformed churches, which were generally popular among colonial German immigrants and their nineteenth-century descendants in Nockamixon, the Pennsylvania Dutch had established distinctive ways of commemorating Good Friday, Easter, Whitsunday (Pentecost), Whitmonday, Ascension Day, and Christmas. Conversely, the Dutch had little inclination to celebrate Thanksgiving, though the state government had promoted it since 1843. Indeed, certain of these Germanic folk traditions more or less mutated and gained wider acceptance in Bucks County and other parts of America in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁶¹

⁶⁰ A. R. Horne, “The Worth and Character of the Pennsylvania Germans,” *A Collection of Papers Read before the Bucks County Historical Society* 1 ([1908]): 334; K. S. (F), interview, Harrow, PA, Nov. 3, 1981; R. T. (F), interview, Livingston, NJ, Jan. 27, 1985; observations of author in Nockamixon Township and Niederhausen, Baden.

⁶¹ Don Yoder, “Introduction: The Folk Cultural Background,” in *Christmas in Pennsylvania: A Folk Cultural Study*, by Albert L. Shoemaker (Kutztown, PA, 1959), 4, 9, 14n; Alfred L. Shoemaker, *Eastertide in Pennsylvania: A Folk Cultural Study* (Kutztown, PA, 1960), 19–20, 70–71, 77; Buck, “German Population in Bucks County,” 64; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Dec. 13, 1843, Oct. 24, 1854.

Christmas provided the best example of this convergence of immigrant and indigenous customs. It had been widely celebrated among the Pennsylvania Dutch since at least the early nineteenth century. Of more direct relevance, the prevailing denominations of Nockamixon Township all celebrated the holy day, in part, in their churches—Catholics with Mass and Lutherans and Reformed with combined “Sunday School Christmas” festivities in their church basements. The Lutheran and Reformed celebrations, a development from the American Sunday school movement, became popular in “union” churches of the area by the 1870s. The event combined Scripture reading and socializing—including singing and the giving of gifts to children—and was almost certainly bilingual.⁶²

Important components of Christmas celebrations were evergreen trees, which people decorated on Christmas Eve, and Belsnickel. The latter, a corruption of “Pelz-Nicol,” or “Fur-clad Nicholas,” involved the appearance of a friend or relative, usually on the day before Christmas, disguised in a mask and fur coat, to ask the children of the house about their past behavior and to reward or punish them accordingly. Both Christmas trees and Belsnickel had become well established among the Pennsylvania Dutch by the mid-nineteenth century and were familiar to the Rhineland immigrants of that era. In Nockamixon Township, these customs were passed on to the children and grandchildren of the newcomers and carried over well into the twentieth century. However, by then Belsnickel was gradually being replaced by the more uniformly benign “Kris Kringle” or Santa Claus.⁶³

Many Pennsylvania Dutch traditionally had engaged in a variety of other religiously associated folk customs pertaining to Lent and the Easter season—from Shrove Tuesday to Whitmonday—that non-German Pennsylvanians widely eschewed. Yet, such celebrations would not have been alien to newcomers from the Rhineland. One of these concerned the observance of Good Friday. Reporting in 1864, the *Bucks*

⁶² Yoder, “Introduction,” 1, 3, 4, 8, 14–15, 17; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Dec. 30, 1876, Dec. 29, 1877.

⁶³ Shoemaker, *Christmas in Pennsylvania*, 21, 43, 46–47, 52, 54, 59, 61, 80–81; Henry C. Mercer et al., “Remarks on the Christmas Tree,” *A Collection of Papers Read before the Bucks County Historical Society* 4 (1917): 553–55; S. R. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Dec. 25, 1982; A. K. (F), interview, Bucksville, PA, Apr. 21, 1999; Mergenthaler, “Descendants of Daniel and Katrina Stoeckel Trautz,” 4; R. T. (F), interview, Livingston, NJ, Jan. 27, 1985; S. H. (M), interview, Rupletown, PA, Aug. 26, 1982; P. R. (M), interview, Bucksville, PA, May 24, 1999; M. K. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Dec. 25, 1991.

County Intelligencer commented that, "Last Friday, 'Good Friday,' was, as has been the custom from time immemorial, generally observed as a holiday in the German districts of this county. There is usually very little labor performed in that section on that day."⁶⁴ Conversely, the English-dominated areas of Doylestown and Lower Bucks, even after the state government established Good Friday as a legal holiday, generally ignored it and continued business as usual.

A similar cultural alignment occurred with the Pennsylvania Dutch celebration of Easter and Ascension Thursday. Early English settlers, excepting Catholics and Episcopalians, did not observe Easter, while the Dutch did. Palatines from the Upper Rhine introduced the folkloric Easter rabbit and attendant custom of coloring Easter eggs and distributing them to children. This quaint practice was "fortified" by nineteenth-century German immigrants and gradually won acceptance among people of other ancestry in Bucks County and the wider Pennsylvania community. The descendants of the immigrants perpetuated these customs well into the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Pennsylvania Dutch were also distinctive in their observation of Ascension Thursday. A Doylestown newspaper found the day generally ignored in the county in 1865, "except in the German districts, where it was observed this year as usual in many quarters by religious services in the churches, and by a cessation from labor."⁶⁶ Pennsylvania Dutch everywhere abstained from work and, uniquely, went fishing. Nineteenth-century Rhineland immigrants to Upper Bucks clearly did not introduce this Ascension Day celebration, though, since they were largely Catholics for whom it was a holy day of obligation, they would have found it compatible with their practices. As with Easter customs, the angling tradition persisted among the newcomers' offspring well into the next century.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Mar. 29, 1864. The rest of the information in this paragraph is from Shoemaker, *Eastertide in Pennsylvania*, 4, 19; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Apr. 15, 1873, Mar. 30, 1875.

⁶⁵ Shoemaker, *Eastertide in Pennsylvania*, xiii, 45–48; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Apr. 15, 1873, Apr. 16, 1879, Apr. 15, 1882; Blanche M. Kimenhour, unpublished diary, 1933–39, entries of Apr. 11, 1936, and Apr. 16, 1938, in possession of author; S. B. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, June 18, 1985.

⁶⁶ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, May 30, 1865.

⁶⁷ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, May 27, 1873; *Doylestown Democrat*, May 21, 1896, June 3, 1897; Shoemaker, *Eastertide in Pennsylvania*, 70, 72, 74; A. K. (F), interview, Bucksville, PA, Jan. 25, 1995, and June 1, 2000; B. H. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, July 9, 1984; K. S. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, July 3, 1991.

The dominant culture in Nockamixon Township regarding alcohol also facilitated the assimilation of nineteenth-century immigrants into local society. Alcoholic beverages were “of almost universal use” on the western border of the township in the 1830s.⁶⁸ Taverns, which served as both hotels and social centers along the township’s major transportation routes, such as the stage-coach roads and the Delaware River/Canal, had long been more numerous in Nockamixon and the other German townships than in Quaker-dominated Lower Bucks County. They were frequented by local males and by the late nineteenth century were sponsoring dances for young persons.⁶⁹

Immigrant attitudes on this issue were quite compatible with prevailing mores in Nockamixon Township and the vicinity. Badener and other Rhinelanders familiar with *Gasthaeuser* in their homeland, and accustomed to routine alcohol consumption during their workday, adapted naturally to the local custom of patronizing these establishments. Indeed, an Alsatian immigrant family operated one of these hotels, located near the western edge of the Swamp, from 1870 to 1916. Even the grape-growing and wine-making skills, which the immigrants brought with them and handed down to their descendants, were not out of place since the manufacture and consumption of vinous liquors was already well established among the native born.⁷⁰ A continuing appreciation for wine notwithstanding, the newcomers, in a very tangible example of accommodation to local practices, readily took to the more popular American drink, whiskey. Cheap and potent, it helped brighten communal labor projects, though it was rare that anyone drank so much as to be unable to work.

⁶⁸ William J. Buck, “Prices of Store Goods, Produce and Labor from 1826 to 1836,” William J. Buck Papers, MSC 16, fol. 3, Spruance Library.

⁶⁹ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, June 6, 1885; yearly lists of taverns in the manuscript tax records for Bucks County townships, Spruance Library; “A list of persons recommended and continued upon former recommendations to keep Houses of Public Entertainment in the County of Bucks for the year ensuing from June Sessions 1772,” Miscellaneous Papers, 1745–1850, in Bucks County Papers, 1682–1850, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; George M. Grim, “Historic Sketch of Ottsville and Vicinity,” *A Collection of Papers Read before the Bucks County Historical Society* 4 (1917): 105; R. T. (F), interview, Livingston, NJ, Jan. 27, 1985.

⁷⁰ Rinderle and Norling, *Nazi Impact*, 21, 35; *Easton Express*, Sept. 28, 1917; Frank L. Love, comp., *Bucks County Tavern License Petitions, 1869–1923* (Doylestown, PA, 1996), vol. 2; M. K. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Dec. 25, 1991; S. R. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Dec. 28, 1991; K. S. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, Mar. 24, 1990; S. B. (F), interview, Ottsville, PA, June 18, 1985; George L. Laubach, scrapbooks, 1:89; U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Schedule 4.—Production of Agriculture,” 1860, Nockamixon Township, Bucks County, PA; U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Schedule 2.—Production of Agriculture,” 1880, Nockamixon Township, Bucks County, PA, microfilm, National Archives, Washington, DC.

Indeed, both Pennsylvania Dutch and Rhineland mores frowned upon drunkenness.⁷¹

Russell A. Kazal suggests that protection of the right to use alcohol quite possibly exceeded language as a unifying force among German Americans in Philadelphia. This concern galvanized their opposition to the largely Anglo-American temperance movement, which had emerged in the 1840s and persisted into the 1920s and which they perceived as a threat, not to the abuse of alcohol, but to legitimate social activity.⁷² The same could be said of the Nockamixon Germans, both native and foreign born, who were united in opposition to the persistent, statewide prohibition movement of the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Quakers of central and lower Bucks supported prohibition. In an 1854 poll, the township voted against prohibition by a tally of 363 to 22. In 1873, it again overwhelmingly rejected prohibition under an 1872 “local option” law passed by the legislature that permitted counties to outlaw alcohol sales by referendum. In the 1890s, Nockamixon lent no support to Prohibition Party candidates.⁷³

The emergence of the temperance movement and, in the 1850s, of a county Know-Nothing Party stimulated interest in the right to vote. Mirroring the tendency among church-affiliated Germans in western settlements, once naturalized, Nockamixon’s Catholic and Protestant immigrants joined the Democratic Party, which opposed both prohibition and nativism.⁷⁴ The recent arrivals, in following their natural, conservative political proclivities, readily melded into the local political culture. The “German townships” of Upper Bucks in general and Nockamixon Township in particular had long been bastions of Democratic strength in the county. Before, during, and after the German influx of the mid-nineteenth

⁷¹ Buehrle, “Swamp,” 85–86; Daniel F. Mergenthaler, “Reminiscences,” MacReynolds Papers, Miscellaneous, fol. 33, p. 1, Spruance Library; William Beidelman, *The Story of Pennsylvania Germans Embracing an Account of Their Origin, Their History, and Their Dialect* (Easton, PA, 1898), 146, 148–49; Horne, “Worth and Character of the Pennsylvania Germans,” 339.

⁷² Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 40–41, 92; Rippley, *German-Americans*, 18, 53, 55, 109, 118.

⁷³ Terry A. McNealy, “A Forgotten Tavern,” *Mercer Mosaic*, July/Aug. 1985, 15; “Election Returns of Bucks County, 1812–1906,” W. W. H. Davis, scrapbook; *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Apr. 2, 1872, Mar. 18, 1873, Mar. 25, 1873, Apr. 4, 1873.

⁷⁴ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Oct. 16, 1855; *Doylestown Democrat*, Oct. 17, 1854; Gjerde, *Minds of the West*, 261, 263, 269, 273, 280–81, 309. Contrary to Paul Kleppner’s findings among other German Americans, Lutherans in Nockamixon evidently did not turn away from the Democratic Party when “brought into social interaction with German Catholics.” *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850–1900* (New York, 1970), 47.

century, Nockamixon Township voted consistently and in landslide proportions—four or five to one—for the Democratic Party’s candidates over opposition candidates, be they Whigs, Republicans, or others.⁷⁵

This political orientation—and the value system behind it—translated into lukewarm support for the Civil War by both natives and immigrants in Nockamixon and other German townships. As a result, several local Lutheran pastors of an abolitionist bent were forced to resign and local recruiting quotas were difficult to fill. Both Rhineland-born township residents and those who were native-born but of German ancestry sought exemption from the draft and failed to report and deserted in roughly proportionate numbers. In November 1864, township voters cast 41 ballots for Lincoln and 315 for Democrat George B. McClellan.⁷⁶

* * *

German immigrants and their children in Nockamixon Township experienced a relatively seamless adjustment to their corner of America. Economic opportunity commensurate with their skills and preferences produced notable material progress. The prevailing native culture, imbued with Germanic linguistic and cultural traits, created a comfortable social environment. The existing churches reflected their Old World affiliations and welcomed the newcomers with familiar services in a language they could comprehend.

Some historians have argued that German immigrants to Pennsylvania established subcultures distinct from and, to some degree, in conflict with that of the Pennsylvania Dutch.⁷⁷ In counterpoint, however, it can be noted that these historians were speaking primarily about large urban immigrant aggregations, which included many non-Rhinelanders, had large enough numbers to create their own institutional networks, and, influenced disproportionately by Forty-Eighters, maintained an active public interest in the political future of their homeland. Conditions dif-

⁷⁵ “Election Returns of Bucks County, 1812–1906,” W. W. H. Davis, scrapbook; Mergenthaler, “Descendants of Daniel and Katrina Stoeckel Trautz,” 5.

⁷⁶ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, Sept. 10, 1861, Aug. 25, 1863, Nov. 15, 1864, Feb., 21, 1865, Mar. 28, 1865; Edmund Ellis Bieber, *Springfield Church: A Brief History of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church of Springfield Township Bucks County, Pa. From 1751 to 1953* (Pleasant Valley, PA, 1953), 65–68; “List of Non-Reporting Drafted Men and Deserters,” Pennsylvania Quarter Sessions of Bucks County 1866, Spruance Library.

⁷⁷ Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock*, 21–22; Yoder, “Pennsylvania Germans,” 51, 53; Donner, “We Are What We Make of Ourselves,” 542.

ferred in Bucks County, where the immigrant community was smaller and overwhelmingly from the Upper Rhine, created no entirely German American institution, joined existing nonpietistic churches, and manifested little interest in Old World politics. Despite the advantages Nockamixon offered the immigrants, their life there was, of course, not utopian. Canal boating and farming were arduous and often dangerous occupations. Furthermore, while the newcomers did share many values and customs with the native born, some of the latter raised objections. The Know-Nothing Party made an appearance in the township—and county generally—in 1854. It contributed to an election day barroom brawl between immigrants and natives in March 1855. This was the only incident even resembling antforeign violence in the township in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The new third party failed to chip away at the dominance of the local Democratic Party, which emphatically denounced it and its attendant nativism. The Know-Nothing spirit was largely confined to the less Germanic, eastern edge of the original township, where it would be absorbed by the emerging, but never thriving, Republican Party.⁷⁸

Thus, Nockamixon Township's economic, social, and cultural traits attracted Bucks County's only significant German immigrant population in the nineteenth century. They induced large numbers of them and their children to remain and to blend into a distinctive, multireligious Pennsylvania Dutch side channel of American life, which contributed to its expansion from northern into parts of central Bucks. In the process, the Rhinelanders learned English and participated in the local economic and political systems while retaining a modified version of their mores as they assimilated to the native Pennsylvania Dutch society around them. With this community, their descendants drifted slowly and calmly into the mainstream of Anglo-American culture in the twentieth century.

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⁷⁸ *Bucks County Intelligencer*, May 1, 1855, Sept. 4, 1855, Oct. 9, 1855; *Doylestown Democrat*, Oct. 17, 1854; "Election Returns of Bucks County, 1812–1906," W. W. H. Davis, scrapbook, *passim*.