

# Steven Rowan

Long-time SGAS member Steven Rowan, professor of history at the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL), has written, edited and translated extensively on the history of Germans in America. The German American Heritage Society (GAHS) of St. Louis recently recognized Rowan’s efforts by naming him this year’s Carl Schurz Heritage Award recipient.



The GAHS award was named for the famous 19th-century German immigrant who served as a Civil War general, newspaper publisher, U.S. envoy to Spain for President Abraham Lincoln, U.S. senator from Missouri, and secretary of the interior under President Rutherford B. Hayes. Each year it recognizes an individual or organization for his or her “dedication to the preservation of the history and heritage of our German forebears.”

Rowan was born in Bremerton, Wash., and raised in Spokane, Wash. He earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Washington in Seattle and a doctorate in history from Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass.

He has taught at UMSL since 1970. His research and teaching leaves have included the following:

- Teacher of reformation paleography in summer sessions at Concordia Seminary in Clayton, MO, since 1974;
- Visiting lecturer at King’s College in London, 1975-76;
- Research fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in West Germany, 1979-80;
- Member of the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J., 1989-90;
- Distinguished Chair in American Studies at the Karl-Franzen-Universität in Graz, Austria.

Rowan’s latest publication is *The Baron in the Grand Canyon: Friedrich Wilhelm von Egloffstein in the West*. It is the most recent of 16 published books, mostly editions or translations from German, except for his 1987 book, *Ulrich Zasius: A Jurist in the German Renaissance, 1461-1535*.

He has authored 45 articles, most notably “Gottfried Duden’s Critique of Alexis de Tocqueville, Michel Chevalier and Himself in 1837” in *The Yearbook of German-American Studies*, vol. 44. ■

## Laudatio

# Germans of Louisiana

The Newsletter editors would like to thank Andreas Hübner of the Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen for the following essay about the Germans of Louisiana. The essay serves as an excellent *Einstimmung* for the Annual Symposium in New Orleans this May.

Off to Louisiana: *Colonial Louisiana’s early German-American History*

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### Introduction

The following essay offers a short introduction to colonial Louisiana’s German-American history. This history has long been dominated by narratives of suffering and hardworking Germans and begins with the colonization of the so-called German Coast of Louisiana. Located about 30 miles upriver from New Orleans, this area was first settled by indentured servants in the early 1720s. While originating from various regions of modern Germany and different places all over Europe—for instance Alsace, Hungary or Switzerland—these migrants were all classified as Germans by early French census takers. Accordingly, their settlement was named *Côte des Allemands* under French and *Costa de los Alemanes* under Spanish colonial administration. The migrants themselves soon began to be known as the Germans of Louisiana. As they moved from indentured servitude to independent farmers to plantation owners, they entered the historiographies of colonial Louisiana as hardworking agricultural men and as diligent housewives and mothers.<sup>1</sup> During the nineteenth century these Germans were even integrated into the narratives of the Louisiana Creoles, when German-American filiopietists declared them to represent the “Creoles of German descent.”<sup>2</sup> In recent times, studies by historians such as Helmut Blume, Reinhart Kondert, and Ellen C. Merrill have shown their significance to Louisiana History, drawing from a wide array of source material in French, Spanish, and American archives.<sup>3</sup> ➡



St. Mary’s Assumption Church is a National Historic Landmark in New Orleans. The church was completed in 1860, built for the swelling German Catholic immigrant population in the Lower Garden District section of the city



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# SOCIETY FOR German- American Studies

NEWSLETTER

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## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

A new year is upon us. This new year brings with it a new and improved SGAS web presence. On Thursday, December 6th, 2012, SGAS.ORG re-launched with a completely new look and feel, which I believe you will find both attractive and easy to use.

The Society exists to support research on the German element in the Americas, foster discussion of the issues raised by scholarly investigations, and publish the most fruitful results of those labors. That three-pronged commitment is reflected in every aspect of the revamped website. Under the “Grants” tab you will find full descriptions of support available for both small and large research projects through either the Arndt or the Faust funds. Under “Publications” you find more information about both of the Society’s publications, the *Yearbook for German-American Studies* and the *Newsletter*. The editors of both welcome your submissions. Of course, the annual Symposium of the Society offers the unique opportunity for us to gather together in person to renew friendships as we discuss our common interest in the life, literature, and culture of German-speaking immigrants to North America. In 2013 we break new ground as we meet for the first time in New Orleans, an important port of entry for many who would travel up the Mississippi and settle much of the Midwest and an important venue of German-American life in itself.

Our meeting in New Orleans will also include the biennial election of officers. So I hope that you will make plans to join us for the 37th annual SGAS Symposium, May 9–12, 2013, to help celebrate a German-Orleans homecoming. Check out SGAS.ORG for more details.

Herzliche Grüße,

*Randall P. Donaldson*

Randall P. Donaldson  
SGAS President





Suffering German Settlers

The history of the Germans of Louisiana began long before they finally settled on the German Coast in 1721; it started with the very beginnings of their passage to Louisiana. The German settlers came to Louisiana by way of recruitment campaigns fostered by John Law's Company of the Indies. Financed by European stockholders, the Company sought to populate colonial Louisiana with European settlers and African slaves and to turn the territory into a profitable enterprise. Ill-prepared from its beginnings and plagued by structural and organizational flaws, the Company's efforts to transport settlers and slaves to Louisiana were marked by failure. Describing the circumstances upon their arrival at Old Biloxi, French officers like Dumont de Montigny established the image of the suffering German migrants in his *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*.<sup>4</sup> According to Dumont, the Company had been unable to provide either food or lodging to the newly arrived settlers. While many died on the beaches of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Dumont identified the Germans as the bulk of the victims apart from the Provençals. Dumont's descriptions were fully in line with those of other colonial agents. Jean-Baptiste Bénéard de la Harpe, the French explorer and employee of the Company, reported in his journal that the Germans were left behind on the beaches and without any further assistance, were doomed to decease.<sup>5</sup> In order to fully comprehend these descriptions, it is essential to keep the colonial context in mind. Dumont, for instance, was at enmity with Bienville, the governor in office. He might have inserted the

passage of the suffering Germans into his *Mémoires* to emphasize Bienville's incompetence—for Dumont never hesitated to do so in his writings.<sup>6</sup> Besides, in his *Mémoires*, Dumont "consciously str[ove] for literary effect" and "move[d] through one adventure, or more often misadventure, after another."<sup>7</sup> His descriptions conveyed less information about the history of Louisiana than about his self-conception as a French Robinson Crusoe and nobleman. As such he stressed the disorder and suffering of Louisiana life; he meant to entertain his readers. De la Harpe's descriptions of the suffering Germans were related to the struggles of the Company to attract any settlers to Louisiana at all.<sup>8</sup> Constituting only about 150 persons, these migrants, in de la Harpe's eyes, represented an essential impetus for the colony's development. De la Harpe, thus, linked his description of the suffering Germans with the demand to provide them with victuals and provisions for six months.<sup>9</sup> He illustrated the significance of the Germans by pointing out their potential strategic use as buffers in between Spanish and British territorial claims at Bayou Saint-Bernard.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, the suffering and possible deaths of the Germans were intertwined with the colony's future. In addition, the description of the Germans as suffering appeared to be part of a larger debate on nation, empire, and race taking place in the early 18th-century Atlantic world. Bringing together the concept of "francité" and the colonial situation, historian Cécile Vidal recently argued that the debate on the nation and the colonial situation was strongly entangled ➡

with concepts such as *blanchité*, *créolité*, race, etc.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, a record of Swiss soldier Kolly and his descriptions of the settlers from the German states opened a new perspective. In May 1724, Kolly undertook a journey along the Mississippi River depicting the "situation des habitants [sic]" in close proximity to the military posts that he inspected.<sup>12</sup> Listing the different groups and peoples, Kolly applied the label of "nation" to the Germans as well as to a variety of Native American groups. Kolly thereby revealed an ambiguity in the use and in the understanding of the label "nation" in the early eighteenth century that expressed the difference between France and the colonial space. Apparently, Kolly applied the term "nation" to Indian groups and Germans alike with a notion in mind "that does not stop at the frontiers but which, on the contrary, is a sort of mass of individuals who move from one frontier to another, through States, beneath States, and at an infra-State level [...]"<sup>13</sup> This concept of the "nation" was, of course, highly different from the ideas of the nation state or nationality that were later on established in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Colonial Officers and Hardworking Germans

Likewise, descriptions of hardworking German migrants opened new perspectives. A quote

by Commissaire Ordonnateur Edmé Gatien de Salmon, taken from his correspondence with the ministry in France, highlights this argument. Describing the current situation in colonial Louisiana, Salmon stated that "Ces Allemands sont d'ailleurs très laborieux," and furthermore reported "ce sont les seuls habitants de la Colonie qui n'ont point eu de negres de la Compagnie de la premiere main, [...], ce pendant ils travaillent beaucoup, ce sont eux qui fournissent le marché de la Nouvelle Orleans de legumes, herbage, boeurre, œufs, et autres denrées [sic]."<sup>14</sup> To rephrase Salmon's words in English: the Germans are quite industrious, they did not receive any African slaves, but still they provide the market of New Orleans with supplies of scarce food. This description of the Germans was a crucial part of a master narrative to be found in most records of colonial Louisiana. Whether in administrative reports to France, jurisdictional documents of the Superior Council, or travel journals and accounts, the Germans were

mostly described as industrious or hardworking, as suppliers of food or farmers, and as an integral part of colonial Louisianan society. In accordance with Salmon, Jean-Bernard Bossu, a French naval officer, traveler, and adventurer, described the Germans and the German Coast in his journal of 1768: "les Allemands s'établirent à dix lieues au dessus de la nouvelle ➡



This image is from the Historic New Orleans Collection – "Die Schnitzelbank oder Kunstmaler Klexel" – published in Mühlhausen in Thüringen, ca. 1920. The sheet music was used by the Deutsche Gesellschaft von New Orleans for humorous musical programs in the early 20th century.

Orléans: ces Peuples sont très-laborieux; on les regarde comme les pourvoyeurs de la Capitale."<sup>15</sup> Studies of early colonial Louisiana have long since preserved this narrative. In 1909, J. Hanno Deiler, a German-American historian of the filopietist tradition,<sup>16</sup> quoted the successors of the 1721 migrants as follows: "We are the descendants of those Germans who turned the wilderness into a paradise such as Louisiana never possessed before."<sup>17</sup> Drawing from Deiler and once again citing the descendants of the Germans in the 1950s, historian John F. Nau denoted: "They built New Orleans."<sup>18</sup> Deiler and Nau's objectives appeared clear.<sup>19</sup> In order to strengthen the position of German-Americans, they stressed the contributions of that particular group to American and Louisiana history. Consequently, these German-American scholars have been criticized for their "generally self-congratulatory exercises, designed to instill confidence in people who had been given reason to question their value as American citizens."<sup>20</sup> Still, this sort of narrative was also adopted by prominent scholars of Louisiana history in the 1960s and 1970s. Historian Edwin A. Davis, for instance, argued that "the Germans probably saved the colony".<sup>21</sup> His professional colleague Joe G. Taylor declared the initiation of the German migration to colonial Louisiana to be "the most important contribution that the Company of the Indies made."<sup>22</sup> In recent times, Ellen C. Merrill, among others, claimed that "against all odds these Germans survived and provided the breadbasket for New Orleans, assuring the survival of the French colony during the colonial period."<sup>23</sup> While these descriptions

emphasized the hardworking character of early German migrants and later German-American settlers, they appear to reinforce the voices of colonial officials and actors; they, in other words, privilege the colonial archive. Conclusion Instead of focusing on the sufferings and industriousness, or the contributions and success of the Germans, future scholarship should strongly concentrate on groups that are inextricably linked with the history of the Germans of Louisiana: African-Americans and American Indians. In line with this, future scholarship should utilize approaches such as Gender Studies to review images of women as "diligent housewives and mothers". Furthermore, present-day academia could richly benefit from studies that discuss the history of the Germans in Circum-Caribbean, Atlantic, and Trans-Atlantic perspectives. Different projects might, for example, investigate how notions of "Germans" or "Germanness" were produced in exchange between colonial and metropolitan agents and administrations; projects could also explore how German farmers of colonial Louisiana were embedded into networks of French and Spanish mercantilism and capitalism. Last but not least, historians need to understand how the Germans of colonial Louisiana began to be known as suffering, as hardworking, and even as Germans per se; to put it another way, historians further need to question the mechanisms and methodologies of producing historical knowledge of German-Americana in colonial Louisiana. ■

Germans of Louisiana  
NOTES/ BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Cf. Ellen C. Merrill, *Germans of Louisiana* (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 2005), 42f.  
2. Cf. J. Hanno Deiler, *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and the Creoles of German Descent* (Philadelphia: American Germanica Press, 1909); Reinhart Kondert, *The Germans of Colonial Louisiana* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1990); Reinhart Kondert, Frederick D'Arensborg and the Germans of Colonial Louisiana (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2008); John F. Nau, *The German People of New Orleans, 1850–1900* (Hattiesburg, MS: Mississippi Southern College, 1958). For a German perspective, see the geographer and historian Helmut Blume, *Die Entwicklung der Kulturlandschaft des Mississippi* (Kiel: Selbstverlag des Geographischen Instituts der Universität Kiel, 1956). For a concise description of the early migration see René Le Conte, "Germans in Louisiana in the Eighteenth Century," in *A Refuge for All Ages: Immigration in Louisiana History*, ed. Carl A. Brasseaux (The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History, Vol. 10) (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1996), 31–43.  
3. To name but a few: Archives nationales d'Outre-mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Center for Louisiana Studies, Lafayette, LA, and Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.  
4. Dumont de Montigny, *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*, Tome 2 (Paris: Bauche, 1753), 42.  
5. ANOM, C, 13 A, 6, folio 189, Bénéard de la Harpe à [Bienville].  
6. Cf. Gordon M. Sayre, *The Indian Chief as a Tragic Hero: Native Resistance and the Literatures of America, from Moctezuma to Tecumseh* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 207.  
7. Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 51.  
8. Calls for settlers are abundant in colonial correspondences, see for example Mississippi Provincial Archives (MPA), Vol. 3, 25, „Bienville to Pontchartrain“; „It would be difficult for this country to be able to subsist by itself so soon unless you send at once a large number of settlers here who will be able to support themselves by themselves against the enemies.“  
9. ANOM, C, 13 A, 6, folio 189, Bénéard de la Harpe à [Bienville].  
10. ANOM, C 13 A 6, folio 189verso/190, Bénéard de la Harpe à [Bienville].  
11. Vidal Cécile Vidal, "Francité et situation coloniale: Nation, empire et race en Louisiane française (1699–1769)," *Annales* 63:5 (2009): 1019–1050, see 1049.  
12. ANOM, G1, 465, "Etat des compagnies d'Infanterie qui etoient entretenus par la Compagnie des Indes dans la province de la Louisiane au mois de May 1724 et situation des habitants qui sont dans chaque poste," 20.12.1724.  
13. Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey, English series ed. Arnold I. Davidson (New York: Picador, 2003), 142.  
14. ANOM, C13 A 15, folio 64verso/65, Salmon au ministre, 27.03.1732: "The Germans are by the way very industrious, they are the only settlers of the colony who did not receive any slaves from the Compagnie [...] still they work a lot, they are the ones, who provide the market of New Orleans with vegetables, herbs, butter, eggs, and other foodstuffs."  
15. Jean Bernard Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages aux Indes occidentales* (Paris: Le Jay, 1768), 38f: "the Germans have established themselves ten miles upriver from New Orleans: these people are very industrious; they are regarded as the provisioners of the capital."  
16. For a short characterization of the filopietist tradition see Allan H. Spear, "Marcus Lee Hansen and the Historiography of Immigration," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 44:4 (1961): 258–268.  
17. Deiler (1909), 128.  
18. Nau (1958), xiii.  
19. See Alexander Franz, *Die Kolonisation des Mississippials bis zum Ausgange der französischen Herrschaft* (New York: G. Wigand, 1906) and Louis Voss, *German Coast of Louisiana* (Hoboken, NJ: Triangle Press, 1928).  
20. Spear (1961), 260.  
21. Edwin A. Davis, *Louisiana, A Narrative History* (Baton Rouge: Claitor's, 1965), 58.  
22. Joe G. Taylor, *Louisiana: A Bicentennial History* (New York: Norton, 1976), 10.  
23. Merrill (2005), 82.