

**A Comparative Examination of German-American Women Immigrants  
In The Rural and Urban Areas of America  
In the Nineteenth Century**

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## Introduction

In 1962, my mother, a German, married my father, an American soldier, and came to live in the United States. As I grew up, she often commented that when she came to live in Swartz Creek, Michigan, a rural area, she felt very isolated because she had grown up in Berlin and was used to the conveniences of city life. This comment made me wonder, if my mother had had that type of experience in the early 1960's, what was it like for women in the 1800's immigrating to the United States? If the differences between the United States and other countries in the 1800's were as great or greater, how did those women feel and survive in a foreign land? The earlier immigrants tended to have much less information about the United States when they left their native countries. Because of my own ancestry, I was interested in researching German immigrants. I was more interested though in studying German immigrant women in both urban and rural areas, initially because of my mother's experience, but more importantly because German women often are not discussed in the literature pertaining to immigration unless they did something significant or unusual. Furthermore, when one thinks of an urban or rural area, a very different picture comes to mind. For example, one imagines the rural area to be quiet and peaceful versus the hustle and bustle of the urban area. Due to these different pictures one creates in their mind about urban and rural life, I was interested in how the experiences of German immigrant women might have been similar and different.

In my research, I am making a comparative study of German immigrant women in both the urban and rural areas of America in the nineteenth century. My major research question is what are the similarities and differences between rural and urban German women immigrants in the nineteenth century. I am attempting to provide a clearer

understanding of life in these two areas, and how these women contributed to American culture. This implies that they both wanted better opportunities, but because of where they settled their views of the United States were different as well as their contributions. The research that I completed is important because it illustrates the diversity of American culture. My research helps in understanding American culture better because most research that has been done on German immigrants focused on the men. Also, if there has been research done on German immigrant women it concentrates on either the urban or rural areas not both together.

German immigrant women in the rural and urban areas of the United States in the nineteenth century struggled to acculturate. Those in the rural areas had to battle isolation. If they were lucky enough to live near other Germans they tended to closely associate with one another. Even though many stayed within a German community and married other Germans, acculturation occurred faster in the urban areas because of their work and contact with the native-born. Often times urban German immigrant women worked for the native-born Americans. These immigrants adapted to American ways, but also left impressions of their own culture with the American born. Women who worked as domestic servants, were often times considered a “good catch” by a German man because they understood American culture better, and this knowledge helped the man to assimilate better and deal better with American men. Rural German women contributed to American culture by helping to settle the frontier and providing their family with continuity between German and American culture. They were important in maintaining German traditions. Urban German immigrant women, on the other hand, were significant in helping their family become more a part of American society. Even though they may

have tried to maintain German traditions. They learned a lot about Americans and their way of life as the German women came in contact with them, and they passed their experiences on to their husband and children. The children continued this trend of acculturation, which led to Germans becoming more a part of American society and culture. Since there were these differences between urban and rural acculturation, how German immigrant women fit into the American society and how they viewed the United States was much different. In addition, researching German immigrant women in the United States is important because peoples' perceptions of German women in the United States were different than those of other immigrant groups. For example, German domestic servants were often hired before the Irish because the Germans were mostly Protestant; and thus, seen as less threatening than Catholic Irish girls. Protestant meant "sobriety, modesty, cleanliness and a willingness to work"(Kamphoefner, News, 526). This provides us with a better understanding of American attitudes during this era. Also, the way the German community lived was important because it helps one understand the German contributions to American culture.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the questions of why German women were immigrating to the United States, and what the living and working conditions were like for rural and urban women in German speaking areas. This chapter is essential to the understanding of how life was the same or different for German immigrant women. It is the background for establishing the basis of my research. Through the understanding of what these immigrants experienced before they came to the United States, one begins to understand why they wanted to go to a rural or urban area. It also, provides the reader with a basis for determining similarities and differences between

life in German speaking areas and life in the United States. It looks at how conditions in Germany were worse for women than men. Chapter one also emphasizes the fact that many German immigrant men and women were searching for better work, religious and/or marriage opportunities and the reasons behind their searches.

The second chapter poses the question, what was it like for German women settling in rural United States? Here, I examine what life was like for women on the frontier. It helps create a clear image of German immigrant women on the frontier and why they were just as important as the men in settling the frontier, which was important in creating American culture. Normally, men are emphasized in research about rural areas, but without the women they would not have survived very well. I look at what drew German families to the rural areas of the United States, and what was the woman's role in helping to make the transition from a German speaking area to the rural United States a success despite many hardships, especially isolation. Also, I look at how German immigrants maintained many of their traditions and cultural beliefs because of their isolation. In addition, there is information on German-American nuns and how their experience on the frontier was different from other German-American women.

The third chapter reveals the answers to the question: what was it like for German women settling in urban United States? I continue my research by looking at the women in the cities. It was easier to find research that compared different ethnic groups. This was useful in providing a clearer picture of how German women were similar or different to other ethnic groups in urban areas. This is significant in having a better understanding of how German women contributed to American culture versus other groups. This chapter focuses particularly on domestic service because that is what most

single, German women did in the United States. Furthermore, I look at how domestic service and other activities German-American women in the cities were involved in led to faster acculturation. Acculturation was one of the most significant factors in German women becoming a part of American culture. In addition, I have included six tables to help clarify the numerical data on domestic servants in the United States including, age of marriage, fertility ratios, women's role in the home after the age of sixty, and dependency on other family members income as compared to other ethnic groups.

The final chapter summarizes the similarities and differences between rural and urban German immigrant women. This is at the heart of my research. Rural and urban German immigrant women came to the United State looking for better opportunities, but because of their different experiences their view of the United States was different.

In researching this topic, I focused first on attaining secondary sources. As these sources became exhausted, I began to search for primary sources. The most difficult part of this project was providing enough primary sources. There were a few books that have been published with letters in them, *News From the Land of Freedom* and *Hold dear as always: Jette, a German Immigrant Life in Letters*, were the most helpful in providing primary sources. The letters in *News From the Land of Freedom* combined both urban and rural areas. The letters from the two sisters, Engel and Margarethe Winkelmeir, working as domestic servants were interesting. They illustrated what life was like for German immigrant women who were working for other Germans in the United States compared to when they worked for the native-born Americans. They also explain what domestic servants were learning from the native-born, which would be useful in acculturating. They also help us understand the difference between life in the United



States and life in the German states. Also, the letters in this book were enlightening as to what life was like in various German states, especially in regards to the difficulties poor Germans experienced in getting married. In addition, the book provides excellent background information about each of the people writing and why they immigrated to the United States. *Hold dear as always: Jette, a German Immigrant Life in Letters* was very useful in providing information about women in rural areas. It not only provided letters Jette Bruns wrote, but also letters from her husband and other family members in Germany. Her letters provide much information about her life in the German states, and the difficulty she went through in leaving her life in Germany for what she believed was her wifely duty to follow her husband. She clearly expresses the hardships and isolation experienced by rural women. In addition, she explains how in the rural areas families were dependent on the aid of other rural families in times of need. Besides the two books of letters, the August Schramm diaries were most valuable because they provided the most information over a long period of time. For example, by reading the diaries over many years I could conclude if the author was talking about an isolated incident, or something that happened regularly. For instance, August Schramm wrote often about other women coming to help his mother with various tasks. The letters from Johann Heinrich Zur Oeveste, Georg Bernreuter, Margaretha Pickelmann, Johann Schiefer, and the information about the Ostermeier/Buesking family in Jacqueline Johnson's account of the family were useful, but were limited because I could not make as many conclusions about rural life based on these letters by themselves. The conclusions I made were based on using letters from many sources instead of one. All of these letters provided information about German women's' life in the rural areas, which were useful in

providing a comparison with German women's life in the urban areas. I did not find, other than the book collections, letters from Germans living in urban areas. This surprised me because I thought it would have been easier to find letters from people living in the cities than in the rural areas. Also, the letters I found were sometimes difficult to read because of the age of the letter, the type of handwriting or the old German script they used.

Moreover, I had to mainly read letters written by men to find out information about German women. This is important for many reasons. One reason is the information is coming from a male perspective and would have probably been more informative if a woman wrote it because men and women view events differently. For example, I could see this in Jette Brun's letters versus her husband's letters. She spoke of the isolation of frontier life and how difficult it was on her. Her husband mentions the women's isolation in his letters, but not nearly as detailed as she does in her letters. Another reason for more male letters being available is that it reveals that women probably either did not have time to keep a diary or write letters, or were not literate enough to read and write. Yet, all the letters I read were significant in my research because it allowed me to make my own conclusions about Germans in America without outside influence.

My research presented here draws from many good secondary resources as well. Christiane Harzig's research on German American women in Chicago was probably one of the best secondary resources on German women in an urban area. Linda Shelbitzki-Pickle's research was the best secondary resource on German women in rural areas. Both of these sources were very complete in their research and provided me with excellent background information. These two sources seemed to fit well with the primary sources

that were available. I did not see many differences between what they said about urban or rural life and what the primary sources indicated. Both of these resources are fairly recent in their research; and therefore, were important in using as background information. They were both accurate when compared to my primary resources and seemed to substantiate what the other secondary sources were saying that were not as recent.

Christiane Harzig's article "Creating a Community: German-American women in Chicago" provided information about Mecklenburg women in Chicago. It showed a contrast between life in Mecklenburg and life in Chicago for this group of German immigrant women. She explains how the German women opened their homes up to newly arriving Germans. As well as, discuss the life cycle of this group and various groups and activities the German women belonged to in the United States. This information was useful in comparing with Laurence Glasco's study of Buffalo, New York in 1855. His study helped to broaden the basis of information on urban German women immigrants, by examining the native-born, Irish and German men and women. This provided for another contrast not only to rural German women immigrants, but also other ethnic groups.

Linda Shelbitzki-Pickle's book, *Contented Among Strangers*, offers a plethora of information about German women immigrants in the rural areas. In addition, she supplies the reader with information about Russian-Germans and German nuns that settled the frontier. Her research offered a broad base of information that I could use along with my primary sources to develop a clear picture of life in the rural areas of America for German women. With this clear picture, it was possible to provide the

similarities and differences between life in the rural areas and life in the urban areas of the United States for German immigrant women in the nineteenth century.

American culture can probably be best described as diverse. In that diversity women and immigrants are a significant element. America has often been described as a melting pot of ethnic groups. Therefore, the research presented here is significant in helping people understand how women and immigrants, in this case German women, contributed to American culture. By examining the similarities and differences of the rural and urban German immigrant women one should gain a clearer understanding of how each of these groups of women added to American culture. This may be in how urban women acculturated faster and why that was, or the fact that rural German women were important in settling the American frontier. My research is unique in that it combines the two areas of urban and rural together. Therefore, my research is a stepping block for a reader who wants a brief overview of the differences and similarities between German immigrant women in the rural and urban areas in the nineteenth century.

## Chapter 1

### Conditions in Germany and

#### Why Germans immigrated to America in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Conditions in Germany were worse for women than for men. Despite these poor conditions, the reasons to emigrate for both men and women dealt more with the search for better work, religious and/or marriage opportunities. Regardless of where German immigrants ended up when they arrived in America, the reasons for immigrating were similar for most.

Women had few rights in nineteenth-century Europe. Even when the German nation was established in 1871, women could own land, but they were not allowed to administer it. It did not matter if they were single or widowed. Married women were under legal guardianship of their husband. Unmarried women were under the guardianship of the nearest male relative, and until the twentieth century, German women were not allowed to be a regular student at the University, and most professions were closed to them. (Pickle, 23). Thus, women were poorly educated in comparison to men. In addition to these laws, until 1900 men could physically beat their wives to discipline them (24). However, not all German-speaking women were treated this way.

Specifically, women from the upper and middle class were not as bad off as the poorer German women. Wealth and status provided certain personal and public privileges to the upper class (Pickel, 24). The Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century, which tried to apply the scientific method to understanding all life, and Pietism, which was a belief in a deeper personal devotion to God, together elevated female status (Spielvogel, 629). The Enlightenment was seen as the beginning of modern European

feminism. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She emphasized that if Enlightenment thinkers were stressing that a king should not have arbitrary power over their subjects then “the subjection of women to men was equally wrong”(614-15). Also, if Enlightenment was “based on an ideal of reason innate in all human beings” then women have reason and should be entitled to the same rights as men. Two enlightened thinkers supported such ideas, Diderot and Voltaire (614). Pietism was based on spiritual equality not political equality. For these reasons, the Enlightenment and Pietism helped elevate female status. Women from the middle class profited the most from this status elevation. The status elevation was influential in the cultural life of middle class women and allowed for more education. In addition, it also established a movement for women’s political and social rights (Pickle, 24).

This was best exemplified in Henriette (Jette) Bruns, who was born into a well-to-do family in Oelde, a Westphalian city, around 1813 to 1814. Her father had a good library. They had a grand piano, and she received both piano and voice lessons at school and at home (Schroeder, 34). She graduated at age thirteen from a school in Oelde. Soon after, her mother died in 1827(36). She was sent to her Uncle Geisberg to gain more education. At his home, she learned to sew, and along with five other girls, she was sent to the Chaplain Neuvöhner to receive private instruction in World History, composition and geography. Also, at the Martini school she received French lessons. In addition, she learned music, drawing and dance. During her second year, she added cooking lessons (38). In regards to cultural life, her mother had been a member of a singing society (34). After Jette returned from her two years of extended education, she joined a music club

and rather enjoyed it. She was also involved in many social activities with school friends and cousins (41).

Yet, women of the lower class were not as lucky as Jette Bruns. Industrialization, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, changed the lives of many agrarian families (Pickle, 24). Before industrialization rural or urban women did “productive labor of a seasonable and interruptible nature in or near the home” (25). Their duties were to raise, harvest, prepare and store food. They spun and wove wool for the family clothes and cared for the children. In rural areas, they helped in the fields during peak times and took care of the livestock, too (25). Industrialization took away production from the family and changed women’s roles. Women were in charge of the home, but were not paid for it, so, they lost their status and power (26).

“In the families of some successful craftsmen and small businessmen, women continued to play almost the same central productive, pre-industrial role in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that they had in the 19<sup>th</sup>” (Pickle, 27). For many though, this was threatened by industrialization because these men were being forced out of work. The craft workers that also had small plots of land, cottagers, and day laborers in the rural areas were the most vulnerable. Most had become part of the cottage industry in the late eighteenth century and were enjoying the extra income most unmarried daughters earned while working in the home” (27). The cottage industry was when people did work in their home. For example, a family may spin or weave cloth. The cottage industry broke down “gender-determined work roles, since the entire family cooperated to gain and maintain economic independence,” and the cottage industry provided women with more status

(28). When industrialization was established, the cottage industry ended. These people were forced to go to the factories or relocate in order to survive (28).

The middle class woman's role changed too, which caused more jobs to open for the lower class. The middle class women's purpose was to take care of the home, which was to be a refuge for their husband from the cold commercial world. As time passed, many middle class women came to view housework as demeaning and began hiring servants, and having servants came to signify middle class status. Especially after the 1848 revolution failed, the trend towards "aristocratizing of the German-speaking Middle classes became stronger"(Pickle, 26). The aristocratizing of the German-speaking middle class was especially important to the servants. Their experience as a servant was essential to those German women who immigrated to the United States and worked as servants in the United States. For example, some German women also had a work agreement, which allowed them to pay off their fares. This was similar to some in Europe who were hired help. Several single women had money for the fare and then used their skills to work in the United States (46).

In addition to the relationship between German female servants and immigration, marriage was an important factor for immigration. For women, the "only acceptable course for ensuring some measure of personal and financial independence was marriage and the founding of her own household"(Pickle, 28). A girl's whole existence was focused on her future marriage. The "savings she accumulated, the dowry of linen and thread she made or was given, the agricultural and household skills she developed, the reputation she earned as a worker and person in the rural community determined her future and that of any children she might have"(29). Married women lost any



independence they might have had when they were a “single wage earner or property owner”(30). Women’s power was only in the household. If women did not marry, then they either chose religious life, or remained a celibate family member or servant for the rest of her life (30).

Marriage was not always an easy thing for couples to accomplish in certain German areas. As a result of the difficulty of getting married, many women and men immigrated to the United States. For example, there often were restrictions placed on the marriages of poor people in many German areas. These areas were trying to limit families that were poor. This did not help. These families just had more illegitimate births and more hostility toward the government (Pickle, 32). These laws were against couples who did not have the required amount of money, goods, or permanent residency to get married. These laws especially affected day laborers and seasonal workers (Sinke, 73). Some couples left for America because of the stigma of illegitimate children, while others wanted to improve their economic situation (74). The difficulty of being able to marry can best be seen in the immigrant family the Klingers. They came from Steinreinach, in Waiblingen County in the Neckar district of Württemberg. Eberhard Ludwig Klinger and his wife, Barbara, had twelve children. Four of the children had been born before they were married in 1824. They married late because Württemberg had many restrictions on undesirable marriages. An example, would be a marriage that was not financially sound (Kamphoefner, *Letters*, 532). Eberhard was not a full citizen because he did not have enough money, and he lived in an impoverished situation most of his life. From 1846 to 1855, emigration peaked in Württemberg. Württemberg’s emigration rates, in the 1850’s, were sixty percent higher than in other areas. Then in

1855, because of early industrialization, emigration decreased. Germany was industrializing around 1850, so by 1855 with more industry would be more jobs; and thus, fewer people would leave. Though Eberhard and his wife did not emigrate themselves, many of their children did. In 1848, Eberhard's oldest daughter, Anna Marie, applied for permission to go to America. She stated that her parents could not give her money. The local authorities said she was well behaved, and Anna Marie said she had some clothes and about one hundred guilders (533). The authorities also said she did not have any defects (no previous criminal convictions, not a minor) and was granted permission to leave (534). In 1857, Daniel Klinger and his common law wife Marie Friedrike Kaiser and their two children immigrated to America. Marie was given financial assistance from her town of Kleinheppach. Town authorities thought that she and her children would soon be in need of public assistance, so loaning her money to immigrate seemed less costly (534).

Moreover, peasant women had to work hard to gain enough wealth to marry on their level. Otherwise, they had to marry down. Most wanted to marry because "this step integrated them into the close kinship structures of rural communities"(Pickle, 33). To middle class observers, emotional attachment in personal relationships seemed to be lacking because of economic strains in marriage and family (33). But this seeming lack of affection could have been due to the emphasis the middle class observer put on the economic disparity of the rural peasants. The middle class observer was looking at peasant life in his or her own perspective "one imbued with the emotional value family life had acquired in bourgeois society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries..." (36). Also, the peasants worked so much; and therefore, lacked the energy to express

affection. Finally, it may be due to them being shy to express affection in front of the middle class (36). These emotional and economic strains led people to immigrate to the United States. Some women married just before they left or when they got to America (45). Some marriages were arranged with a German already in America. This reflects the rural customs of arranged marriages in Germany. Sometimes, the money the women brought to the marriage made the immigration possible (46).

Likewise, inheritance laws were also a problem for people that wanted to get married. Inheritance patterns were partible and/or impartible. Partible inheritance patterns existed in west and southwest German lands. The “family property was split equally among the sons and daughters upon the death or retirement of the parents”(Pickle, 32). Usually, one child bought or rented the land given to his siblings so a somewhat profitable farm existed. Also, the house went to one heir, but that heir had to pay his parents or siblings for it. The result was more small peasant holdings in the nineteenth century. Impartible inheritance existed in most of Prussia, Bavaria, Westphalia, and Austria. In this inheritance pattern, families lived on a large farm with separate houses. They did not travel to farm their land. There was a strong attachment to the land. The home and the land went to one male heir. The name of the house was that of those living in it. The home and the land had continuity not the family. Often the heir married and lived with his parents until they turned the land and home over to him (32). The heir had to reimburse his brothers and sisters in money or property “for their share in the family holding”(32-33). Both forms of inheritance tried to keep the land and home intact, and thus enhanced “intergenerational ties in the family and links to the village and community”(33). These inheritance patterns exemplify the ties to the land and

community that the Germans who immigrated to the United States had. Land ownership, when they emigrated, was a family goal worth great sacrifice because that was the type of society they came from (40). Many tried to maintain their German culture and traditions not only in their homes, but community. These inheritance patterns had some negative aspects too. They caused economic antagonism between family members. This was often, one of the factors leading to emigration. Another problem was that the heir had to wait for his parents to die or retire before he could “come into” his “own economic majority” (33). Also children, by law, had to support their parents.

Besides marriage and inheritance problems being reasons to immigrate, the lack of food drove some to leave. In terms of food, it was difficult for rural families. In the first half of the 1800's, as agricultural production changed, potatoes became the staple food for poor families (Pickle, 39). When the potato crop failed in the 1850's, there was a huge “emigration from southwest Germany”(39-40). Meat was only served on holidays in poor families. Any butter or eggs they had were usually sold at the market. Hunting and trapping rights were only given to property owners (40).

The conditions in Germany and the reasons for emigrating varied depending on three time periods. The three periods were before 1848, 1849 to 1866 and after 1866. Fredrich Munch divided German emigration into these three periods. Fredrich Munch, who immigrated to the United States in 1830, was a leader of the Giesen Society that was trying to found a New Germany in Missouri (Hawgood, 21 & 111). The first period was the Germans that came before 1848. Here, “he saw a mixture of the discontented in all walks of life turning their backs forever upon Europe to make a new life....” (21). The second period was “Einwanderung No. 2”(21). This period was from 1849 to 1866.

These people saw their emigration, at first, as temporary and saw the early settlers as defiant in the way they had turned their backs on Germany. This group often chose urban life over rural life (21). One example of this second group, would be immigrants like Johann Gottlieb Liskow and his wife and family who came to the United States to farm because the land was cheaper, and he had been a part of the revolutionary party in 1848. In 1850, “persecution became great and the government often took unlawful means to bring accusations against democrats; the president of the government and the judge of our district” came to the village. Liskow was lucky enough that people told the judge that he was an upstanding citizen and a moderate democrat. This gave him enough time to get him and his family out of Germany (Liskow, 13).

The final period that Munch describes was after 1866. This group came of their own free will generally, because of economic reasons, and also emigration was easier than in the past (Hawgood, 21). For example, in east Westphalia there was a structural crisis in 1867. In the 1840’s local textile production decreased because of mechanized spinning and weaving. Many of them worked in a cottage industry. This lack of employment caused many spinners and weavers to leave (Kamphoefner, *Letters*, 569). Since Westphalia was unable to employ many of these spinners and weavers, they encouraged them to emigrate; and therefore, made it easier for them to leave. Local authorities “... did not go out of their way to discourage would-be emigrants, even if they left without official permission; instead, it was regarded as a stroke of luck that ‘America needs what we have too much of’”(570). Some went to do seasonal work in Holland, northern Germany, and the Ruhr area, but many went to America (570).

Finally, religious reasons drove others to America. The best-documented group is the Old Lutherans who left Prussia between 1835 and 1854. The Old Lutherans were a dissenting group of the newly formed United Evangelical Church that had been created by King Frederick Wilhelm III. He had unified the Lutheran and reformed state churches into the United Evangelical church. The Old Lutherans saw this new church as moving away from the true faith. They wanted their own clergy and liturgy. The Prussian government responded by imprisoning the clergy and taking the churches. During 1836 to 1838, the Prussian government made it very difficult for this group to emigrate. They had to go before a commission to defend their request to leave. Despite this, many people still left so the government said every emigrant group had to take a pastor. In 1839, Johann Grabau of Erfurt, a pastor in Pomerania and a retired Prussian captain Karl G.H. Von Rohr organized a mass exodus. They were an “emigration society made up of Old Lutherans from Pomerania, Saxony, Silesia and Berlin”(Kamphoefner, *Letters*, 300). A total of 1, 239 people went. Emigration continued until 1854 (301).

In conclusion, reasons for immigrating to the United States during the nineteenth century cannot be specific to just one group. There are many reasons for Germans to come to America, depending on their experience in Germany and the time period in which they lived. Examining the conditions in Germany during the nineteenth century helps one to understand why Germans immigrated, but more importantly this aids one’s understanding of how life was similar or different for these immigrants before and after immigration, especially German women immigrants.

## Chapter 2

### What was it like for German women settling in rural United States?

German immigrants chose to settle in the urban and rural areas of America.

Those families that chose to settle in rural areas found many similarities between rural life in America and rural life in Germany (Pickle, 48). The success of the immigrant family was based on the help of the women in the family (47). In addition, where the German immigrants came from and why determined what their experiences were like in the United States. Those immigrants that settled in the rural areas of the United States were able to maintain many of their traditions and cultural beliefs because of their isolation from the native-born and the sense of community that they established among the rural German communities. In addition, German-American nuns had a different experience on the frontier than other German-American women.

There were laws in the United States that made it possible for women to gain land. In 1832, the first significant group of immigrants bought land for \$1.25 an acre and had to buy a minimum of forty acres (Kamphoefner, *News*, 51). Then in 1841, the “right of preemption was granted to ‘squatters’ who had settled extralegally on unsurveyed government land”(52). In 1854, the Graduation Act lowered the price of federal land that had been on the market for ten years. These changes in land distribution set the stage for free distribution of land to settlers in the Homestead Act. In 1862, the Homestead Act stated that if one builds a house and lives on 160 acres for five years, they would receive the land for approximately a \$10.00 filing fee. One would need \$500 to set up a farm (52). The Homestead Act of 1862 said “single women and female heads of households could gain 160 acres of land by residing on and improving it over a five year

period”(Pickle, 58). In the “last four decades of the nineteenth century women gained title on approximately five to ten percent of the land acquired through homesteading, preemption or timber culture in the Great Plains”(58). Then by 1900, fifteen to thirty percent of women held title to land in some areas of the Dakotas. In the first twenty years of the Homestead Act, few German born women took advantage of it. Later, immigrants especially Germans from Russia were more likely to get land through the Homestead Act (58). In the United States, conditions were favorable for Germans from Russia. The western states, in the 1870’s, were booming. Acts of congress, in the 1860’s and 70’s, set aside a lot of land through Kansas and Nebraska, on either side of the railroad lines. The railroads were looking for farmers to develop this land. The railroads sold the land for low prices (Pickle, 134).

Economically though, German women from Russia were at a disadvantage. According to Russian customs, women could not inherit land unless there were no male heirs. The Volga German women were worse off economically because they used the *mir* system. This system was used to distribute land. Land was given based on the number of men in the household. So, if one had girls that meant poverty (Pickle, 138). The *mir* system also meant that the new bride lived with her in-laws doing the hardest work. The mother in-law was tough on the new bride, perhaps because she experienced the same thing when she was a young bride. These customs continued for a time in the United States, longer among the Volga Germans in Ellis County, Kansas. Elsewhere, we see families breaking up for many reasons, but mostly for economic reasons. In the United States, it was economically more possible for couples to live on their own. This was difficult for the older women to accept because they had expected, when they were



older, to have a certain amount of domestic power, and now they had to give it up. Despite these old traditions that tried to prevail in the United States, some older women did realize that coming to America meant that they and their daughters may not have to be financially dependent on men. For example, “Christina Heine and her daughters homesteaded on adjoining acreage. They could escape the poverty awaiting a family of daughters and also gain the close companionship and support from each other that in Russia would have ceased upon the daughters’ marriage...”(139-140).

Those that settled the Great Plains often disliked the barren look. They lived in log cabins, dugouts and sod houses. The heaviest chore for women was carrying water for the house and livestock (Pickle, 67). The patterns of women’s roles were different between German speaking immigrants and Anglo-Americans. German-American farms were more diversified because women were responsible in German-speaking areas for farm animals. Many clung to yeoman or subsistence farming. This may be due to German women’s central role in farming. It also reflects the expectation of women’s participation in agricultural production. “A Nebraska study shows that German-American farmers had more poultry and cattle and were more likely to raise swine and sheep than were Anglo-Americans”(70). This probably was due to cultural and culinary choices as well as “traditional importance of female agricultural and domestic production”(70). German-American women influenced what animals and foods were grown on the farm. For example, they wanted sheep for the wool so they could knit, and they grew grapes for their own wine. “All European immigrant women had to learn how to deal with new situations and new materials, either from American women or from country women who had immigrated earlier”(71).

Compared to most German immigrants, the Russian German immigrants had different qualities and did quite well in the Great Plains area. This meant a different way of life for these women. Germans from the Steppes in Russia were familiar with the Great Plains barren terrain. They introduced red winter wheat, which helped the bread basket state prosper (Pickle, 67) The Germans from Russia were of the mindset that they were different, and they made themselves separate from the dominate culture. They did this probably because that was what they had done in Russia as colonists. In 1760, they had been invited to Russia to settle the frontier on the Volga. During the eighteenth century, other areas in southern Russia, the Black Sea, and Crimean Steppe were opened up. To get more people to come, Russia offered “land grants of up to 175 acres per family”(133). Russia also said that these settlers did not have to participate in the military or local government, and they could have German language public schools. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, German colonies prospered and developed around the village church (133). Around 1870, they decided to leave Russia because the increase in population was taking up more land. In addition, “by the 1860’s, a significant proportion of the German-speaking population (approximately one-third among the Mennonites) had become a landless proletariat”(134). Also, the conditions in Russia were changing. Taxes had increased by twenty-five percent between 1840 and 1868. Grain prices had fallen. “Certain economic advantages the colonist enjoyed, such as exclusive licenses for brewing beer were withdrawn”(134). Russian leaders tried to impose on the German colonists land reform, and modernization that was suppose to help Russian peasants. Wealthier colonists did not like this because they would have had to give up land. Also, Russia wanted the Russian language used in the schools and

government. Then in 1874, there was a military reform law that stated all could be drafted. This was probably the final straw that pushed this group to immigrate to the United States (134).

Since land was so critical to the rural German immigrants, they were told by emigrant advisers that women had to have a “ strong resilient body, robust health, resilient soul, strong nerves, great lack of consideration for herself, and friendly obligingness to others” (Pickle, 47-48). Some believed that “German-speaking women were culturally conditioned to be ready to participate in the family effort that made frontier success possible”(49). Women were advised that they would have to do difficult frontier tasks of clearing forests, removing stumps, planting, weeding, building and other tasks. Women were also expected to provide health care and teach the children (49). Once land was attained, it was expected that women would contribute to maintaining the family and household, but they were not often given credit for it. Farmwomen and children grew large gardens. They then picked, stored and/or preserved what they grew (56). Sometimes the children took produce to the towns to sell, but more often it was taken to town to barter with merchants, or they bartered with friends. Some believed that rural German-American women were better off than urban German-American women because they did not have to work outside the home and most married German-American women in cities did not make money (57). In Indiana, whole families went every week to sell produce, eggs, milk and other items. They sold products as they drove to Evansville, Indiana, and at the “Little Market” or 4<sup>th</sup> Street Market (Bigham, 9). Amanda Mohr said she "enjoyed that - being there and meeting the people"(10). Lois Leich said it was a social experience. She was able to see her school friends and her parent's friends (10).

On butchering days, women supervised the making of headcheese and sausage. August Schramm wrote of these experiences in his diary. He wrote on March 6<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> 1865 that Louise Richmann helped his mother make shirts. Then on April 5<sup>th</sup> he helped his mother make a garden near their home to grow greens. On several occasions, he wrote of his mother and sister-in-law, Nancy, and sometimes his father and others involved in butchering or making sausage. For example on January 11, 1866 Nancy and his mother fried out the lard, while on January 2, 1867 Nancy, his mother, father and Mrs. Sanders made sausage. August Schramm also wrote about his wife helping on the farm and making soap (July 30 1879, Nov. 15, 1880). Frederick Buesking wrote about Ellen, his wife, and the children tending the garden and that the garden was important because it was the “main source of food for the winter months”(Johnson, 15). They had to learn to store and preserve food early. They also sold some eggs, butter, cream and garden produce. He also wrote about “Ellen standing over a large black kettle, some three feet across making lard, grits or sausage”(15). The children were expected to help with “churning butter, weeding the garden, tending the animals, doing the dishes”(17). Time and location determined the extent of the work women did. In Frankenmuth, in contrast to other areas, Johann Georg Schiefer, his wife and Margaretha Schwartz wrote to his parents in 1854 that women did not have to work much in Frankenmuth. “In the past winter I cleared 8 acres, but my wife did not as much as have to pick up one twig.” The attitude of many was that if one was not doing hard physical labor than that person was not doing much. This does not take into account all the work women did in the home. This expresses the lack of respect for women’s work. Despite this lack of respect for women’s work, German-American men were looking for a German woman to marry.

German immigrant patterns of marriage were opposite of those of other ethnic groups. For example, German women immigrants married and began raising children right away. Other immigrants worked or postponed having children after marriage (Sinke, 78). Irish and Southern and Eastern European women went to the United States for a job (79). In 1900, 44 percent of the Irish women, 28 percent of the Scandinavian women, 18 percent of central European women, and 17 percent of other European women were working. Also, by 1910, 47 percent of the Irish women, 10 percent of the Scandinavian women, 12 percent of central European women and 25 percent of other European women were working. (86) As job opportunities in America increased, one would think German women would do the same as others, but by 1900 14.8 percent of German women worked and by 1910 only 13.6 percent worked (See Table 1). So, why did this happen? (79)

**Table 1**

**Women Immigrant Employment**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>1900 (percentage)</b>	<b>1910 (percentage)</b>
Irish	44	47
Scandinavian	28	10
Central European	18	12
Other European	17	25
German	14.8	13.6

**SOURCE:** Data from Suzanne Sinke and Stephen Gross, "The International Marriage Market and The Sphere of Social Reproduction: A German Case Study". In *Seeking Common Ground*, ed. Donna Gabbaccia. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger. 1992), 86.

From 1880 to 1895, many German immigrants lived in the eastern part of the United States in the big cities. In 1895, there was a shift of Germans living in rural areas especially the mid-west. This could be due to the shift in areas of emigration back to the west to southwest Germany and a more conservative group. In the rural areas, farming was a family occupation; and therefore, a wife was needed. Women were needed in the home for domestic tasks (Sinke, 80). German men were looking for women with similar religious and regional background. They often had to look to the old country for this. Usually, they wanted a woman that was industrious, had a good disposition, a developed figure and passable face. Class and social position did not matter. In addition, men were motivated to find a wife because many unmarried men stayed in boarding houses that were expensive (79). By the end of the century, people were married in a civil ceremony, religious ceremony, common law arrangement or a combination thereof. There were few restrictions to marriage in America. They were miscegenation, bigamy, and age at marriage. Property or residence requirements were not a restriction as many had faced in Europe. Most men did not want to marry women from another ethnic background. German men viewed native-born American women as lazy. Most German women felt jealousy and disgust for native born American women and also felt American women did not do much. Family and friends in the United States encouraged German women to go to America because women were treated better there and divorce was easier to acquire. A husband had to support the children and wife if a divorce occurred (81). Some men married for money, either German or American women, especially young widows. Few German-American women returned to the Old World. Only some newly

married couples returning with capital or other women who were impoverished returned to the Old World. If a man returned, it was after he made some money (82).

Germans tended to live in groups together. In 1837, Gustav Englemann said that in St. Clair County in Illinois “life in this settlement is only very slightly modified by the influence of the American environment... (Hawgood, 37). Intermarriage was rare with native born if Germans lived close together. For example, in 1850, of the six thousand Germans who lived in Milwaukee and four thousand native born, there were only six Germans married to a native born. In 1860, there were thirty-five married to non-Germans. Then in 1870 and 1880 they were intermarrying more, but it was more intraracial and not interracial. Intraracial was when the native born was a son or daughter of a German immigrant rather than interracial when a son or daughter was from another ethnic group. In 1905, interracial marriage was frequent for other immigrant groups, but not Germans (38). This type of pattern was seen elsewhere too. By 1850, there had been Germans living in Missouri for twenty years, but there still was little intermarriage with native born. One in one hundred German women had an American husband. Only four percent of German men married outside their ethnic group (Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians*, 112).

Many immigrants liked it better once they were married. J.Heinrich zur Oeveste wrote on February 21, 1840 that he liked it better being married rather than unmarried (2). Georg Bernreuter of Frankenmuth said practically the same thing on October 20, 1866, when he wrote that taking the step to get married was difficult, but he is the richest and happiest man in the world because of it, and that he has the best wife in the world. Often there was advice to those in the Old World about marriage in the New World.

Gotthardt Bechtold wrote on March 15, 1850 some advice for Fritz to tell Dorothea in regards to marriage in America. He said that she should not stay alone in New York. He said, "presentable women are very scarce" there. She should come to Illinois where she could marry with honor and respectability. Marriage was cause for a big celebration, which the women arranged. August Schramm wrote on November 23, 1865 that Christine Rethmeier and Mrs. Weaver helped his mother bake cakes for his brother, Gustav's wedding next week. Then on November 25 he wrote that ten kegs of beer were purchased for the wedding dance. His mother, "Christine Rethmeier, Nancy Roesenery, Mary and Analise Meier baked and prepared chickens and turkeys all day." On November 26, they went to the church to invite all the boys and girls to the wedding. The preacher married them at home, and after the dinner was dancing. There were about two hundred people there, and they drank eight kegs of beer and danced until two in the morning.

Marriages among Russian Germans were arranged. The girl's mother was involved in early discussions. In some communities, the mother and father would lay their hands on the couple to show their blessing (Pickle, 143). They kept the old wedding customs of invitations, Polterabend which was a celebration the night before the wedding, the order of the procession to and from the church, "ceremonies recognizing the special status of cooks at the wedding feast, and" after the wedding feast "the pinning of money, dry goods and other gifts on the bride's dress at the wedding dance" (143-144). Men were involved in these ceremonies, but the women were the ones who arranged it all (144).



In addition to high expectations of frontier women, women dealt with many trials and tribulations. Childbirth on the frontier was very dangerous in the nineteenth century. Sometimes other immigrant women helped one another through the birthing process because no doctor was available to them (Pickle, 50). August Schramm mentioned in his diary of December 18, 1879 that his wife was helping Mrs. Strumpf, since she just had a baby. Katie M. Artz Simon from South Dakota, in 1893, recalled the babies being born at home with a midwife (Wagner, 115). Other times women were alone or delivered their baby with their husband or children's help (Pickle, 50). Similarly, child birthing, in the rural areas of the Germans from Russia, used midwives from the communities, female relatives and neighbors. Midwives were preferred in most immigrant communities. They also used folk medicine. Women and men performed healing acts known as Brauche. The tradition was that a man passed on remedies and charms orally to a woman and a woman did the same, but to a man. There were many female healers/Brauchers that were midwives. They were respected and feared in their communities (144).

If the woman died due to childbirth, illness, or other reasons, other immigrant women often took their place in caring for the family (Pickle, 50). Jette Bruns exemplifies this, when in 1847 her sister-in-law died of tuberculosis. She cared for her brother's three children as he went to seek his fortune (Schroeder, 13). Later, her brother built a store nearby and settled in Jefferson City, Missouri with his children. Then in 1858, he died and she now had to care again for her brother's children who were ages thirteen to seventeen (14). The same type of help applied if the husband died.

For instance, two days after Sophie Luise Eleanor Schwarz (Ellen) arrived with her family in Hancock county Indiana from Frille her father died of typhoid fever

(Johnson, 1 & 5). Her relatives, who already resided in Hancock County, helped her mother and siblings. Her brother did most of the physical labor on the farm, but he died in 1860. A tree had fallen on him while he was working elsewhere to earn money for the family (5&6). Ellen married, but her husband died leaving her with two young children to raise. The choices for widows during this time were to either leave their family and friends and go to a city to work in a factory or shop, or if possible re-marry, or stay close to home. Ellen chose to move to her mother's house. After she moved in with her mother, she worked for another family (11).

Similarly, in Frankenmuth, Margaretha Pickelmann wrote her pastor in 1865 about her husband dying. He left her with nine children between the ages of nineteen to ten, and none of them could support themselves. Her oldest son was taking care of the farm work. The second son was becoming a smith, and her third son was becoming a cartwright. She had not done any farm work in the past, and now she had to give orders. She also mentioned the Weber family. This family was not as lucky in receiving help. When the father died, he left behind his wife and eight children. The oldest son went to war against his mother's advice. Therefore, she had no one that was old enough to help her farm the land. Consequently, she had to lease her farm and live alone with her little children. She had a more difficult time.

Economically, many drove their children as hard as themselves. They also neglected them when times were difficult. One mother left her children locked in the house with a dog to protect them, while she went to wash and sew for the neighbors. The children were only an infant and toddler. Generally, when boys and girls were eight, they

worked (Pickle, 50). Infant mortality was high because there was little pre or postnatal care. Mothers had a difficult time caring for their baby because they were so busy (51).

One of the biggest differences between rural Germans and rural Americans was that the German-Americans realized they could pool their money and work together. In this way, they could advance (51). A good example of this is the extra work women did. Besides working around the farm, women did other work related to female domestic duties. Therefore, they earned more money. Midwifery, boarding, taking care of families, cottage industries and hiring out daughters to do housework are examples of how more money was made possible (Pickle, 53). In addition, women made curtains, clothes and other items for their family (54). Frederick Buesking, who was born in Neuenkaick and came to the United States in 1872, wrote that his wife Ellen cradled, spun, and dyed wool (Johnson, 11-12). The children then wound the yarn into a ball. "Ellen knitted socks and mittens, hats and scarves for the family"(16). The butter and egg money women earned helped the family in times of need for extras and staples (Pickle, 55). August Schramm wrote on March 3, 1865 that his mom sold two heifers for seventy-five dollars and the little white spotted steer to a man from Push County. In this way, she financially contributed to the family. Jette Bruns had done similar things, but she also entertained many politicians, clergymen and candidates in her home because there was no inn (Schroeder, 74). Later, after her oldest son, husband and a black family went to a bigger farm, she and the younger children stayed in Westphalia to take care of things. During this period, she rented part of the house to another family (128).

As a result of living in the United States, inheritance was more equal among children than it had been in Germany. Parents were retiring earlier because of American

tradition and because of the force of law. “The American pattern of equal inheritance was, by and large, congenial to German-speakers” (Pickle, 59). Problems still existed among children even though they tried to make inheritance more equal (64). This could be due to the inheritance customs where they had settled plus the land transfer patterns they were used to in Europe. Men still received more land than women did in their parents wills (65).

At the same time, politically and socially, native-born American women were influenced by women’s suffrage and temperance, but not Germans. Most were not supportive of either idea (Pickle, 72). Many among the German-American press did not support these movements either. Articles were written about the German community’s opposition to woman’s suffrage (73). Rural German-American women tended to be isolated from these American views on suffrage and temperance. Many felt women in America had more rights than German women. This was because rural German-Americans women tended not to “oppose the traditional pattern of female subordination after their arrival in America”(74). The German-American men viewed women’s suffrage as a negative influence on their women and did not support suffrage (74). In addition, alcohol was part of their ethnic diet and social scene. This view was often in conflict with American society (73-74). German “women’s inaction suggests they shared men’s attitudes toward women suffrage and temperance”(73). Since most of the German women did not demand suffrage or protest the use of alcohol, it was seen by many that they agreed with men’s attitudes on suffrage and temperance.

To some extent abuse of German-American rural women did occur, probably because the men had the right to in Germany. At the same time though, German women

did gain respect, but not equality for the work they did at home and in the fields. Because of the new circumstances in America, women learned to ride horseback and to go alone to visit neighbors (Pickle, 75). A girl in the German-American community spent a five to ten year-waiting period between her confirmation and learning handicrafts and household duties. This was just like she would have done in Europe (76).

Rural German-speaking women also tried to maintain their native language in their children. This, though, led these women to be isolated partially or completely from Anglo-America, which their descendants became a part of. They kept traditional housekeeping practices, which for German-speakers was cleanliness. They did abandon some household traditions like eating out of a common bowl, and they abandoned the proteinless diet of Europe. They ate less rye bread. It was replaced with white bread, which in Europe was a wealthy man's food (Pickle, 86). Other than this, the food remained the same (87). All ate together. They did not separate the children, workers and others (86). German-Americans used tablecloths on their tables. Their clothing changed because of the climate. They said good-bye to their woolen clothing and replaced them with cotton shirts. Americans, in the urban areas, often criticized rural German-American women for their lack of color and headscarves. The rural German women's regional costumes (Trachten) sometimes had special significance for women and were used for special occasions. Despite their differences with American fashion, their clothing styles no longer separated classes, as in Europe. Only money and taste did. Women were also responsible for maintaining holiday tradition (87). For example, German women from Russia "supervised the coloring and hiding of Easter eggs"(141). Women also taught the Christmas songs and bought or made the Christmas gifts. A

woman also portrayed the Christ child during the Christmas Eve visits along with Pelznickel, who was like St. Nicholas. The people that portrayed the Christ child and Pelznickel visited the children in the Lutheran and Catholic communities. ... "Women's participation was crucial in perpetuating all the folk customs and celebrations that their descendants commemorate and carry on today"(141).

The younger a women was when she went to the frontier the easier it was to adapt. Also, how much she integrated into American society and how much she wanted to integrate played a role too. Louisa Gellhorn in 1868 was one, when she arrived in Iowa with her family. She had positive memories of growing up. She was young enough that she did not have to participate in the difficult work of getting a new farm established (Pickle, 93). She had no difficulty adjusting. There was some cultural conflict with Anglo-Americans, and she was sometimes called a dirty Dutch. She lived in an ethnically mixed neighborhood. She seemed to integrate well into her neighborhood. She went to an English language church. She traded work with her neighbors and played with all the area children. She went to the country grade school, did domestic work for Americans and married an Anglo-American (94).

In 1877, thirty-seven year old Anna Barbara Immendorf Rappenthal arrived in West Kansas with her husband and children (Pickle, 100). She had a much different experience than Louisa. She did not miss Hesse, but where she originally settled, Philadelphia. Therefore, she missed her family in Philadelphia (101). She was reluctant to go to the frontier and had heard of her sister's hardships in Minnesota, including that a bull had gored her sister. Anna had to carry water a half mile to her farm the first five months. For the first fifteen years, she spent eighteen to twenty-four hours working.

Anna was a city woman and valued education. So, she feared a poor quality education for her children. As a result, she tried to supplement the children's education with the Bible and magazines (101).

Jette Bruns felt she was fulfilling her main duty as a wife by going to the United States with her husband (Schroeder, 59). She described saying good-bye to everyone, " 'I shall never forget this as long as I live!' It is really indescribably difficult"(63). Jette and her family arrived in the Westphalia settlement in 1836. Isolation was a big problem for her (9). She said the psychological suffering was made worse on the frontier by "unaccustomed deprivations and hardships, inexorable forces of nature and debilitating diseases"(10). She often dealt with illnesses. In the 1840's, they were affected by cholera that struck at many in Missouri (126). These difficulties were probably compounded by the fact that many Europeans, Jette included, believed that the Schlaraffenland of German myth existed in the United States. Schlaraffenland was "where the trees are laden with fruit, the brooks flow with milk and honey, and roasted doves can be plucked from the air"(10). In August 1837, Jette worried about how to feed and care for everyone. They had not had many successes that first year, and she was concerned how everyone was going to have enough to eat. She wrote, that the first year was very difficult, and it took a lot of "perseverance and patience not to lose courage"(78). She continued to wait to move into their house that was being built. In addition, they had not been able to prepare a field for cattle, flooding had caused problems for what they had planted, and their horse got sick and could not plow so, they had to hoe the weeds by hand. They were not expecting very much from what they had planted; and therefore, there would be little to eat (79). She continued to say that it was

“a great worry for the housewife...well, what else should I complain about? That I am very often vexed? That I feel doubly annoyed with all these misfortunes? That it is not fun to represent cook, nursemaid, and housewife in one person?”(11). By June of 1840, Jette was hoping for more female companions to share her daily trials and tribulations, and her fears and joy (11). Jette said, that there was not “another congenial female being with whom I could exchange now and then my feelings when I need some relief and would forget the daily worries and set these aside for a short time”(105). She said she did speak with her husband about her feelings and he listens, but does not really get involved in what she is talking about (105). She was devastated by the deaths of three of her children. She was often left alone because her husband’s medical practice was far-flung. Dr. Bruns, her husband, wrote in 1837 that he has a lucrative practice, but ‘the one thing we lack is good company. This is particularly unpleasant for the women...’”(77). Her husband appears to understand her loneliness, but can do little to help her because of the lack of people in the area. Jette felt unrewarded in life despite settling well (12). Even in 1849, after more than twelve years of being here, she still felt like a stranger. She found it difficult to adjust to the different customs, language and morals. She felt people had no feelings and everything was cold and foreign (13). Even in 1853, at thirty-nine years old she wrote that she was a “ ‘still, sad indifferent figure, without interest, with aged features, a mouth without teeth’”(13).

German women from Russia, probably, had a more difficult time adjusting. They had very little or no social contact with those that were not part of their ethnic or religious group. This slowed their assimilation, and they participated very little in American politics. The women living in towns took on the American fashions, whereas, the women



in rural areas were slow to do this probably because their basic associations were with their neighbors and fellow church members. They rarely went to town (Pickle, 136-37). Some kept a hat in a bag and wore it if they went to church in other communities (137).

The German women from Russia were dedicated to the family farm life, married young and had many children. The average number of children from first generation Volga Germans were 9.3 versus the average of those born in the United States from 1895 to 1910 was 8.1. They did their hard work without complaint and instilled the same in their daughters. "Contemporary scholars have concluded that the success of these families in the marginal farming areas of Kansas was often due to the willingness of wives to contribute their earnings to the accumulation of land and to daughters' willingness to work for wages that were also dedicated to that endeavor"(Pickle, 137).

As for women in these communities, if they were married they had little leisure time, they married within their community, and they did not work outside the home (Pickle, 138). Among the Germans from Russia, women were subordinate to men. The Mennonite church teachings and doctrines, which most Volga Germans subscribed to, supported subordination to men. Also, women's subordination to men was expressed in community attitudes, and "customs, and practices"(138). Wedding customs supported this too. Among the Volga Germans in Kansas, a bride walked in front of the man in the beginning of the wedding ceremony, but walked behind him to the celebration and the rest of her married life (138).

In addition, women continued to be subordinated when it came to ideas of divorce and illegitimacy. Divorce and illegitimacy was disapproved of, and the community directed their criticism and blame, especially, against the women. The church told

women that they must submit to the man's sexual demands. Mennonite Elders felt the church came before wife and family. The Mennonite church was the leader. For example, one family only had a few children and the Elder asked why. They said because more pregnancies would endanger the wife's life. The Elder told them that it would be to the glory of the church if she risked her own life (Pickle, 138).

These women helped ease the change from immigration by creating a home environment that was a haven from the New World. Their ethnic distinctiveness was projected in their everyday activities. They made traditional German foods such as blood sausage and sauerkraut, and served kuchen and zwieback at teatime lunch, when relatives and friends came on Sunday. This helped people to feel more at home in a strange place. Food also showed itself in celebrations such as holiday meals. Women also prepared the funeral and wedding refreshments with neighbors and relatives. The traditional headpieces worn in the wedding or the Mennonite cap were made by the women (Pickle, 140).

In the rural areas, community institutions were set up by German speakers to preserve ethnic life and to help them adapt to their new life. Churches and schools were two very important institutions they set up. Church was the center of their cultural and communal life (Pickle, 78). Women were not allowed to have a public role in the church. Although women often did provide traveling ministers with places to stay, a place for church services and food for the people after the service, but they were rarely mentioned. Women were given credit for founding a church only when they were widowed and had given land or money to the church (79). Men had the more public role in the church and women did the behind the scene tasks similar to maintaining the household, cooking,

cleaning and fundraising (80). August Schramm wrote on March 23, 1866 that Nancy, her mother, Mary Rethmeier and Mrs. Landwehr went to the church to fix up the pulpit with new flowers. These tasks provided social situations that allowed women to maintain their female friendships (Pickle, 80).

Religiously, the Germans from Russia hoped to come and settle in areas where they could set up their own community. This usually did not happen. “Krimmer Mennonite Brethren settlement at Gnadenu in Marion County, Kansas, came closest to achieving this goal”(Pickle, 135). In about two or three years, their village system broke down and the town of Gnadenu did not exist. The Volga Germans in Ellis County, Kansas adapted some Old World styles of village living, such as two houses. The house on the farm was the main residence, and the other was in town. The family would go to their second home on Sundays and during school time. The mother or older daughter would have to maintain it (135). For many years after they immigrated, they continued the tradition of “communal holding of land for grazing and gardening purposes in the sections of land on which they established the towns of Munjor, Catharine, Pfeifer, and Schoenchen”(136).

In terms of church, German women from Russia, no matter what their religious denomination was, sat on the left side because the left side was associated with evil and betrayal. There was also a separate entrance to the church for women. Since the male hierarchy dominated the Catholic Church, Volga German women played little to no role in the church except if they joined a religious order (Pickle, 141). Mennonite women were important to the church life especially behind the scenes. Women were responsible for encouraging the men in the family to propagate the faith. They endured the

tribulations they and the men experienced. Women hosted prayer meetings, “and Bible study groups and doctrinal discussions at which church policy was formed or altered”(142). If the men were involved in the public life of the church, it meant the women had to do more at home. Mennonite denomination determined what women’s formal participatory role was in the church services and activities. Most women were not allowed to take a public role in services and meetings (142).

Mennonites introduced Sunday schools, to deal with the influence of American Protestantism, and women were used to teach other women and children in these schools. Mennonite Brethren women that were part of a missionary could preach or teach classes that had men in it. Women set up “missionary societies and to hold prayer and Bible study meetings perhaps again because of the example of American Protestant women”(Pickle, 142). At times, in the United States, there was a women’s auxiliary to the church, which sometimes had its own budget program, annual retreat and membership list. All Mennonite women helped with disaster relief. These two incidents suggest that some women immigrants of the United States were allowed “opportunities for self-sufficiency in areas of spiritual activity and expression that had been closed to them before they immigrated”(142).

Rural and some urban mid-west churches used German for church services. In a community of Germans, women pushed for the use of German because that is what they knew. Women living in ethnically mixed communities, or Germans who where more progressive encouraged their children to learn English (Pickle, 143).

Likewise, female influence in the school was probably like that of their influence in the church. They supported their husband’s donation of land and money. Children

only attended school if and when they were not needed for work just as in Europe. Girls were not encouraged to attend school. They were to marry and stay home (Pickle, 81). One example of this, was when “Gottfried Walz wrote a niece from Bouton, Iowa, advising her not to undergo the teacher training, for as a member of the school board he had too often seen such education go to waste among young women”(81-82). Female teachers usually were not approved. In Europe, teachers had been men. Many times pastors, priests and teachers were given high status that they would not give to women. Women in Germany were not allowed until the mid- nineteenth century into institutions for higher learning. If women became teachers, they stayed in the urban areas. In the United States, teaching was one of the few professions women were allowed in, but German women were slow to do this. It was not until 1900 that first and second generation German speaking women “accounted for only eighty-six of the 314,269 female teachers and professors in the United States, far below the number one might expect from their share in the population”(82).

German founded churches usually established schools that were set up to train German language teachers. Those schools that were conservative often maintained the idea that women teachers were inappropriate because it was outside of the domestic sphere (Pickle, 82). The more conservative religions were the Missouri Synod Lutherans and the Catholics. Germans also set up private and parochial schools because of changes in laws in the 1850’s that did not allow for subjects to be taught in any other language, but English. Catholics and the Missouri Synod Lutherans were very successful in establishing parochial schools that competed well with public schools for students (83). They supported German schools because they felt Germans who were Americanized

tended to fall away from these churches and join American churches, like the Baptists (Hawgood, 39). Schools for Missouri Synod Lutherans were ways to make sure children were not assimilated too quickly into American society. “Many immigrants believed that these intertwined goals- language mastery, cultural retention, and religious education- could be met better in the parochial school than in the public schools”(Pickle, 83).

Frederick Buesking, of Illinois, wrote of his children living with their grandmother during the week because it was closer to the German school, expresses one example of the importance of sending German children to a German school. He was willing to let his children live away from home and do without their labor around the farm so that they could attend a German school. “After the German school, some went back to the public school through eighth grade”(Johnson, 16).

Educationally, Germans from Russia were conservative. As in Russia, after confirmation children were no longer educated because their labor was needed. They felt that children only needed reading, writing, math and enough English to help them in the broader world. Educating women was seen as a waste of time because they spent their time in the home. The extent of literacy they needed was required to learn their catechism and to read hymns (Pickle, 140).

“The most important German-American clubs in rural areas were the *Turner*, (physical fitness and political awareness) societies and the choral groups”(Pickle, 84). Women were not directly involved in these, but played an auxiliary function. Where there was a heavy concentration of German-Americans in the Midwest, women and children had Gymnastic clubs. Rural women probably did not have time for meetings and classes. They probably came with their family to the dances, picnics and parties (84). These

types of events allowed rural women to come in contact with a larger part of society, which helped them to assimilate. German speaking women were not likely to join native born women's clubs. Rural German-American women were slow at establishing parallel organizations in their society because they probably had most of their cultural and social needs met by the church, and they were busy maintaining the traditions of home and ethnic community (85).

In addition to the women who were married and working on the farms, there were nuns on the frontier. They added to the religious and educational needs of those on the frontier. Religious orders were an alternative to marriage, and also a way of gaining independence. The Catholic Church felt the frontier needed religious help because if not, the Catholic immigrants would fall to the Protestant sect. The nuns were called on to set up schools. For example, there were two communities of Roman Catholic nuns, the Adorers and the Benedictines, who came to the frontier. The Adorers arrived around 1870. There were nine nuns at Belle Prairie in Hamilton county Illinois. There were five Benedictine nuns in Maryville in Nodaway County, Missouri in 1874 (Pickle, 168).

The Adorer sisters had a poor view of the New World from the start. They arrived in wintry conditions where they saw huts with holes not windows. The prairie lands were wild and primitive. They had a new two-story frame house with two chairs, a table, five beds and a stove. The parishioners, from the Pfarzheim district, provided them with necessities from their own supplies. The priest also tried to help. The Adorers set up a school, administered the church music and sacristy. They had to receive special permission from the bishop to teach the boys. Spiritually, they had little support because priests did not stay long. There were four priests in one month (Pickle, 169). In Sauk

county Minnesota they had a similar shortage. Until about 1890 there was a great shortage of priests. Most of the priests were young and not very familiar with America. They were also overworked. They usually administered several parishes, and they moved a lot. If they stayed three years this was considered to be an exceptionally long time. Therefore, the “formation of parishes, the construction of churches, the manner in which religious education was provided, and even the dominant elements of worship were heavily influenced by lay leadership and demand, and unpopular pastors were easily removed by parish pressure”(Conzen, 26). As the number of priests that were acculturated increased, their time at a parish increased (27). This county did not have the influence of the nuns.

As a result of their hardships, the Adorer nuns “suffered from the bareness and poverty of their surroundings, the hard work of setting up a household and planting a garden, fieldwork (...) in the Midwest summer heat and humidity, and Malaria”(Pickle, 169). They felt bad and discouraged that they had left Germany. Twelve more nuns, along with Mother Augusta Volk, from the Gurtweil Convent arrived a few years later (169). In 1873, the German State closed the Gurtweil convent and its mission. So, Mother Augusta Volk went to Germany to convince the other nuns to come to America. Forty-eight nuns came. They worked in Illinois and Missouri. In July 1875, the convent split over setting up a motherhouse in O’Fallon, Missouri. The disagreement revolved around the issue that there was an older agreement with the Bishop in Alton. The agreement stated that if they moved the motherhouse they would have to cut their ties with their headquarters in Rome, and some did not want to do that. Most continued on



and founded the Sisters of the Adoration of the most Precious Blood located in O'Fallon (Pickle, 170).

Eighteen nuns and novices stayed with Novitiate Mother Clementine Zerr in Illinois. They had the harshest conditions because of extreme poverty. The Adorers moved a year later to Ruma, Illinois. The bishop helped arrange the buying of a former boys college by the nuns. They had little food, "makeshift shoes and clothing, and hard labor were made bearable by their acceptance of it all as a sacrifice to Christ and as a way of life in accord with their vows of poverty and obedience"(Pickle, 170). The Novitiates had to do the hard labor. Their shoes were either wooden working clogs or cornhusk slippers. Their dresses were made from as little material as needed; thus, they had to take tiny steps (170).

Likewise, in Maryville, Missouri September 5, 1874 the five Benedictine sisters of Adoration arrived. They came to help the Swiss Engelberg Benedictine Abbey, which had been important in founding their home convent, which was the Maria Rickenbach convent in the Lucerne Canton. Their home in the United States had two small rooms without windows above a "rickety rectory near the dilapidated church, a half-mile out of town"(Pickle, 171). Snow came through the roof and walls. The extreme temperatures and barren landscape of the Great Plains were difficult on them. This was especially difficult when compared to the mountains surrounding their home convent. The hard work made homesickness worse. Just the day to day tasks of living, such as cooking, which none of them had been trained to do, took time away from learning English and preparing lessons. Also, they cleaned, sewed, cooked and washed for the priests, provided music and "acted out acolytes at the services," cared for the priests' horse and

cleaned the church (171). One nun wrote to her mother superior “ ‘we give to Father Adelhelm more work than the 60 Sisters in Maria Rickenbach to their confessor’”(172).

Demands on their energies were different, but they experienced the stress of the frontier life just like the women in families faced. Spiritually their lives lacked because the mission priests had many communities to attend to. “Mother Anselma’s letters often bemoaned the impossibility of fulfilling the spiritual goal of the sisters’ mission, the institution of the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist in America, because of their small numbers and the many demands on their time”(Pickle, 172). It was difficult for religious communities such as the Benedictines to continue as they had in Europe leading active and financially profitable lives as well as contemplative lives. This was due to the needs of the frontier life and the lack of monetary support in America (172).

The Benedictine nuns that were originally sent were chosen because they would be missed the least at the convent. A few of them were sickly; others had been dissatisfied at the convent, or sometimes disobeyed their superiors. These nuns were split between Marysville rectory and the rural parish at Conception. This caused problems between the two groups. “ The intervention and manipulations of the Benedictine priest further complicated the relations between the two groups of nuns”(Pickle, 173). The two groups set up a novitiate and were in competition for young German and Irish American women to join them. Their problems were also made worse by various personalities (174).

Being a part of a religious community allowed some women to achieve “personal and spiritual self-realization”(Pickle, 175). “They could capitalize on the needs of

American society to expand their own fields of activity while advancing the cause of their community and church”(175).

They, too, experienced being separated from their family. This was not allowed to affect their work because they had left their family when they entered the convent. Emigration was considered a spiritual decision the sisters had made. It was considered inappropriate or even sinful to let it affect their work. There were some exceptions though for some sisters in regards to family matters. Sometimes family ties were maintained, but they were not always helpful, and often made it worse (Pickle175).

“The structure and nature of their communities continued European tradition, traditions having sacred significance to these immigrants”(Pickle, 176). Many of the American-born candidates were from German-speaking immigrant families. They used German in their communal life, and those that joined were urged to learn German. They also recruited members in Europe (176). They felt that American values were materialistic and superficial. In addition, they believed most girls had “ ‘no mind for work’”; and thus, would not become a Novitiate (177).

It was harder for these women than rural farmwomen because they had to come in contact with English speakers and perform professionally in another language because they were also establishing schools for American Catholic children (Pickle, 176). Since there were no men in their groups, and they lacked money, the hard work of frontier life all rested on them. Despite this, men dominated in certain respects over them, because of the church hierarchy and the European ecclesiastical traditions. The religious women’s experience depended on her individual experience and outer circumstances a lot like other immigrant women (178). Because of the type of work and contact with English

speakers, they had to adapt much quicker than other immigrant women did. One advantage was they had a “certain self-assurance about their identity as upholding of true religious practices”(179). They also were able to maintain some of their ethnicity because of community living (179).

Rural German immigrant women were expected to work hard on the frontier. They were to maintain the home, family and traditions. They often assimilated slower because of their isolation. There were many differences among the German immigrants from Europe and Russia. In addition, the German nuns that settled the frontier had a much different experience because they had to do all that other women did plus teach in a foreign language. They also had to do all the hard work, which other women would have shared with their husband and children on the frontier. All these groups had a common goal of maintaining their religion and German education.

## Chapter 3

### What was it like for German Women Settling in Urban United States?

German women in the urban United States had a different experience than those living in the rural areas. Domestic service characterized the type of work most single, German women did in the United States, a job which helped them to acculturate. Acculturation also occurred when single or married women in the urban areas were involved in activities outside the home. Also, Germans, especially women, had access to agencies in the city, founded by Germans, which would help them, if they met the proper criteria and aid in their acculturation. The dramatic change to German-American women's lives was due to the many different experiences and opportunities available to them.

When discussing women in the United States, domestic service is a critical topic. The extent of urban females working depended on their ethnicity and length of time in the city. Female foreigners working as domestic servants was helpful to them acculturating. In contrast, according to Laurence Glasco's study of Buffalo, New York in 1855, native born women were not greatly affected by work outside the home, even though at age sixteen, native-born white women living in the city started to leave home, most did not leave home to take a job. Native-born women left home and became boarders, a servant or lived with a relative or some other person (Glasco, 278). "Native born women, ages sixteen to nineteen, made up only twelve to seventeen percent of domestic servants. There were no native-born women by the age of twenty-four that were domestic servants (279) (See table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Live-in Domestic Servants**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Native-born	16-19	12-17
	24	0
Irish	13-25	25
	18-21	50-66
German	17-18	66

SOURCE: Data from Laurence A. Glasco, "The Life Cycles and Household Structure of American Ethnic Groups". In *A Heritage of Her Own*, eds. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 279, 282, 285.

On the other hand, about half of the Irish women, by age seventeen had already left home and were engaged in domestic work, whereas native-born women were just starting to leave. Irish women started to leave home at age eleven, and by twenty-one most were living apart from their parents. Compared to the native-born, Irish women were apart from their parents four years earlier. More than a quarter of the Irish women between thirteen and twenty-five were involved with live-in domestic work. About a half to two-thirds of those ages eighteen to twenty-one were employed as live-in domestic servants (See Table 1). "Domestic service was closely related to at least two demographic factors-age and length of residence in the city"(Glasco, 282). Most Irish parents would have preferred their daughters not work as live-in domestic servants. Their fear was based on the fact that many Irish women worked for native-born families with adolescent sons. Few parents in the city could stop their daughters from working. This was due to the family not being able to support them; instead, they used their daughters' incomes. A quarter of the ten to fourteen year olds, living in the city for a year or less, worked as live-in domestic servants "compared to less than 15% of those present more

than three years”(282). There was also a drop among the fifteen to nineteen year olds from seventy-five percent to thirty-two percent. The drop was less dramatic among the girls in their early twenties, which was from fifty-two to thirty-nine percent (282-283). Those in their late twenties dropped from thirty to fifteen percent. Domestic service was the Irish women’s counterpart of boarding out for men and more widely practiced. Around the age of twenty-one, Irish women began leaving work, and by twenty-six years old almost none were employed as domestic servants. They left to get married (283).

Similarly, at eleven German girls gradually began to leave home. Most had left home by twenty-three, which was about two years later than the Irish. Most German adolescent girls were live-in domestic servants for native-born families. Their time in service was shorter. The greatest number of Germans, about two-thirds, worked as domestics between seventeen and eighteen, whereas two-thirds of Irish women worked as domestic servants between eighteen and twenty-one (Glasco, 285) (See Table 1). At seventeen, German women began to marry, about two to three years before Irish women. Eighty percent of those twenty-five and older were married compared to seventy-five percent for the Irish and over seventy-five percent for the native-born (See Table 2). After they married, not more than five percent had an occupation (286).

**Table 2**  
**Age of Marriage and Ethnicity**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Native- born	19	Begin to marry
	21	50
	25	+75
	27	Almost 100
Irish	19	25
	21	50
	25	75
German	17	Begin to marry
	25 +	+80

SOURCE: Data from Laurence A. Glasco, "The Life Cycles and Household Structure of American Ethnic Groups". In *A Heritage of Her Own*, eds. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 280, 283, 286.

“Even though girls and women made up only a minority of German immigrants, in numerical terms it was a large one: after the first third of the nineteenth century they made up an average of 40 percent, a higher percentage than in most other ethnic groups”(Kamphoefner, *News*, 523). German women came to the United States with their families, or followed family members like their parents or husbands, who were already in America. Compared to men, few women went to America on their own. The situation of unmarried females was not that much different than “their male counterparts”(523). The women needed to find work, and their choices were extremely limited. Until the end of the nineteenth century, few industrial jobs were available to women. Most other female jobs usually required qualifications and proficiency in language that they did not have (523). So, usually the only chance for an immigrant girl was to be a servant. By 1840, seventy percent of all female jobs were in private homes and only twenty-five



percent of the jobs were in industry. As a servant their needs were met, because it provided housing, and “reduced the insecurity and danger of the strange surroundings”(524). Even though there were insecurities, such as those mentioned about the Irish parents’ fear for their daughter’s work around adolescent boys, it did provide them with security because these girls had a place to live and were fed. They could also save most of their money because their employer fed them. Domestic work best matched what these girls had done in Germany. Many had already worked as a maid or servant in Europe (524). Also, traditionally for immigrant women, housework was for women (Weatherford, 146). Servant jobs were plentiful because the urban middle class kept growing and more families could afford domestic help (Kamphoefner, *News*, 524). In addition, between the Civil War and World War I the demand for domestics increased. Some men felt they could not marry unless their new wife had a housekeeper. Also, it would be difficult for a Victorian lady to maintain her position within her community if she had to do housework (Weatherford, 147).

As mentioned earlier, domestic work was one of the most common occupations of German immigrant women until marriage. In the United States in 1800, there were forty thousand servants. In contrast, by 1870, that number had increased dramatically to around one million servants, and by 1920 there were two million servants. In the mid-nineteenth century, one out of ten families had a servant girl, and by the end of the century one out of eight families had a servant girl. Having a servant was an “expression of bourgeois lifestyle” and a requirement for that lifestyle. A servant girl became a status symbol for the middle class (Kamphoefner, *News*, 524). In the south most servants were black, but in the north domestic service, “after the first third of the nineteenth century,

increasingly became the domain of female immigrants” (525). After the mid-nineteenth century, Germans made up the second largest group of servants, around forty-two thousand versus the Irish who had one hundred forty-five thousand servants (524). Language barrier was the biggest problem (525). German servants did not get as much resentment from their employers like the Irish did (525-526). Most Germans were Protestant; and thus, seen as less threatening than Catholic Irish girls. Protestant meant “sobriety, modesty, cleanliness and a willingness to work” (526). The many years of discord between Catholic and Protestants in Ireland and Britain spilled over into the United States. Children of British Protestants made up a large part of the United States, and they also were in control of most of the economic and social structures. These native-born Americans... “prided themselves on their British ancestry and their liberal Protestantism and retained many British stereotypes of the Irish” (*Anti-Immigrant Sentiment*, 1). They believed that the Irish experienced poverty because they were lazy, lacked morals, were ignorant and superstitious. They were depicted in the newspapers to be violent, drunk and like apes (1). “Thomas Nast’s cartoons “for magazines such as Harper’s typically depicted the Irish as ape-like brutes prone to wife-beating, drunkenness and general anarchy”(1). Ethnic tensions were violent at times. For example in 1844 when “native-born Americans in Philadelphia rioted for a week, destroying many Catholic Churches and neighborhoods and killing at least a dozen immigrants”(1). Even though there were some anti-German feelings too, it was less; and therefore, German domestic servants were in greater demand.

How did women acquire work once they arrived in America? There were several ways that they could attain employment. The most risky; and thus, the least likely to be

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used was to go through an agent in Europe, or through the agents on the boats. The safest and easiest way was to get help from relatives, or acquaintances already in the United States. Lastly, would be to use an employment agency in the United States (Kamphoefner, *News*, 526).

The opportunity to find domestic work was plentiful (Weatherford, 146). The average workday for domestic servants was from six or seven in the morning until nine in the evening (Kamphoefner, *News*, 526). In the mid-nineteenth century, girls received four to six dollars a month, and by the end of the century, they were making ten to fourteen dollars a month (528). Wages were also different depending on what area of the United States one was working. Domestics in the East made nine to ten dollars a month, and those in the west made twenty to twenty-five dollars a month (Weatherford, 146). They were earning about two to four times more than what they could earn in Germany, which was \$2.50 to \$5.00 a week. If one were a German-American and working for German-Americans they tended to be exploited by them and paid less because of their lack of language abilities (Kamphoefner, *News*, 528). For example, Anna Maria Klinger wrote her parents, in 1849, that she was working for a German family and for right now she was satisfied with her wage of \$4.00 per month. She noted though that if she could speak English, it would be better because the English pay seven to ten dollars a month (537). Also, Engel Winkelmeier wrote, in 1867, that she was working for some English at 3 Talers a week, but her sister Margarethe was working for some low Germans at one and a half Talers a week and would prefer to work for the English (577). When compared to other occupations, servants were better off. For example, a seamstress or female factory worker might make a little more than a servant girl might, but they had to pay for room

and board. A servant girl's room was made near the kitchen with a few furnishings, or a bed in a storeroom or kitchen. When compared to conditions of the lower class in Germany or immigrant neighborhoods, this was luxurious. Most servants found food plentiful. They had more freedoms and were patronized less than when they were in Germany. Some families treated their servant as their child and mother, while others saw them as an irritating part of the family (530). For example, Margaretha Winkelmeier talked of her employers teaching her sewing and that they cared for her during a long illness "like a mother"(530).

Although conditions were better for servants in the United States, mistreatment did exist. They could be accused of stealing or damaging something in the home, and then the money was withheld from their check (Weatherford, 153). Some employers ate well and the servants did not. Some employers distrusted servants and searched the rooms of the servants to make sure they were not taking anything. Sometimes the employers fears were justified, servants were able to make some extra cash, when they, especially cooks, shopped for the employer. They were able to do this through rebates and padding accounts (154). If discovered they could be accused of theft.

The long hours, social status and isolation were the biggest complaints among the domestics. They had to rise early in the morning to light fires, heat the water, and make breakfast, and it went on like this until they put out the fire in the evening (Weatherford, 154). The social isolation was a problem for single domestics. It was difficult for them to meet others from the same social class, age and nationality. They complained the most about the reduction in social status that was implied by domestic work. They were often reminded of their inferiority. For example, one sociologist stated "the domestic

employee receives and gives no word of recognition on the street except in meeting those of her own class; she is seldom introduced to the guests of the house, whom she may faithfully serve during a prolonged visit; she speaks only when addressed, obeys without murmur orders which her judgment tells her are absurd, is not expected to smile under any circumstances, and ministers without protest to the whims and obeys implicitly the commands of children”(Weatherford, 155). These types of things often drove people away from domestic work (155). A YWCA Commission of Household Employment found that even with a questionnaire that was set up to get favorable responses for domestic work, it did not work. They concluded that “domestic workers themselves are not enthusiastic about advising other young women to enter their occupation, the advantages of health, wages, preparation for the future, not counterbalancing the present disadvantages of long hours, lack of place to entertain, dearth of social life and recreation, no opportunity for self-direction and self-development”(155-156).

Experiences as domestics varied. These varied experiences would effect their acculturation. Engel and Margarethe Winkelmeier, who were sisters, had good experiences. They came from east Westphalia from the village of Arrenkamp, which was located in the Prussian district of Minden. When they left in 1867, east Westphalia was experiencing a structural crisis. In the 1840’s, the local textile production decreased because of mechanized spinning and weaving. Their family was involved in the cottage industry. Lack of employment led to many spinners and weavers leaving (Kamphoefner, *News*, 569). Some went to do seasonal work in Holland, Northern Germany and the Ruhr area, but many went to America. From the mid-century to 1871, the start of the German

Empire, the Minden district had the “second highest emigration rate in Prussia, surpassed only by the district of Osnabrück, also a center of cottage linen production”(570).

When they came to America, Engel worked as a washerwoman, and Margarethe was a maid of all work. They worked for Low German employers, which were Germans that spoke Low German, usually from southern German states like Bavaria. Later, they went to work for better paying American families. They felt that the living conditions were better in the United States, and weavers were paid very little compared to the servant girls in the United States. Also, work was harder as a weaver than a servant (Kamphoefner, *News*, 571). Engel wrote home that families from Germany initially were caring for them. She talked about gaining weight from the good food in America (575). Margarethe wrote that their food included tea, “meat, white bread,” potatoes and coffee (579). There was enough for her to eat because she said the English did not eat enough to be even half full because they wanted to be thin. People did not plant gardens. Engel wrote that they could understand English, but they could not speak it well. Margarethe tried to spend more time with the English because she wanted to learn English. This would help her to acculturate easier. Engel also mentioned that her employer tested her. She would leave money out to test her honesty. As for Margarethe’s bed, she did not find it so nice. The lady of the house, though, sewed and made all her clothes and taught her things (579).

Other German immigrant women did not have as good of an experience. The *Michigan Volksblatt* wrote of an extreme example, on July 8, 1871 about a fifteen-year-old that was doing housework for others because her family did not have much. She met a woman who offered her more money and over a few days she was initiated into a

whorehouse. Her father found out and sent her from Michigan to Cleveland. When she arrived there, she asked to work in a notoriously evil house. She was then sent to the police. They persuaded her not to go to such a house and to return to Michigan. Though this does not mean that all servant girls had this type of experience, it does illustrate what could happen to some of these girls due to language and cultural barriers.

Women performed other work too. In 1870, the number one women's job was domestic service, with 35.7 percent of women working in such an occupation. The clothing industry was the second most popular job with 28.5 percent of women working in this industry. From 1880 to 1900, this began to change as the clothing industry dominated, starting in the 1880's, and clerical work dominated in 1900 (Harzig, 197). Large clothing manufacturers were dependent on sub contracting work and giving work to immigrants and poor native-born women (Levine, 71). Hat and cap handwork was sent out to immigrant men and women in New York city. Women were paid a lower wage than men. For example, men earned eight to twelve dollars a week, and women fourteen to twenty-five cents a day (73). In addition, German workers were paid less than Anglo-Irish because they lacked the "know how", which was the ability to speak English, and money to move to better paying areas of their industry or to other areas of the country (Schneider, 23). In the 1850's, apprenticeship rules varied on the employment of women. In increasing numbers in the United States and Europe, women had been entering the traditional consumer goods crafts. German-American Labor organizations were in conflict with women working. At the heart of their vision of independence was the idea of the male breadwinner. With women entering the paid workforce, this vision was deteriorating. "Most skilled male workers viewed women as



unwarranted intruders into the job market, witting or unwitting tools of unscrupulous merchants and employers, degraders of skill levels, and wreckers of the trades generally”(Levine, 123). Women were undermining the “conditions and status of journeymen and their families”(123). There were battles to keep women out of wage work (124).

One example of labor organizations and women was the cigar making industry. In Germany, cigar making did not require much training and did not provide much money and it was seasonal. So, women tended to dominate. In the 1850’s in Germany, men were upset about the female domination. So, male cigar makers in the high-end shops started their first cigar makers’ unions. Their goal was to preserve or introduce a formal craft status to their trade. It was called the German Cigar Workers Association. They wanted only skilled male workers, no women, receive a higher wage, shorter hours, a closed shop system and to set up a strict apprenticeship program (Schneider, 52). In the United States before the Civil War, cigar makers worked at home. They would receive their materials from a “manufacturer”, and the manufacturer paid them for the finished cigars (Nadel, 72). When the cigar mold was introduced in the United States in the 1860’s, German’s tended to dominate and the work was divided. The lowest paid workers, usually girls and older workers, were the Bookers who “prepared the leaves by bending and moistening them”(Schneider, 58). The Strippers, usually girls and women, “then took out the ribs”(58). In 1880, the fairly new German practice of women working in the cigar industry had not made it to the United States. Only 23 of 421 German-American cigar makers were women in the 1880 manuscript census. Some women listed “keeping house” even though they probably were helping their husbands make cigars if

the husband was working at home. This may suggest “the desire to follow the ideal of exclusively male breadwinners”(61). As a result of the low wage and German immigrant’s traditional reluctance to send women to work, the husband and one child would work in the cigar industry (61). By mid 1880’s, the cigar industry mechanized and this feminized the industry. It made it easier for women to work in the industry. “Women were acceptable as machine operators even if they had previously been banned from the regular jobs”(92). It was not viewed as a male trade with mechanization. The cigar factories had up to seven hundred employees. The employees were able to control the pace and conditions of their work. The reason for this was because of the “workers’ sense of fellowship”(Nadel, 72). “It was these relatively good conditions that helped make cigar making the most popular of the skilled trades for second-generation Kleindeutschlanders in 1880”(72).

Mathilde Giesler Anneke, an immigrant living in Milwaukee, fought against keeping women out of wage work by publishing her monthly *Deutsche Frauen-Zeitung*. In some trades, by the 1850’s, it was acceptable to take women and unskilled men into trades because they lacked employees. This was helpful to the craft workers and their families because they often relied on female family members for more income (Levine, 124). Over time the German-American labor movement for the most part accepted women’s work (125). Women in Milwaukee also took in sewing and washing and some work was available from “Milwaukee clothiers,” but “ domestic service was the best alternative for many girls who had to work to help support themselves and their families”(Conzen, 92).

In the 1870's and 80's, the dominant urban ideology was that the husband was to provide for everything, even old age and illness. For peasant families this was new. Rural Mecklenburg men, in the past, worked for only a portion "of family labor"(Harzig, 202). The employer provided for old age and unemployment was non-existent because society had a place for everyone and if not you left. Also, the idea that wives should only be involved in their domestic work at home and also the children working was seen as bad for the family (202). In the rural areas of Mecklenburg, children worked the harvest and cared for the animals. Work for children in Mecklenburg was top priority. In Chicago in 1884, twenty-six percent of families relied in part on other family members' earnings other than the men. Twenty-seven percent of Irish and thirty-two percent of Scandinavians relied on other family member's earnings. Native-born American men were doing the best in providing for their families on one income; and therefore, only nineteen percent of native-born families relied on other family member's income. German-American families were at twenty-one percent. "Laborers", which refers to less skilled jobs or day workers, made up "36 percent of the Illinois work force," and they "needed support from family members more often than did other workers"(203) (See Table 3). In laborer families, the wife's income from working possibly as a milliner or washerwomen provided \$103 a year and in twenty-five percent of the families the children's income provided \$229 a year. The average income in 1884 of a laborer was \$344.49, and the yearly expenses were \$388.38. The family income of \$414.02 was needed to keep the family afloat. The wife's income made up the difference. The women were also needed to raise the children or "provide services for 'singles' in the community"(204). Women in 1880 made up 15.3 percent of Chicago's manufacturing

employees and in 1910 19.5 percent. Often these were German women in their teens and twenties, and they worked to supplement the family income (Keil & Jentz, 79).

**Table 3**

**Chicago 1884 and Ethnic groups dependency on other Family members income besides the men**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Native Born	19
Germans	21
Irish	27
Scandinavians	32
All families	26

SOURCE: Data from Christiane Harzig, “Creating a Community: German-American Women in Chicago”. In *Peasant Maids-City Women From the European Countryside to Urban America*, ed. Christiane Harzig. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 206.

For example, 3.4 percent of households in Chicago were classified as non-traditional because they were either single living alone, or the wife was the head of the household. All others lived in a home where a wife took care of the home (Harzig, 204). “The German-American woman as guardian of her family was, across socioeconomic lines, a central aspect of ethnic identity” (205). “ ‘Keeping house’ ” often meant caring not only for her husband and offspring, but also for members of her extended family and community who had no immediate family of her own”(204). Usually, they did not take on boarders for additional income, but they did feel obligated to let other Mecklenburg immigrants stay with them temporarily. The wife cared for three or more children plus her relatives, and boarders if they had any. Nineteen percent of the children being cared

for were under five. Housework was important to a woman's identity and ethnic identity (205).

As for Mecklenburgers in Chicago, work/labor had a new meaning to them. Men worked by the clock in some industrial work and were responsible for the family's income. Women were expected to keep the house up with available cash and with "the availability (or unavailability) of urban services"(Harzig, 185). In 1870, most Germans in Chicago were from Prussia, but a large number of Mecklenburgers also settled there. Most Mecklenburgers went from Hamburg to New York. Then they traveled by train or ship to the mid-west. They went to the mid-west because they thought the best chances of settling were there. Often, they chose to settle in Michigan, Iowa, Chicago or Milwaukee. Most Mecklenburgers were farm hands, maids and/or small farmers. Chicago was probably only supposed to be a brief stop for them. Many thought they would get a job, make some money and buy land, which lasted a couple of months, ten years or permanently (Harzig, 186).

If they were prepared, Mecklenburgers had opportunities in the city. "Until 1870's, the city's industrial production was mainly based on craftsmanship and skilled labor"(Harzig, 187). If one were skilled in these areas, then the dream of owning ones own business was possible. As industry expanded and the need for skilled work was less, more German workers were disappointed (187). Men usually found work "in the lumber and brickyards, in the grain processing industries, or on the truck farms at the city fringes"(188). German women worked for many of the neighborhood businesses such as bakeries, dry goods stores, tobacco stores, and tailor shops (188). With the help of Germans, the clothing industry came to the north side of Chicago; and therefore, the

number of tailors increased. There were many storeowners, teamsters, and house movers all of whom were the head of the household. Often Mecklenburgers that were the head of the household were on the low end of the economic scale. They held eighty percent of the laborer jobs (Harzig, 194). Small businesses were only profitable because of family help, especially their wives and older daughters. Working women were young and single in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1870, 6.9 percent or fifty-three women were employed in the seventeenth ward, which is where most of the Mecklenburg Germans settled in Chicago, versus 59.3 percent or 438 men (196).

In 1880, dressmaking was the “only female occupation among the top ten occupations for Germans in Chicago, and the median age of German dressmakers was 18.4 years” (Keil & Jentz, 79). A woman in an article in the *Chicago Arbeiter-Zeitung* wrote of conditions where she worked. For a dozen shirts she wanted to charge \$2.50. This was more than other places (80). She did not want to work in the factory because she wanted to keep all the money. If she worked in a factory, she may have money taken out for various reasons, such as, if the needle or throat plate broke on the sewing machine she operated, she had to pay for it even if it was not her fault (81). The poor lighting ruined their eyes. Most workers were eleven to twenty-five. The young ones sewed on buttons (82).

Besides immigrating for work, German women immigrated for marriage. Their work as a servant was good preparation for their marriage. Furthermore, the rate of acculturation was partly due to the wife having been a servant in a native-born’s house because when an immigrant girl compared herself to her brother, she noticed that he was less likely to come in contact with the native-born. This was due in part to different

expectations of boys and girls. When he left home, he usually boarded with families of the same nationality, married a girl of the same nationality, and established his household in an ethnic neighborhood, whereas the girl would live with the native-born throughout her domestic work (Glasco, 287). Acculturation occurred with females earlier because of their contact with native-born. This contact “occurred at an impressionable age, when patterns of behavior, dress, language, and cultural values were still being learned”(288). This was important when they had their children later (288). Working in an American home was the quickest way to learn about Americans, learn English and to be rapidly acculturated. They learned English faster than those working in factories probably because of the nature of their job, which put them in contact with native speakers on a regular basis (Weatherford, 148). Most German immigrant women did not work long as servants because they married. Domestic servant women were more attractive as wives because they dressed better, they knew English well, and they knew American customs and ways better, which could be useful (Kamphoefner, *News*, 530). For example, once these women were married, they taught their husband and children what they had learned and ran their household, according to what they had learned in the American homes (Weatherford, 148). Thus, they helped their husbands acculturate. Social thinkers felt that domestic work was a good way to prepare women for marriage. One sociologist said that in “some families the woman was a servant before her marriage... The care these women take of their children’s diet and health presents a striking illustration of the superiority of domesticating service over factory training for developing intelligent homemakers” (Weatherford, 152). In contrast, the *Michigan Volksblatt* wrote, on July 17, 1871, negatively about women’s work. The editors wrote about the image that women

portrayed to their daughters. They questioned women if housework, gardening and raising children was the kind of education parents wanted for their daughters. They also wrote that women were house puppets for the man's pleasure. The women had to do everything. The man brought home the food, the women prepared it; she also spun, dyed the yarn and did other household tasks. In short, they questioned whether this was what women should teach girls. Even though this newspaper raised this question, most girls, native-born or foreign, were preparing for marriage and domestic servitude.

Native-born women, in Laurence Glasco's study of Buffalo, New York in 1855, began to marry around nineteen. By the age of twenty-one, half were married and by twenty-five more than seventy-five percent, and lastly by the age of twenty-seven most were married (See Table 2). They began having a small family once the household was established (Glasco, 280). Their low fertility ratio was achieved by having most of their children by the age of thirty-five. On average, they had 2.56 children (See Table 4). If the husband died, or there were financial problems the women were unable to maintain their position as wife in an independent household. She probably would have moved in with relatives. As the life cycle changed for a women so did their status. An example of a life cycle change, would be childbearing women getting older and no longer bearing children. About one-fifth of the native-born women over age sixty were listed as a spouse, sixteen percent became the head of the household, half lived with one of their children, less than one-fifth lived with their in-laws, and a small percentage lived with collateral kin, or boarded (281) (See Table 5).



**Table 4**

**Ethnicity and Fertility Ratio**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Fertility ratio Average/ Peak living at home</b>
Native-born	2.06 / 2.56
Irish	2.37 / 3.43
German	2.13 / 3.08

SOURCE: Data from Laurence A. Glasco, "The Life Cycles and Household Structure of American Ethnic Groups". In *A Heritage of Her Own*, eds. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 281,283, 286.

**Table 5**

**Women's role in the Home Over the Age of 60 based on  
Ethnicity**

<b>Role in the Household</b>	<b>Percentage of Native - Born women</b>	<b>Percentage of Irish women</b>	<b>Percentage of German Women</b>
Spouse	20	>10	30
Head of the Household	16	25	20
Lived with one of their children	50	50	50
Lived with their in-laws	>20	15	14
Lived with Collateral kin or boarded	Small percentage	Small percentage	N/A

SOURCE: Data from Laurence A. Glasco, "The Life Cycles and Household Structure of American Ethnic Groups". In *A Heritage of Her Own*, eds. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 281,284, 286.

Yet, a quarter of the Irish women were married by nineteen, half by twenty-one, and three-fourths by twenty-five (See Table 2). . In contrast to the native-born regulated fertility rate, Irish women's fertility rate was higher than the native-born women (Glasco, 283). Native-born regulated their fertility in many ways. Celibacy was one form of birth control. Also, a long lactating period or possibly abortion was the most common forms of birth control. People usually used the "simplest and cheapest method known called 'sleeping the American way'" (Weatherford, 5). This meant the man and wife slept in separate beds or separate rooms. (5). The Irish had unregulated childbearing (Glasco, 283). Many times this unregulated childbearing was due to different views about sexual mores among ethnic groups, as well as to foreign women's lower status and the dominance of men. This meant that the men also believed children proved their virility and were potential income earners (Weatherford, 4). Their fertility ratio was double that of the native-born women. The fertility rate of the fifteen to nineteen year olds was two-thirds higher than the native-born. Of those in their twenties and early thirties, fertility was much higher than the native-born, almost two times higher. The average size of the family, though, was comparable to the native-born. The Irish had 2.37 children and the native-born had 2.06 with the native-born peaking with 2.56 children living at home. The Irish by age fifty peaked with 3.43 children living at home (See Table 4). Why were the number of children low despite the higher fertility? One reason was the household cycle. Native-born families kept their children home longer (Glasco, 283). Domestic service was an important regulator of Irish family size. Between the ages of forty-one to sixty Irish family households started to breakup. In their forties and fifties, only half of Irish wives were in their own household compared to three-fifths of native-born. In addition, a

quarter of them were the head of their own household compared to less than fifteen percent among the native-born women. This may be due to several factors, such as early death of Irish men and or middle aged Irish women not remarrying. Over the age of sixty, Irish women were still the heads of the household in a disproportionate number. About a fourth of these women were not living with their husband, which could be due to death, separation or more uncommon, but possible divorce. In comparison, only sixteen percent of the native-born women were not living with their husband and heading a household. Half of Irish women over sixty lived with one of their children; fifteen percent lived with their in-laws and a small number of them-boarded (284). Those that did head a household worked, such as taking in laundry (285) (See Table 5).

In comparison, once German women in Buffalo, New York were married there was little delay in setting up their household, or starting their family. Women fifteen to forty-four had the same overall fertility rate as the Irish. Among the young and old, the rate was higher than the Irish was, and middle childbearing years were only slightly under the Irish. They had on average 2.13 children and were in between the Irish and native-born. The family peaked at around age forty-five with 3.08 children, which was in between the native-born and Irish again (See Table 4). The family size was regulated, too, because the girls were sent into domestic service, and boys became apprentices (Glasco, 286). In the same way, women from Mecklenburg, a German state, seemed to keep family size under control. Earlier German-American women seemed to have had control over the first birth and decided how many children they would have, which was a little more than four. In 1870, 56 percent of households had one to two children, thirty-one percent had three to four and thirteen percent had five or more. German families in

1900 in the inner city of Chicago had and an average of 5.7 children (Harzig, 201) (See Table 6). This could be due to a lack of education or fewer deaths of children.

**Table 6**

**Mecklenburg German Women and Fertility in 1870**

<b>Number of Children they had</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1-2	56
3-4	31
5 +	13

SOURCE: Data from Christiane Harzig, “Creating a Community: German-American Women in Chicago”. In *Peasant Maids-City Women From the European Countryside to Urban America*, ed. Christiane Harzig. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 201.

For older German women in Buffalo, New York over the age of sixty, more than a third still had a husband, where as one-fifth or less of native-born and Irish had a husband still. One-fifth of German women were the head of their household, half lived with one of their children, fourteen percent lived with their in-laws (Glasco, 286) (See Table 5). In contrast, Mecklenburger men in Chicago between the age of sixty and sixty-five “gave over responsibility to their married sons and daughters or moved into other households as boarders” (Harzig, 206). Mecklenburg women at age sixty-one no longer “‘ keep house’, but stayed home”(206). They often moved in with their children. Some widowed women might have kept house for their unmarried sons and daughters; and thus, still be considered head of the household as indicated through census (206).

German immigrants usually chose their mate from the same ethnic background (Hawgood, 71). In Detroit in the 1890's Germans were the most "endogamous groups in the city, with 78.4 percent of their marriages within the group"(Nadel, 48). In comparison, immigrants from Mecklenburg were willing to consider other partners from other areas of Germany. Though there was much endogamy in Mecklenburg, Mecklenburgers in the United States chose their partners from Prussia, Pomerania and Holstein. Even though they did not marry from the same area, it was important that they married a German. Even most second generation Germans married only Germans. Between 1870 and 1875, the age of marriage for Mecklenburg men was 27.4 years old and 23.2 years old for women. This was much younger than had they married in Mecklenburg, where the ages were thirty for men and twenty-six for women. Eight percent of men and seven percent of women, most of whom were widows, were forty or more years old, when they married. In 1885, the age at marriage decreased slightly to 26.2 for men and 22.3 for women (Harzig, 200). The lower marriage age was attributed to urbanization not acculturation because these were first generation Germans (201).

In the late nineteenth century, there were some changes in ways that German – American women viewed choosing a partner. German-American women were still considered a key for men for fulfillment through marriage, but marriage was now seen as an option in America, whereas in Germany, marriage depended on economic condition (Sinke, 72). If economic conditions in Germany were not favorable women entered the religious service or was a servant in someone's home (74).

"The tradition of men choosing their mates and fathers influencing such decisions for daughters lost some of its power as the choices for marriage increased and the

distances between family networks widened”(Sinke, 77). Women could make more money in America than Germany, so it was easier to be independent if they wanted to. This did not mean that men could not choose who they married, but women had more of a choice to say no and still have a good chance of getting married to someone else. The fact that so many got married within their first two years in America indicates the economic advantages and opportunities that America offered to married couples (78). Immigrants in America tried to get their single female friends or relatives to come to America because marriage opportunities were better. One brother wrote home about his younger sister. “[Rosina should] take care not to get involved with someone because she will get a husband here and women are more highly regarded in America than in Germany”(74). A dowry was not needed in America (74). Some wrote, “ ‘You write that Roessele is not married yet and lacks sufficient wherewithal, in America one doesn’t need anything, because the husband has to buy everything, here everything is totally different, because one doesn’t need a dowry”(74-75). Women who were above average marriage age and widows could take part in the international marriage market, which were the marriages taking place in America among the immigrants. Romantic love was not mentioned much. Marriage focused on a man’s financial or professional worth, where he was from and if he was a “good” husband (75). After immigrating, German women, on average, married within two years. For example, sixty percent over age fifteen married within the first two years. The “percentage rose consistently after 1891”(76). Those that decided to venture to America to take part in the marriage and economic opportunities had to be cautious of men on their voyage over because some men falsely promised marriage or jobs that turned out to be brothels. The *Deutsche*

*Auswanderer Zeitung* told women that sea air was not a contraceptive and “unwanted pregnancy could lead to poverty, prostitution or infanticide”(78).

An example of women and their families coming to America can be shown in Christiane Harzig’s study of Mecklenburg women in Chicago. Mecklenburg women’s lives, in Germany, were dominated by regulations set up by nobles, landlords and others. Their life stages from being a girl, marrying and so forth determined what was expected of them and what they were allowed to do. In Chicago, most were young or middle aged. The largest group were those fourteen or younger. There were few teenagers older than fourteen. There were also few elderly. There were a large number of men between forty and fifty. “Migration was responsible for this demographic pattern”(Harzig, 197). Most emigrated when they were in their twenties and single. They then married, had children and settled down. Few people left Mecklenburg in the middle of a life cycle, especially in their late thirties and forties; and thus, they did not bring half-grown children with them. Therefore, there were few immigrants who were fifteen to twenty-four (197). The greater number of men in their forties and fifties illustrates the mobility of single men looking for employment. In addition, the importance of getting a husband in the German-American communities was reflected in the number of women from twenty to twenty-four who were immigrating (197-198). This was the typical age of marriage for women in Mecklenburg. So, instead of staying in Mecklenburg they went to the United States where the demand for German women in German communities of Chicago was high.

In addition, a majority, 73.6 percent, of Harzig’s sample of children under twenty-five were born in Illinois. Children from four to fourteen were sent to school. There were many complaints of German-American student attendance. For example, the Missouri

Synod school in Chicago's West Side would not allow ten-year-olds to be taken out of school to work. Most Mecklenburg children attended neighborhood religious schools. They had to pay a small tuition. These schools were more like Mecklenburg schools than American schools. Religion and obedience were important. Male German-American teachers taught classes in German. Any higher education, besides ministry, was probably not emphasized (Harzig, 198). It was not believed necessary to be highly educated for the jobs available to them.

Furthermore, children working on the farm had been very important and now their responsibilities changed. Adolescents, in Mecklenburg, at twelve left home to work on an estate or for a peasant household. Living in the city of Chicago, some went to school until High School. About eighteen percent of the children went to high school and graduated. By the age of fifteen, most children left school. Fifty-seven percent were employed after this and twenty-five percent stayed home working in the household, this usually meant the girls. Why did so few girls have paying jobs? Many girls were needed to work in the family business such as stores and tailor shops; and therefore, did not have a paying job. Parents were reluctant to let their daughters work in factories where social reformers said, "women's purity was in constant jeopardy" because they had to dress lightly because it was so hot (Harzig, 199). Thus, the young women's morals would be affected (199).

Aside from the type of work experience and marriage, German-American women's life was also defined by other experiences outside the home. Churches were probably one of the most important institutions along with Frauenvereins, which were women's church groups that provided opportunities for women outside the home. The



Church was a community builder and the church defined women's roles. Aid Societies were important in helping immigrant families and especially women affected by illness, desertion or the loss of their husband.

In the 1840's in Chicago, German-Americans organized the first churches. By 1853, there was a German society set up to help new arrivals. In 1856, they established the Deutsches Haus and finally in 1865 they set up a German club. The forty-eighters, who had been a part of the revolutionary party in the German states in 1848, were very active in politics in the United States. They helped organize the Republican Party, and received support for the Civil War. By 1870, there was a well-developed German-American community. There were fifty thousand German born in Chicago; and thus, Germans made up 17.5 percent of the population in Chicago. "Churches, schools, orphanages, old people's homes, and hospitals were organized by Germans for Germans" (Harzig, 188). Many associations that were formed, such as, singing, gymnastics, cultural organizations and mutual aid societies met the social needs of Germans. Entertainment was plentiful in the theaters and music halls. The German language press provided news for the immigrants. Class distinctions, religious differences and regional origins helped to differentiate the immigrant as much as gender and generation did (189).

Aside from working or maintaining a household, there were other activities for urban German-American women. For example, the German parishes in Milwaukee provided outlets for women to do something outside the home. St. Peter's Church established a girl's school in 1842, and also formed an association for women. Their jobs were to care for the church, "sewing for poor, helping poor girls and other 'works of

mercy”(Conzen, 160). German parishes developed “mutual benefit associations to women’s altar and rosary societies; from sodalities for young men and women, fund-raising, building societies and associations to foster social contact, to drama and debating societies, accompanying parishioners through all phases of their lives”(162). Despite this, men’s activities were emphasized more than women’s activities because women were not encouraged to have activities outside the home (162). Turnvereins also provided other activities for girls. They had gymnastic classes for girls in 1855(180). In 1859, the Engelmann secondary school was started for girls. They offered “instruction in hand work, drawing and singing as well as penmanship, geography, arithmetic, history, natural history, French, English, and German; until that time, parents unwillingly sent their daughters to the convent schools”(182). In 1851, a group of parents formed “the Milwaukee Schul-verein and incorporated the German and English Academy”(182). This led to Peter Englemann being hired and establishing the Engelmann Schools, which were important in educating girls. Many of his ideas influenced Milwaukee Public schools and led to other schools like his being established. Frauenvereins were an outlet for other activities for German women. These organizations provided scholarships to the Engelmann School. During the difficult financial times of the 1850’s, they provided for the survival of the schools and “served as an important umbrella organization for the activities of the more leisured and cultural among the German women”(183). “Milwaukee women were brought out of the house and into cooperation, but were also separated by class through the development of social organizations”(191). Frauenvereins also allowed them to have leadership roles. For about ten years, the Frauenvereins were organized in Detroit, and by 1899 they had about 225 members. These organizations had

women as their leaders (*Michigan Volksblatt*, 39). In addition to Frauenvereins, Turnvereins and church groups, music was an outlet for women. In 1872, German women in Detroit had a choir as strong as the man's choir and their voices were good. The men and women's choir had three hundred members, but the leaders were all men. Around 1899, the two choirs began to sing together (*Michigan Volksblatt*, 39).

Aid societies like Chicago Relief and Aid Society and German Aid Society helped those in need. The German Aid Society only helped those that had recently arrived from Germany. They became the "main point of contact for many Germans who needed support"(Harzig, 208). Between 1883 and 1884 of all Germans in Chicago, 31.4 percent of the men were asking for help and 41.5 percent of married couples were asking for help. Men usually asked for money to go somewhere else in the United States, or to return to Germany. Others asked for money for food and other basic needs, or to pay medical bills. Few single women asked for money. This was due to the fact that the percentage of single women asking for money was low. Only two percent, of those requesting money, were not married and only nine percent were widowed (208). Most of the single women wanted help to move somewhere else. A few wanted to go back home. Most were asking for money to visit or stay with relatives in northern Illinois and Wisconsin. Many needed family support to survive. The policy of the German Aid Society was short-term help. If a family needed long term help they were sent to other institutions, which many times the German community was supporting (209).

Illness of family members showed how unstable the working class household was. "Medical bills always broke the family budget"(Harzig, 209). If a man was unemployed, the women and children took over financial responsibility. A woman could

work as a washerwoman or seamstress at home or in a sweatshop. One example of this is a family of eight, in which the father had been ill for five or more years and the youngest child was three months old. The mother and oldest daughter kept the family going by sewing pants for seventy-five cents a day (209). If a woman burned “her hands,” did “not recover from her last pregnancy confinement, or” was “... prevented by rheumatism from taking in more washing, rent was often unpaid, and eviction usually followed immediately”(210). They could get money from the German Aid Society if they could convince the agent that the mother would work soon (210).

Desertion was the number one reason women had to ask for help. Men left the wife taking all they had. Usually, abuse was involved, physical, alcohol or both. Some men left to get work and would be gone for weeks or years. Others simply just disappeared. There were a few other men who kept in contact and sent money, and then suddenly the money would stop coming in and the wife would not know where her husband was. Often the men left, when a family crisis was imminent, such as, an unwanted pregnancy, or unemployment. Then, women often had to ask for support and a place to live or shelter for her children and later take them back when she could afford to. The German community was helpful in these situations. Children were sent to a Protestant institution called “Ulrich’s Children’s Home”(Harzig, 210).

Widows asked for help usually if the husband had died suddenly and there was no income or if they had been widowed for awhile and an illness hit and they needed extra money. Single women often asked for help when they had just arrived, or if they were unemployed (Harzig, 211). These kinds of problems were common to other groups too, but the way ethnic charities reacted were different. The German Aid Society, “like many

German-American women's groups that regarded charity work as one of their main functions, was discriminating about who was eligible for support"(212). On the other hand, Irish Catholic institutions did not discriminate to whom they gave charity. The criteria for the German Aid Society were deserving people who were not involved in social disorder and experienced hard times not because of their own fault (212). In the *Chicago Arbeiter-Zeitung* the seventeenth and twentieth of October 1881, a girl said she paid \$3.50 a week "for room and board, fifty cents for 'carfare', fifty cents for laundry; I earn six dollars"(Keil & Jentz, 146). This made it difficult for some women to survive on their own. If the woman did not have money, the police tried to put her in jail (146). Women could get help from the Home for the Friendless, if they were not earning money. They did accept children and the aged (148). There was the Woman's Industrial Home. There the women had to help in the morning with breakfast and in the evening there were drunks and prostitutes there. The pillows and mattresses were dirty. Sometimes some women went to sleep on a park bench (148).

Church was a community builder among the German in Chicago. The Protestants provided religious services in a familiar atmosphere, but they changed according to American culture. In Mecklenburg, since 1817, the Evangelical Lutherans were the state church. Many may have had a negative attitude towards church because of religion and state being intertwined. Often the church was seen as part of the oppression. The Church in Mecklenburg educated the children, everyone had to pay church taxes, which the state then paid the clergy, and the people depended on the church from baptism to death. In Chicago, they were not like this; it was voluntary. Though German Protestant churches existed in Chicago, since the 1830's. It was not until 1843, that the first Evangelical

Reformed church building was built in Chicago (Harzig, 213). The Missouri Synod was the largest Protestant denomination in Chicago. German religious schools were set up. They were a place for education and services, and they were an effective missionary device (214). The women did not have a vote in the church, but they influenced the development of the churches. Women were “members of women’s groups, as teachers, or as daughters of pastors”(217). An example was the Mary-Martha Guild at St. Paul’s in Chicago. It started in the 1890’s, and helped male students who were studying to be pastors at Concordia College. At St. Martins in Chicago, the “ladies Aid” raised money for the church, which was their goal. Jungfrauenverein was a single women’s group that decorated the altar. There were women teachers in the Lutheran schools, but their positions were unstable because they were the first fired, and they had a lower salary than the men. For example, in 1867, St. John’s hired a woman “ ‘ since no male teacher was available’”(217). She made about twenty dollars a month where a seamstress made \$22.50 a month. On the other hand, a skilled male worker made \$1.75 to \$2.50 a day. A month later, when the class was too large for her to teach a male teacher was hired for thirty-five dollars a month (217). Some daughters of Pastors had an important function. “They often married men who became school headmasters or assistant pastors in a branch congregation”(218). This helped guarantee the continuance of the trade. This allowed for more power for the family and “guarantee the integrity” of personnel working in the church (218). Despite the daughter’s of Pastors having an important function, most “women’s tasks were reduced to support, aid, and last-resort substitution”(218). Women had the freedom to “decorate, beautify, and raise money”(218).

Often in the Missouri Synod women did not have control over their own groups. Still women got together to talk and got involved in their community; and thus, went beyond their own household. For some, involvement in church groups one night a week was their first step beyond the home. Outside church, there were other areas where German-American women were shaping their community. For example in 1898 in Chicago, there were “ 5 female choirs, 4 women’s gymnastics associations, 28 social groups and charity organizations and 21 lodges with an exclusively German-American female membership”(Harzig, 218-219). Usually, women organized for social causes, which included female advancement. Members of women’s auxiliaries in gymnastic societies organized festivities to honor returning champs from out of town competitions, they taught the young and fought to get girls gymnastic groups formed. Most women groups formed for a charity reason, and they tried to combine that with social entertainment (219). An example was the Frauenverein Altenheim that was very successful within four years, gaining five hundred members. In July 1885, they started building the German Old People’s Home in Harlem, which were the Chicago suburbs (220). The Frauenvereins were organizations that did fund raisers, developed rules and regulations, set up financial checks and balances and organized a men’s auxiliary which had to report to them. The women’s groups were good for the community (220).

Urban German women immigrants had a different perception of the United States than rural German women. They often became acculturated faster and were involved in more organizations outside the home. They also had access to more public services such as the aid societies. Urban German women immigrants’ lives often changed dramatically when they came to the United States.

## Chapter 4

### What Were the Similarities and Differences

#### Between Rural and Urban German Immigrant Women?

There are many similarities and differences between the rural and urban German immigrant women. Both urban and rural German speaking women almost never came on their own to the United States. They came to America looking for better opportunities, but opportunities in a German-American community. Urban and rural German women would describe the United States differently. This was due to the type of experience they had in the United States.

Germans immigrated for reasons, such as, for work, marriage, or religious. In Germany, class determined lifestyle. The lower class was most effected by industrialization and revolution. Before industrialization rural or urban women did “productive labor of a seasonable and interruptible nature in or near the home”(Pickle, 25). They also spun, wove wool for the family clothes and cared for the children. The rural women, in addition, had other duties related to farm work. For most of these women, regardless of class or where they came from, their choices in life were similar. They could become part of a religious order, marry, remain single, or become a servant. There were many marriage restrictions for the poor Germans. Restrictions to marry did not exist in the United States, no matter what the couple’s income level was or where they resided. Most of the immigrants were looking for land in the United States. Even most of those that settled in the city initially intended on buying land when they came to America.



The need for women in the German-American communities also led women to immigrate to the United States. In the rural areas, they were needed to help with farming and performing domestic tasks. In the urban areas, German men were looking for German women too. They would help with domestic tasks, but also if they had worked as a domestic, they could help acculturate the family. The opportunities for marriage were better for women in the rural and urban areas of the United States than in Germany. They could be more selective than what they had been in German-speaking areas. One of the biggest similarities was that German-American women tended to stay with their ethnic group. This included where they chose to live as well as who they married. Size of families seemed smaller in the urban areas because of the fact that at an early age children left the home to work either as a domestic for a girl, or an apprentice for a boy.

Rural women had few or no public services available to them. The city women had access to German aid societies that would often help them in times of need. Rural women, on the other hand, had to rely on others in the community to help them in times of need. Also, the work and conditions in the rural area, for women, were much different than the work and conditions found in the urban areas. Rural women encountered much loneliness and hard work. For some, they were far away from other people; they had to help clear land, care for the family and had very little time for social activities. The children in the rural areas were often driven as hard as the parents were, in order to maintain the farm.

Urban women performed functions similar to the rural women in the home. Just as the rural family often depended on the women and what they did in the home, so too did the urban families. The urban women often had to help in the family business and for

German laborers the extra income the wife and children made determined their survival. There seemed to be more desertion of families by the father in the cities, which rural women did not seem to have to deal with. The survival of the family in the city, according to society, laid on the shoulders of the man. This was very difficult for the men to do, and at the same time was very new to them.

Both groups set up their own churches and schools. Women in the rural area only provided domestic services to the church, such as, cleaning and arranging flowers. In the city, there were groups formed in the church, which allowed the women to do something outside the home. These groups did the cleaning and arranging of flowers like the rural women, but they also were involved in “sewing for the poor, helping poor girls and other ‘works of mercy’”(Conzen, 160). In addition, German parishes developed “mutual benefit associations to women’s altar and rosary societies; from sodalities for young men and women, fundraising, building societies and associations to foster social contact, to drama and debating societies, accompanying parishioners through all phases of their lives”(162).

Schools were set up in regards to religion. Many parents sent their children to these religious schools as opposed to the public schools. They were hoping to maintain their children’s religion as well as the German language, which was used in these schools. Children in the city tended to go to school longer, until age fourteen, than in rural areas. In rural areas, some children attended until eighth grade. Sometimes, in the city, parents tried to remove ten-year olds from school to work. This was met with resistance by the schools. Most of the time, in both areas, men taught the children.

Women teachers, especially in the rural areas, were seen as inappropriate. Women teachers in the city were more accepted, but they were paid less and fired first.

Both rural and urban areas had Turnvereins, but women were less involved in them in the rural areas. They did have gymnastic clubs in both areas, but only in rural areas that had a heavy concentration of German-Americans in the mid-west. Normally, the rural women just came to the dances and picnics with their families because they did not have much time for meetings and classes. Like some rural women, urban women had choral groups. Urban women were also involved in Frauenvereins, Jungfrauenvereins, and auxiliary groups. Urban German-American women got together to talk and got involved in their own community groups.

Urban women tended to acculturate faster. Much of this was due to many single women working as domestic servants for native-born families. The opportunity to be an independent woman was more likely to occur in the city. There were also more work opportunities there. At the same time, urban women had to fight at times to be able to work in certain craft areas, which many thought should be left to the men, who were regarded as the legitimate breadwinners. In rural areas, German-American women tried to maintain their native language with their children. This caused them to be isolated partially or completely from Anglo-America, which their descendents became a part of.

The difficulty of leaving one's homeland for something foreign was definitely hard for many immigrants. The opportunities they sought in the United States, along with encouragement from family or friends in the United States helped many immigrants, but especially the women to take that step. The type of life they led on arriving in the United States was determined by where they lived, in a rural or urban area.

## Conclusion

Urban and rural German-American women had many similarities and differences. The major similarity was that they were looking for better opportunities in the United States. Since their experiences were much different, their view of the United States was different. Resources that were available and who wrote them were critical in forming the basis of my thesis.

I think that in viewing the resources I had, I often questioned the source of the information. Many times the letters I read were from men. If women had written them, I would have received a different perspective on what was happening. Often the men were concerned with how much money was made, or what was happening with the farm. On the other hand, women may have mentioned these things, but one learned more through a women's writing. Her letters were much more detailed about the emotional side of what was happening to her and her family. In addition, even the scholarly research that was done by women, Christiane Harzig and Linda Shelbitzki-Pickle seemed to express more of this emotional side. For example, in Linda Shelbitzki-Pickle's book, *Contented Among Strangers*, she discusses the Germans from Russia. She said that the longer these Germans lived in the United States the custom of the new daughter-in-law living with her in-laws ended. This change was difficult for the older German women from Russia because she lost her authority over her daughter-in-law, which had been the custom of the older women when they were first married. This period of time that a woman lived with her in-laws was very difficult. The daughter-in-law was expected to do the most difficult tasks, and she was not treated well by her mother-in-law. It had become a custom that you would treat your daughter-in-law the way you had been treated. Reading

about things that happened specifically to women helps the reader to understand more what life was like for these women.

The opportunities that the German women were looking for in the United States pertained to work, marriage or religion. Within this realm of opportunities, marriage was a major similarity between the rural and urban German immigrant women. It did not matter if they lived in the urban or rural areas, getting married was easier in the United States because there were no financial restrictions. Also, an added bonus to getting married in the United States for German women, was that they could be more selective about who they married because there were many German men searching for a German wife in the United States. In fact, many were encouraged to come to the United States to get married because of the selection. In addition, it allowed them to make the choice as to whom they married as opposed to an arranged marriage. They were given greater freedom in this area.

Urban women had greater opportunities than rural women because of the services that were available to them. There were church groups for urban women to join as well as Frauenvereins, Jungfrauenvereins, and auxiliary groups. This allowed these women to come in contact more with other women outside their home. It also allowed for more independence. The German immigrant women in the urban area contributed to American culture because of their association to these various organizations, which allowed them to come in more contact with the native-born and help other Germans. In addition, the type of work urban women did resulted in greater contact with native-born, which in turn allowed them to impart some of their German ways on the native-born, but also helped them to acculturate faster by being a part of the native-born families. This then allowed

them to acculturate their husband and children. Women in the rural areas were too busy maintaining the family, home and farm to become heavily involved in an outside group; and therefore, had less independence than the urban women. Despite the fact that both groups tried to maintain their German language and traditions, it was only the rural women that were partially or completely isolated from Anglo-America, which their descendents became a part of, because of maintaining their German language and traditions. This was the reason that they saw little need to learn English as long as those around them spoke German. Despite their isolation, these rural German women did contribute to American culture by helping their husbands settle American land. Also, by maintaining the German traditions some of those traditions eventually would become a part of American culture. It may have only affected certain American communities, but it was a result of their children passing the traditions on to their descendents.

It would be interesting to find out what the percentages were of German women that immigrated for work, marriage or religious reasons and compare that to what they did in the United States. This would be difficult to accomplish because of the limited records available, especially letters or diaries from these women. The lack of these materials may have been due to their literacy rate, especially rural women. As well as not having enough time to write. I would like to see more primary sources on German immigrant women in the urban areas in the nineteenth century. One of the things that I searched a lot for, were urban area primary sources, especially letters or diaries. I was surprised that there were so few sources related to my topic. I would have thought that the urban women would have had more time and be more literate to write a diary or letters. The other obstacle is whether family members kept the letters and then are they

willing to give them to an institution for public use. There are many unanswered questions as to why there is a lack of these materials. Another interesting area to research would be to follow a single family in both the urban and rural areas in the nineteenth century and make a comparison. In addition, I would add to that research by selecting two or three other ethnic groups and make a comparison between the German single family in the urban and rural areas with other ethnic groups.

German immigrant women of the nineteenth century had many similarities and differences. Despite the difficulties in attaining primary sources from these women, it was a very interesting topic to research. They immigrated for greater opportunities, but because of where they lived they had different views of the United States, and contributed differently to the culture of America.

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