



**“We Shall Be
Literally ‘Sold
to the Dutch’”**

*Nativist Suppression
of German Radicals
in Antebellum
St. Louis, 1852-1861*

BY MARK ALAN NEELS

Between the years 1852 and 1861, an increasing influx of foreigners to St. Louis greatly exacerbated nativist anxiety in the city. Directed prominently at radical antislavery German immigrants, nativism manifested in both violent mob action and, later, in legislative efforts to suppress foreign influence in the political process. Ultimately, the violence between both the German-born and native-born citizens of St. Louis during these years preconceived the lines of contention in Missouri during the later conflict of the Civil War. Furthermore, throughout the ordeal of the 1850s, German immigrants held to their convictions and emerged from the conflict as one of the most influential voting groups in the state.

By the mid-1840s, German immigrants from previous decades had found their niche in St. Louis society. Obtaining an ample grasp of the English language and making significant contributions to the city's workforce, many had become fully immersed in an accepted "American" lifestyle. However, when a second wave of immigrants from the Fatherland arrived in the Mississippi valley in 1850, this second generation proved strikingly dissimilar to its predecessors. According to immigrant Henry Boernstein, this second wave contained refugees from Germany in the aftermath of the failed revolutions of 1848. Mainly artisans and intellectuals, Boernstein described them as fleeing "the iron fist of victorious reaction."¹

Nicknamed the "Forty-Eighters" after the year of their mass exodus to the American continent, these radical Germans began to make significant impacts on public policy in the years following their settlement in the Mississippi valley. Following their arrival, however, they also experienced trouble with the "native-born" population, which was largely xenophobic. As Boernstein recalled in his memoirs, the difference in appearance between the average "American" citizen and the rough European conjured up comparisons between the "civilized" and "uncivilized" man. "The Anglo-American took care to appear as a *gentleman*, always with a stovepipe hat, in black whenever possible, with a smooth-shaved face and clean boots," Boernstein wrote. That same Anglo-American gentleman "was rendered uncomfortable by the *peasant character* of the earlier German immigrants, with their caps, their long pipes, their sauerkraut and beer, and all the other peculiarities."²

Still, differences in appearance did not serve as the sole cause of apprehension between the classes. Rather, the American-born population became incensed at the foreign radicals when reading English translations of their native-language newspapers. The columns of German-language periodicals were full of democratic rhetoric, seeking to energize foreigners to preserve their European heritage by actively involving themselves in national and statewide elections. For instance, as late as October 1857, the German-language *Anzeiger des Westens* declared:

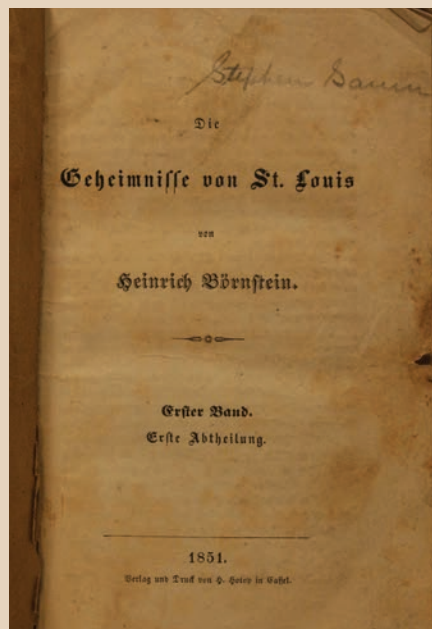
America belongs to *us* just as much as it does to *them*, and *our* spirit, *our* way of getting something out of life, and *our* concepts of economy can find a place in this country, its resources, and its development just as well as what the *natives* seem to think is predestined. [italics in original]³

Such rhetoric convinced many American-born citizens of the existence of a radical scheme to transplant a diluted form of the German revolution into their society. The earlier "Americanized" immigrants shared this anxiety, the fruit of which was a schism between the older generations of Germans and their new radical counterparts. More than any other single issue, this separation served, according to William Forster, as the cardinal failure in the German radicals' ability to adapt during their first years in the city. While older Germans were happy to adopt American behaviors and social patterns, the Forty-Eighters refused to assimilate so easily.⁴



After being marginally involved in the 1848 revolution in Paris where he launched a career as a journalist, political activist, and even homeopathic doctor for a short time, Henry Boernstein (1805-1892) came to St. Louis in 1850. He published Missouri's most influential German-language newspaper, *Anzeiger des Westens*, but moved to Bremen when Lincoln appointed him American consul. In his absence, *Anzeiger des Westens* ceased publication.

(Photo: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)



In 1851, Boernstein published *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, originally serialized in *Anzeiger des Westens* in German, then in English the following year as *Mysteries of St. Louis: The Jesuits on the Prairie des Noyers, a Western Tale*. The novel reveals Boernstein's anti-Catholic and anti-capitalism leanings, suggesting that Jesuits were acquiring the land around present-day St. Louis University as part of a plot to find hidden treasure and circumvent American democracy.

(Photo: Olin Library Special Collections, Washington University in St. Louis)

Over time, however, generational differences yielded to unity in response to the escalating pressures placed upon Germans by the native, anti-foreign population. In 1851, understanding that mutual animosity did nothing to collectively improve their future prospects, Boernstein joined with other Germans to promote what they called the Society of Free Men. Intended to strengthen and unify the German population “in the pursuit of a mutual cause by founding freethinking schools and by fighting the Jesuits,” the Society became one of the German population’s most prominent associations within a year. Furthermore, the use of the words “Free Men” in the Society’s name was no coincidence. Germans supported a free labor economic system, and while the Society stressed the preservation of German culture as its main objective, it also adopted an antislavery platform. The issue, unfortunately, was fraught with peril for future relations between the German immigrants and their nativist neighbors in Missouri. From that point on, freedom in all of its manifestations, rather than assimilation or enculturation, would be one of the most important issues for German-born citizens.⁵

While German immigrants were loud in their antislavery policies, it does not appear that slavery was a particularly explosive issue for most St. Louisans. Within the city limits, Floyd Shoemaker has noted, in 1850 there existed 1,700 free blacks and 1,500 slaves. Combined, blacks represented a miniscule portion (just over four percent) of the city’s overall population of 78,000 people. This figure helps to explain the difficulty the Society faced in taking sides, within St. Louis, on an issue that was of greater importance to out-state Missourians. Richard C. Wade explained this phenomenon further by stating his belief that most Missouri slave owners chose to reside in rural areas, rather than urban areas, because cities provided a greater challenge in isolating blacks from the free labor proponents among their neighbors. In St. Louis, therefore, the Germans came under attack from nativists not because of their antislavery agenda, but rather for their attempt to “Americanize” politics by involving themselves in a uniquely “American” problem. Outside of the city, however, the German attachment to free labor did draw animosity from proslavery activists. The alliance of nativists and proslavery ideologues would become more dangerous over time.⁶

Within a few years of their arrival in Missouri, the German radicals had completely electrified the political atmosphere in the state. In the years to come, as antislavery advocates and German immigrants joined forces against proslavery nativists, Missouri



Thomas Hart Benton (1782-1858) was among the most notable Jacksonians in the U. S. Senate for his five terms (1820-1850). In his last term, Benton worked to preserve the Union against what he considered the threat of southern extremists. His fight in the Senate against John Calhoun of South Carolina to allow slaves to be transported into western territories won him enemies among proslavery Missourians, including Claiborne Fox Jackson. (Photo: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

politics reflected the buffeting currents of discord that were fanning the flames of disunity across the entire nation. Nativist and proslavery opposition to the German electorate’s growing influence became so inflamed that Boernstein, in his position as editor of the *Anzeiger des Westens*, feared that the threats being leveled at him by nativists might culminate in violence similar to that which befell Francis McIntosh, a free black man burnt alive by a mob for the murder of two St. Louis dock workers. The execution by mob rule of editor Elijah Parish Lovejoy was also fresh in the minds of all antislavery St. Louisans.⁷

Perhaps Boernstein’s fears were justified. Starting in 1852, the rift between immigrants and nativists noticeably widened as violent uprisings, provoked by both parties, escalated in intensity. In that year, one Irish-born immigrant, disgusted by increasing anti-foreign sentiment, lamented to the editor of the *Missouri Republican*, “I wish every distinction founded on the accident of birth to be forgotten and abolished. All that I want is that when a man’s political claims are in question, it should not matter where he was born.”⁸ As elections approached in the city of St. Louis, many more commentaries such as this began appearing in the foreign newspapers. Meanwhile, out of

retaliation for the success of German-backed candidates, nativists increased their efforts to curb foreign enfranchisement.

The candidate dearest to the hearts of German St. Louisans was Senator Thomas Hart Benton. Just before the arrival of the radical Forty-Eighters, the Missouri senator had reversed his long-standing proslavery views, provoking a campaign of vilification against him by citizens outside the city. Because he eventually became an antislavery advocate, proslavery Democrats condemned him and his followers to political oblivion. With a growing schism in the Democratic Party, the minority Missouri Whig Party won a landslide victory in 1848, which one Democrat attributed to “the *traitorous designs* of T.H. Benton.” Rather than caucus with the victors, however, by June 1852 the Benton Democrats sought to introduce themselves as separate from the other two political organizations. Any chance of success, they believed, lay in continued opposition to the proslavery Democrats. Whigs shared common antislavery opinions with the Benton Democrats; however, the two parties opposed one another over the issue of foreign enfranchisement. Bentonites advocated for the rights of foreign-born citizens, while Whigs supported a nativist agenda. Attracted to the Benton party for obvious reasons, German voters had a profound influence on the continued success of the minority party of Benton and his partisans.⁹

Proslavery Missourians, like their Whig opponents, were largely nativist to begin with, and the combination of Benton's antislavery agenda and his embrace of foreigners made the senator and his constituents all the more disgusting to nativists of all political affiliations. After losing several elections in the space of four years, the same Democrats who had fervently opposed Benton fixed blame for their party's dire straits on meddling foreigners. In order to destroy Benton's future political prospects, proslavery men realized that they must rebuild their own party as an opposition to all things foreign. On that note, G.W. Good, a friend of the prominent Kennett family of Missouri, suggested to Colonel Ferdinand Kennett (brother of St. Louis Mayor Luther Kennett), "We shall be literally 'sold to the Dutch' & the sooner we put our house in order, the better... It seems to me that every man of character & influence in Missouri should esteem it his especial business to do all in his power to kill off Benton."¹⁰

Good elaborated further on his opinion of the Benton-foreign alliance by laying out a two-pronged strategy for reclaiming success for the anti-Benton party. First, they needed to strengthen the support of proslavery voters by opposing the antislavery wing of the Benton party. Second, they needed to win over disaffected Whigs through an anti-foreign platform. The result, Good hoped, would be an unstoppable opposition to antislavery foreigners by the majority of citizens and, consequently, the destruction of any party that linked its fate to that of the German radicals.

The first prong of this strategy, to win over anti-foreign Whigs, had largely succeeded by late March 1852 when Whigs began attributing the continued success of the Bentonites to the influence of German voters. A column titled "The Locofoco Row" appeared in the March 28 edition of the *Missouri Republican*, recounting the violence of a German mob toward an assembly of anti-Benton Democrats and Whigs at the St. Louis courthouse. *The Republican* reported that the *Anzeiger des Westens* had accused this nativist assembly of attempting to tear apart a fragile reunion between Benton Democrats and their disaffected proslavery partisans. *The Anzeiger*, the *Republican* claimed, had accused the Whigs of persuading the nativist Democrats to renege on an earlier compromise with the Bentonites to nominate candidates for municipal offices that would be acceptable to the German citizenry. *The Anzeiger's* editorial suggested, therefore, that this recent meeting at the courthouse was a conspiracy by nativist Whigs to aggravate the anti-foreign sentiment of the anti-Benton Democrats, and thereby nominate a new set of candidates—this time without the endorsement of the Germans.¹¹

An Act to Provide for the Organization, Support and Government of Common Schools, in the State of Missouri

Sec. 10: The English language, and its rudiments, shall be taught in all schools organized and kept up under this act.

Approved December 12, 1855
Revised Statutes of the State of Missouri, 1856

In 1855, Missouri state government passed a comprehensive act to standardize the organization, methods of funding, and duties of teachers in public schools around the state. Among those "reforms" for schools was this provision, Section 10 of Article VII, "Miscellaneous Provisions."

The allegations are confusing, to say the least, but the supposed attempt by the Whigs to break up unity within the Democratic Party was consistent with their party's earlier strategies for success. As John Mering suggested, the status of the Whigs as a minority meant that the only chance for success in elections lay either in endorsing "Whiggish" Democrats, or in electing Whigs by creating schism within the Democratic ranks. The latter was their preferred method. Thus, the editors of the *Anzeiger* argued that unless they were successfully blocked in their attempt at disunion, the nativist Whig candidates would once more achieve victory. Therefore, the *Anzeiger* concluded, it was the duty of all good Democratic Germans to thwart the efforts of the Whigs by any means necessary.¹²

Prompted by the *Anzeiger's* call to arms, on the evening of March 27, 1852, as the Whig and Democratic assembly met in the rotunda of the Courthouse, a German mob interrupted the proceedings by shouting over the voice of the convention chairman. Failing to effectively disrupt the meeting, the Germans rushed the podium and tore into pieces a scrim with the words "THE UNION OF DEMOCRACY" above the image of two hands clasped in friendship. The efforts of the mob were ultimately futile, and its only success was greater animosity from the natural-born citizens, along with a concentrated effort over the next few weeks on the



Besides being the site of the famous *Dred Scott v. Sanford* case, the St. Louis Courthouse was also the scene of a nativist mob in 1852. (Photo: Christopher Duggan, Lindenwood University)

part of nativists against Germans. Retaliation came the following Monday at a German rally near Laclede Market, when a pro-German demonstration was interrupted by an assembly of Whigs and anti-Benton Democrats who assaulted the foreigners with stones and debris. Several prominent Germans threatened to open fire on the assailants with their pistols. This episode did not come to an end until the municipal police intervened on the side of the nativists against the Germans.¹³

Nativists saved their most violent demonstration for Election Day. An anti-foreign mob led by notorious nativist Edward Zane Carroll Judson, alias Ned Buntline, assaulted the polling place of the primarily German First Ward—considered to be the epicenter of foreign political activity. Judson’s cohorts smashed the ballot box to pieces and scattered the Germans’ ballots through the streets, then followed up the assault by attacking and plundering the nearby German-owned taverns. Furthermore, when a few Germans resolved to protect their community and attempted to resist Judson and his followers, the assailants opened fire with revolvers while a municipal fire brigade joined the nativist ranks and turned their hoses on bystanders who attempted to assist the wounded Germans. By the time nightfall brought an end to the hostilities, a German tavern owned by a prominent member of the community had been burned to the ground, and the mob had quelled further German resistance by threatening to turn a cannon, confiscated from the German militia, on its own citizens. As had occurred in the Laclede Market riot, the nativist-controlled police force once again did nothing to suppress the violence. Possibly due to bad press generated from their earlier involvement in the Laclede riot, the police stood idly by in this case and offered no assistance to either party. The position of the police in these violent demonstrations was an important example of the lengths to which nativists would go in order to suppress foreign influence in civic affairs.

The violence of nativist mobs ultimately culminated in the reelection of their candidate, Luther M. Kennett, as mayor of St. Louis. However, their reactionary measures completely overshadowed the fact that by disturbing the earlier rally at the courthouse, the Germans had incited the mob war in the first place. Instead, any further reticence on the part of naturalized Germans to unify with the Society of Free Men vanished in the face of what was perceived by Germans to be a nativist onslaught. German unification became so strong, in fact, that German voters played an integral part in securing Benton’s election to the House of Representatives that August. Of the Germans’ increasing resilience, Boernstein later recalled, “The Germans were determined not to allow their right to vote to be altered by one iota. Their experience had been so considerably enriched by the events of the municipal

election in April that they drew even closer together, and they were resigned and prepared even for the worst.”¹⁴

Following Benton’s election in the fall of 1852, and realizing how mob reaction to German enfranchisement could backfire on them, proslavery Democrats and nativist Whigs began to revise their methods of foreign persecution. As earlier attempts to unify Whigs and Democrats under an anti-foreign banner had proven, animosity against foreigners knew no political affiliation. Thus, as the Whig Party declined in the middle part of the decade, the nativist Know-Nothing Party effectively took up the torch. Uniting under a common anti-foreign banner as the election of 1854 approached, they employed more professional means to suppress foreign involvement.

Drawing from the experience of the past six years, latter-day nativists understood the overwhelming influence of the foreign element on the outcome of statewide elections. Therefore, under the leadership of the Know-Nothings, an anti-foreign movement in the state legislature directed at the curtailment of foreign enfranchisement gained momentum in the middle years of the decade. In fact, the effective minimizing of foreign influence became key to the Know-Nothings’ 1856 national platform. Article 4 of their platform stated, “Americans *must rule* America, and for this purpose, before all others *only native-born citizens should be elected to all federal, state and municipal offices.*” The reaction from the pro-foreign populous to the national platform was, understandably, explosive.¹⁵

Know-Nothing literature rationalized the party platform by questioning whether immigrants were sufficiently tutored in the “American system” to effectively exercise their right to vote, and whether foreign loyalty among the immigrants lay with the welfare of the nation or with outside forces – such as the Pope. Most prominent, though, was concern at the overindulgent lifestyle of immigrants, who drank heavily and celebrated on Sundays. These concerns led

Know-Nothing state legislators to propose a temperance movement in an effort to curtail the conduct of business and consumption of alcohol on the Christian Sabbath. Since many Germans owned local taverns, they naturally bore the brunt of these measures.¹⁶

While temperance was successful at decreasing the number of drunks roaming the city streets on Sundays, the measures were of a greater and more immediate political significance in restricting tavern operating hours, which robbed foreigners of their primary venue for political fundraising. Taverns provided forums not merely for the conviviality of drink, but also for arguments over political issues. Furthermore, the profits from the sale of alcohol often went to fund pro-German campaigns. Restricting operating hours almost entirely suppressed the Germans’ best means of

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When the Know-Nothings
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except Negroes and
foreigners and Catholics.’
When it comes to this,
I should prefer emigrating
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where they make
no pretense of
loving liberty.”*

— Abraham Lincoln

opposing nativism.¹⁷

Rather than completely barring immigration, Alexander Keyssar defended the Know-Nothings by explaining that measures such as the temperance movement were meant only to temporarily restrict immigrant rights, and limit their political activity only until the immigrants could be properly acculturated to the American way of life. Out of a similar compulsion, in November 1857, anti-foreign members of the Missouri legislature rejected a request by German citizens to incorporate a town in central Missouri. Originally, the Germans hoped that nativists would welcome such a village. While it *did* create an epicenter from which to potentially promulgate the German culture in the state, proponents of the measure also argued that it removed foreign pressure from communities otherwise dominated by nativist populations. The *Anzeiger des Westens* asserted that slavery was the key issue leading to the measure's defeat. The legislature, the paper stated, denied the charter out of continual fear, whipped up by the proslavery advocates in the legislature, of abolitionist-leaning Germans. Indeed, Jefferson City sat in a primarily proslavery district and the legislature consisted of a majority of proslavery representatives. Were a German village to be located in this proslavery stronghold, it was certainly possible that, over time, the influence of free-labor Germans on local elections might tip the balance in the state legislature in the favor of antislavery proponents. The proslavery population therefore portrayed the failed measure as an attempt by the Germans to cultivate fertile soil for promoting their perceived threat of an association between "Germanism" and abolition. By voting down the measure, proslavery legislators had inaugurated a quest to eradicate both the uniquely German lifestyle and, simultaneously, to halt their opposition to slavery.¹⁸

The campaign to implement the nativist agenda, however, resulted in a spectacular backfire that consumed the Know-Nothings rather than their intended target. As quickly as the party appeared on the national scene, it disappeared. As was the case in previous years, the stronger the intimidation of the Know-Nothings, the stronger the German resistance. However, coming off of their victory against the German village and again currying favor with former anti-foreign Whigs and Know-Nothings, the anti-Benton Democrats successfully pressed the correlation between "Germanism" and antislavery politics until they were inextricably linked in the minds of anti-foreign politicians and citizens alike. Against this newly empowered force, the Benton Democrats stood little chance of further political gain. Cast adrift



Claiborne Fox Jackson (1806-1862) led the anti-Benton Democrats in the Missouri legislature. In 1850, when senators were still chosen by the state legislature rather than popular election, he was able to deny Benton a sixth term representing Missouri in the U. S. Senate. Later, he was elected governor of Missouri in 1860; he supported the Confederacy, and attended the Missouri General Assembly in Neosho in October 1861 that passed an ordinance of secession. He fled to Arkansas in early 1862, where he died of stomach cancer late that year. (Photo: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

and searching for a base from which to counter the onslaught of proslavery Democrats, the Benton Democrats eventually found refuge in the ranks of the fledgling Republican Party. Likewise, the Germans found in this new organization, their greatest ally in the fight against nativist suppression.¹⁹

On August 24, 1855, in response to the Know-Nothing national platform, Abraham Lincoln wrote to his friend, Joshua F. Speed, "How could anyone who abhors the oppression of Negroes be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. . . . As a nation," Lincoln continued, "We began by declaring that 'All men are created equal.' We now practically read it, 'All men are created equal except Negroes.' When the Know-Nothings get control it will read, 'All men are created equal, except Negroes and foreigners and Catholics.' When it comes to this, I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty."²⁰

The fact that the Republican Party nominated so moderate a candidate as Lincoln in 1860 helped to uplift the disaffected partisans from the ashes of previous political parties. The new party had managed to successfully form a coalition of Whigs, Benton Democrats, Know-Nothings, and Free-Soilers under one banner.

While antislavery Whigs and Know-Nothings had remained vehemently anti-foreign, they were far more opposed to what they saw as an emerging conspiracy by proslavery Democrats to monopolize power in Congress through the extension of slavery into the Western territories. German Missourians were equally opposed to this proslavery conspiracy, and were willing to overlook the inclusion of some nativists in the party ranks as long as the moderate Lincoln continued to support the sort of inclusive policies he had mentioned in his letter to Speed.

The emergence of the Republican Party, however, did not immediately absolve Missouri immigrants of the burden of nativist suppression. While Lincoln won the presidency in 1860, the anti-Benton Democrats secured the election of Claiborne Fox Jackson as governor. Jackson's administration, condemned by the *Anzeiger* as one of "arrogance, arbitrariness, ignorance, and coarseness incarnate," intensified the suppression of foreign enfranchisement in the months leading to the outbreak of war in Missouri. Indeed, it was under Jackson's leadership that the suppressive efforts of proslavery nativists reached a fevered peak.²¹

Newly inaugurated, the Jackson administration immediately enforced legislation that required immigrants to learn English in order to attend public schools. This act, the governor explained,



Despite nativist questions about them, German immigrants served in the Union Army during the Civil War. In St. Louis, they were commemorated by this statue in Forest Park of Franz Sigel, a commander in Baden during the Revolution of 1848 who arrived in the United States in 1852.

(Photo: Christopher Duggan, Lindenwood University)

was a punishment for the hostility exhibited by Germans during the previous decade toward the institutions of the state. Because of their incendiary acts against proslavery Democrats, he argued, Germans deserved no special favors or protections from the government. As an additional sting, the *Anzeiger* reported that the state legislature refused to print a German language edition of either the recent Language Act or the governor's inaugural speech. By refusing to print in the German tongue, Jackson and the Democrats essentially scoffed at the influence of German voters, refusing to acknowledge any cultural identity separating them from other citizens. By promoting these same measures, the new governor effectively sent the message that his administration sought to eradicate any sense of "Germanism" in Missouri, once and for all.

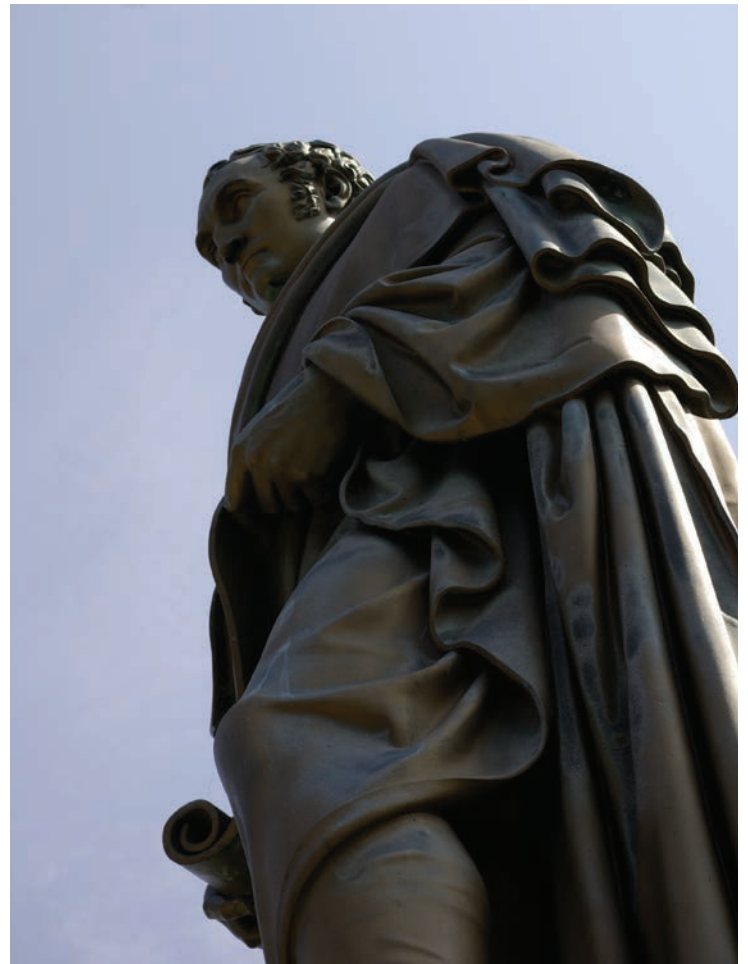
Another measure approved by the Missouri Senate barred further organized resistance to state officials in St. Louis. A prior act, in effect from March 1855, gave municipal leaders the power to quell mob action. This new act, however, revoked that authority and placed that power solely in the hands of the governor. Both the *Anzeiger* and the *Missouri Democrat* denounced the new act, arguing that, by approving such measures, the state legislature had evolved the office of the governor into a military dictatorship. "It

is a law," the *Anzeiger* declared, "that grants to people with a blue cockade an unlimited license to commit violent crimes of every sort without punishment."²²

Germans in St. Louis greatly feared that the new act would also allow the governor to declare them enemies of the state. Apart from quelling mobs, the language of the act was so ambiguous as to possibly allow Governor Jackson to sponsor mobs through inaction. With the enforcement of this act, a few nativists, miles away in the state capital, had ultimately nullified all of the gains made over the past decade for German Missourians.

In early April 1861, in accordance with the new legislation, the Jackson administration appointed new police commissioners in St. Louis. Their sole purpose was the removal of any organized opposition to the administration within the city limits. The *Missouri Republican* reported that, by the powers granted to them by the governor, the commissioners planned to again enforce the Sunday temperance laws. Furthermore, they planned to punish antislavery advocates by granting no permits or authorizations for travel to freed blacks or mulattos, and by imprisoning any person carrying abolitionist literature.²³

The following day, Sunday, April 14, 1861, news arrived of the surrender of Fort Sumter to rebel forces in Charleston, South Carolina. Simultaneously, in St. Louis the police commissioners began enforcing the temperance laws by sending law enforcement officers to close all German venues and expel their patrons into the streets. Resistance was met, particularly at the St. Louis Opera House, then under the management of Henry Boernstein. While



This statue of Thomas Hart Benton by Harriet Hosmer stands facing westward in Lafayette Square Park.

(Photo: Christopher Duggan, Lindenwood University)

Boernstein argued with the commissioners that the closing of German venues was an illegal suppression of German people's rights as business owners, the agitation of the assembly of theater patrons began to intensify. Only by a careful address to his fellow citizens did Boernstein manage to avert a riot.

Boernstein urged the citizens to oppose the hateful acts of the administration not with violence, as they had done in the past, but by voting against pro-Jackson candidates in the next election. However, the Jackson administration did not remain in power long enough to be swept away by constitutional means. When Jackson proclaimed Missouri's loyalty to the Confederacy, the administration's oppressive measures spawned armed resistance to secession by the entire German and free population of St. Louis. On April 19, 1861, the *Anzeiger* ran an editorial with the title, "Not One Word More – Now Arms Will Decide!" To that effect, following the governor's letter to the president denouncing the federal government's call for troops, Boernstein and several prominent German citizens, including later acclaimed Civil War commander Franz Sigel, met at the offices of the *Anzeiger* and agreed to muster a German militia to assist the federal troops.²⁴

The inclusion of nativists and German immigrants in the same political party proved that by 1860 some conservative nativists were willing to put aside their personal prejudices in order to pursue the far weightier common goal of preserving the Union. For example, General Nathaniel Lyon, the commander in charge of the Union forces in Missouri, was himself a nativist, while one of his closest lieutenants, Sigel, was a radical German. Still, the majority of Missouri nativists, those who had wreaked havoc on the German immigrants during the previous decade, opposed the Republicans and supported the rebellion. Prepared to resist once more their recent oppressors, Boernstein and other Germans raised troops for the defense of the Union and were intent upon keeping St. Louis loyal to the United States. To that end, the foreign element was heavily involved in both the capture of the rebel forces at Camp Jackson in May 1861 and the battle of Wilson's Creek later that August.²⁵

The influence of German Missourians was ultimately felt in all aspects of the war, political and military. While they fought valiantly in conflicts across the nation, they were most influential in local politics. Also, while some semblance of nativism continued in Missouri after the war, the postwar influence of the German citizenry assured that nativism never again reached the levels of

violence experienced during the Antebellum period. Likewise, by allying with the victorious antislavery party of the war, the German-speaking electorate had secured its influence in statewide affairs. For a time, in postwar politics, the foreign element proved so influential that the political party that carried its favor tended to carry the election as well.

Who were these German "radicals," anyway?

In 1848, Germany did not exist as we know it today. After the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (1792-1815) the Congress of Vienna had created the German Confederation, which was made up of 35 states and four free cities. These small states were ruled by conservative kings, princes, and dukes who feared that reform would lead to revolution such as they had recently witnessed in France. At the same time, some of their subjects (primarily university students and the middle classes) had adopted such "revolutionary" ideas as representative government, a constitution that included rights such as freedom of assembly and of the press, and a unified German state.

Revolutions broke out across much of Europe in 1848, including in many of the states of the German Confederation. They often began with peasants, hungry from the frequent bad harvests of the late 1840s, and the urban poor, who were also feeling pressured by the scarcity (or complete lack) of food and the loss of their jobs. Middle class liberals took advantage of the disorder to make political demands. After several months, rulers were able to retake control of their states; as they restored order, they were in no mood to make concessions to their ungrateful subjects. Constitutions given under pressure earlier were suspended or changed into conservative documents. Those who had recently rebelled often left Europe entirely, usually going to the United States where they hoped to avoid arrest or to find a place more in keeping with their ideas and ideals. Many of these Germans settled in St. Louis.

— JoEllen Kerksiek

NOTES

¹ Henry Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody: The Missouri Years of an Austrian Radical, 1849-1866*, trans. Steven Rowan (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997), 129-130.

² *Ibid.*, 131.

³ *Anzeiger des Westens*, October 22, 1857.

⁴ Walter Forester, *Zion on the Mississippi* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 252-53; *Mississippi Blatter*, March 27, 1859.

⁵ Boernstein, *Memoirs*, 136; James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri* (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1990), 176.

⁶ Floyd Calvin Shoemaker, *Missouri and Missourians: Land of Contrasts and People of Achievements* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1943), 575; Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 125-126.

⁷ Boernstein, *Memoirs*, 189.

⁸ *Missouri Republican*, March 18, 1852.

⁹ John Mering, *The Whig Party in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1967), 114; Flora Byrne to Charles F. Meyer, September 8, 1848, Meyer Family Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis [hereafter referred to as MHS].

¹⁰ G.W. Good to Col. F. Kennett, December 8, 1852, Kennett Family Papers, MHS.

¹¹ *Missouri Republican*, March 28, 1852.

¹² Mering, *The Whig Party in Missouri*, 19-25.

¹³ *Missouri Republican*, March 28, 1852; Boernstein, *Memoirs*, 178; *Missouri Republican*, March 31, 1852.

¹⁴ Boernstein, *Memoirs*, 198-199; William Norton, Diary, February 16, 1856, MHS.

¹⁵ Boernstein, *Memoirs*, 205; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 83.

¹⁶ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 145.

¹⁷ Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 84-85; *Anzeiger des Westens*, November 15, 1857.

¹⁸ Boernstein, *Memoirs*, 209-210.

¹⁹ *Mississippi Blatter*, December 24, 1859.

²⁰ Ward Hill Lamon, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln: 1847-1865* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 299.

²¹ *Anzeiger des Westens*, January 14, 1861.

²² Boernstein, *Memoirs*, 268-270; *Anzeiger des Westens*, April 16, 1861.

²³ *Missouri Republican*, April 13, 1861.

²⁴ *Anzeiger des Westens*, April 19, 1861.

²⁵ *Anzeiger des Westens*, April 19, 1861; Boernstein, *Memoirs*, 272-96. For an excellent study encompassing the German role in shaping events in Civil War Missouri, see William Garrett Piston and Richard W. Hatcher III, *Wilson's Creek: The Second Battle of the Civil War and the Men Who Fought It* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).