

# The german influences in wisconsin culture



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In these days citizen of Wisconsin thinks of German culture, many would think of the mass celebrations that are put on around the state. What they are getting from these celebrations is a small perspective of German influence on this state. Actually, what they did for Wisconsin was much more than what is seen at these celebrations. Germans were very good farmers, intelligent workers, and an important part of the industrialization of Milwaukee which expanded around the state. The establishment of a German influenced society in Milwaukee and the gathering of the multi types of German immigrants into a strong political and economic culture led to the Americanization of Germans in Wisconsin.

Some of the Wisconsin citizens are Ethnic groups settled in different areas of the state. Germans settled in the south east area of the state, and around the city of Milwaukee. German immigrants were considerably diverse in their religious and socio-economic backgrounds. There were many reasons for their immigration. Some came because they wanted religious freedom or to avoid the military service, while others moved because of the economic opportunities from the Industrial Revolution. By 1850, sixty percent of Milwaukee's community was born in Europe, and two-thirds came from Germany and German speaking countries.

Germans came in three ways of immigration from different areas of the German lands. The first immigration was between years 1845 to 1860, from the south western lands and came because of bad productivity of their lands, overcrowding, and political reason. The second immigration came between years 1865 and 1875 from the north West lands when the wheat prices were falling that reason supported farmers to immigrate to the United States.

The third immigration was from 1875 to 1893, The German farmers displaced from their lands because of that they emigrate from north eastern of Germany. All of these groups had the ability to farm efficiently and this is what drew them to Wisconsin. They had the ability to consolidate into the economic stature of Wisconsin. With the foundation of the railroad system, many Germans settled on farmland around Milwaukee where they could very easily distribute their crop yield for profit.

At the time Milwaukee was one of the only large cities in the state and once the railroads were built it became one of America's largest milling and wheat markets. Germans that were part of the second wave were able to sell their wheat to many neighboring states and benefited from American society.

The third wave of immigrants brought a style of farming that was different then what was being practiced at the time. German farmers soon adopted farm consolidation, where individual farms were put together to create a larger yield that could be used for profit, instead of survival. This was the basic theory of today's commercial farming.

Germans thrived in this area because they came in as one of the highest industrialized immigrants. Many times they were considered the model ethnic group because they were very profitable. This was also a challenged issue, because Germans would only hire other Germans to do a lot of the important jobs of the city, creating a homogenous economy. German architects thrived in Milwaukee because they were the only ones being hired. As America was progressing with industries, Germany was moving right along with the help of Captain Frederick Pabst. Captain Pabst was a German who directed the world's largest brewery and was instrumental in

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industrializing Milwaukee. He expanded from his brewery and created an economic empire that included the city's Opera house. The Opera house, built with German influence, was named the Pabst Theater. Others, such as George Brumder, who created the nation's largest German-language newspaper, also helped with the progress. There were many jobs created from German leaders that supported the city economically.

Germans in Wisconsin were very unique because they established their foreign culture into the political and architectural aspects into inner city Milwaukee. The 1860s were a time that Germans in Milwaukee came together and created what was called "German Athens". German aspects of culture were seen everywhere. Breweries were all along the streets, along with beer gardens and saloons. These places created a sense of community that brought together all different types of Germans. From 1890 to 1915, homes, industrial complexes, commercial blocks, and public buildings were built with German influence to transform Milwaukee, and Steven Hoelscher wrote, "from a typical American Victorian city into one with decidedly Teutonic air". German influence was so strong that the city hall of Milwaukee was built with their Old World culture. Non-Germans of the Milwaukee area did not agree with the newly established power of German culture. Many had negative stereotypes of Germans, depicting them as beer-drinking oafs who preferred to mingle with their own kind rather than join American society. Germans retaliated during a celebration on October 6, 1890, where the celebration leaders wanted to sell a threefold message, "that Germans had remained politically passive too long; that they too, had played a major role in creating the United States; and that they had

permitted native-born Americans to relegate Germans 'to a secondary class, by ridiculing our customs and language'".

This was showing that Germans were starting to come together, and even though they still had kept their homeland values close to them, they have also helped create American traditions, and should not be segregated because of their celebration of culture. By creating a "mini Germany" within Milwaukee it helped unite the Germans, which was a start to them becoming part of American culture.

World War I was a major turning point in German Americanization. With Wisconsin having a lot of German influence in the political structure, there was a lot of tension among German immigrants. Many still had ties with their homeland and struggled when their new homeland, the United States went to war against Nazi Germany. Before 1917, most of the Germans were in favor of the German-led Axis powers, and felt that the British were the blame for World War I. They even held a fund raiser where they raised 150,000 dollars to help the efforts of Germany. However, this was the peak of distinct German culture. Leaders had already seen a decline in their German communities in participation in Old World events. German plays were declining in quality and the Pabst Theater was losing its significance. The war, as Hoelscher wrote, "acted as a 'catalyst' that jelled the Americanization of the German population of the U. S.". Wisconsin was looked upon by the United States as a state that was for Germany and did not support their country. Wisconsin's non-Germans quickly tried to destroy that notion. At first it took segregating the German population from the rest of the states population. They did things such as remove references of "

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German Athens" from city guidebooks, riot against German plays supporting the Old World at the Pabst Theater. Germans decided to give up a lot of traditional plays and loyalty to the Old World. This affected the first generation of Germans, but there was a significant decline in loyalty throughout the next few generations and more of a loyalty to the United States. Although the immigration to the United States may have caused conflict, German influence has had an overall positive affect on the Milwaukee area. Their immigration waves were able to adapt to the economic culture of Wisconsin while still able to maintain their traditional cultures. They were also able to evolve as the United States and Wisconsin became industrialized. Many Germans became successful leaders in the industrial economy of Milwaukee and were extremely influential in the cities growth. Today, the German culture is still prevalent in the state, and their traditions are celebrated by all cultures.