

## GERMAN INFLUENCE IN NEW ALBANY

*Tomorrow is Christmas eve and tomorrow night is the traditional time for Santa to leave his gifts for the children under the gaily-decorated Christmas tree. It's the way New Albany and the rest of the nation have celebrated Christmas for the past 90 years or so – but there were no Christmas trees in New Albany homes in the early days. The tree and the visit from Kris Kringle were traditions brought along by German immigrants who began arriving in the United States in the 1830s.*

The music and singing were loud, the beer flowed freely and the dancing was vigorous at the old Apple Tree Garden – the center of German social life in New Albany 60 years ago.

The Apple Tree Garden, New Albany's only genuine beer garden, was at West and Ealy Streets in what was then known as the West Union neighborhood – the whole area north of Falling Run Creek and extending from the foot of Silver Hills on the west to Pearl Street on the east.

West Union – which probably received its name from West Union Street – had been heavily populated with Germans from the time the first immigrants had arrived in the 1830s. No doubt Falling Run Creek provided the ideal location for the slaughter houses, tanneries and glue and tallow works which many of these early Germans established.

Brewing was another typical German occupation and the city's first brewery was established in the 1840s by Joseph Kealchle at the corner of West

Fourth and Spring – the location later of the well-known Reising Brewery owned by Swiss immigrant Paul Reising.

Other thrifty craftsmen among the German newcomers set up in business as tailors, stone carvers, furniture makers and other trades. Immigrants from rural Germany preferred farming and settled in the Catholic community around St. Mary's in Lafayette Township or at St. Joseph Hill on the Clark County line where they established St. Joseph Church.

The first German church in New Albany, however, was Protestant . . . St. Mark's Evangelical & Reformed . . . which was established in 1837 on State Street near Falling Run Creek and the West Union area. Other German churches established about 1850 were the United Brethren, a German Methodist and a German Presbyterian. In the middle 1850s German Catholics in the city, who had been attending Holy Trinity, established St. Mary's.

The establishment of these churches followed the second great wave of German immigration which came in the 1850s after the unsuccessful revolutions of 1848 in the German homeland. Imbued with liberal political attitudes, these German immigrants enlisted in great number in the Union Army during the Civil War to help preserve the unity of their adopted homeland.

In 1850 an attempt had been made to establish a German-language newspaper, called *The Sun*, in New Albany but it lasted only a short while. Not until 1875 was a successful German newspaper established here – the *Deutsche Zeitung*. The famous old *Louisville Anzeiger* was also read in most German households in New Albany and Floyd County.

About the time of the Civil War, New Albany's Germans established an elementary school on East Fourth Street with classes taught in German.

The German immigrants became some of the city's most solid and respected citizens and contributed not only to its economic life but its cultural life as well. Singing and music societies flourished after the Germans arrived and the old Maennerchor Halle, home of New Albany's German chorus, still stands on East Spring, today occupied by a power lawn mower business. Evidence indicates that the city's earliest marching brass band was established by the German citizens some 100 or more years ago.

The first World War brought an end to many manifestations of German influence in New Albany as in the rest of the country. Preaching in German was stopped in the churches, the German American Bank & Trust Company hastily changed its name to the American Bank and many German families found it prudent to stop reading German periodicals.

But this attitude did not spread to the Christmas tree and the visit from Santa. It had already become a part of American tradition – along with pretzels, hamburgers and hot dogs all of which came along with the German immigrants.

Where New Albany's first Christmas tree was erected can only be a matter of guess now, but it was probably in some snug little cottage in West Union where the cheery greeting rang out – "Froeliche Weihnachtsfest" – "Merry Christmas".

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