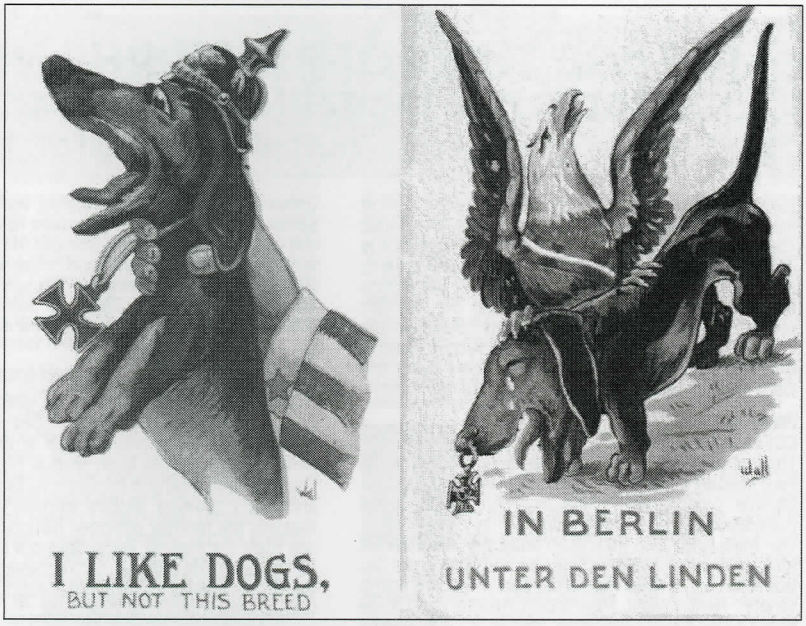

American anti-German Propaganda World War One. After the wars, the Dachshund Club of America launched a ' rehabilitation' campaign regarding the dog's image.

GERMAN IMMIGRATION

World War I had a devastating effect on German-Americans and their cultural heritage. At once, German ancestry became a liability. As a result, German Americans attempted to shed the vestiges of their heritage and become fully "American." Among other outcomes, this process hastened their assimilation into American society and put an end to many German language and cultural institutions in the United States.

Although German immigrants had begun settling in America during the colonial period, the vast majority of them arrived in the nineteenth century. In fact, as late as 1910, about nine percent of the American population had been born in Germany or was of German parentage – the highest percentage of any ethnic group. Moreover, as most German-Americans lived on the East Coast or in the Midwest, there were numerous regions in which they made up as much as 35 percent of the populace.

German immigrants were generally considered to be hard working, thrifty, and charitable; a successfully integrated group that still clung to its cultural heritage by maintaining German language schools, newspapers, and various social clubs. Most of them felt united by a common conception of cultural "Germanness." the vast majority German-Americans had a nostalgic love for their ethnic heritage, yet no sense of political loyalty toward Imperial Germany.

AMERICAN REACTIONS TO WAR IN EUROPE

German-Americans included "Germans" who had emigrated from various German-speaking territories prior to their official political unification in the German Empire of 1871. By 1914, the vast majority of German-Americans were American-born descendants of such earlier immigrants. Although many of them strongly sympathized with their relatives, they identified firstly as Americans and thus wanted to stay out of the war.

Still, it was not enough to combat an anti-German sentiment that had been growing in the U.S. for two decades. Under Kaiser Wilhelm II, Germany had developed a militaristic reputation. Furthermore, at the time, Germany and the United States were involved in growing economic competition not only in North America and Europe, but also in Latin America, which only heightened the tensions between the two nations. Not long after the outbreak of World War I, Americans started to view the conflict as a war of ideology: the Allies were portrayed as defending "civilization," the Axis Powers were seen as asserting their "cultural superiority." This fateful equation

of German culture with military might soon proved disastrous for German-Americans.

In May 1915, the Lusitania, a British passenger steamer, was torpedoed by a German submarine off the Irish coast, resulting in the loss of nearly 1,200 lives, including 124 Americans. The situation for German-Americans worsened immediately.

AMERICA'S MOBILIZATION FOR WAR

After war was declared, President Wilson immediately proclaimed all German citizens "alien enemies." They were barred from living near military facilities or airports, in all port towns and in the nation's capital. They had to disclose their bank accounts and any other property to an Alien Property Custodian appointed by the Attorney General. Furthermore, in 1918, Germans had to fill out registration affidavits and be fingerprinted. German citizens in America who failed to comply with these rules or who were considered potentially dangerous were placed in internment camps for the duration of the war.

The fear of spies grew when Americans were warned to be watchful of their neighbors of German descent and to report any suspicious person to the authorities. It was rumored that spies were poisoning food, and that German-Americans were secretly hording arms. The situation was only made worse by newspapers and government officials, both of which fed the public's paranoia. German language services in churches were disrupted and German language newspapers were shut down; churches housing German congregations were painted yellow; schoolchildren were forced to sign pledges in which they promised not to use any foreign language whatsoever. By March 1918, 38 out of 48 states had restricted or ended German language instruction in schools. Ohio, Iowa, and Nebraska passed the strictest language laws in the country; since their laws also prohibited the use of any foreign language in public places or on the telephone.

Public and university libraries ended their subscriptions to German language newspapers, books written in German and even English books that dealt with Germany and Austria-Hungary were stowed in basements for the duration of the war.

ANTI-GERMAN SENTIMENT, go to page 10

However, some libraries went so far as to destroy them or to sell them as wastepaper; several of these books were actually publicly burned along with German language newspapers during local patriotic celebrations. Most German-American congregations suffered from the language ban, and many of them eventually switched to English for their religious services.

Hundreds of German names for towns, streets, parks, and public buildings were changed. Extremely recognizable German names such as "Berlin" or "Hamburg" became "Pershing" or "Belgium." Many German-Americans sought to avoid further harassment by changing their family names, often shortening them or translating them into English. The same was true for most cultural societies. Even music fell victim to patriotic scrutiny. Many orchestras and opera houses stopped playing works by German and Austrian composers such as Beethoven or Mozart to avoid being labeled disloyal.

As a result of the war, many German-Americans preferred to conceal their ethnic background, as could be seen in the first postwar census, when about 900,000 German-born Americans seemingly vanished, only to reappear under the categories of American-born or other ethnicity. .

GERMAN-AMERICANS IN MINNESOTA

When the U.S. entered WWI, Germans were the single largest ethnic group in Minnesota, as it is today (38.6% in the last census). Nativism during this period was a patriotic attitude that saw recent immigrants – particularly those of German descent – as potentially traitorous. The most conspicuous nativist agency was the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety (MCPS). Created by the state legislature in April of 1917 created the MCPS, a seven-person commission.

Perhaps the most hotly debated nativist issue was the use of German in the classroom. Many schools, both public and parochial, used German as the primary language of instruction. While Minnesota did not ban this practice outright, the MCPS did urge school boards to make English the exclusive educational language, with the exception of foreign language courses.

SWEET LAND

the musical

Ann Michels. Photo: Rick Spaulding

by **Perrin Post** and **Laurie Flanigan Hegge**
lyrics by **Laurie Flanigan Hegge**
music by **Dina Maccabee**
directed by **Perrin Post**

From the film *Sweet Land* by Ali Selim and short story "A Gravestone Made of Wheat" by Will Weaver

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