

## RESEARCH NOTE

### LOUISVILLE'S BLOODY MONDAY RIOTS FROM A GERMAN PERSPECTIVE

Translated by William G. O'Toole, Jr., and Charles E. Aebersold

**T**he *Louisville Anzeiger* was founded in 1848, and it supported the German community in Louisville for ninety years until it closed in 1938. It was nationally recognized and was usually highly ranked among the German-language newspapers in the United States. In 1914 the German musical community of Louisville hosted the Saengerfest (Singing Festival) for choral groups from Europe and America. Thousands of people visited Louisville for this gala event as they had for the three previous Saengerfests held in Louisville in 1850, 1866, and 1877. The material translated below on Bloody Monday appeared in an article entitled "Die Kulturfortschritte von Louisville, Ky." ("The Cultural History of Louisville, Ky.") on 21 June 1914 in a one-hundred-and-sixty-four-page souvenir edition of the *Louisville Anzeiger*. Only the material dealing with the nativist Know-Nothing party and Bloody Monday is quoted from the article which is based on contemporary accounts from earlier issues of the newspaper. This 1914 account was obviously a sharply abridged version of contemporary accounts which provided far more details.

There is a grim irony in the appearance of this article shortly before the outbreak of World War I on 1 August 1914 which resulted in a new wave of anti-German feeling in Louisville and throughout the

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nation, particularly after the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917.

## 1853

On the 24th of April, country Rowdies attacked the German "Turners" in the Woodland Gardens because they were in traditional costumes, and beat them with clubs.

During the year there were already indications of the Know-Nothings' feelings against those known to be immigrants. On the 8th of October, the "Journal" [*Louisville Journal*] had an article in which the "18,000 local Germans" were classified as Catholics, Protestants and agnostics, and later listed those in the "Turners," the "Workers' Club," and the "Free Mason Club." This article denounced a large portion of the Germans as agnostics, and disposed of the puritanical Protestant sects as modern heathens with a hidden mission to instruct under the cover of their Americanized religious and administrative opinions.

## 1854

In these years the local "German Life" reached a high point, just before entering a longer unhappy period of reactions that later became bloody; blind-Party-fury in the making. A former Catholic priest, Gavassi,<sup>1</sup> agitated the people with flamboyant speeches against Papism. It led to childish demonstrations, causing the police to interfere in a brutal manner. This affair caused the foundation of the secret order of the "Know-Nothings." That, in itself, rapidly spread over the whole country. The first step of the Order was hostile opposition against the Catholics only; it then expanded against all of the free born elements.

Heinzen, Domritke, Bürgler, and the Druggist Stein put the finishing touches on the renowned "Louisville Platform," which was accepted on the 19th of February in the Apollo Hall under the title

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1 Not identified.

"Unification of the Germans."<sup>2</sup> "Freedom, education, prosperity for all" were proclaimed as great principles in the American Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution protects against those who "speculate" against it with "corruption in place of virtue;" thus duties and their fulfillment become imperative. The core of the Nation should not become avaricious and greedy. The people must spot the unfaithful representatives, and the people must make corrections for their betterment. They look for the modern Democratic Wilson Administration to realize what our forebears put down in this important document.

On the 12th of October, the Know-Nothing Council passed an ordinance requiring that the clubs close at 10 o'clock in the evening.

1855

"Where brute force controls, nothing good can come from it."

With this motto Schiller<sup>3</sup> characterized the [Know-Nothing] Party as the nitpickers of these years.

On the 7th of April, in the Municipal elections, the Know-Nothings achieved a complete victory. With this mandate the Council began with the dismissal of Captain Schröder.<sup>4</sup> Peter Silar, who as yet could neither read nor write, took his position as interpreter on the City Court.<sup>5</sup> The new Council declared on July 10th that, for the next school year, no schoolteacher could be recruited or employed if he was Catholic or foreign born.

2 The "Louisville Platform" was written to present a unified position for local Germans and espoused an ambitious reform program. It was eventually adopted by twenty-seven newspapers throughout the country. Not all of the men associated with the "Louisville Platform" can be identified with certainty. Heinzen may be J. Heinze, a piano maker. Domritke may be Louis Domeik, a shoemaker. Bürgler is not identified. Stein is G. C. Stein; his drug store was at 681 Market. See *Louisville City Directory and Business Mirror for 1858-9*.

3 Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805) was a famous German romantic poet.

4 Conrad Schroeder was listed as a city court interpreter and notary public. See *Louisville City Directory for 1852*.

5 The *Louisville City Directory and Business Mirror for 1858-9* lists Peter Silar as a grocer.

On the 5th of May, the Know-Nothings were defeated in the magistrate elections. The Germans were prevented by force from exercising their right to vote.

On the 12th of May, during a false fire alarm, the German Firefighting Company was attacked and the fire extinguisher wagon was broken and demolished. Because of the opposition of the Know-Nothings, the German Militia Company disbanded. Meanwhile, their weapons were not given to the City, but were surrendered to State authorities. With the edict against the Catholics and foreign born, the populace started flirting with the Temperance humbug fad. Geo. D. Prentice, the editor of the neutral "Journal," went over to the Know-Nothing Party and hailed their Temperance ideals. The Council, whose members did not include whiskey lovers, refused Tavern Licenses to several German hosts. It became law. Judge [William E.] Bullock decided on the 20th of July that the Council was not empowered to refuse Tavern Drink Licenses because Taverns were necessary for the comfort of the public, and a Tavern License, itself, was a License for the sale of drinks. On the other hand, the Council was not obliged to grant licenses to sell drinks.

On the 7th of July, the City Council on their own granted, to Tavern Owners only, licenses to sell beverages. Thereupon the wily Judge Bullock issued a warrant against the City Council for "disrespect of judicial decrees."

Several of the City Council gave in and put up bail, while others refused to put up the demanded bail and were arrested. The Appellate Court decided that the City, as a corporation, and not the individual City Councilmen, had to put up bail. Governor [Charles S.] Morehead finally settled this dispute in 1857, ruling that all of the Tavern hosts within the City had to pay the tax, and any not yet paid.

### Bloody Monday

Up until now, all that had happened in the Know-Nothings' defiance of the immigrants had been as child's play compared to what was perpetrated against them on the 6th of August, 1855 at the State election.

The Know-Nothings, Blacklegs and professional gamblers had bet great sums on the results of the election. Hundreds of armed bullies were imported to help win their bet through violence. Already, on the night before, they had seized voting places. Few of the old well-known Democratic citizens took part, but all Germans and Irish who came near were driven back by thrown rocks and by Bowie knives. Americans who didn't know the secret signals were rejected. By 10 o'clock in the morning the City found itself gripped in violence by the excited and mercenary rabble, and neither lives nor possessions were safe.

It came to downright street fighting, and the crimes began and continued without number. Only through the intervention of Mayor [John] Barbee was the German [St. Martin] Catholic Church on Shelby Street saved from plunder and burning. Generally the savageness of the rabble continued as it started. Louisville was devastated by these crimes. German and Irish families fled from the City.

A curse seemed to stick with the City because of the outrages perpetrated on the businesses and on the divided population. Nevertheless, the City was under mob rule those days; the few Americans who leaned towards the Know-Nothing Party Platform were gripped in horror by the abuses, which brought about changes in that Party; therefore, it became impossible for a repeat of the scenes they saw on this so-called "Bloody Monday." The consequences of "Bloody Monday" were revealed soon. No one was able to buy and sell belongings; trade and commerce came to a halt. The value of property and possessions sank to a low standard. Only slowly did the City recover.

#### 1856

The period from 1848 until 1855, with its storm and unrest in the local German community, could be conveniently described as the period of the "Know-Nothing Horror"; and from then up to the onset of the Civil War could be described as a period of relaxation and lethargy.

The faint-hearted Germans agreed to cooperate in mutual achievements. The low key political approach displayed by the opposition party was totally overwhelmed by the Know-Nothings. One hardly dared to visit the public gardens on Sunday afternoons out of fear of the Bullies, who were hired and imported by the Know-Nothings for the bloody Election-day. They had stayed on in the hope of additional pay for their services. The "German Life Style" limited itself only to the "club-life" and, of the clubs, it was mainly the singer-clubs, which were then open for men only.

### 1857

On the 25th of June, the City Council agreed to publish its transactions again in the German language. At the City-elections on the 4th of August, the Know-Nothings defeated their adversaries due to the non-involvement of the immigrants; however, they had already been defeated at the State level. On the 20th of January, the "Orpheus" gave a great Concert in the Mozart Hall under the direction of Günther and G. Zoeller.<sup>6</sup> On the 27th of January, the founder and owner of the "Anzeiger," Mr. Georg W. Dörn, died. He was a veteran of the Hanover detachment of the British legion under Wellington.

In the first half of the year there were many cases of arson. The cause of this was that all kinds of trash were put out which compounded the efforts of the voluntary firefighting companies. On the 31st of March, there trod on the stage of the local English theatre the renowned Lola Montez, actress and dancer, as the "Good Fairy" of King Ludwig of Bavaria.

On the 27th of April, Mayor [William S.] Pilcher of the Know-Nothings was chosen over all parties to proclaim a message of a Social Reform Program, much to the unhappiness of his constituents.

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<sup>6</sup> E. W. Gunther was a music teacher; see *Louisville City Directory and Business Mirror for 1858-9*. The *Louisville Directory 1864-5* lists a George Zoeller as being associated with J. Dolfinger and Company. He was also organist and choir director at the Cathedral of the Assumption.

On the 21st of June, a "Jewish Club" was established, whose purpose was amusement and instruction through lectures in the areas of religion and politics.

At the City election on the 4th of August, for the first time there were no election problems for the immigrants, nor intimidation by those holding different opinions. In the State election eight Democrats were elected into the Legislature. The first German Insurance Company was established with Mr. Lavall as president.<sup>7</sup> For several years it found itself in a general financial crisis. Because of the substantial export of agricultural products that moved through Louisville, there was not much sympathy for their financial problems.

The School Officials introduced the German language as a subject taught in various schools. Work began on the municipal high pressure water pipe system.

The material quoted from the year 1857 demonstrates the welcome return of normality to the political life of Louisville. The definitive end of the Know-Nothing influence is indicated in the quote given below.

#### 1865

In that year, the Know-Nothing Party, already long dead, was solemnly buried in the election on the 1st of April when a German, Mr. Phil [Philip] Tomppert, was chosen as the Mayor of the city.

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7 Ibid., gives Francis Reidhar as president of the German Insurance Company.