



*Courtesy of Baker University and Kansas United Methodist Archives, Baldwin City, Kansas.*

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# Language and Loyalty: The First World War and German Instruction at Two Kansas Schools

*by Justine Greve*

A wave of patriotism broke across the country when the United States entered the First World War in April 1917. In addition to joining the Red Cross, buying liberty bonds, or planting victory gardens, some citizens asserted their patriotism by burning German books, removing German composers from symphony programs, and re-naming Rubella “liberty measles.”<sup>1</sup> The anti-German sentiment also had a more violent side. Those deemed “too German” faced ridicule, threats, accusations of disloyalty or espionage, and sometimes physical harm. In response to such attitudes many German immigrants made efforts to Americanize. Many stopped speaking German both in public and at home. Teaching or learning German as a second language could also raise suspicions, and this wartime anti-Germanism had a devastating effect on German language and literature departments in American colleges and universities.

Scholars such as Frederick Luebke, LaVern Rippley, Don Tolzman, and Carl Wittke have detailed the harsh treatment of German Americans during World War I without much attention to the way university foreign language programs handled the new Germanophobia.<sup>2</sup> Post-secondary institutions were not as likely to ban the “Hun language” as elementary or high schools, but academia was nonetheless affected by the popular association of German speaking with national disloyalty. Schools that saw a decline in German enrollment were public as well as private, religious as well as

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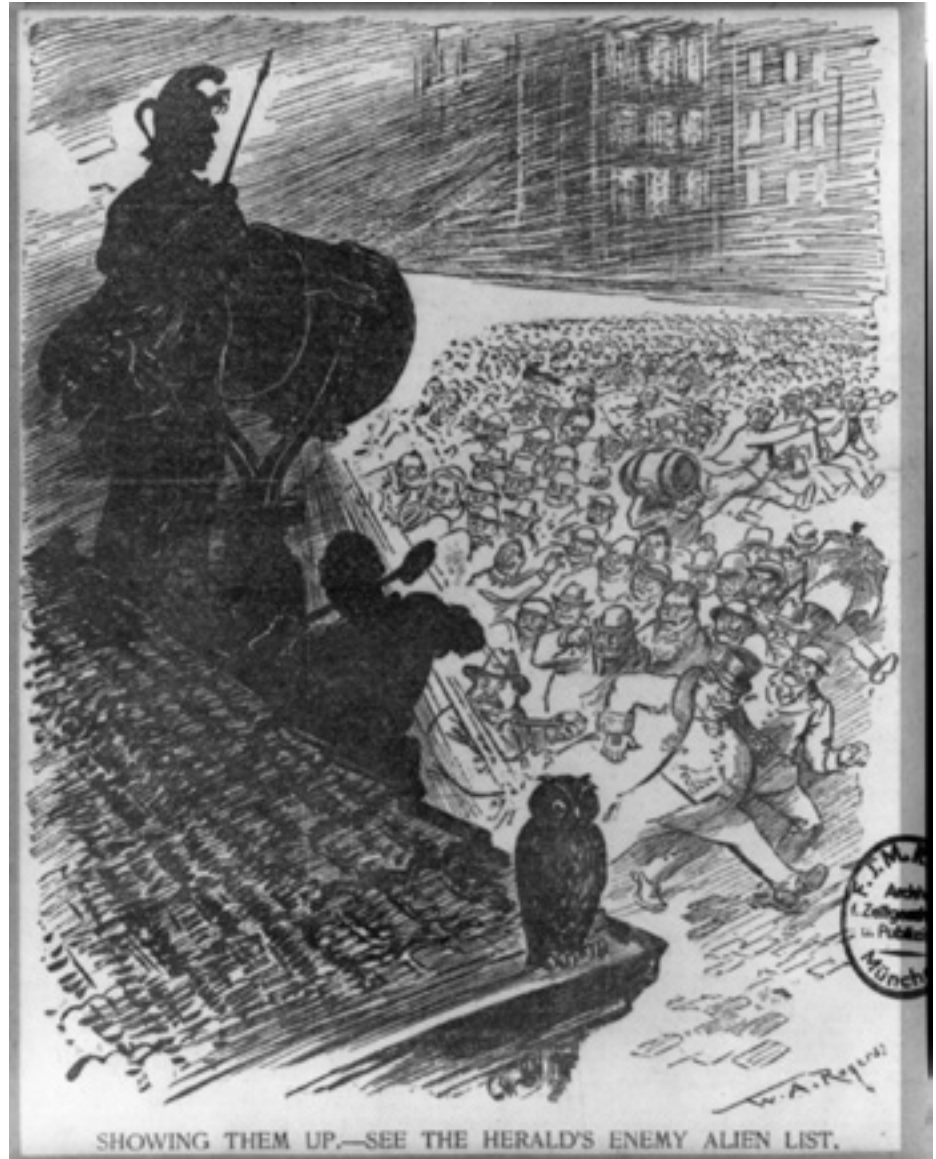
1. Terrence G. Wiley, “The Imposition of World War I Era English-Only Policies and the Fate of German in North America,” in *Language and Politics in the United States and Canada: Myths and Realities*, ed. Thomas Ricento and Barbara Burnaby (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998), 223, 231; Barbara Tischler, “One Hundred Percent Americanism and Music in Boston during World War I,” *American Music* 4 (Summer 1986): 164; LaVern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (1976; reprint, Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), 186.

2. Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974); LaVern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976); Don H. Tolzmann, *German Americans in the World Wars* (München: K.G. Saur, 1995); and Carl Wittke, *The German-Language Press in America* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957).

secular, “100 percent American” as well as German. Though the phenomenon as a whole can be superficially explained as “patriotism,” this tells us little about the specific reasons schools shied away from the language. A closer look at the elimination of German in two Kansas institutions indicates that the motives varied with individual schools’ circumstances. In many cases—at least, on the surface—rejecting German classes, clubs, and culture was a voluntary statement of national allegiance, either on the part of the administration or the student body. At Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas, prowar enthusiasm was coupled with an anti-German sentiment, likely fueled by the highly respected and Germanophobic William Alfred Quayle, a Methodist bishop and former president of the university. As a result, students at Baker abandoned German as a field of study. At Bethel College in North Newton, the “patriotic” elimination of the German language was driven in part by fear and the school’s perceived need to prove its national loyalty. Experience with anti-Germanism and anti-pacifism caused the Mennonite-affiliated institution to drop German, hoping to establish a patriotic image for its students and staff—members of a group that otherwise appeared subversive.

**B**aker and Bethel represent two models of the “patriotic” rejection of German: one apparently lighthearted and the other involuntary. Yet as with most binary categories, the distinction is not actually so clear-cut. Any resident of the U.S. is under the gaze of Uncle Sam and, in a national crisis situation, likely aware of his or her own performance of patriotism. Though certain behaviors are more dangerous and certain people more closely watched than others, all people must police themselves. Thus it is necessary not

only to recognize oppression and privilege, but also to rethink the motives of the patriots who seem to have given up German so easily and pressured their neighbors to do the same. With their own claim to American authenticity on the line, xenophobia may have felt for some like the best—even a necessary—option.



*This lithograph, printed in the New York Herald on April 12, 1917, shows a searchlight scanning a marching crowd of German Americans, depicted stereotypically as portly men with handlebar mustaches and long pipes. The U.S. government classified hundreds of thousands of German American men as “enemy aliens” during World War I, leaving them vulnerable to searches, property seizure, and even internment. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C*

The First World War was not the first time in American history that German speakers had been ill-treated. In the mid-1800s, religious differences and a rise in nativism created tension between (often Catholic) Germans and the English-speaking Protestant majority. Nativists' primary concern was that teaching immigrant school children in their native language hindered the process of assimilation. Instruction of German as a second language does not seem to have been a subject of concern; the problem was not with the German language itself, but the obstinate foreignness some Americans attributed to its immigrant speakers.<sup>3</sup>

This reluctance to assimilate took on a more serious meaning in 1914, as many German Americans supported their former country while most of the American public fell behind England and France. In 1917 the countries became official enemies, and loyal American citizens branded German the language of the Hun. No longer merely a sign of laziness, German speaking could be the mark of subversion. According to historian Terrence Wiley, around 18,000 people across the Midwest "were fined for language violations" during this era. Punishments frequently went far beyond fines—to arrests, threats, beatings, or even lynchings—when language violations coupled with lack of support for the war effort. In Worden, Kansas, for example, three men tarred a Lutheran pastor for refusing to preach in English or in support of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Though language was always a factor in anti-German sentiment, the linguistic aspect of the campaign was primarily focused on the elimination of German in schools. Americans viewed education as an important force both in assimilation and in the war effort. Many educators (and, indeed, the National Education Association) opposed German language instruction in American classrooms. Though the efforts were concentrated on the elementary grades, German was also eliminated from many high schools and some colleges. A March 1918 survey indicated that 15 percent of American secondary schools had eliminated German from their curricula. The change was particularly pronounced in certain areas. Prior to the war, 96 percent of high schools in Michigan offered German; by 1920 that number had decreased to less than 8 percent. Even when the language was not actually eliminated,

many students refused to enroll in German classes. In 1915 about a quarter of high school students studied German; by 1922 that number was at less than 1 percent. The *Newton Weekly Kansan-Republican* reported in 1918 that in Kansas, "all high schools and academies have eliminated the language, and practically all elementary schools have done likewise." Such an inclusive report seems extreme but may not have been far off. Historian Arlyn John Parish agrees that by 1918, "practically all schools substituted other courses for German."<sup>5</sup>

The story of German instruction at the university level is somewhat harder to trace. Clearly, German teaching raised suspicions at some institutions. In 1918 six members of the German faculty at the University of Michigan were removed on charges of disloyalty—their subject matter apparently grounds for dismissal.<sup>6</sup> In Kansas, some schools (such as Bethel College and Fort Hays Kansas Normal School) eliminated German outright. Others, such as Baker and the University of Kansas, kept German classes on the books, even as students refused to enroll.

Persecution of German speakers and discouragement of all things German came in forms ranging from presidential edicts to glances from neighbors or instances of vigilante violence. In Kansas, non-naturalized German immigrants were required to obtain permits in order to enter certain parts of the capital city. Governor Arthur Capper kept a "slackers file," which contained correspondence regarding possible German subversives. On the more local level, groups like the Barton County "Night Riders" set about "to clean up the county of German spies, German sympathizers and dirty slackers."<sup>7</sup> The threats and actions of "loyalty leagues" and other self-appointed patriots were most common in areas highly populated by German immigrants but were certainly not limited to them. Indeed, "there was hardly a community in the United States," writes Carl Wittke in his study of

3. Wiley, "The Imposition of World War I Era English-Only Policies," 214, 216.

4. *Ibid.*, 220, 223; "Preacher given coat of tar by strangers," *Topeka (Kans.) Daily Capital*, May 10, 1918, Kansas Memory Database, item #213502, [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org).

5. Arlyn John Parish, "Kansas Mennonites during World War I," *Fort Hays Studies—New Series: History Series* (May 1968): 53; "Bethel Takes a Sweeping Step," *Newton Weekly Kansan-Republican*, September 18, 1918, 3; see also Wiley, "The Imposition of World War I Era English-Only Policies," 226, 229.

6. Wiley, "The Imposition of World War I Era English-Only Policies," 222; Clifford Wilcox, "World War I and the Attack on Professors of German at the University of Michigan," *History of Education Quarterly* 33 (Spring 1993): 59–84. Wilcox notes that these professors were primarily "singled out . . . for ideological reasons" rather than ethnicity (several were of German descent). The university defended two other ethnically German professors against alumni who called for their removal (p. 62).

7. "Disloyalists are warned," *Inman Review*, April 26, 1918, Kansas Memory Database, item #213538, [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org); "Governor

## GERMAN SETTLEMENTS IN KANSAS

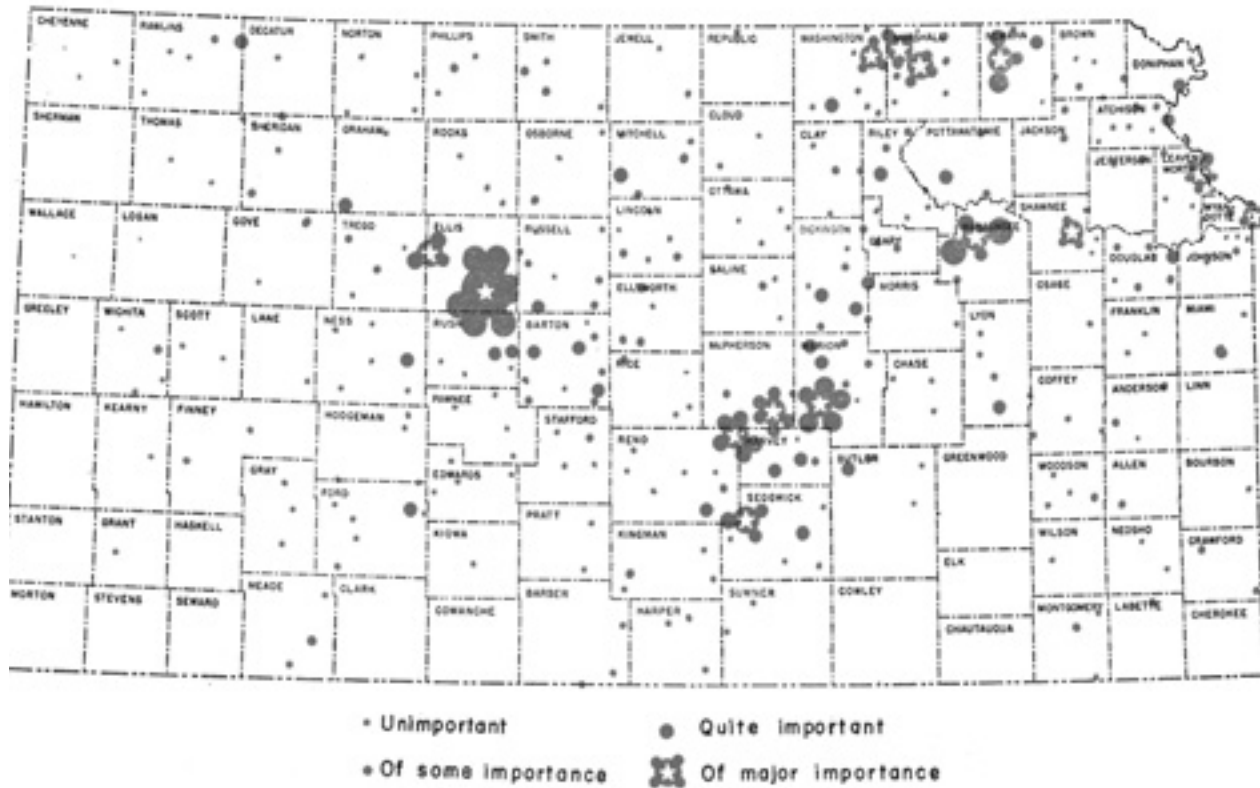


Figure 1. Although this map shows that Pottawatomie County contained only four German settlements, the *Kansas City Star* in June 1918 condemned it as “the most disloyal county in the state.” The article listed the offenses of alleged enemy aliens from throughout the county, including Wamego resident Louis B. Leach’s crime of refusing to give to the Red Cross. Although he “subscribed heavily” to the Liberty Loan, he found the sidewalk of his home branded with a cross in yellow paint. When Leach told a committee of patriots, “You can tar and feather me, or even kill me, I won’t give a cent,” vandals painted his car with crosses and the word “Slacker.” Map originally published in J. Neale Carman, *Foreign-Language Units of Kansas I. Historical Atlas and Statistics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1962), 46. Courtesy of the University Press of Kansas.

the German-language press, “which did not have a ‘Security League,’ ‘Loyalty League,’ ‘Citizens’ Patriotic League,’ or some other volunteer vigilante organization which spe-

cialized in hunting German spies.”<sup>8</sup> Tarring and featherings took place in the highly German McPherson County, but also in the more “American” Douglas County. The *Kansas City Star* declared Pottawatomie County “the most disloyal county in the state” (“dotted with slackers and disloyalists”), though it contained relatively few German settlements (see Figure 1). Of course, the “100 percent Americans” of the area

Arthur Capper’s slackers file,” General Correspondence, folder 11, box 36, Arthur Capper Administration, Records of the Governor’s Office, State Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka; Kansas Memory Database, item #212615, [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org); “All alien enemies liable to arrest,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 19, 1917; “Watch enemy women,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 19, 1918.

8. Wittke, *The German-Language Press in America*, 268.



In 1916 Baker University's German club, *Die Lustigen Deutschen*, numbered twenty-three members, as shown in this photo from the university's yearbook. The student newspaper, the *Baker Orange*, reported the club's activities regularly; the club held biweekly meetings, hosted a yearly program of skits and traditional German songs, and organized events such as picnics for members. By 1919 the club had not been mentioned in the *Orange* for two years, and the yearbook's cartoonist concluded that German at Baker was all but forbidden. Courtesy of Baker University and Kansas United Methodist Archives, Baldwin City, Kansas.

were working hard to correct this with threats, yellow paint, and tar.<sup>9</sup> Nowhere was a German speaker completely safe.

For most students at Baker University, German was a second language and foreign culture. But before the U.S. entered World War I, German was a popular interest. The school had an active and vibrant German club—*Die Lustigen Deutschen*—with twenty-three members, biweekly meetings, and an annual program of German songs and skits. The “House of Hanover,” a Ger-

man ruling lineage, was both a literary society and one of the rotating names for Baker graduating classes. Course catalogs from this period listed thirteen semester-length German courses. Though prewar yearbooks did not list seniors' courses of study, the large number of German club members (all of whom had at least two years of German experience) and class offerings suggests that several students each year graduated with a major or minor in German.<sup>10</sup>

9. “Preacher given coat of tar by strangers,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 10, 1918; “Use tar and feathers,” *McPherson Daily Republican*, April 23, 1918, Kansas Memory Database, item #213529, [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org); “On trail of disloyalty,” *Kansas City Star*, June 9, 1918, Kansas Memory Database, item #213516, [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org). See also William

D. Keel, “Deutsch, Däätsch, Düütsch, and Dietsch: The Varieties of Kansas German Dialects after 150 Years of German Group Settlement in Kansas,” Department of German Languages and Literature, University of Kansas, at [http://www2.ku.edu/~germanic/LAKGD/William\\_Keel\\_Essay.shtml](http://www2.ku.edu/~germanic/LAKGD/William_Keel_Essay.shtml).

10. “*Die Lustigen Deutschen*,” in *Orange Blossoms* (Baldwin City, Kans.: Baker University, 1916), 138.

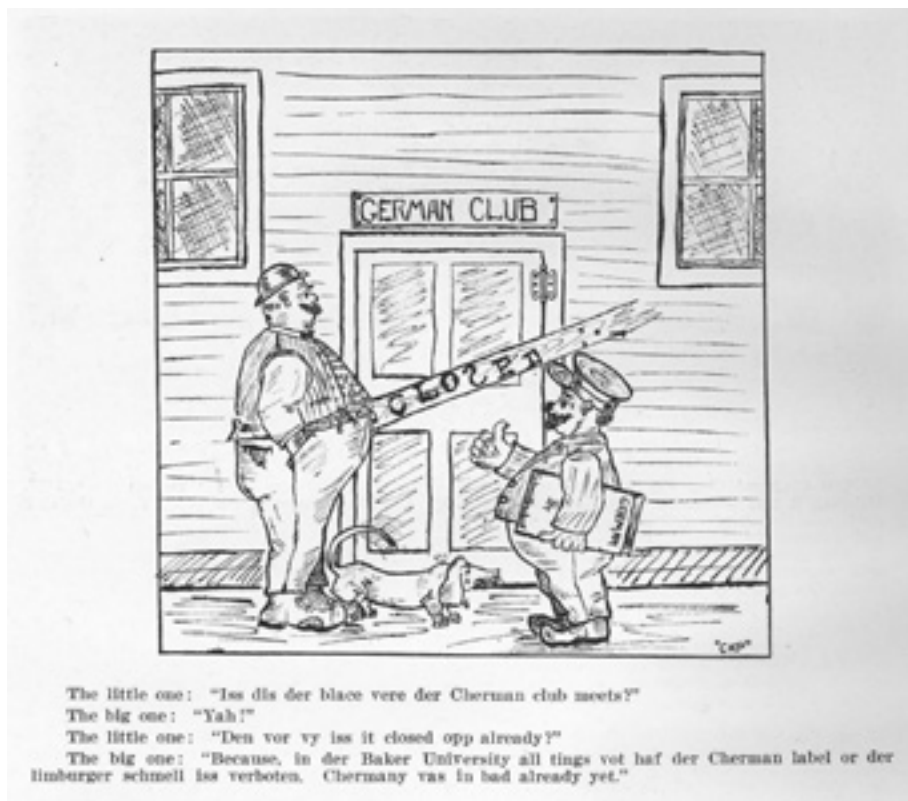


Figure 2. This political cartoon, published in the Baker University Yearbook in 1919, comments upon the gradual elimination of "all tings vot haf der Cherman label" from the university. Although the cartoon suggests German cultural activities and classes were officially verboten, the cartoonist was not entirely accurate. In fact, President Lough decided in May 1918 not to discontinue Baker University's language program despite pressure from "several sources" to do so. Courtesy of Baker University and Kansas United Methodist Archives, Baldwin City, Kansas.

As at other schools across the country, patriotic fervor overtook Baker once Congress declared war on Germany. A significant number of students left to join the army. Most others were involved in the Red Cross, the Students' Army Training Corps, or other patriotic organizations and initiatives. Editions of the school newspaper, the *Baker Orange*, were filled with news from the front, what Baker students were doing to help out, and ideas for how students could become involved in the war effort. At the Board of Trustees meeting in June 1917, university president Samuel Lough reported that "Baker seems to have been conspicuously responsive to the calls of patriotism and the stimulus created by the crisis in our national affairs."<sup>11</sup> This nationalism led to a drastic

ruthless that her name will forever be marked as the blackest in history." In response, students decided "that the name of Hanover should forever be discarded."<sup>13</sup> Unsurprisingly, none of the members of that class graduated with a major or minor in German. In fact, as of December 1919, the president reported the retirement of the former German professor, noting that no one at Baker had taken a German class in two years.<sup>14</sup>

change in attitudes toward Germany. A political cartoon in the 1919 yearbook illustrated the fate of German language and culture at Baker. The cartoon depicted two Germans discussing the boarded-up "German Club" building. When one asked the reason for the closure, the other explained, "Because, in der Baker University all tings vot haf der Cherman label or der limburger schmell iss verboten" (see Figure 2). Indeed, reports of German Club activities disappeared from the *Orange* around the time of U.S. entry into the war. The paper reported on a German club picnic in October 1917—the week after the influential Bishop Quayle gave his first campus speech decrying the use of the German language.<sup>12</sup> After that activity, no more articles about German club activities appeared in the *Orange*, even though the press continued to cover other campus groups (including language clubs).

In 1918 the senior class (the "House of Hanover") decided to follow the lead of the English crown and change its name to the "House of Winsor [sic]." The 1919 yearbook explained the change: "In 1914 came the Great World War, and during those years the Ruling House of Germany carried on a war so

11. *Trustees Minutes, Dec. 1910–Dec. 1925*, Baker University Archives,

Baldwin City, Kansas, 81; "Best wishes soldiers," (Baldwin City, Kans.) *Baker Orange*, December 15, 1917.

12. The "Yank," *Baker University Yearbook* (Baldwin, Kans.: Baker University, 1919), 126; "German club picnic," *Baker Orange*, October 27, 1917.

13. The "Yank," 1919, 62.

14. *Trustees Minutes, Dec. 1910–Dec. 1925*, 154.



COLORS: Navy Blue and Old Gold. ENSIGN: The Crown. MOTTO: A Posse ad Esse.

*Before 1918 both a graduating class and a literary society at Baker University had taken the title of “House of Hanover” as a symbol of German cultural pride. Students decided in 1918 to change the name to “House of Windsor,” as seen in this image from the 1919 Baker University Yearbook, publicly discarding Hanover as a name “marked as the blackest in history.” Courtesy of Baker University and Kansas United Methodist Archives, Baldwin City, Kansas.*

While the cartoonist responsible for that German club drawing got the overall picture right, the word choice was actually a little off. All things German *were* eliminated from Baker, but they were not actually *verboten*. Despite some pressure to officially do away with German, the school’s administration was not responsible for the changes that took place.

The university’s position on German instruction was evident in the minutes of a Board of Trustees meeting held in May 1918. At the meeting, President Lough told the Board of Trustees that “several sources” had suggested removing German from the curriculum, at least temporarily. The president noted that he did not want people to see Baker as sympathetic to Germany if it continued teaching the language. Nevertheless, he was “persuaded” that eliminating the subject “would be a serious mistake.” Continued German instruction, in Lough’s mind, was a more sensible, as well as more patriotic option. He argued that refusing to learn the language of the enemy put the country at a great disadvantage. After all, German citizens continued to learn English and French. And he was not alone in his belief: a national conference on education standards had also warned against the militaristic disadvantage created by eliminating German programs in American schools. It

was good pedagogic practice, Lough concluded, to keep teaching German.<sup>15</sup>

The university maintained this position despite the fact that Baker students completely stopped enrolling in the language. The German courses listed in the 1918–1919 catalog were essentially the same as those from preceding years. From 1919 to 1921, the catalogs listed only four German courses. This was a drastic reduction from the thirteen offered in 1916, but still an optimistic assertion, considering that no students at all were enrolling in German. That the university kept a basic German program on the books (even after the retirement of its only German professor) indicates that the administration did not change its position either to fit campus reality or comply with public anti-German sentiment. It was a fruitless gesture, perhaps, but symbolically significant.

Baker’s symbolic decision to maintain a German program was possible because it did not feel a need to prove its national loyalty. Baker was, for the most part, “100 percent American.” Its foreign elements—where they existed—

15. *Ibid.*, 117.





Samuel Alexander Lough (1864–1946) served as president of Baker University from 1917 to 1921. He resisted pressure to discontinue German language courses at the university, continuing to offer them even as students refused to enroll. Courtesy of Baker University and Kansas United Methodist Archives, Baldwin City, Kansas.

were not threateningly foreign in the way some Americans perceived Germans to be. Homer Kingsley Ebright, author of a history of Baker, related an anecdote about the naturalization of some Baldwin City residents—including President Lough—who had not yet become American citizens. Of those he mentioned, one (Lough) was Canadian, another British, and the third a Spanish speaker. Ebright attended the ceremony himself and reflected that he “enjoyed helping these ‘foreigners’ become American citizens.”<sup>16</sup> His placement of quotation marks and lighthearted discussion of the ceremony indicated the positive patriotic spirit at Baker. If the new American citizens underwent naturalization because they feared the consequences of not doing so, that sentiment did not make it into Ebright’s later interpretation of the event.

16. Homer Kingsley Ebright, *The History of Baker University* (Baldwin City, Kans.: [Baker University], 1951), 200.

In addition to Baker’s ethnic neutrality, the school’s affiliation with the Methodist Church contributed to its credentials as a loyal institution. The denomination treated the conflict almost as a religious war. In churches, at conferences, and in Methodist publications, writers and speakers presented the conflict as a fight between good and evil; a victory would be a triumph for justice, God, and right. For some preachers, this position translated explicitly into being anti-German. The strongest of the pro-war, anti-German preaching at Baker came from Bishop William Alfred Quayle. Bishop Quayle was a powerful figure at Baker—a highly respected former professor and sort of campus spiritual leader.<sup>17</sup> When Quayle spoke, Baker listened. So when the bishop delivered anti-German speeches and sermons, students may have begun re-evaluating their affiliations.

In October 1917, Quayle gave an extremely anti-German speech at a campus chapel service. He vilified the Germans, calling “every allegiance and connection with Germany . . . vile and contemptible” and proclaiming that “the man who talks pro-Germanism now talks fool-osophy.” “The German language,” he concluded, “should be extinct, because it teaches German culture and German customs, and these we do not want.” The following January, the *Orange* reported that Quayle had written a letter to Herbert Hoover, criticizing the Germans on the basis of their beer culture, attributing “the unthinkable barbarism of the German armies” to their “centuries of beer drinking.”<sup>18</sup>

17. “Rhetorical connections between good and the Allies (and evil and Germany) were not subtle. In an article in the *Methodist Review*, Bishop William McDowell declared: “God is not on the side of the Kaiser. God is on the side of mankind.” William F. McDowell, “The Church in a World at War,” *Methodist Review* 34 (July/August 1918): 509. In a similar spirit, the *Central Christian Advocate* (St. Louis, Mo.) observed that “the decision for war was voted on Good Friday—the day on which the Great Martyr died for humanity,” pointedly suggesting that the war was a righteous undertaking. “It Is War,” *Central Christian Advocate*, April 11, 1917. Shortly thereafter, the magazine printed a “Letter to Methodists” on behalf of the Board of Bishops of the Methodist Church stating that Christians must not be afraid to sacrifice peace for a just cause. “As followers of Jesus Christ,” they wrote, “we labor and pray for the reign of peace. But . . . There can be no peace, and there ought to be no peace, until it stands squarely based upon righteousness. We stand with the President in his message to Congress where he said: ‘The right is more precious than peace.’” L. B. Wilson, “The Church in War Time: Semi-Annual Meeting of the Board of Bishops, Methodist Episcopal Church, April 25 to 30,” *Central Christian Advocate*, May 9, 1917. For Bishop Quayle, see *Baker University Yearbook* (Baldwin City, Kans.: Junior Class of Baker University, 1921), 4.

18. “Bishop Quayle writes to Herbert Hoover,” *Baker Orange*, January 12, 1918; “Addresses student body,” *Baker Orange*, October 20, 1917.



*Bishop William Alfred Quayle (1860–1925) of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and former professor and president of Baker University, enjoyed a prestigious reputation at his alma mater. When he visited Baker University in October 1917 to deliver a speech condemning the German culture and language, students listened, voluntarily ceasing to enroll in German classes. However, the patriotism they displayed appears less voluntary and more coerced when positioned against the threat of harassment that loomed over many German Americans in the Midwest after the U.S. entered the war. Courtesy of Baker University and Kansas United Methodist Archives, Baldwin City, Kansas.*

A few months later, Quayle gave another well-attended and anti-German speech, arguing that one can make “no distinction between the German people and their rulers.” He spoke disparagingly about supporters of Germany, or those who believed “that we should meet her and extend our hand, then show her the rightfulness of living. Those kind of people are unsympathetic with God, if they are in sympathy with Germany.” For Quayle, the war was a religious

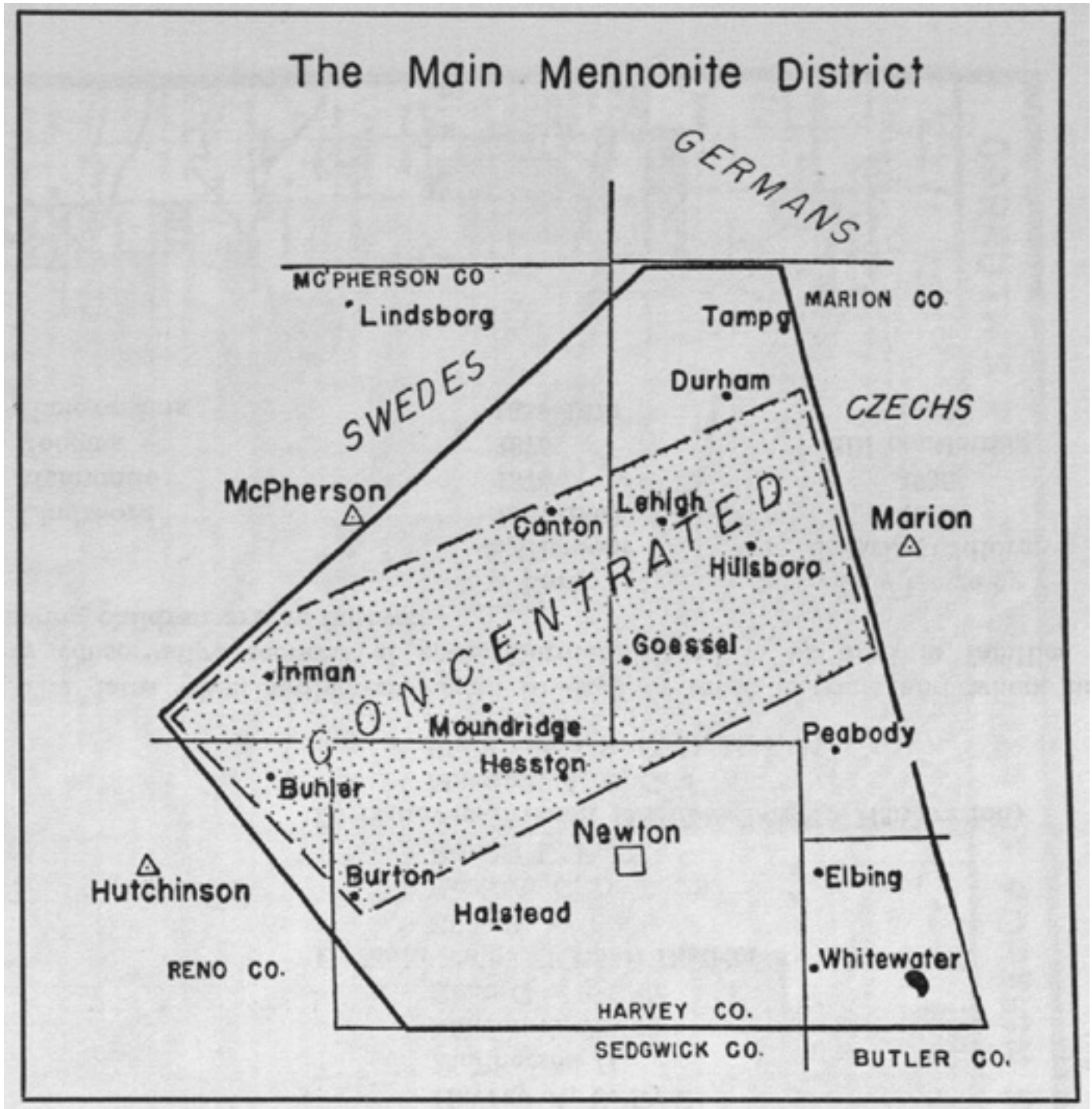
one: “God is resolute and stands for a clean world, Germany is a damn world . . . This war is to see whether God or the devil is going to rule.” Even after the war was technically over, Quayle kept up the intensity of his beliefs. In March 1919, he spoke on the war, demonstrating his attitude against the German people, not just their rulers, and indicating that he sought retribution, not a forgiving peace.<sup>19</sup>

Quayle persistently linked evil with Germany and German military behavior with German language and culture—a position that Baker students would have been exposed to in the school newspaper as well. Though the *Orange* never took a direct stance on the appropriateness of German language instruction, it ran several stories from papers around the country that addressed this issue. A December 1917 article acknowledged that “there is the very proper use of German, as well as French and Spanish,” but noted that “this is a different thing from the mischievous and partisan forcing of German in the lower grades.” Teaching German, it argued, was sometimes “for a purely selfish, anti-national, un-American reason” (despite teachers’ assertions about its “scientific and cultural value”). Another article similarly conceded the academic and practical value of learning the language but maintained that German propagandists used language instruction as a way to promote German ideas, politics, culture, and nationalism in America’s public schools. Perhaps Baker students found it easiest to drop German altogether rather than risk learning “not German, but Germanism.”<sup>20</sup>

As Baker newspapers and yearbooks presented it, students’ decision to abandon German was much more patriotic than paranoid, much more fun than fearful. For the most part, students at Baker probably decided against taking German classes

19. “Bishop Quayle here on Wednesday,” *Baker Orange*, April 6, 1918; “Bishop W. A. Quayle speaks on ‘present tense of war,’” *Baker Orange*, March 17, 1919.

20. “Stop teaching Germanism,” *Baker Orange*, November 3, 1917; “German in the schools,” *Baker Orange*, December 1, 1917.



In central Kansas, a cluster of counties holds a large number of Mennonite communities and Anabaptist institutions. The area shown in this map includes Hesston College, McPherson College, and Tabor College in Hillsboro, all of which lie within thirty miles of Bethel College in Newton. Originally published in J. Neale Carman, *Foreign-Language Units of Kansas I. Historical Atlas and Statistics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1962), 58. Courtesy of the University Press of Kansas.

as a “voluntary” show of patriotism rather than from fear of persecution if they did enroll. But the nationalism of Baker students—even the 100 percent Americans among them—cannot really be seen as completely un-coerced. Patriotism is a value in America, and during World War I, it took on a religious quality. While Baldwin City did not see the anti-German violence of areas more heavily populated by German immigrants, German sympathy was hardly acceptable. The school newspaper reported that a young Baldwin man was arrested after his landlady told the police about some seemingly pro-German articles in the man’s room, including a picture of the emperor. He was soon released, but the case illustrated the real danger of giving others any reason to suspect disloyalty.<sup>21</sup> With incidents like this one and campus speakers like Bishop Quayle, students hoping to be perceived as good Americans and good Christians may have felt they had little choice but to shy away from taking German.

The wartime atmosphere at Bethel College was much different than that at Baker, largely because the prewar atmosphere was much different. Founded by German-speaking Mennonites who emigrated from Russia in the mid-1870s, Bethel College was essentially bilingual. Many students spoke German as a native language, and the college—especially its older leaders—considered this an important part of its identity.<sup>22</sup> Course catalogs were comprised of two sections: one in English and one in German. The German department offered both classes for native speakers and those for students learning German as a second language. The Board of Directors conducted its meetings in German (a practice that continued into the 1920s), and the school newsletter (*Monatsblätter*) printed some articles in German and others in English.

Unlike other Kansas schools, where the war brought a flood of patriotism and mass exodus to enlist, Bethel approached the war and military service more cautiously. The school was composed primarily of Mennonites—Ana-

baptists who opposed war on principle. While Baker’s Methodism solidified the appearance of loyalty, Bethel’s Mennonite, German-speaking identity made the school automatically suspect. To counteract its “slacker” appearance, Bethel students made concessions to patriotic peer pressure (or in some cases got caught up in the wartime spirit themselves). Eliminating German became a part of the school’s plan—“voluntary” or not—to prove Bethel’s loyalty through alternative means.

**T**he wartime atmosphere was threatening for Mennonites—particularly in the Midwest. Government intelligence agencies suspected Mennonites might be communists or undercover German agents. Many midwestern Mennonites were verbally or physically harassed and even subjected to serious acts of mob violence. Three men in McPherson County were tarred and feathered for not buying liberty bonds. One of the men, Charles Diener, recalled that the mob came to his home after he removed a flag the community members had put on his father’s church. While the family did try to avoid buying bonds, he said his family’s loyalties lay “with the United States. We weren’t pro-German.” The family did not even speak German at home. In another instance of mob violence, Burrton resident John Schrag was beaten, drenched in yellow paint, and nearly lynched on Armistice Day—also accused of failing to purchase war bonds.<sup>23</sup> In order to avoid this sort of ostracism or to avoid the draft, a few hundred Mennonites—probably between six and eight hundred—moved to Canada between 1917 and 1918.<sup>24</sup> This included a handful of young men from Bethel and the surrounding area.

23. Interview with Charles Gordon, Schowalter Oral History Collection (OH.1), Gordon folder, box 2, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel University, North Newton, Kansas (hereafter cited as “Oral History Collection”). Interview with Charles Diener, Diener folder, box 1, Oral History Collection; see also James C. Juhnke, “Mob Violence and Kansas Mennonites in 1918,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 43 (Autumn 1977): 334–50, also available at [http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1977/77\\_3\\_juhnke.htm](http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1977/77_3_juhnke.htm); Allan Teichroew, “Military Surveillance of Mennonites in World War I,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 53 (April 1979): 99.

24. Additionally, many Hutterites, also facing persecution for their ethnicity and religious beliefs, moved to Canada during the war years. Unlike the Mennonites, who tended to move individually or in small groups, Hutterites often resettled as whole communities. About one thousand Hutterites moved to Canada during the war. Allan Teichroew, “World War I and the Mennonite Migration to Canada to Avoid the Draft,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 45 (July 1971): 246. The numbers Teichroew quotes are from Frank Epp, “My Own History Allows Me No

21. “Cap’ Taylor a German spy?” *Baker Orange*, February 16, 1918.

22. President Kliewer expressed this sentiment in a letter to German professor H. H. Wiebe, in which Kliewer described a current German instructor. He said that “for an American, she has mastered German very well” and that she would be successful at a “non-German school.” The comment assumed that at a place like Bethel, her language skills and ethnic background prevented her from truly fitting in. John Kliewer to H. H. Wiebe, March 24, 1916, “Wiebe, H. H.,” folder 560, box 3, Bethel College Archives, John Walter Kliewer Presidential Papers (III.1.A.1.c), Mennonite Church USA Archives, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel University, North Newton, Kansas; Keith L. Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas, 1887–2012* (North Newton, Kans.: Bethel College, 2012), 16.

Bethel students and staff were aware of the serious consequences for objecting to war service. Many letters to the school's president, John Kliewer, discussed the possibility of being sent to the prison at Fort Leavenworth for not serving. In order to avoid this fate, many became less dogmatic about avoiding anything war-related. Mennonite pastors and leaders encouraged young men to register for the draft, viewing it as a necessary step in obtaining exemption from service, as well as an indicator of support for America. Mennonite historian Allan Teichroew writes that church leaders in fact "had few compunctions about work in the interests of the nation as long as it was civilian in nature and free from military control."<sup>25</sup>

As it turned out, noncombatant work was not always civilian. While some Mennonites obtained farm furloughs or were assigned to reconstructive work in Europe, many others reported to army camps—where some experienced harassment and uncertainty about what kind of work to give to the Mennonite recruits. Indeed, the enlistees themselves did not always know just what they could ethically do in service of the nation. They had little to go on. The U.S. government was slow in defining noncombatant service, and Mennonite ideas about how much and what type of work their men should accept varied widely.<sup>26</sup>

Bethel president Kliewer spent time helping students, faculty, and staff negotiate positions that would keep them out of prison and morally uncompromised. While Kliewer himself felt "that serving soldiers, when they

were in human need, would be permissible," he was sensitive to the moral ambiguity of the situation. "It was not easy to give an answer that would serve as norm under all circumstances," he later wrote.<sup>27</sup> Most Bethel students considered noncombatant work the best option. Ultimately, about 7 percent of the 315 Kansas Mennonites who were drafted took up regular army service, and 48 percent took noncombatant jobs, such as sanitation work. The remaining 45 percent refused service entirely.<sup>28</sup>

Since most Mennonites were unwilling to fight, they had to prove their loyalty to the U.S. in other ways. Early in the war, some Mennonites had expressed pro-German sympathies. For example, the German-language magazine *Der Vorwärts*, published in McPherson, was unusually outspoken in support of Germany and hosted fund drives for the German Red Cross. As the war progressed, however, most overt pro-Germanism disappeared, and Mennonites became more willing to provide tangible support for America. Though liberty bonds clearly funded the war effort, patriotic citizens strongly encouraged Mennonites to buy them, and the Sedition Act of 1918 made it a crime to impede their sale. Saying anything "disloyal . . . or abusive" about the U.S. or dissuading others from buying bonds could carry harsh penalties—jail time or hefty fines, in addition to being branded a subversive by one's neighbors. While most Mennonites initially avoided purchasing liberty bonds, most eventually gave in to the pressure to do so—justifying them as a kind of tax they had to "render unto Caesar."<sup>29</sup>

Escape," in *I Would Like to Dodge the Draft-Dodgers, But . . .*, ed. Frank Epp (Waterloo, Ontario: Conrad Press, 1970), 13. Epp's source for the figures is J. A. Calder, minister of colonization and immigration, in a House of Commons debate, May 19, 1919.

25. Allan Teichroew, "World War I and Mennonite Migration," 221, 224; see also General Correspondence Files, John Walter Kliewer and Emma Ruth Kliewer Papers (MLA.MS.28), Mennonite Church USA Archives, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel University, North Newton, Kansas (hereafter cited as "Kliewer Papers"). Nationwide, the army court-martialed 504 conscientious objectors and sentenced most of them to prison. James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890–1930* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1989), 237.

26. Teichroew, "World War I and Mennonite Migration," 220–27. In an interview in the Schowalter Oral History Collection, Henry Coopridner remembered being threatened while in an army camp that he would be shot by firing squad for not serving in a combat role. Coopridner folder, box 1, Oral History Collection. Some conscientious objectors were subjected to forms of torture, such as having to stand for hours with their arms extended. Glenn Wiebe, *General Exodus: The Kansas Mennonite Migration to Canada during World War I*, (master's thesis, Wichita State University, 1995), 30; Peter J. Wedel, *The Story of Bethel College* (North Newton, Kans.: Bethel College, 1954), 236.

27. *Memoirs of J. W. Kliewer: Or, from Herdboy to College President* (North Newton, Kans.: Bethel College, 1943), 87–88; H. J. Krehbiel to John Kliewer, April 17, 1918, "January–July 1918," folder 17, box 3, Kliewer Papers. Kliewer did some of this work as a member of the Peace Committee of the General Conference, whose goal, Kliewer explained, "was to help young men who . . . had come into difficulties because of their non-participation in war preparations."

28. James C. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1975), 103; Wedel, *The Story of Bethel College*, 240; Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 57.

29. "The U.S. Sedition Act," in *United States Statutes at Large*, vol. 40, April 1917–March 1919 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 553–54, also available online at [www.gwpda.org/1918/usspy.html](http://www.gwpda.org/1918/usspy.html); Parish, "Kansas Mennonites during World War I," 55; Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms*, 104; Juhnke, "Mob Violence"; Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 212. According to Sprunger, "most Mennonites of Harvey County very likely bought a bond or two, although reluctantly" (Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 58). It seems that some Mennonites were able to placate their neighbors by giving to the American Red Cross instead of buying liberty bonds. Interviews in the Schowalter Oral History Collection with Isaac T. Neufeld and John P. Franz suggested this fact. Neufeld folder, box 2, and Franz folder, box 2, Oral History Collection.

Bonds could be a useful sort of tax, in that buying them could help dispel charges of disloyalty. Hoping their neighbors would see them as more American than German, Bethel students advertised liberty bonds in the *Bethel College Monthly*, donated to the YMCA and Red Cross, and flew American flags on campus.<sup>30</sup> In the fall of 1918, the elimination of German would join the list of such concessions.

The show of patriotism at Bethel was not entirely a show. Many Mennonites were patriotic—they were grateful for the freedom and prosperity they had found in America and were willing to support the country in its fight for democracy. As historian James Juhnke notes, “the Mennonites wanted to be good Americans as well as good Christians. They did not consider themselves slackers or disloyalists.” At Bethel, students emphasized their “100 percent loyalty.”<sup>31</sup> The school took pride in the service flag hung in the hall of the main building—with stars representing the 148 students who had served in the war. Some students and staff were strong advocates for their country—with “outright enthusiasm for supporting and winning the war.” History professor C. C. Regier even talked about the war as a “righteous crusade”—a description one might have heard at Baker. These progressive students and staff also embraced the shift to English as a positive, modern move. Regier, for one, was glad when Bethel finally became “an entirely English (or rather American) institution.”<sup>32</sup>

Bethel had been moving toward English for quite some time. Although about 80 percent of the first Bethel College course catalog (1893–1894) was written in German, by 1917 just 17 percent of the catalog was German. Many students spoke German at home, but not all did, and students often preferred to take classes in English. Furthermore, as Bethel tried to attract non-Mennonite students, moving toward English was a necessity.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Bethel students were more closely tied to German language and heritage than students at Baker or at most other Kansas colleges.

This connection was evident in Bethel’s German club—Die Deutsche Verein. It was similar to Baker’s German club

in size and activities, but its pro-German sentiment seems to have been even more intense. In early 1917, the group published a long article in the *Monatsblätter* on the school’s deep connection to Germany and the obligation every club member had to promote German culture and language. This attitude continued even after the U.S. entered the war. A January 1918 article in the Bethel newspaper declared: “The students of Bethel have not yet lost interest in the Deutsche Verein. They still consider this as one of the important organizations [of] the school.”<sup>34</sup>

School leaders felt the same way about German language instruction that some students felt about the club. Judging by listings in the course catalog, Bethel had planned to offer its normal selection of German classes during the 1918–1919 school year. However, during a “Special Meeting” in September 1918, the faculty passed a resolution eliminating German from the school. Two days later, the *Newton Weekly Kansan-Republican* printed an article proclaiming that “Bethel, the leading Mennonite college in America, a school founded and supported chiefly by German speaking people, has taken a step farther than any other college in the state in the matter of doing away with the teaching of German as a language.”<sup>35</sup> This decision meant not only the end of German instruction but of all obvious use of German and support of its culture. As of October 1918, the formerly bilingual *Monatsblätter* became the *Bethel College Monthly*, and articles appeared primarily in English. The German club disappeared (without eulogy or explanation). The school newspaper stopped reporting German club activities sometime in 1918, and by 1919 the yearbook no longer included the group as a campus organization. Church services at the campus church switched into English.<sup>36</sup> As at Baker, patriotism (be it voluntary or forced) won out.

34. “Deutsche Verein Not Germany,” *Bethel Breeze*, January 22, 1918; *Monatsblätter* (Newton, Kans.), February 15, 1917, 4.

35. “Bethel Takes a Sweeping Step,” *Newton Weekly Kansan-Republican*, September 18, 1918, 3; “Special Meeting, Monday, Sept. 16,” Faculty Minutes 1910–21, folder 4, box 1, Faculty Meeting Minutes (MLA.III.1.A.5.a), Mennonite Church USA Archives, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel University, North Newton, Kansas (hereafter cited as “Faculty Minutes”).

36. While the Bethel College church switched to English, some other churches in Newton continued to conduct services in German, even after pressure from the community to switch. Many older members of the Mennonite church in town would have been unable to understand English services (Kliewer, *Memoirs*, 93). Indeed, according to Glenn Wiebe, “most Mennonite churches in Kansas continued to use German despite the threat of violence” (Wiebe, *General Exodus*, 39).

30. “Our National Colors,” *Bethel Breeze* (Newton, Kans.), February 12, 1918. Wedel reported that Bethel students gave about \$1,700 to Army YMCA camps during the war. *The Story of Bethel College*, 240.

31. Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 55, citing the *Bethel Breeze*, May 21, 1918; James C. Juhnke, “Mob Violence, 336.”

32. Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 56, 59; Wedel, *The Story of Bethel College*, 239.

33. Wedel, *The Story of Bethel College*, 267; Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 44.



John Walter Kliewer (1869–1938), president of Bethel College from 1911 to 1920 and again from 1925 to 1932, poses here with his wife Emma and his children Ruth, Karl, and Paul. Kliewer worked throughout the war to help Mennonites avoid military service without suffering violence or imprisonment. Kliewer ultimately bowed to pressure to eliminate German classes at Bethel College, believing that severing German cultural ties might allow the college's students and other Mennonites to follow their religious beliefs without harassment. Photograph number 2007-158, courtesy of the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.

The faculty resolution eliminating German from Bethel explicitly stated the reason behind the decision: "Whereas the use of the German language calls the loyalty of Bethel College into question at this time be it resolved that the German language be eliminated from this institution."<sup>37</sup> A sub-headline for the Newton paper's article on Bethel's decision declared: "ACTION IS VOLUNTARY." The paper considered the move unprovoked, claiming that no one had complained about Bethel offering German at the college and that there had not been "any accusations or insinuations of a disloyal spirit in the college faculty or its management."<sup>38</sup> Perhaps no outward threats or comments were made (at least

within earshot of the *Newton Kansan-Republican* editors), but administrators and faculty members felt that teaching German left the college open to charges of anti-Americanism.

Considering public attitudes about speaking German, it seems unlikely that the decision was un-coerced. Newtonians had no tolerance for the language of the Kaiser. At one point, the community tried (unsuccessfully) to ban German publications. Multiple acquaintances of Bethel President John Kliewer were suspected of—or arrested on—charges of disloyalty.<sup>39</sup> Kliewer wrote in a letter to the Board of Directors that he felt people in Newton were raising "quite a stir" over Bethel's teaching

37. "Special Meeting, Monday, Sept. 16," Faculty Minutes 1910–21, folder 4, box 1, Faculty Minutes.

38. "Bethel Takes a Sweeping Step," *Newton Weekly Kansan-Republican*, September 18, 1918, 3.

39. C. C. Regier to John Kliewer, March 6, 1918, "January–July 1918," folder 17, box 3, Kliewer Papers; H. H. Ewert to John Kliewer, April 10, 1918, "January–July 1918," folder 17, box 3, Kliewer Papers; Parish, "Kansas Mennonites during World War I," 52.

of German. "Friends of our school," he said, had repeatedly heard Newtonians suggest that Bethel be shut down due to its pro-German stance.<sup>40</sup> There was certainly no law that required Bethel to take the action it did, but the school's ethnic and religious identity, as well as the atmosphere in the community, made it vital that Bethel sever its German connection to whatever extent it could.

Most Mennonite elementary and high schools in Kansas had already taken this step. According to historian Arlyn John Parish, prior to the war, about two-thirds of Mennonite elementary schools in the state's Western District offered religion classes in German. By October 1917, that number had been cut in half. A year later, all German Bible instruction had ceased. Because of anti-German attitudes, Parish continues, "most Mennonite preparatory schools had to discontinue all instruction in the language" by late 1918. The government made clear that Mennonite parochial schools (often taught in German) could remain open, but some patriots in their communities would have preferred them to close.<sup>41</sup>

Colleges and universities were more varied in their response to the war. Fort Hays Kansas Normal School—located in highly German Ellis County—also eliminated its German program, but it seems to have done so in a spirit more like Baker than Bethel. School records give little insight into the reasoning behind the decision, but the school itself had no particular German identity, and it does not appear that community members made threats against it.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, three schools that *did* have a somewhat German identity did not eliminate the German language during the war. Hesston College, Tabor College, and McPherson College—all affiliated with Anabaptist churches—were located within a thirty mile radius of Bethel. Parish suggests that Hesston's lack of a German department may have kept

patriotic citizens from targeting the school. At Tabor, Parrish concludes that German courses were not eliminated because the majority of the town's population was German.<sup>43</sup> Maybe the same logic can be applied to McPherson.<sup>44</sup>

Why, then, was Bethel different? Perhaps Newton had a large enough non-German population to make the pressure it put on its German speakers substantial. Anti-German hostility was strong in all of the counties around Bethel, but it seems to have been particularly bad in Newton.<sup>45</sup> In an interview in the Schowalter Oral History Collection on Mennonite experiences during World War I, one Newton man said the anti-German feeling persisted even into the late 1930s. "It was strong, Newton's been a hotbed here," he said of the American-German tension; "there have been some red hots here all the time." In another interview, Albert Unruh described Mennonites shopping in McPherson rather than Newton, where the patriotism was too "extreme."<sup>46</sup>

The "100 percent Americans" of Newton made clear their feelings on anything German. Businesses with German owners were streaked with yellow paint. Citizens put up signs with messages like, "GERMANS: SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF A CIVILIZED NATION. THE HUN LANGUAGE WILL BE BARRED EVEN IN HELL."<sup>47</sup> The local paper published a list of "alien enemies" who had registered with the police chief (the concentration in the area was the third largest in the state). A letter from his-

spoke English) was likely in the single digits. "Distribution of Church Membership by Classes, 1931–1932," *Fort Hays Kansas State College Bulletin* 23 (January 1933): 178.

43. Parish, "Kansas Mennonites during World War I," 52, 54.

44. McPherson College course catalogues indicated that the school continued to offer German instruction throughout the war period. In an email to the author, McPherson College librarian Susan Taylor speculates: "Since the heritage of the Church of the Brethren was German, the Brethren were largely pacifists, and the enrollment had a large percent of Brethren students, I doubt if the war would have had a major effect on the teaching of German at that time." She seems to make the same argument as Parish: because the townspeople were so highly German, the school did not experience anti-German sentiment from the community. Susan Taylor, McPherson College Librarian, email message to author, February 13, 2009.

45. Anti-German hostility was worst in Marion, McPherson, Harvey, Butler, and Reno Counties—the first three of which had large Mennonite populations. Juhnke, "Mob Violence"; Wedel, *The Story of Bethel College*, 235; Wiebe, *General Exodus*, 15.

46. Interview with Albert Unruh, Unruh folder, box 3, Oral History Collection; interview with August Epp, Epp folder, box 2, Oral History Collection. Wedel commented that some outsiders thought Newton was going over the top with its anti-Germanism. He said businessmen in nearby cities announced that they would serve the needs of the Mennonites if Newton did not want their business (Wedel, *The Story of Bethel College*, 237).

47. Parish, "Kansas Mennonites during World War I," 52.

40. "Freunde unserer Schule . . .," John Kliewer to the Board of Directors of Bethel College (translation mine), Sept. 25, 1918, "August–December 1918," folder 18, box 3, Kliewer Papers.

41. Parish, "Kansas Mennonites during World War I," 53–54; Wedel, *The Story of Bethel College*, 287.

42. Despite the large Volga German population in Ellis County, the student body at Fort Hays was probably less ethnically German than at Bethel. The Russian Germans in Ellis County were very strongly connected to their German identity, and it was not until much later (the 1930s and 1940s) that many parents began teaching their children English as a first language. Glenn G. Gilbert, "The German Language in Ellis County, Kansas," *Heritage of Kansas* 9 (Special Issue, 1976): 8. Additionally, statistics from the 1930s indicated that only about one-tenth of Fort Hays students were Catholic. As many Volga Germans in this area would have been Catholic, the percentage of students with a Russian German background in the 1910s (when even fewer





In 1916 Bethel College offered German language courses, such as this class for elementary school students, with relatively little controversy; indeed, Bethel was essentially bilingual, conducting numerous courses in German. After the United States entered the war, however, pressure mounted on college president John W. Kliever to eliminate German from the college altogether—a demand to which he reluctantly conceded in September 1918, despite considering it pedagogically unsound. Photograph number 2011-161, courtesy of the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.

tory professor C. C. Regier to President Kliever indicated that the former had been suspected of some form of disloyalty (though he had no idea why) and that the Board of Directors had expected him to resign as a result. Another letter in the Kliever correspondence file reported that two mutual acquaintances were arrested due to disloyalty (probably for not buying liberty bonds). The writer found this frightening. “Whatever they were thought to have done,” he wrote, “they certainly are not dangerous citizens.”<sup>48</sup>

Events at nearby schools may have made Bethel especially nervous. In April 1918, the main building at Tabor College caught fire; though the cause was never conclusively proven, some suspected it to be arson. Similarly, St. Paul’s Lutheran School in Herrington, Kansas—about sixty miles northeast of Newton—mysteriously burned

48. “Was immer sie getan haben mögen, gefährliche Bürger sind sie gewisz nicht.” H. H. Ewert to John Kliever (translation mine), April 10, 1918, “January–July 1918,” folder 17, box 3, Kliever Papers; C. C. Regier to John Kliever, March 6, 1918, “January–July 1918,” folder 17, box 3, Kliever Papers; “Newton Scores Third in Alien Enemies,” *Newton Weekly Kansan-Republican*, April 4, 1918, 8.

down the day after the president received a petition requesting that the school eliminate German.<sup>49</sup> Kliever wrote in a letter to the Board of Directors that he was afraid not cooperating with Newton’s patriots would leave the school open to a similar fate.

From the perspective of the Newton paper, Bethel College had little reason to worry about its image. The school, it maintained, had not been chastised for teaching German in the college. An article on September 18, 1918, did acknowledge that “there has been some criticism of Bethel College because of the course in German in the academy,” specifically due to the high school’s “tending in a certain sense to segregate such young people and taking them away from the public high schools.”<sup>50</sup> The problem was not so much the German language but how it was used to avoid assimilation. If, indeed, the primary criticism was directed at Bethel’s high school and not the college, President Kliever did not seem to perceive this distinction.

It was the establishment of local loyalty leagues that ultimately led Bethel to become monolingual. A letter to Kliever from William Ewert explained why an upcoming church conference would be held in English: “We found ourselves forced to take this step, because the so-called Loyalty Leagues are now being formed almost everywhere and making it very unpleasant for those who speak German.”<sup>51</sup> School historian Peter Wedel said that the school was occasionally threatened, and in order to prevent an attack by patriotic Newtonians, students sometimes stayed overnight at the school’s main building.<sup>52</sup>

After the Newton Loyalty League was formed, the group asked Bethel to reduce the amount of German spoken and taught at the school. President Kliever pro-

49. Herman Koester, “Speech on the history of St. Paul’s School,” St. Paul Lutheran Church Documents, Herrington Historical Society and Museum, Herrington, Kansas; Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 218.

50. “Bethel Takes a Sweeping Step,” *Newton Weekly Kansan-Republican*, September 18, 1918.

51. “Wir fanden uns zu diesem Schritt bezwungen, weil an fast allen Orten jetzt die sogenannten [*sic*] Loyalty Leagues gebildet waren und die es demjenigen die Deutsch sprechen sehr unangenehm machen.” William Ewert to John Kliever (translation mine), September 19, 1918, “August–December 1918,” folder 18, box 3, Kliever Papers.

52. Parish, “Kansas Mennonites during World War I,” 54; Wedel, *The Story of Bethel College*, 236.

posed that Bethel switch all of its religion courses formerly taught in German to English. The League debated this offer, but requested that the school drop its language classes too. In order to settle the issue quickly and quietly, Kliewer promised to comply, so that “they could simply say to these worked-up people that Bethel College completely eliminated German for this year.”<sup>53</sup> Like Baker president Lough, Kliewer felt that dropping German was “pedagogically . . . a mistake,” but with two strikes against it, Bethel recognized that becoming less German might make it easier to be pacifist. As Kliewer reflected years later: “Maybe, to save our religion, we shall have to sacrifice our language. . . . The change may be painful, but when God’s clock strikes, we must be ready to hear, or we will suffer loss.” More progressive Bethelites had talked for years about downplaying German, pointing out that being Mennonite did not have to go hand-in-hand with speaking German.<sup>54</sup> During the war, the school’s more traditional leaders were forced to accept that letting go of German was the best way to prove their patriotism and protect the values that transcended both language and national loyalty.

**A**cross the state and across the country, the German language was a casualty of the First World War. Although most efforts targeted German Americans and German instruction in primary and secondary schools, the language as an academic course of study at colleges and universities also suffered from the era’s extreme patriotism. At Bethel, the elimination of German was the result of the school’s perceived need to demonstrate its loyalty in order to avoid ill-treatment by nativists and zealous American citizens. At Baker, the German language virtually disappeared from classes and clubs, not because of an administrative

edict but because students rejected all things German as a matter of national loyalty. Of course, if some students at Bethel felt that national loyalty was forced on them, students at Baker may have felt like they had to be patriotic as well. During the war years, Uncle Sam’s critical eye was on the entire country—not just its German immigrants. Even native-born citizens (like most students at Baker) may have felt they had something to prove. An easy way to do this was to reject German.

Abandoning German was not necessarily easy for academics to do. But as historian Carol S. Gruber notes, “the critical detachment and independence that are the hallmarks of the scholar could appear to be peacetime luxuries” amid the patriotic fervor of the First World War.<sup>55</sup> For instance, when University of Michigan president Harry Hutchins dismissed six of his German professors, he did so under pressure from the alumni organization and the state Board of Regents. Historian Clifford Wilcox suggests Hutchins may have felt a particular need to prove his loyalty because he had not immediately required military training at the university once the war broke out.<sup>56</sup> No doubt, many other university leaders could have sympathized.

The elimination of German at Baker was indeed differently motivated than that at Bethel. Even if some Baker students wished to keep from calling into question their identity as truly American, they rarely faced actual threats or intimidation. Nonetheless, it is likely that Mennonites were not the only ones who gave up German because they had a reputation to protect. Xenophobia is an aggressive strategy, but it is also defensive—a way to protect one’s claim to authenticity. Where national loyalty is a national virtue—when one’s claim to legitimacy can be shaken by declining to buy a liberty bond—subscribing to the legitimating ideology may never be “100 percent” voluntary. ❏

53. “[S]o dass sie den aufgeregten Leuten einfach sagen könnten Bethel College habe für dieses Jahr das Deutsch ganz fallen lassen.” John Kliewer to the Board of Directors (translation mine), Sept. 25, 1918, “August–December 1918,” folder 18, box 3, Kliewer Papers. Kliewer, however, did not give in to the League’s second request: that Bethel announce it was the first college in Kansas to drop German from its curriculum. Wedel, *Story of Bethel College*, 237.

54. Kliewer, *Memoirs*, 15, 92; Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 59.

55. Carol S. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 5–6.

56. Clifford Wilcox, “World War I and the Attack on Professors of German at the University of Michigan,” *History of Education Quarterly* 33 (Spring 1993): 80.