An Immigrant Heritage: South Dakota’s Foreign-Born in the Era of Assimilation

GERMANS, NORwegIANS, Dutch, Danes, Russians, Irish; Viborg, Eureka, Tabor, Lake Hendricks—a patchwork of European ethnic settlement colors the history of South Dakota. The people, the communities in which they settled, and the rich heritage the entire state enjoys give cultural meaning to the tourism motto “Land of Infinite Variety.”

After one hundred years of statehood, an effort to identify common themes that unite all ethnic groups seems an appropriate exercise. Much has been done and still needs to be done on each
South Dakota immigrant nationality, but such efforts frequently occur in isolation, leaving out the common circumstances that united most immigrants as they left their native countries. On arriving in the United States, the immigrants, individually and collectively, also enjoyed similar opportunities and combatted similar frustrations. Finally, as the number of foreign-born migrants declined after 1910, each South Dakota enclave faced the twin dilemmas of assimilation or maintenance of cultural identity. Because South Dakota's ethnic groups originated primarily in Europe—generally 90 percent or more of the foreign-born at any given census—the following observations are mainly (but not exclusively) applicable to those origins.

European economic and social conditions drove most immigrants to the United States. The century from 1820 to 1920 saw the largest population migration in world history—Europeans moving principally to the Western Hemisphere but also to Oceania and South Africa. This demographic "push" resulted from a combination of factors: (1) Industrial revolution and land reform destroyed an economic and social system extant since the Middle Ages. People left agricultural land, moved to cities for factory jobs,
then abandoned their country altogether for better opportunities. (2) European health conditions improved with the Industrial Revolution, which meant the population doubled between 1750 and 1850, resulting in more people than land or factory could absorb. (3) Persecutions for diversity in personal beliefs, including religious tenets, and for the reluctance to perform military service intensified with increased nationalism. (4) Emigration restrictions, such as feudal laws tying people to the land, relaxed. (5) Improvements in transportation facilitated movement of people across the Atlantic, shortening travel time from months to weeks or days.

A like number of phenomena “pulled” immigrants to the shores of South Africa, Oceania, and North and South America: (1) Vast interior land areas opened for settlement coincident with the subjugation of indigenous peoples. (2) State and territorial governments, speculators, and railroad corporations directed barrages of publicity at would-be emigrants. (3) Relative religious, political, and entrepreneurial freedoms existed in the new regions. (4) Positive feedback from initial settlers—so-called American letters—told those “back home” of the social liberties and economic cornucopias that awaited them. (5) General, sustained prosperity resulted from the Industrial Revolution with attendant agrarian and urban growth. American economic booms from 1865 to 1873, in the early 1880s, and the early 1900s encouraged immigration. National depressions in 1873 and 1893 and the Dakota hard winter of 1886-1887 had reverse effects.

Nearly 34 million people left Europe and moved to the United States alone from 1820 to 1920. Thereafter, this country adopted a more restrictive quota system and generally ceased an open immigration policy. More than half of this 34 million came during three specific decades. Between 1881 and 1890, 5.2 million arrived; between 1901 and 1910, 8.8 million came to America; and between 1911 and 1920, 5.7 million came. Historians have traditionally divided this influx into two distinct categories, based on region of origin within Europe. “Old” immigrants arrived between 1820 and 1890—with 1882 the single peak year. Ethnically, most of these migrants traced their origins to the British Isles, northern Germany, and Scandinavia. All the “push” factors culminated in these regions before 1890. Thereafter, those same developments matured in southern and eastern Europe. Between 1890 and 1920 (with a 1907 peak), most immigrants came from the east Baltic region, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy. These people became the “new” immigrants.
A quick overlay of South Dakota history reveals dramatic growth at the precise crest of the old immigration. The Great Dakota Boom, which had its most significant impact east of the Missouri River, increased South Dakota's population by 734 percent between 1870 and 1880 and by another 255 percent in the decade that followed (Table 1). Coincident with this, most rural settlement in the American West took place before 1890. As a result, the population in this newly settled land had a heavy base of Germanic (from in and outside the borders of what became Germany), Scandinavian (Norwegian, Swedish, Danish), Dutch, and English-speaking (English, Welsh, Irish) peoples.

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the strength and composition of South Dakota’s foreign-born population between 1870 and 1950. German immigrants make up the largest percentage of the state’s ethnic population because most foreign-born listed under “Russia” were Germans who had first settled near the Black Sea then moved to South Dakota in the 1870s. The aberration in this block of old immigrants was the Czechoslovakian settlement, which began in Yankton and Bon Homme counties in the early 1870s and pushed gradually westward. This migration resulted from a specific colonization effort and predates by nearly three decades the general movement of southern Europeans into the United States. By the time this influx of new immigrants arrived in North America, most “free” western land had been settled. More opportuni-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Foreign-Born Population</th>
<th>Percent Foreign-Born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>11,776</td>
<td>4,815 $^a$</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>98,268</td>
<td>37,636 $^a$</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>348,600</td>
<td>91,055</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>401,570</td>
<td>88,508</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>583,888</td>
<td>100,790</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>636,547</td>
<td>82,534</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>690,755</td>
<td>66,061</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>642,961</td>
<td>44,122</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>652,740</td>
<td>30,932</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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$^a$Approximate foreign-born population in what became South Dakota.
TABLE 2
SOUTH DAKOTA FOREIGN-BORN BY COUNTRY OF BIRTH, 1890-1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1890</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>5,524</td>
<td>8,708</td>
<td>13,061</td>
<td>16,813</td>
<td>20,918</td>
<td>19,788</td>
<td>19,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany a</td>
<td>5,248</td>
<td>8,304</td>
<td>12,739</td>
<td>15,674</td>
<td>21,544</td>
<td>18,172</td>
<td>18,188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia b</td>
<td>4,423</td>
<td>6,468</td>
<td>9,023</td>
<td>11,193</td>
<td>13,189</td>
<td>12,492</td>
<td>12,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2,677</td>
<td>4,361</td>
<td>6,540</td>
<td>8,573</td>
<td>9,908</td>
<td>8,647</td>
<td>7,746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2,528</td>
<td>3,721</td>
<td>5,298</td>
<td>5,983</td>
<td>6,294</td>
<td>5,208</td>
<td>4,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada c</td>
<td>1,656</td>
<td>1,834</td>
<td>2,922</td>
<td>3,455</td>
<td>5,012</td>
<td>5,906</td>
<td>8,432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1,547</td>
<td>2,008</td>
<td>3,068</td>
<td>3,218</td>
<td>2,656</td>
<td>1,566</td>
<td>1,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England &amp; Wales</td>
<td>1,167</td>
<td>1,548</td>
<td>2,159</td>
<td>2,943</td>
<td>4,024</td>
<td>3,962</td>
<td>5,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia d</td>
<td>1,058</td>
<td>1,593</td>
<td>2,589</td>
<td>2,819</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland (N. &amp; Eire)</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>1,213</td>
<td>1,954</td>
<td>2,980</td>
<td>3,298</td>
<td>4,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria d</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>1,151</td>
<td>5,372</td>
<td>3,263</td>
<td>3,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland b</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>1,085</td>
<td>1,381</td>
<td>1,175</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>1,102</td>
<td>1,153</td>
<td>1,579</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada-French</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>1,138</td>
<td>1,061</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Includes a portion of Poland prior to 1920.

Finland is included with Russia prior to 1900. Germans from Russia are listed under Russia.

Includes Newfoundland.

Parts of Poland and Czechoslovakia are included in Austria prior to 1920.

ties for employment existed in the industrializing urban areas east of the Mississippi River. Because it lacked such opportunities, South Dakota attracted few southern Europeans after 1900. After 1890, however, one important immigration "pull" exerted itself in South Dakota—vainglorious letters from first-round, foreign-born settlers encouraged their former Old Country neighbors to join them. Added to promotional literature from states and railroads, this word-of-mouth advertising took on a momentum of its own. South Dakota, instead of experiencing substantial "new" immigrant settlement after 1900, saw large numbers of European neighbors join their foreign-born compatriots who had moved to the Northern Great Plains decades earlier. Large portions of entire villages emigrated to join friends who had gone before. Examples abound: the Opdalinger from the Opdal Valley in Norway who came to Yankton, Danes from the Lake Thisted region who settled near Badger, Swiss-Germans from the villages of Waldheim and Horodisch who settled near Turkey Creek, Protestant German-Russians—Schwarzmeerdeutschen—who settled
near Eureka. The correspondence often took the encouraging form of money and tickets sent from America to others in Europe. By the turn of the century, more than thirty percent of Scandinavian immigrants came on prepaid tickets. Hence, the flow of information and the flow of new ethnic settlers continued in pre-established patterns. Germans brought more Germans; Norwegians brought more Norwegians.

Conditions in Europe coincident with the Great Dakota Boom had dictated the predominant ethnic populations of eastern South Dakota. West river settlement in the first decades of the present century generally extended the nature of that composition, and the ethnic groups in the two parts of the state are about the same. Again, few southern and eastern Europeans came to South Dakota’s prairies between 1900 and 1920, even though they poured into the United States at record levels. Most stayed in eastern cities and took industrial jobs.

In Deadwood, Chinese immigrants held a funeral service while curious Caucasians looked on, 1891.
Concurrent with the 1820-1920 century of immigration came the rise of xenophobia, which ultimately closed the open book of American opportunity. The restriction of immigration took root in several concerns. Claims of racial inferiority, buoyed by pseudoscientific explanations of white superiority, focused primarily on Asians (first Chinese, then Japanese) and darker-skinned southern Europeans. Religious prejudices also played a part as historic anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish threads wove through the fabric of American development. Political paranoia took form with the “anarchists” who assassinated presidents or caused labor unrest and the antidemocratic forces that produced urban bossism or “Red scares.”

Economics predominated among the concerns that bred immigration restriction, however. Prosperity and growth required cheap labor to feed it. Successions of immigrant groups took the poorest jobs under the worst conditions to build railroads, stoke steel furnaces, mine ore, and cut timber. Those same immigrants willingly undercut nascent unionization as quickly as capitalists brought them in to do so. Depressions exacerbated the conflict between established workers and the recently arrived competition.

Political arguments that took place far removed from South Dakota ultimately dammed the flow of immigrants and meant a decline in the number of foreign-born after 1910. In 1875, Congress passed the first restriction on immigrants, banning convicts and prostitutes. By 1882, West Coast and mining prejudices (those of the Black Hills included) against Chinese immigrants produced an Exclusion Act. Racial discrimination and fear of economic competition transferred readily to the Japanese who replaced their Asian neighbors until President Theodore Roosevelt felt compelled to negotiate the Gentlemen’s Agreement in 1907. This arrangement stopped most Japanese immigration but did not dispel prejudices, which boiled to the surface in World War II.

Elsewhere in the United States, xenophobia continued to nibble away at the concept of open immigration. Periodic economic depressions and the rise of unions, such as the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor (who listed sizeable numbers of foreign-born among their members), gave rise to the proposal of literacy tests as a method of limiting immigration. In the midst of the Panic of 1893, Congress passed such legislation, but President Grover Cleveland vetoed it. By 1907, Congress resolved to take action and appointed a joint House-Senate committee
under the leadership of Senator William P. Dillingham (Vermont) to study the matter. In 1911, the Dillingham Commission issued a forty-two-volume report that generally found old immigrants to be more industrious and suitable for citizenship than the new foreign-born. Dillingham's report did not go so far as to suggest a ban on immigration, but he did propose restricting limitations, based on a percentage of the number from each nationality currently residing in the United States. The 1913 Congress responded with another literacy restriction, but President William Howard Taft refused to sign it, firm in his belief that America should welcome immigration.

National sentiment changed dramatically with American entry into World War I. Nativism and xenophobia ran rampant. It reached its worst form in restrictive anti-German legislation at the state level. South Dakota's Germanic population suffered most—particularly Hutterite groups who, in addition to speaking a foreign language, did not believe in swearing allegiance to a government or serving in the military. German-language newspapers and businesses ceased to exist. Hutterites left South Dakota and the other western states, where they had settled only forty years earlier, for the more rational protection of the Canadian government.

Close upon wartime discrimination came the anti-foreigner Red scare of 1919 and a nativistic resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in postwar America. Many Americans feared another wave of "new" immigrants, and Congress scrambled for a solution. In 1921, one-year, stopgap legislation limited the number of immigrants from any one country to three percent of that country's foreign-born total already in America as of the 1910 census. Legislators had returned to the Dillingham solution. This meant 358,000 Europeans could enter the United States in 1922, less than half of the 800,000 who arrived in 1921.

Congress extended and tinkered with the 1921 law, settled on the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, then made its provisions permanent in 1929. This legislation effectively ended the era of open immigration in the United States. The Johnson-Reed Act continued the existing exclusions: no anarchists, prostitutes, illiterates, or destitute. Its most important policy change came in the focus and size of permitted immigration. Two percent (rather than three) became the quota (ultimately limited to 153,714 per year), but Congress set the benchmark census year as 1890, rather than 1910. That deliberate move discriminated against new immigrants—the southern and eastern European settlers who began coming to the United States after 1890. England and Ireland took
54 percent of the total; Germany 17 percent; Scandinavia 4.4 percent; every other country something less. Clearly, Congress saw the English-speaking, the Germanic, and the Scandinavian immigrants as most desirable.

Between 1917 and 1921, regional and national constrictions effectively closed ethnic immigration into South Dakota. West river’s land rush “used up” the last available homesteads; federal legislation shut the open door and dimmed the Statue of Liberty’s light for Europe’s huddled masses. What was the legacy for ethnic South Dakota? Decline.

Statistically, the number of South Dakota foreign-born declined twofold (Table 1). Such immigrants clearly made up a large portion of the territory’s first settlers, reflected in their 40.9 percent and 38.3 percent representations in the 1870 and 1880 census data. As settlers from other regions of the United States joined the foreign-born on the eastern prairies, the latter’s portion of the total population declined relentlessly. In absolute numbers, the foreign-born increased during the Great Dakota Boom, declined in the decade that followed, but peaked as a result of west river settlement between 1900 and 1910. Thereafter, the lack of urban employment opportunities, mortality, and immigration restrictions meant numeric decline.

Beyond the statistical absolutes, such data held long-term implications for South Dakota ethnic groups. By and large, the foreign-born had founded their communities as enclaves in a dominant culture. Continued immigration replenished the foreign-born stock and rejuvenated cultural uniqueness. Without an influx of new immigrants, social and economic interaction took its toll on ethnicity; so, too, did marriage. Second-generation offspring had no first-hand attachment to an alien country or customs; third-generation, usually even less. Time also played a role. Most immigrants came to the United States in their twenties. As years passed from the date of immigration, the foreign-born aged. According to the 1930 census, nearly 99 percent of South Dakota’s Germans from Russia arrived before 1914; as did 93 to 94 percent of the Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, and Czechs; 90 percent of the English and Danes; and 80 percent of the Dutch. As original ethnic settlers grew older, it fell on native-born progeny to maintain cultural values and customs; not all did.

All cultures use a limited number of institutions to maintain ethnic identity: family, language (spoken or written), church, school, social or fraternal groups, and material culture (buildings or artifacts indigenous to the culture). To one extent or another, all
During World War I, the German-speaking residents of Eureka (above) and other areas with large German populations became suspect as xenophobia ran rampant. Marches, bond drives, and other shows of patriotism were expected of loyal South Dakota residents.

South Dakota ethnic groups established these institutions. As they flourished, so did the sense of ethnic identity; as they declined, the group's sense of unique national origin did likewise. Coupled with the statistical dwindling of ethnic population in South Dakota after 1910 is the progressive demise of these institutions.

Cultural density, or "critical mass," served to mitigate the rate of decline. While all immigrants tended to settle near people of their own nationality, some groups formed tighter and larger communities than others. Czechoslovaksians in Bon Homme County, Danes in Turner, Swedes in Union, and Germans from Russia in Hutchinson, McPherson, and Edmunds provide good examples. Several hundred foreign-born of the same nationality gave cohesion as well as social and economic viability to a group. All those counties were also relatively sparse in population, which meant that an ethnic enclave exerted an influence beyond its statistical limits and felt less threatened by a native-born majority.

Irish foreign-born are a different story. Even in Minnehaha County, where they had their highest numbers, they never reached two hundred. Surrounded by the overall size of Sioux Falls, they could not exert the same influence or maintain the same visibility that the Czechs of Bon Homme County enjoyed. Norwegians and non-Russian Germans provided another type of example. While both groups top the list of overall numbers of eth-
Immigrant Heritage

nic immigrants in South Dakota, they spread themselves throughout the state. Such dispersion meant quicker assimilation and a more rapid decline of unique social institutions.

Immigration restrictions codified in the 1921 federal legislation marked the beginning of the end for significant numbers of European foreign-born families in the United States. Not all individuals of a specific nationality married someone with the same background. With the exception of the Irish, European foreign-born immigration included more males than females. Some of the prepaid tickets that went from the United States to Europe brought over women and children to join fathers, husbands, and brothers. Other men and women who immigrated joined compatriots in ethnic enclaves and found spouses from their own nationality group. Nationally and in South Dakota, this happened most often among Germans from Russia, Czechs, Swedes, and Norwegians. Immigrants from the British Isles, Danes, and Germans (in general) found spouses outside their ethnic background more frequently than not.

Demographically, then, three dynamics worked to break up the ethnic family. First, after 1921 fewer foreign-born arrived. Next, as discussed earlier, immigrants aged. A foreign-born couple of the same ethnic background reached their childbearing years, had children (who were, of course, native, not foreign-born), grew older, and ultimately died. The number of foreign-born listed on Table 1 declined predictably after 1910. Finally, cultural pluralism gave way to a melting pot where a foreign-born German male

Fear of foreigners and other insecurities led the Ku Klux Klan to march in Rapid City and elsewhere in the state during the 1920s.
married a foreign-born Norwegian female and had children who identified with both nationalities, or neither.

Perhaps the best example of a cohesive ethnic group whose social institutions still declined in the face of Americanization can be found in the Germans from Russia. They faced the same challenges that confronted all immigrant groups in preserving their ethnic institutions and identity. When their migration from Germany to Russia began in 1763, Empress Catherine the Great granted the immigrants extensive rights that helped preserve their cultural identity. In addition to providing some financial assistance with initial settlement and limited freedom from taxation, she exempted them from military service (which their faith forbade) and permitted them almost total autonomy in setting up schools, churches, and local government. Under such conditions, those Germans maintained their family, language, and ethnic identity for more than a century.

In 1871, Czar Alexander II began to modify previous protections, and the Germans looked elsewhere to relocate. Delegations to the
United States and Canada in 1872-1873 requested similar concessions. The Canadian government agreed to most of the conditions; President Ulysses S. Grant’s administration did not. All the same, migration began to Manitoba, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. Unable to obtain large blocks of land from the government or the railroads to reestablish their European-like villages, these Germans from Russia sought out private landholders and purchased sites for prairie colonies—like a twenty-five-hundred-acre site in Bon Homme County in 1874 and other locations in Hutchinson County in 1874 and 1877. In time, a series of colonies also nestled along the James River.

Sown with the seeds of their first crops were the germs of ethnic destruction. The surrounding society had assumed that assimilation, not isolation, was the primary purpose of immigration. Accordingly, English dominated as the language of business, government, and social interaction. Furthermore, immigrant children attended public schools, parents functioned within the expectations of local governments they did not control, and churches fit denominational patterns, not local predilection.

A German-language press arose to provide newspapers for the new immigrants, and yet by their very existence, these publications assisted in breaking down ethnic uniqueness. Historian Anton H. Richter summarized their purposes:

The foreign-language papers . . . provide [immigrants] with a linguistic lifeline, which is extremely important if serious mental and emotional conflicts are to be avoided. One’s language, after all, is one of the most important components of one’s psyche. While acquiring English, the immigrant finds security in the mother tongue. The foreign-language press also serves as an agent of Americanization, providing instruction in the history, ideals, and procedures of the new country, printing local and national news, giving advice in its editorials, and acquainting the newcomer with the American standard of living.²

The *Dakota Freie Presse*, which began in Yankton in 1874, is the best and longest running example of this ethnic-language medium. At their peak in 1909, 785 German-language newspapers existed in the United States. Over time, South Dakota supported 25 such papers; North Dakota, 39. Their success was also their failure. Many papers started as German-only enterprises. Over time, fewer readers spoke only German, and articles appeared in English as well. As German immigrants became more Americanized, they had less need for a special ethnic press. By

1928, South Dakota lost its last German-language newspaper. Between 1954 and 1955, the final North Dakota journals closed their doors. The same process can be seen in the history of the Tabor Independent, published between 1904 and 1952 to serve the Czech population in southeastern South Dakota. Its columns carried articles in English and Czech to ease the assimilation process until the need no longer existed.

Unquestionably, the greatest threat to preservation of language and cultural values occurred during World War I amid the anti-German paranoia that swept the nation. South Dakota, with large numbers of German foreign-born and readily identifiable groups such as Hutterites, experienced particular violence. As did most states, South Dakota organized a Council of Defense in April of 1917 to oversee state support of war effort. On 25 February 1918, the council issued a letter to all educational institutions proclaiming "the teaching of the German language in the public schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions of learning within the State, is detrimental to the best interests of the nation."3 It ordered the immediate cessation of such activity. On 25 May, the council made its pronouncement official in Order No. 4 and then in July went on to issue Order No. 13, which banned any public use of the German language. This prohibition extended to church services and reached the point at which all churches in the German-Russian community of Eureka were closed and locked by authorities. Yankton and Faulkton had book burnings, ridding schools and libraries of anything in the German language.

Hutterites formed a special target for anti-German sentiment. In 1871, they had fled Russia when forced into military service and denied religious freedom. In 1918, they faced precisely the same persecution in the United States. Twelve of South Dakota’s seventeen Hutterite colonies moved to Canada in 1918. Shortly thereafter, four more left, and at war’s end, only one remained. Likewise the German-language press suffered. In 1917, six papers in South Dakota served approximately thirty-seven thousand subscribers. By 1920, only one survived with fewer than four thousand paid readers. During those brief war years, prejudice against the German foreign-born reached extreme heights and placed great stress on members of the ethnic group to preserve any aspect of their cultural identity. German culture, which had survived a

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In 1914, the Tabor Independent printed full pages in the Czech language. By 1924, only one or two announcements appeared in Czech as the need for foreign-language newspapers decreased among the immigrants.
SOUTH DAKOTA ON DUTY

THE STATE COUNCIL OF DEFENSE issued a bi-monthly newsletter chronicling its activities.

"Buy Coal NOW or Twist Hay Next Winter"

What is this behind the great exodus of the cattle people to the West toward the end of the 19th Century? Was it because of the advent of the railroad that made it possible to move large herds of cattle across the country? Or was it because of the drought that caused many farmers in the Midwest to move west in search of new opportunities? These are questions that have been posed by historians for many years. "Buy Coal NOW or Twist Hay Next Winter" is a reference to the advice given by the State Council of Defense to farmers to prepare for the future by investing in coal now, rather than waiting until it was too late. This advertisement was part of the council's efforts to prepare the state for future disasters.

The State Council of Defense issued a bi-monthly newsletter chronicling its activities.
century in Russia relatively unchanged, had suffered major duress in South Dakota after less than fifty years.\(^4\)

Religion played a central role in the lives of many foreign-born, and the ethnic church served as a focal point for community identity. This was particularly true during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries before other community institutions rose to fill the social needs of settlers. In the church, as well as the temporal world, language held the key to ethnic preservation. Here, again, a specific example illustrated the impact of change. Norwegian Lutherans transplanted their native church to South Dakota. As might be expected, the greatest number of new churches went up during the Great Dakota Boom—128 churches by 1889. (Some churches served more than one congregation.) During the first twenty-five years of statehood, Norwegians added another 119 churches; during the ten years from 1916 to 1926, twelve more; in the decade thereafter, none.

In 1905, a national organization, the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, began to sample its membership regarding the language of choice in conducting services. One hundred seventeen South Dakota congregations reported. Only one indicated exclusive use of English; 16 used both English and Norwegian; 100 worshiped in Norwegian only. A decade later, 164 churches reported, and still only 10 used just English; 68, just Norwegian; 86, both. By 1925, the incursion of English had become pronounced: among the 261 congregations, 47 listed English alone; 202 employed both; and only 12 used Norwegian exclusively. A decade later, not one Norwegian Lutheran church in South Dakota used only the native tongue; congregations were equally divided between English only and both languages.\(^5\)

Not surprisingly, rural churches stuck to Norwegian more than their urban counterparts, but all had to adapt or risk membership loss. The fact that membership increased during the same thirty-five-year period indicated that non-Norwegians and American-born descendents joined the church—the change to English was the price the ethnic church had to pay. Organizationally, Norwegian Lutheran churches also became homogenized. In 1890, six separate synods served South Dakota’s Norwegian Lutherans. By

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1930, consolidation and federation brought together most Norwegians and twenty-one other ethnic Lutheran synods (German, Danish, Swiss, Swedish) into the Evangelical Synod Conference and the American Lutheran Conference. Together, they accounted for 95 percent of all Lutheran congregations in the state.

The same conversion to English-language services and administrative consolidation took place in all ethnic denominations: Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Mennonite. Most change and merger occurred between the 1910 peak in foreign-born numbers and the mid-1930s. The process continued as ethnic differences faded with the passing of time.

Ethnic social and fraternal organizations also struggled to exist after 1921. Norwegians had Sons of Norway, Bygdelags, and Norwegian Singers Association to preserve their sense of community and material culture; Danes focused on the Danish Brotherhood; Czechoslovaks met under the aegis of the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association and in Sokols to preserve their language and ethnic values beyond first-generation immigrants. Most fraternal and social organizations also included in their purposes some form of life or burial insurance to replace support that would have been available in the Old Country through the extended family. Each organization sought to preserve their cultural uniqueness; yet all exhibited some of the same patterns in growth and decline.

These organizations formed nationally between 1880 and 1900. As immigrants arrived in the United States, they realized their separation from native culture and sought to found institutions in this country to preserve their heritage. Most organizations in South Dakota experienced their greatest growth between 1900 and 1920. This came after the major influx of population as more foreign-born realized their European cultural identity was slipping away with assimilation and Americanization.

Immigration restriction in 1921 marked the start of membership decline. A few new lodges formed, reorganized, or consolidated with neighboring groups, but by 1930 the number of organizations and their membership had dropped substantially. Surviving lodges faced the same dilemma that confronted churches. Originally, an attribute of membership was preservation of language, so members conducted lodge rituals and business in the native tongue. As American-born generations sought membership (or their parents encouraged it), English became the dominant language if the organization wanted to survive and grow. Economic hardship and the depression of the 1930s reduced support even further. By
World War II, only a few ethnic lodges remained, always in a community with a large enough enclave to provide support. Rural groups, like communities in which they resided, declined and died. Second- and third-generation members moved away from the values, culture, and communities of their foreign-born ancestors.

Between 1930 and 1950, several phenomena combined to further curtail the preservation of ethnic culture in South Dakota. Time continued to reduce the number of foreign-born, increase the native-born, and distance ethnic groups from their European heritage. Economic depression curtailed financial support and made earning a living more important than preserving cultural values. Nativism and xenophobia experienced a resurgence during World War II and the Cold War hysteria that followed. Relocation of Japanese-Americans between 1942 and 1945 and concern over “un-American” activities after the war are examples.

After 1930, another form of ethnic decay became increasingly obvious—material culture began to disappear. Foreign-born brought with them styles in architecture, costume, art, and handicraft. Some had actual physical items such as quilts and rosemaled furnishings. Others built the same kind of thing they had left behind in Europe, such as Germans from Russia who erected homes and stoves of a particular design or Finns who enjoyed outdoor saunas. Time took its toll on these physical items as well as on the women and men who knew how to make and use them. Some artifacts and skills were passed on to succeeding generations; others were not.

The several decades immediately following South Dakota’s 1910 peak in the numbers of foreign-born settlers, therefore, witnessed the general decline in the influence, institutions, and values they brought to the state. Their arrival had been the result of patterns extant beyond South Dakota’s borders. Pressures to succeed financially, to Americanize, and to preserve ethnic heritage were also not unique to this state. Likewise, immigration restrictions codified during the 1920s fell beyond the purview of state power, “dried up” the flow of new foreign-born, and meant a predictable decline in ethnic group vitality. Specific South Dakota examples wove their own threads in the patterns of a national fabric.

Fortunately, the 1930s also witnessed some effort to preserve ethnic culture. New Deal programs assisted churches, societies, communities, and counties in gathering and preserving their records, an effort that gave support to the retention of diversity in South Dakota’s cultural heritage. Rural sociologist John P. Johansen at South Dakota State College in Brookings also combed
The people of Tabor, South Dakota, have been especially careful to preserve their cultural heritage, sponsoring an annual Czech Days celebration in which to honor and renew their cultural roots.

The state to gather data, which he published in two Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletins: Immigrants and Their Children in South Dakota in 1936 and Immigrant Settlements and Social Organization in South Dakota in 1937. Fortunately, too, larger ethnic enclaves struggled to preserve their foreign heritage: Germans from Russia at Eureka and Freeman, Dutch at New Holland, Czechs at Tabor, Welsh at Powell, Danes at Viborg, Norwegians at Augustana College—all stand out as successful examples.

From such efforts and the cultural tenacity of many private individuals, South Dakota has preserved a flavor of its ethnic heritage. Centennials of community settlement and the national bicentennial in 1976 have provided further inspiration and impetus for preserving, printing, and disseminating information about this part of our past. The celebration of South Dakota’s statehood centennial throughout 1989 provides another opportunity to bear testimony to the contribution these foreign-born immigrants have made and to the color and resilience of their traditions.
South Dakotans have much from which to choose when examining the state’s ethnic heritage. To date, however, we still need a comprehensive volume that attempts to unify the subject—a lack other writers have decried for more than fifty years. Without a doubt, the best starting point for bibliography on South Dakota’s foreign-born is Gerald F. De Jong’s article “Dakota Resources: A Preliminary Guide for Studying European Ethnic Groups in South Dakota: A Bibliographic Essay,” which appeared in *South Dakota History* 15 (Spring/Summer 1985): 66-114. De Jong picks up all significant primary, secondary, and journal material prior to 1985 and cites worthwhile national studies that place South Dakota’s experience in context. A recent work on a single ethnic group is Anthony H. Richter “A Bibliography of Works Dealing with Germans in South Dakota,” *Schwartzkammer* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1988):162-186. *South Dakota: Changing, Changeless, 1889-1989: A Selected Annotated Bibliography*, edited by Sue Laubersheimer and issued by the South Dakota Library Association in 1985 (with supplement and index) also helps, as does *Planning for the South Dakota Centennial: A Bibliography*, edited by Herbert T. Hoover and published by the South Dakota Committee on the Humanities in 1984.

The seminal statistical studies of South Dakota are the two South Dakota State College Agricultural Experiment Station bulletins that John P. Johansen prepared in 1936 and 1937: *Immigrants and Their Children in South Dakota*, Bulletin no. 302 (May 1936), and *Immigrant Settlements and Social Organization in South Dakota*, Bulletin no. 313 (June 1937), in which much information on each ethnic group and their cultural institutions appears. Another South Dakota State University sociologist, Douglas Chittick, did an excellent narrative overview of the state’s ethnic settlement patterns and heritage entitled “A Recipe for Nationality Stew,” in *Dakota Panorama*, ed. J. Leonard Jennewein and Jane Boorman (n.p.: Dakota Territory Centennial Commission, 1961), pp. 89-145. Other sources I have used on South Dakota topics are noted in De Jong’s article, except material on World War I, which is cited in footnotes.


Finally, this essay is a good place to renew the call that both John P. Johansen and Gerald F. De Jong issued for a comprehensive history of South Dakota ethnic groups. It is also appropriate to reaffirm the rich cultural resources that survive in many South Dakota communities—lasting legacies of the contributions from European foreign-born.
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