

## The Cincinnati Germans: Their Ancestral Homelands in the German States By Don Heinrich Tolzmann

### Introduction

A historical marker for “Cincinnati’s German Heritage” at Sawyer Point along the Ohio River bears this inscription: “Cincinnati, along with Milwaukee and St. Louis, became one of the three major corners of the ‘German Triangle,’ so-called for its historically high concentration of German-American residents.” (1)

In various books of mine I have described the history of German immigration, settlement, and influence in the Cincinnati area, but have not concentrated in particular on the *Heimatbestimmung* (homeland determination) of the German immigration to the area. (2) The purpose of this article is to focus on that topic.

### Germans to America Passenger Data File, 1850-1897

Cincinnati is located in Hamilton County in southwest Ohio. Information on the origins of German immigrants has been identified, and is now available at the FamilySearch Wiki’s link to “Germans in Hamilton County.” This information is based on a search of the “Germans to America Passenger Data File, 1850-1897.” (3)

This data file resulted in information on the German state origins of 10,218 German immigrants to Cincinnati. This is a relatively sizable database, so conclusions about the homelands of German immigrants to Cincinnati can be viewed as well founded. The results of the search are as follows:

Prussia (not specified)	30.1%
Hannover	28.4%
Bavaria	9.9%
Oldenburg	8.6%
Hessen	4.8%
Baden	2.6%
Württemberg	2.5%
Saxony	2.2%
Other states	10.9%

### Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the search of this database. It indicates that 37% of the German immigrants to Cincinnati came from Hannover and Oldenburg. A total of 30% are listed as coming from Prussia, but based on my research of German immigration to Cincinnati, I would estimate that at least two-thirds of this amount, or 20%, came from Westphalia, which like Hannover and Oldenburg was located in northwest Germany.

This makes for an estimated total of 57% of the German immigrants to Cincinnati from 1850 to 1897 came from northwest Germany. The statistics clearly reflect the significance of this region for Cincinnati. I like to refer to “Goetta Country,” as this is the homeland of this German-style sausage that is so popular in the Cincinnati area. (4)

German immigrants also came from southern and other German states, with the lead state here



A Close-up of a map of northwest Germany in 1815, showing the homelands where German immigrants to Cincinnati in the 19th century mainly came from: Westphalia, Hannover and Oldenburg.

From: Cambridge Modern History Atlas, 1912.

being Bavaria with 9.9%. Although the Bavarian-style Oktoberfest is widely celebrated in the area, the actual immigration from Bavaria turns out to be slight. So this reflects the popularity of the festival, rather than the German immigration to the area.

The statistics from the “Germans to America Passenger Data File” do not fully cover the German-speaking immigration. Some, but not all German-speaking immigrants from Switzerland, France, and Luxemburg are listed, but not those from Austria-Hungary or Russia.

So, data from those areas would be not be reflected in the German statistics for Hamilton County. This is important to note as the immigration from Austria-Hungary increased after the American Civil War, and continued on well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (5)

However, the data that is available provides enough information to come to conclude that German immigration to Cincinnati was predominantly from northwest Germany. Recognizing the homeland origins of the German immigrants to Cincinnati can help us understand not only the history of German immigration to the area, but also the various influences they exerted in the making of Cincinnati’s German heritage, as we know it today.

On the basis of this *Heimatbestimmung* the German customs, traditions, festivals, etc. prevalent in the Cincinnati area could be examined to determine to what extent they might have been influenced by the immigration from northwest Germany. The food item “goetta” has already been mentioned, but there are many other aspects of Cincinnati’s German heritage that could be explored to ascertain their origins. (6)

Although there are several specialized studies regarding the causes of German immigration from northwest Germany to America (See the Appendix), there is a need for an overarching survey of the region, covering Westphalia, Hannover, and Oldenburg. This would place the immigration to Cincinnati in the proper historical context of immigration from the entire region of northwest Germany. (7)

## Notes

1. An illustration of this historical marker can be found in: Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *German Cincinnati* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), p. 127.
2. In addition to the work cited in footnote no. 1, see the following works of the author: *Cincinnati’s German Heritage* (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 1994); *German Heritage Guide to the Greater Cincinnati Area*. Second edition (Milford, Ohio: Little Miami Publishing Company, 2004); and: *German Cincinnati Revisited* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2011).
3. See: “Germans in Hamilton County, Ohio” at: [www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germans\\_in\\_Hamilton\\_County\\_Ohio](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germans_in_Hamilton_County_Ohio). This data file is based on a series of books edited by Ira A. Glazier and P. William Filby, *Germans to America: Lists of Passengers Arriving at US Ports 1850-1897*. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1988ff). Altogether there are sixty-seven volumes covering the years from 1850 to 1897, with each volume containing the names of ca. 70,000 German immigrants.
4. Regarding goetta, see: Dann Woellert, *Cincinnati Goetta: A Delectable History* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2019), esp. “Goetta’s German Origins,” pp. 26-48.
5. For the history of the German-speaking immigrants from the areas that once made up Austria-Hungary, see: Rebecca S. Rodgers, “The Donauschwaben: History, Development, and Culture of an Immigrant People,” (M.A. Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1984), and: Roger Schneider et al, *50 Jahre Donauschwaben in Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati: Verein der Donauschwaben, 2004).
6. For information on German customs, traditions, and festivities in the Cincinnati area, see the works cited in footnote no. 1 and 2.
7. See the Appendix for works on “Immigration from Northwest Germany, A Selective Bibliography.”

## Appendix - Immigration to America from Northwest Germany, A Selective Bibliography

### Books and Articles

- Aengenvoort, Anne. *Migration-Siedlungsbildung- Akkulturation: Die Auswanderung Nordwestdeutscher nach Ohio, 1830-1914*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999.
- Holtmann, Antonius. "Basic, Reliable Information About Early Emigration from the Osnabrück Area (Landdrostei) in the Kingdom of Hannover to the United States During the 19th Century," *The Palatine Immigrant* 34:1 (2008), 20-28, translated by LaVern J. Rippley.
- Holtmann, Antonius. "*Ferner thue ich euch zu wissen...*" *Briefe des Johann Heinrich zur Oeveste aus Amerika (1834-1876)*. Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995.
- Walter D. Kamphoefner, Walter D. et al. *Von Heuerleuten und Farmern: Die Auswanderung aus dem Osnabrücker Land nach Nordamerika im 19. Jahrhundert*. Kulturregion Osnabrück Bd. 12. Bramsche: Landschaftsverband Osnabrück e.V., 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Westfalen in der Neuen Welt: eine Sozialgeschichte der Auswanderung im 19. Jahrhundert*. Münster: Coppenrath, 1982.
- Kessel, Jürgen. *Johann Bernard Stallo (1823-1900): Ein deutsch-amerikanischer Jurist, Schriftsteller und Diplomat*. Oldenburgische Familienkunde. Bd. 58. Oldenburg: Oldenburgische Gesellschaft für Familienkunde e.V., 2016.
- Thörner, Udo. *Venne in America: The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Mass Emigration to America of Tenants and Small Cottage Farmers from a Rural Village in the Region of Osnabrück*. Osnabrück: Arbeitskreis Familienforschung Osnabrück e.V., 2008, 20-44.
- Tolzmann, Don Heinrich. "The Land of Milk and Honey: Letters of Johann Bernard Meyer from America to Family in the Osnabrücker Nordland, 1835 and 1844," *The Palatine Immigrant* 43:2 (2018) 11-17.
- Vortmann, Jürgen. *Auswanderer aus dem Kirchspiel Bramsche 1730 bis 1930*. Bramsche: Rasch Verlag, 2012.
- Welp, Hermann and Monika Thölking, "Off to New Shores: German Immigration to Cincinnati from the Osnabrücker Nordland in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century," Translated and edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. *The Tracer* 35:4 (2014): 112-16.

### Website

See the website of the Forschungsstelle Deutsche Auswanderer in den USA – Dausa, which is maintained by Dr. Antonius Holtmann: <http://www.nausa.uni-oldenburg.de/forschf.htm>.

Also see the author's site at: [www.donheinrichtolzmann.net](http://www.donheinrichtolzmann.net).