

Chapter One

European Background

Since man lives by permission of physical geography, it is his fate to be divided by mountains, rivers, and seas into groups that develop, in semi-isolation, their diverging languages and creeds, their climatically conditioned features, customs, and dress. Driven by insecurity to suspect the strange, he dislikes and condemns the alien, outlandish looks and ways of other groups than his own. All of these fascinating varieties of terrain—mountains and valleys, fiords and straits, gulfs and streams—that make a panorama of diverse delight, have broken the population of a minor continent into a score of peoples cherishing their differences, and self-imprisoned in their heritage of hate. There is a charm in this mosaic of originalities, and one would deprecate a world of people confined in identical myths and pantaloons.

The Story of Civilization: The Reformation, A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564 by Will Durant, page 143i

An appreciation of German heritage is enhanced with an understanding of the religious and political history of the ethnic German-speaking populations in various European states, kingdoms and countries during the 16th through 19th Centuries. The commonality that bound these various regions was the written German language even though culturally there were significant differences among them such as the dour and stern Mecklenburgers and the more lighthearted Bavarians with their lederhosen and Oktoberfest.

Religiously, there was a major division between the Protestants and Catholics. The genesis of the separation of many Germans from the Catholic faith began in 1517 when Martin Luther, a German monk, attacked the Church's teachings and practices. Many German nobility, peasants, and townspeople openly joined this movement that was referred to as the Reformation because it was meant to reform the Church. This faction became known as Protestants meaning "those who protest." While some of the ruling class was sincere in their belief that changes in the Church were necessary, others opposed the Church to gain ownership and control of its property. Many peasants joined the movement to free them from their temporal master's control more than because of their disagreement with Church doctrine. Neither Pope Leo nor the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V could impede the Reformation's rapid and extensive movement. Will and Ariel Durant described the state of affairs in Germany during this period.

Germany was confusion with a complexity: not a nation but a name, a medley of principalities agreeing in language and economy, but jealously diverging in customs, government, currencies and creeds. Each of these units acknowledged no superior except the emperor, and ignored him fifty weeks in the year. Some foreigners found consolation in this division of Germany; 'If it were entirely subject to one monarchy,' wrote Sir Thomas Overbury in 1609, 'it would be terrible to all the rest' of Europe. Even for Germany it was in many ways a pleasant arrangement. It weakened her political and military competition with unified states, but it gave her a local liberty, a religious and cultural variety that the Germans might reasonably prefer to such centralized and exhausting autocracies as those of Phillip II in Spain and Louis XIV in France. Here was no tyranny pullulating Paris sucking the life of a country, but a galaxy of famous cities each of which had its own character and vitality.

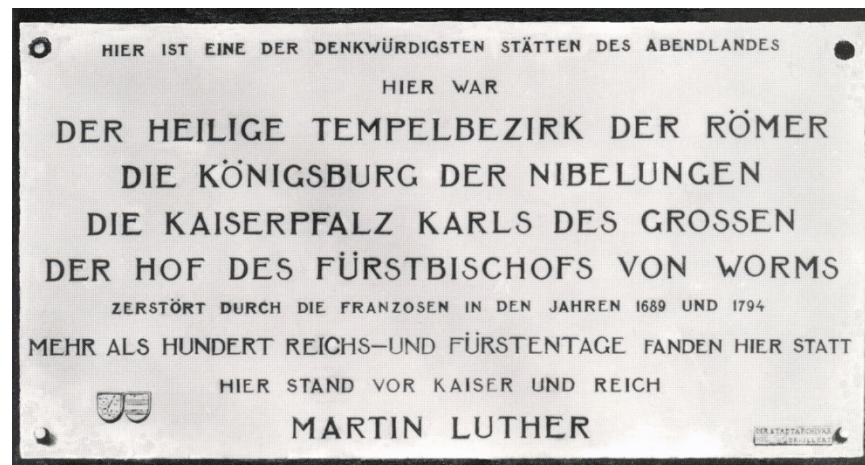
The Story of Civilization: The Age of Reason Begins, A History of European Civilization in the Period of Shakespeare, Bacon, Montaigne, Rembrandt, Galileo, and Descartes: 1558-1648 by Will and Ariel Durant, pages 542-543

The Peace of Augsburg (1555) established the prerogative of the Lutheran and Roman Catholic nobility to choose the religion for those geographical areas they controlled. The principle was *Cuius regio eius religio*, "Whose religion, his religion." Based upon the selection of the Catholic or Lutheran faith, the church land and properties were likewise given to these two respective religious institutions. The ruling

nobility also became the head of the official religion in their region. Dissidents were forced to move; e.g., “religious cleansing” similar to today’s “ethnic cleansing.” Only these two religions settled their differences and other religion groups, such as the Calvinists, Dutch Reformed, and other sects gained no official recognition, independence or ownership of church property. However within the Lutheran areas, Calvinists, Anabaptists and Unitarians gained more religious freedom.ⁱⁱ

Later, the Catholic Church instituted the Counter Reformation or Catholic Reformation to bring “prodigal” Protestants back to the flock by either peaceful means or force. By 1600, relatively few Protestants remained in Austria, Bavaria, parts of Bohemia (later Czechoslovakia and now the Czech Republic and parts of the Slovak Republic), and the Rhineland, which were the regions along the Rhine River on the border between France and Germany. Notably it includes Worms where Luther was ordered to appear to recant his protest against the Catholic Church. The rest of Germany remained predominantly of the Lutheran faith or other Protestant-based Reformation faiths such as the Calvinists, Dutch Reform, and other minor sects.

This landmark is at courtyard of the location of the Catholic Church in Worms.
It was taken in August 2004 and is from the Linda and Dale Sporleder Collection.



In 1618, a protest by Calvinists against an appointment of Catholic leadership in Prague, Bohemia known as the “Defenestration of Prague” instigated a series of military conflicts that lasted for 30 years. The wars were both violent confrontations between Protestants and Catholics and also politically motivated by those seeking to remain free from the central control of the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Emperor. Beyond these competing factions within Germany; Denmark, Sweden, and France entered the fray to gain German territory and challenge the Austrian Habsburgs family’s power and control over much of Europe including Spain. The political nature of the dispute was signified by Catholic France supporting Lutheran Denmark and Sweden to diminish the power and authority of Catholic Austria.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years’ War. Territorially, Sweden acquired Western Pomerania and Eastern Pomerania (now Poland) was assigned to the Teutonic and Lutheran Brandenburg. Catholic France gained part of Alsace and other nearby territory. The Dutch Republic and Switzerland were granted independence. Also, the Peace of Westphalia extended the Peace of Augsburg to include Calvinists, as well as reaffirming the area controls by the Catholic and Lutheran nobility as of 1526.

Prussia’s role in German history was pivotal. During the 1600’s, the Hohenzollern family began to expand its power in eastern Germany and ruled the state of Brandenburg with Berlin as the capital. In 1618, Brandenburg inherited Prussia. As noted, the Peace of Westphalia added part of Pomerania. Also the German territories on the lower Rhine River were added.

The Hohenzollerns created a professional army and a strong civil service to defend and rule their scattered empire. An adage was that Prussia was an army seeking countries to govern. In 1740, Silesia, a province of Austria, was added to the empire. Prussia's action led to two wars with Austria known as the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). Other nations joined either side. Ultimately, Silesia remained under Prussian rule. During the 1770's, Prussia, Austria and Russia seized parts of Poland until by the end of 1795, it disappeared from the map of Europe. Will and Ariel Durant again described the status of Germany with the beginning of the 19th Century.

Germany was not a nation, if that means a people living under the same government and laws. Germany in 1800 was loose concatenation of some 250 'states,' each with its own laws and taxes, many with their own army, coinage, religion, customs, and dress, and some speaking a dialect unintelligible to half the German world. However, their written language was the same, and gave their writers a third of the Continent for their potential audience.

The Story of Civilization: The Age of Napoleon, A History of European Civilization from 1789-1815 by Will and Ariel Durant, page 587

Toward the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) rearranged the political map of Europe including the reduction of the German city-states, small kingdoms, and landgraves to less than 40 plus Austria and Prussia. The major city-states included Lübeck, Hamburg, Bremen and Frankfurt. The various German sovereigns and free cities united in the German Confederation (*Deutsche Bund*) included Austria, Prussia, Brandenburg, Bavaria, Hanover, Württemberg, Saxony, Saxony-Weimar, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Oldenburg, Baden, Hesse-Darmstadt, Luxembourg, Hesse-Kassel, Holstein, Schleswig, Lauenburg, Nassau-Usingen, Anhalt-Dessau, Anhalt-Köthen, Anhalt-Bernburg, Saxony-Coburg-Saalfeld, Saxony-Meiningen, Saxony-Gotha-Altenburg, Saxony-Hildburghausen, Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, Waldeck, Lippe-Detmold, Schaumburg-Lippe, Nassau-Welburg, Hohenzollern-Hechingen, Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, Schwarzburg-Sonderhausen, Reuss-Greiz, Reuss-Schleiz, Reuss-Lobenstein, Reuss-Ebersdorf, Liechtenstein, and Hesse-Homburg. Former members of the dissolved Confederation of the Rhine that did not join the German Confederation were Westphalia, Berg, Würzburg, Modena in Italy, Savoy, and South Netherlands. Sovereignty over them was maintained by various kings, dukes and princes including some beyond the borders of the states.

The Revolution of 1848 was a seminal event in German history both as it relates to attempted internal changes in the government and a reason why many Germans left to live in other countries, including the United States. While the United States had gained its independence from England between 1776 and 1789, France had experienced its own violent revolution in 1789 to rid itself of its monarchy. Although England did not eliminate the royalty entirely from its ruling class, its earlier Glorious Revolution in 1688 curtailed and limited the power and authority of its monarchy.

The Congress of Vienna not only rearranged the political map of Europe, it also strived to restore and maintain crowned heads as leaders of their respective sovereignties, including the recently reconstituted German states. Contrary to this attempt to continue the *status quo*, liberal leaders in the German states and other countries sought to secure a more equitable and representative government including such radical fundamental proposals as freely elected parliaments or a national assembly; universal suffrage; popular and economic administration; and responsibility of ministers and all officials to the people.

They also sought far-reaching individual liberties such as freedom of the press, religion, conscience and teaching; trial by jury; and universal German citizenship. Fiscally, socially, educationally and economically, they demanded just taxation; protection of labor and the right to work; adjustments of capital vis-à-vis labor; universal instruction; and abolition of all privileges. Militarily, they wanted a national militia and universal arming of the populace.

The German states also were dealing with unification. Essential to this issue was whether a unified Germany should include Austria (*Grossdeutschland* or Grand Germany), or exclude it with the leadership

role falling to Prussia by default (*Kleindeutschland* or Little Germany). The *Grossdeutschland* versus *Kleindeutschland* issue was resolved on March 7, 1849 when the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef I imposed a constitution for Austria and Hungary as well as the Italian and Balcanese (a region in the Balkans) provinces that were made a part of the Hapsburg Empire. As a multi-nation empire with significant non-Germans as member states, the remaining German states would not have condoned or accepted Austria as the leader and even a member of a Teutonic empire.^{iv}

On March 28, 1849, the National Assembly (*Nationalversammlung*) adopted a constitution for the anticipated new Germany nation. It was to be a constitutional monarchy with a hereditary Kaiser or Emperor as the head of state. On April 2, 1849, a delegation of the *Nationalversammlung* met with the King of Prussia, King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, in Berlin to offer him the crown. He declined by diplomatically conveying to the delegation that, while he felt honored; he could accept the position only with the consent of his peers, the other sovereign monarchs of the German states. In actuality, Friedrich Wilhelm IV believed he was King of Prussia solely “by the grace of God” and did not accept the notion that a legal government required the consent of the governed as represented by its elected body. In a letter to a relative in England, Friedrich later confided that the delegation insulted him by offering a crown “from the gutter” and a throne that was “disgraced by the stink of revolution, baked of dirt and mud.” Thus, the German states’ failed experiment with democracy ended and the previous feudalistic and militaristic order was basically restored.

Prior to the Revolution of 1848, Germans had been migrating to America for other reasons such as bad harvests as well as other economic and religious motivations. With the prospect of political reforms, the migrations in 1848 through 1850 declined slightly from the peak of 1847. After there appeared to be more certainty that the German states would not develop into democratic forms of government, migration increased dramatically.

Year	Number of Migrates	% Increase (Decrease)
1846	95,000	-
1847	110,000	15.8%
1848	85,000	(22.7%)
1849	85,000	00.0%
1850	85,000	00.0%
1851	113,000	32.9%
1852	162,000	43.4%
1853	163,000	00.6%
1854	300,000	84.0%
Total	1,198,000	

The total number of Germans who immigrated to all countries between 1849 and 1854 was estimated at 1,100,000, which would have been about 2.5 per cent of the total population of the German states from which they departed. Those who came to America because of their disillusion with German governmental reforms were given the moniker the “Forty-Eighters.”

Most noted among the Forty-Eighters who came to America was Carl Schurz (1829-1906), a spokesman for German immigrants. He supported Abraham Lincoln’s presidential campaign and was appointed Ambassador to Spain. During the Civil War, General Schurz commanded Union troops. In 1869, Carl was elected to serve as a Senator from Missouri and in 1877 he was appointed Secretary of the Interior under President Rutherford Hayes.

Mecklenburg with a population of only 420,000 people had some 148,000 people emigrate from 1850 until 1890. The majority came to the United States. Most of these emigrants were poor peasants seeking opportunities for a better life. Jürnjakob Swehn aptly expressed to his former school teacher why he left and how his life improved in Iowa.

Ach by me, sweat has got me vun dummboozled more than by you in the old country. In my village I was born a hired man, and I would have stayed one all of my life. Even if I had my own house, I still wouldn't have any land, and my kids would all be maids and hired men

We have had to hustle here and work hard, much harder than in the old country. This is the God's truth. For all of that, I made something of myself. That is also God's truth. Here I made myself free. Here I stand with my own two feet on my own ground and am nobody's slave. *Das Freisein ist schon ein par Eimer Schweiss wert.* To be free is worth whole buckets of sweat.

*Letters of a German American Farmer, Jürnjakob Swehn
Travels to America, page 25*

And, you wonder why I left home. I will tell you this. I wanted to be a free man, and I wanted to farm my own land, stand on my own ground. Not just a few ruten¹ of rented ground, but land my children would inherit. Isn't it born into a person that you want to have your own place, you own *hüsung*, and isn't that good and proper as a birthright?

*Letters of a German American Farmer, Jürnjakob Swehn
Travels to America, page 161*

Most Mecklenburg emigrants left through the port of Hamburg. To leave Mecklenburg-Schwerin, it was necessary to obtain government permission.^v The petition and the permits were called emigration papers or *Auswanderungskonsensakten* defined as *Auswanderung* – emigration; *konsens* – consent, permission; and *akten* – files or documents. The request was made in the husband or father's name with his birth date along with the same information for the wife and children listed as family members. The family was not allowed to write the information directly and it was necessary for an “officer” of the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin to write the information for them. The Mecklenburg government encouraged its citizens to leave by imposing the condition that the person who left could not come back.^{vi}

Meanwhile in 1864, Prussians and Austrians invaded Denmark with its king losing his post as Duke of Holstein, Schleswig and Lauenburg.

The Austro-Prussian War (1866) commenced on July 3rd, 1866 with the Battle of Königgrätz (Sadowá) in which the Prussians decisively and swiftly won. Austria did not fare well in the others engagements with the Prussians and on August 23rd the brief war ended under the Treaty of Prague. The German Confederation was dissolved and the King of Hanover, Prince-Elector of Hesse-Kassel, and Duke of Nassau lost their thrones because they supported Austria.

As the dominate country, Prussia incorporated Lauenburg in 1865 and Holstein, Schleswig, Hanover, Hesse-Kassel, Hesse-Homburg, Nassau, and the City of Frankfurt in 1866. By 1871, Prussia established the German Empire (*Deutsches Reich*) that included Prussia, Bavaria, Württemberg, Saxony, Saxony-Weimar, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Oldenburg, Baden, Hesse-Darmstadt, Anhalt-Dessau, Saxony-Coburg-Gotha, Saxony-Meiningen, Saxony-Altenburg, Brunswick-Wolfenbütel, Waldeck, Lippe-Detmold, Schaumburg-Lippe, Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, Schwarzburg-Sonderhausen, Reuss-Greiz, Reuss-Schleiz and the city-states of Lübeck, Hamburg, Bremen. The King of Prussia, William I, was proclaimed hereditary German Emperor. Austria, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein were not included.

During the 19th Century, ethnic Germans from some of these regions came to America including the Sporleder, Boell (*Bölle*), Berens (*Behrens*), Jonas, Werner, Klausch, Buckendahl, Faber, Heuton, Koehler (*Köhler*), Lempke, Manske, and Freitag families. In the following chapters, these families are discussed. Also more information is provided as to their “homeland” and why the Germans from these regions left and many decided to migrate to America.

¹ A “rute” is a unit of length used in land measurement of about 3.77 meters or 4.12 yards. “Ruten” is the plural of rute.

Chapter One Endnotes

ⁱ Will Durant and his wife, Ariel, published an eleven-volume set of books dealing with the story of civilization up to about 1815 which coincides with the demise of Napoleon's rule and his empire. The cited volume was sixth in the series.

ⁱⁱ *The Story of Civilization: The Age of Reason Begins, A History of European Civilization in the Period of Shakespeare, Bacon, Montaigne, Rembrandt, Galileo, and Descartes: 1558-1648* by Will and Ariel Durant, page 551

ⁱⁱⁱ "The Thirty-Years-War" by Professor Gerhard Rempel, Western New England College, as retrieved on Jan 8, 2005, <<http://mars.acnet.wnec.edu/~grempel/courses/wc2/lectures/30yearswar.html>>.

The Story of Civilization: The Age of Reason Begins, A History of European Civilization in the Period of Shakespeare, Bacon, Montaigne, Rembrandt, Galileo, and Descartes: 1558-1648 by Will and Ariel Durant, pages 556-572

^{iv} "The German 1848 Revolution: A German Perspective," *Der Blumenbaum*, Vol. 15, No. 3: January/February/March 1998, p.102 ff., Sacramento German Genealogy Society, published by Lorelei Press, as retrieved on Feb 4, 2005 05:50:45 GMT, <<http://www.serve.com/shear/germusa/perspekt.htm>>.

^v Palmer, Michael. *German Genealogical Society of America Bulletin* (Vol. 2, No. 9, page 101, September 1988). See also, "Sources for Genealogical Research in Mecklenburg" by Daniel Schlyter, © 1998-2005, ProGenealogists, Inc., as retrieved on Jan 25, 2005 11:12:24 GMT, <<http://www.progenealogists.com/germany/mecklen/sources.htm>>.

^{vi} *Jürnjakob Swehn, der Amerikafahrer*, page xi.