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# FROM LANGENBRÜCK TO KANSAS CITY

THE KIEFER-SCHOLZ FAMILY

German Migration to Missouri [2.0/2021]



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German Migration to Missouri is a joint project of



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*For Bob – and the entire Kiefer-Scholz family*



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MARJORIE MCHALE

## PREFACE

It is just so exciting for the members of the Kiefer-Scholz family to have their heritage brought to life with this wonderfully detailed history. Thanks to Grandma Thekla and Grandpa Robert, who kept their letters, photos, and other personal effects, so our heritage and history can come alive today.

It is wonderful that the documents of our family history have now been catalogued, translated, and shared with the family and the public. On behalf of our whole family, I would like to express our thanks to the professors who led this research project: Drs. Andrew Stuart Bergerson, Li Gerhalter, Thorsten Logge, and Joanna Wojdon. We would especially like to thank the many students and research assistants from Austria, Germany, Poland, and the United States for all their hard work of archiving, digitizing, transcribing, translating, researching, and writing the story of our family.

I would be remiss not to also acknowledge my sister Roberta, our family historian, who preserved many of these documents. I am so sorry she didn't live long enough to take part in this project. She would have been a wealth of knowledge and information, and it would have given her great joy to see these stories come alive again.

Many memories of my childhood came back as this wonderful project began to take shape. My nuclear family, the Roseburrroughs, lived three blocks away in Kansas City, so Grandma Thekla was ever-present in our lives, and we loved her. She was always giving us "chew gum," telling us stories, and making pots of "kids coffee" — hot milk with loads of sugar and two tablespoons of actual coffee. Needless to say, we felt very special with our own pot of coffee. So, what was there not to love!

Unfortunately, none of my generation ever knew our grandfather, Robert John Kiefer. He died when Marjorie, my mother, was only 12 years old, and she was Thekla and Robert's oldest child. Still, we heard family stories from her, Uncle

Bob, “Tante” Rita and the many other members of the Scholz family that had settled in the Kansas City area.

One of my favorite anecdotes took place aboard the *Queen Elizabeth II*. I was fortunate enough to have my parents, Marjorie and Walter Roseburrough, join me on a transatlantic crossing. I was standing on deck with them when we entered New York Harbor early one morning. As we were passing the Statue of Liberty, my mother told me the story of how proud her father Robert had been when he first arrived in the United States. She was crying. I am ever grateful that I had the opportunity to share that experience with her. She said how much it meant to her that she was able to do what her father and mother had done decades earlier—when they came to America and also saw the beautiful and stately Statue of Liberty, symbol of their new, chosen country.

Every member of the Kiefer-Scholz family is so very honored to be part of this research project to document and preserve our German-American heritage and history. Thank you, Grandma and Grandpa, for preserving our family history, so that, through this very informative course and book, we can learn so much more about the experiences of our immigrant family. You left a legacy that has made us all so proud.

Kansas City, 16 February 2021  
Marjorie McHale



Figure 1. *The Scholz family house "Am Bahndamm," Langenbrück, n. d.,*  
Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P90x1231-TX3337a.



Figure 2. *Members of the Scholz family and their house "Am Bahndamm," Langenbrück, n. d.,*  
Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9140909-TP2107a.



## INTRODUCTION

### PROVENANCE

In the early twentieth century, Thekla E. Scholz and Robert J. Kiefer migrated to the United States in from Upper Silesia in what was then Germany and is now Poland. They married in 1922 and lived in a home at 30<sup>th</sup> and Belleview in the Westside neighborhood of Kansas City. Robert died young in 1935; when Thekla also passed in 1975, the family discovered that she had collected boxes of letters, postcards, photographs, and other memorabilia.

Their daughter Marjorie (Kiefer) Roseburrough moved these items around the corner to her house on 27<sup>th</sup> and Jarboe, where they sat in her basement for many years. After Marjorie died in 2005, her daughter Roberta Marie Roseburrough continued to live in the same home. As the family historian, she took particular interest in this private collection of memories. When Roberta passed on 31 December 2017, however, the documents were divided among her Kansas City relatives: her sister Lisa (Roseburrough) Weis, her brother John Edward Roseburrough, and her cousin Robert “Bob” Kiefer III. None of the members of this third generation of the Kiefer-Scholz family understood more than a smattering of German, nor could they read the old German script in which most of these documents were written. But Bob’s friend, Drew Bergerson was a historian of modern Germany specializing in the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), and they had often chatted about the German and American past while watching their children play together. In the Summer of 2018, Bob reached out to Drew to ask if he would take a look.

By coincidence, Drew happened to be working with Thorsten Logge of the public history program at the University of Hamburg (UHH) in Germany

on a joint, transnational, graduate research seminar on the subject of German Migration to Missouri. Over the course of 2018, twelve students from UMKC, UHH, and the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) worked together virtually to digitize and research archival collections relating to this topic. On the basis of those digitized documents, the students collaboratively wrote chapters for *German Migration to Missouri: A Transnational Student Research Project 1.0* that was published by the Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg in 2019 and is available through Open Access. The results of this research project were also shared with the public at the Missouri Conference on History in March 2019. It proved impossible for students or faculty from Hamburg to participate in the panel, but Drew led a panel that included students from both UMKC and UMSL.

An initial survey of the Kiefer-Scholz Collection revealed that these rich sources afforded a wealth of avenues for exploring the history of German-American migration through the focused lens of one network of friends and family. Thekla E. Scholz and Robert J. Kiefer were not only born along a contested borderland of Central Europe — Upper Silesia — but also belonged to the rural working classes. Historians rarely find such a large set of richly descriptive primary sources written from those perspectives from this time. Indeed, Thekla was clearly the main collector of these materials. She was almost certainly the one who organized some of the postcards into the album in which we found them; and Robert who did the same with the bound documents we found in his leather satchel. It may have been either Thekla or her granddaughter Roberta, however, who created a special set of holy cards relating to life cycle events of family members and close friends. And Marjorie or Roberta Roseburrugh added new items to the collection: a set of notes passed by Marjorie in class as a student at the Redemptorist parish school in Kansas City.

In 2020, the Robert J. Kiefer and Thekla E. Scholz Collection became the central focus for our transnational research seminar. This time, the course was taught jointly online by three faculty members and attended by more than thirty graduate students not only from UHH, UMKC, and UMSL but also from the University of Vienna in Austria (Univie) under the instruction of Li Gerhalter. The project also benefitted from the participation of Joanna Wojdon and her students from the University of Wrocław in Poland (UniWroc), though

they were not formally enrolled in a course. Each member of this large research team came to the project from their own disciplinary perspective of archival science, art history, ethnography, German studies, history, media studies, gender history, museum studies, public history, or some combination of the above. Some members of the Kansas City research team also worked closely with the surviving members of the Kiefer-Scholz family, especially the four grandchildren Bob Kiefer, Lisa (Roseburrough) Weis, Marjorie (Roseburrough) McHale, and Walter Roseburrough to supplement the documentary evidence in the collection with orally transmitted family stories.

The results of this transnational collaboration can be found here in this book, *From Langenbrück to Kansas City. The Kiefer-Scholz Family. German Migration to Missouri [2.0/2021]*. This introduction will introduce the reader to our research project as an example of teaching in the public humanities. We begin by describing the contents of Kiefer-Scholz Collection, including the process of archiving, cataloguing, and digitizing them for student use. We then share the designs, challenges, and achievements of the course itself and close with some instructions about the text. We show that this project involved a rare degree of cross-cultural collaboration between faculty, students, and ordinary citizens from multiple countries and across multiple languages and disciplines, discussing the meaning of the past for the present. Our course offers one model for pedagogy and scholarship in the public humanities that allows for more inclusivity in the process of making sense of the past for the present.

## THE SOURCES

The items in the Robert J. and Thekla E. (Scholz) Kiefer Collection come from German-speaking Central Europe and the United States. They date from 1884 to 1979, with most items originating between 1898 and 1940. The collection consists of 805 postcards, 624 letters, 213 holy cards, 173 photographs, 36 handwritten notes, 32 greeting cards, and 43 other items such as books, booklets, certificates, dues records, newspaper articles, pamphlets, musical scores, prayers, and sales receipts. As seen in Figure 1, most of these paper documents are double sided, written in German, and/or handwritten in the old German script, while some are single-sided, written in English, and/or printed. The

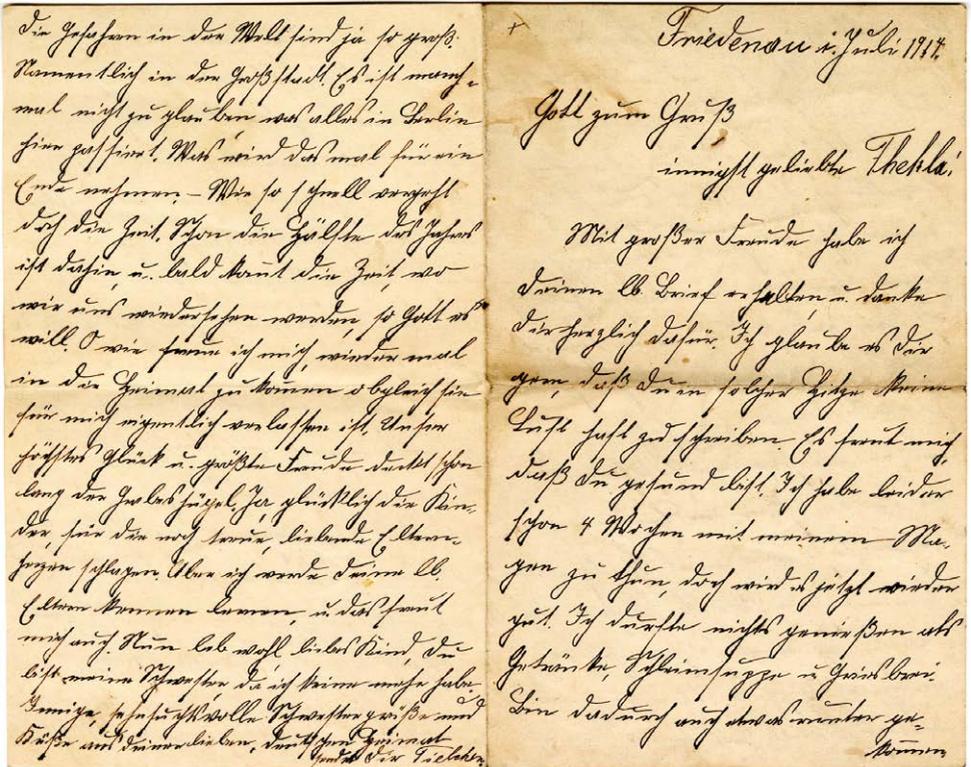


Figure 1. Letter, Otilie "Tielchen" Kiefer to Thetkla Scholz from Berlin-Friedenau on 02 July 1914, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9140702-TL0096.1a

research team has added digital resources to the collection as well: images of several artifacts in the collection or still belonging to the family, virtual documents from online genealogical sites, and video- or zoom-based narrative interviews with transcripts conducted with family members. The bulk of the collection was delivered to Drew Bergerson in Fall 2018 and has been completely processed; a supplementary set of materials included in the totals above was delivered in Winter 2020 through Winter 2021 and is still being processed.

The documents were originally housed in a series of cartons and photo albums. Most of the items were simply thrown together indiscriminately or had fallen out of their original order as was the case of an album of photographs. The letters were the biggest challenge: individual pages from different letters were badly intermixed. In Fall 2018, Drew Bergerson worked with Bob and his son Brendan Kiefer, neither of whom read German, to sort the collection very roughly by kind, size, and date if identifiable. Drew consulted with Deborah Keating and Lee Jisung, two graduate students in history at UMKC, about how best to number, accession, digitize, and catalogue the collection. Deborah had considerable experience processing archival collections at the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum in Independence, Missouri; while Jisung knew how to use the new scanning equipment in the Digital Humanities Laboratory at the UMKC Department of History. Both the equipment and Jisung's time were generously supported by a grant from The William T. Kemper Foundation, while Deborah's time was paid by the history department. Drew then created a series of databases for cataloguing the collection. Although they did not speak or read German, Deborah and Jisung processed all of the items made available to them by the family in the initial, larger delivery. Over the course of 2019 and 2020, they scanned the documents digitally, photographed the three-dimensional artifacts, and assigned each image a temporary accession number both on the item itself and in the online database.

Placing the digitized images on a UMKC cloud server enabled international bilingual collaboration on the process of reorganizing and renumbering the documents in a format useful to researchers. In Hamburg, Thorsten Logge guided Sara Gätke and Sophia Löhmann, work-study students from UHH, through the process of identifying which page belonged to which letter. It was a particularly difficult task. They struggled to match hundreds of individual pages based on subtle clues from the content and material of the letters. This task was made more difficult by the fact that it took place before the second, smaller batch of documents was received from the family, which meant that some pieces of the puzzle were missing. Consequently, some letter pages are not in their original order or even in the same folder as the other pages in the original letter. A future process of cross-referencing will be necessary to fix this problem. Meanwhile Drew read the German on the postcards, photo-

graphs, and other documents and worked with Deborah Keating and Jisung Lee to place those items into chronological order.

Once the items were in their best possible arrangements under the circumstances, the UMKC team assigned permanent alphanumeric numbers to each item using a consistent format based on their date.<sup>1</sup> If a date was not identifiable, the document was organized in other ways useful to researchers.<sup>2</sup> In Wrocław, the research team under Joanna Wojdon renumbered the digital files to correspond to the new permanent numbers for permanent storage. The research team at UMKC then placed the original documents into their permanent folders and boxes according to their permanent numbers. The Collection will be permanently archived in the Sammlung Frauennachlässe, a specialized archive of women's personal documents, located at the Department of History of the University of Vienna.

## THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The students engaged with this rich set of primary sources through an asynchronous online course “German Migration to Missouri” on the Canvas learning management system. UMKC hosted the course, but students enrolled through their own universities and were graded solely by the instructor from institution. This diverse array of students and faculty recorded personal introductions and uploaded them to an asynchronous discussion thread in order to get to know each other better and begin their interactions. The courses

- 1 Letters are identified using the format L[YRMODY]-TL[#side.region]. For instance, L9200422-TL0001.1a is the verso page of the letter written on 22. April 1900. It is located with other letters from April 1900. Postcards are identified using the format P[CYRMODY]-[TP#side]. So P8990723-TP2003b is the recto side of the postcard written on 23. July 1899. It has been relocated to the folder of postcards from 1899. Album pages are identified using the format A[YRMODY]-TA[#.slot and side]. The TA number refers here to a single page within one of the albums and the slot refers to where the postcard was placed on that page: .1 = top left, .2 = top right, 3. = bottom left, .4 = bottom right. All of the rest follows the same pattern as letters. P9161227-TA0020.1a thus refers to the postcard written on 27. December 1916 which appeared on page 20 of Album on the top left slot. It has since been relocated to the folder with other postcards from December 1916.
- 2 In cases where the source is partially or wholly, we inferred a “best guess” from all possible clues. An x refers to uncertain information. So for instance P915xxxx-TP2125a refers to a postcard that is identifiably from 1915 but that is all we know. Since there are often multiple examples of items with the same lack of knowledge, the temporary number serves to distinguish them from one another.

in Hamburg and Vienna began first in March and April. They were scheduled as hybrid but had to stop meeting face-to-face almost immediately due to COVID — very much against the will of the students. This transition was difficult for students and faculty alike due to the uncertainty of the pandemic situation and the forced adjustment to purely online classes. By contrast, the courses in Kansas City and St. Louis were planned in advance as wholly online classes. Moreover, they began in May, many weeks into the COVID crisis, so the adjustment to online learning was smoother for them. Another result of these complicated schedules was that the European students had to wait for the American students to catch up with their coursework before direct collaboration could begin. All of the students completed the work together by September 2020 on the European schedule.

In the first phase of the course, the students used secondary sources to understand the historical contexts in which the protagonists lived. Before the course began, the instructors, along with many other colleagues, had recorded an extensive series of lectures on the histories of German-speaking Central Europe, the United States, Silesia, and Missouri; everyday life, microhistory, migration, and music; letters, postcards, and photographs as sources; and how to read the old German script. The faculty also provided the students with a list of scholarly articles and books through the cloud-based bibliography platform Zotero to which the students also added entries of their own. Working asynchronously, the students then read and summarized these secondary sources for their peers on discussion boards and responded to each other's work in an effort to come to shared understandings of the past. On the basis of these published scholarly works, the students then proposed hypothetical questions about German migration to Missouri that they might be able to investigate using the Kiefer-Scholz Collection.

In the second phase of the course, students began to work directly with the primary sources. Here it is worth reminding the reader that most of the American students had little to no German-language abilities. They either worked with English-language sources, like in the oral histories; or focused on visual materials, like the postcards or photographs. Conversely, the European students faced the not insubstantial challenge of communicating with coauthors and jointly writing scholarly essays in a foreign language — which was also a



seen in Figure 2, students carefully cross-checked the texts to confirm the transcription, working with students who had different language abilities as needed. They also added quantitative and qualitative metadata about each individual image into databases stored on the UMKC cloud server. Additionally, two students from UMKC conducted narrative interviews with members of the Kiefer-Scholz family, recording the interviews in person on video if they lived in Kansas City or using zoom for people further away. These sources became available to other students only late in the writing process because of the fact that the oral-history component began only in the summer after the UMKC course began and because the research was quite time-intensive. Although they were often intimidated at first by the research component, many students really enjoyed learning these new skills and were proud to have developed competencies in transcription and oral history. During this stage of the course, students continued to share their insights with their peers from other countries asynchronously on discussion threads.

It was during the third phase of the course that the students began to work far more directly with one another across borders of culture and language. They all prepared short essays that interpreted their set of primary sources in light of the secondary literature that they had read. Based on these initial essays, the students began to propose ideas for possible topics that could serve as the focus for jointly written chapters. The faculty used these proposals to organize the students into writing teams around shared interests, striving to distribute the students evenly among the groups in terms of language abilities, disciplines, and universities. Most teams began with their individually authored drafts, which they then placed next to one another in larger chapters. The writing groups then began at this point, to work synchronously on integrating their individual scholarship into coherent chapters.

This collaborative writing was not always smooth; it was hard for some groups to stay organized and focused, particularly with the time difference. Other students reported that they enjoyed this part of the course the most. Admittedly, it is hard for the editors to report on precisely how this stage of collaboration took place, because the students no longer worked on the online media provided by the instructors. Instead, they began to communicate with each other directly through other media platforms outside the scrutiny of the instructors.

We supported this shift into their own online spaces as a way for them to build stronger collaborative relationships. Several rounds of submissions and revisions followed. The course formally ended with the final submission of the revised chapters by the end of September 2020, and students were graded according to the various expectations of the different institutions.

## THE OUTCOMES

As is perhaps obvious, this kind of teaching — called “collaborative online international learning” (*COIL Service Mark*) by the State University of New York<sup>3</sup> — is still rather experimental. What makes it unique is not simply that the course was taught by multiple instructors and focused on a research project but that this transnational topic was being explored on the basis of wholly digitized sources by an international team of faculty, students, and citizens. Insofar as such courses are attempted at all, faculty typically design them as undergraduate surveys, such that students can learn together with students and from faculty in other countries about a relatively standardized content. In this graduate research seminar, students were challenged to jointly conduct new research as part of a multinational, virtual research team in order to co-author original contributions to German studies.

Not surprisingly, we encountered a number of challenges with this experimental pedagogy. Each institution began its semester at a different time and allowed students to add and drop the course on different schedules, so the process of manually adding or removing students into all of the UMKC-administered software platforms was complicated, delayed, and sometimes frustrating. Each country, institution, and department also had its own educational culture in terms of the rights, responsibilities, and expectations of faculty and students; and each instructor had their own teaching style as well. In light of COVID, students from Hamburg, for instance, were given the option of either completing the whole course including the writing (“track one”) or simply completing more of the transcription work (“track two”). Another issue related to feedback: should instructors from one institution provide feedback

3 SUNY COIL, COIL Service Mark, <https://coil.suny.edu/about-suny-coil/coil-service-mark/>, 4 March 2021.

or instructions to students of the others? Should feedback be shared in online discussions for peer feedback, consensus building, and collaboration? Students in Kansas City were used to these practices; students in Vienna were not. We were able to turn these challenges into opportunities by discussing the issues and framing them in terms of cross-cultural learning.

The 2020 course was a marked improvement over 2018 in a number of ways. More students enrolled and completed the course. They particularly appreciated having an opportunity for this kind of collaborative virtual research once COVID hit; all of a sudden, our course design seemed ahead of its time. The collaboration was also better coordinated by having the European students begin early in March or April, since they tend to do their writing assignments after classes stop meeting, and having the American students join later in May, since they tend to do their writing assignments while classes are still meeting. Another major reason for the success of the 2020 course was the fact that the faculty focused the course entirely on this one collection, which encouraged more constructive discussions and effective collaboration within and across writing teams. But the real reason why the course worked so well has to do with the protagonists themselves. The Kiefer-Scholz family and especially Thekla E. (Scholz) Kiefer were such interesting people — and the sources about them were so rich in description — that the students soon became quite engaged with, even attached their histories.

By October 2020, the faculty opened the door for two further modalities for collaborative learning. On the one hand, we felt that the chapters could merit publication if revised again to ensure more precise translations, expressions, and references. The chapters also needed deeper integration between their component parts and with each other as part of a coherent book. Moreover, European students are typically taught the expectations for publishing in European contexts, which meant that the prose styles of each chapter were often widely diverse. So, the faculty invited the students to continue to work on the project, believing that they would learn a lot from experiencing the editorial process associated with scholarly publications. They were assisted in this regard by Karen Johnson, a student from St. Louis, who, together with Drew Bergerson, took on the role of copyeditor. Li Gerhalter wrote a prosopography to serve as an introduction to the main protagonists in the book. A team of photographers

from Poland — Marek Drytkiewicz, Maria Frańczak, — Krzysztof Frańczak, Andrzej Frańczak, and Krzysztof Wojdon — took a set of contemporary photos of the town and region in Upper Silesia where Thekla Scholz was born to add a contemporary Polish context for this project. Thorsten Logge then created the layout for the final version of the book in January 2021. On the other hand, two faculty editors and two student authors submitted a proposal to present the results of our collective research at the Missouri Conference on History in March 2021. Due to COVID, the Conference organizers decided to conduct the event entirely online using Zoom. This extraordinary situation allowed participation from team members from Vienna to join their colleagues from Kansas City for a joint presentation on this project — with members of the Kiefer-Scholz family also attending in the audience. Over the course of the Fall and Winter, former students and faculty thus became coauthors, coeditors, and colleagues, working collaboratively to sharpen their contributions to this larger book project.

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

Before we turn to the story of the Kiefer-Scholz family, we need to add a few caveats about the text you are about to read. The first concerns names. Up to the third generation of Americans, the family has maintained a tradition of giving children the same name as parents or grandparents; sometimes the only significant difference lies in a middle or married name. Even the family had to come up with a solution to this problem: they invented nicknames or included the middle initial in order to make these distinctions. Interestingly, that third generation consistently revolted against this family tradition, giving their children new names from a wide range of cultural traditions.

Moreover, naming conventions in scholarly works can suggest an artificial sense of familiarity with ordinary people if we refer to them by their first name, which we would not do, for instance, for a political figure. This practice can have patriarchal implications for women, particularly when they take the last name of their husbands at marriage. According to European norms, scholars never refer to people in their studies by their first name; and precisely when a personal relationship exists, it is even more incumbent on the scholar to maintain a linguistic distance. The opposite holds true in American scholarship,

perhaps due to the fact that Americans use first names in many more situations. Some readers are also more sensitive to the repetition of information. In the chapters that follow, we therefore tried to balance these conflicting demands for scholarly conventions and found working compromises for clarity, readability, and respectful address through three naming conventions: reiterating our protagonists' full names if they had not been mentioned for some time; using their first name only after their full name had been mentioned recently; and following the family tradition of using middle initials to distinguish between the various Roberts, while treating Thekla with the same dignity.

The second concerns footnotes. The authors of the documents often write in interesting ways that reflect their social background, their dialect, and their idiolect — and may be of interest to readers of German. We therefore include the original German in the footnotes for all direct quotations that we have translated in the text. The German transcriptions are all “diplomatic” in that they provide the reader with as mimetic a representation of the handwritten source as is possible within the limitations of the available keyboard characters. We did not add [sic] when their prose deviated from standard German, as is common practice in many scholarly publications. Instead, the students, the faculty, and then Li Gerhalter devoted considerable time and effort to checking them repeatedly to ensure their accuracy. Thanks to the fact that the research materials for this project in the public humanities are entirely online, scholars interested in using this collection for their own research are welcome to contact the editors. We would be happy to provide online access to the Transkribus collection, where the digitized documents can be consulted directly.

Third, we wish to remind the reader that this book is a student project. As young scholars, they were not expected to survey the vast secondary literature on their subjects in order to draft their chapters. The students also did not read all or even most of the sources in the collection before drafting their chapters. Each individually worked on only a small selection of items: around 50-100 documents. The entire research team was able to transcribe only a portion of the sources dating from the late 1890s to the 1920s, along with the narrative interviews with the grandchildren that focused on the period after the Second World War. As a result, there are many more documents in the collection that have yet to be transcribed no less analyzed. Indeed, the family made the second set of documents available to the research team effectively after the re-

search was completed. The following chapters should therefore be understood as initial forays into their topics.

Here then lies the real lesson to be learned from this research project — about the changing nature of scholarship. In a century of digital technologies, the public humanities have opened the possibility for collaboration on a scale and across boundaries that is unprecedented in human history. The outcomes of projects like ours are no longer just the interpretations of the past offered at the end of the research process but the research process itself. When viewed in these terms, this book marks the successful completion of only one stage in that process, and we celebrate the students for the skills, experiences, and insights that they have gained in the process.

Moreover, we have to stop imagining such a fundamental difference between faculty and students, academics and citizen scientists, or even our primary and secondary sources. As Drew argues elsewhere, we are all history writers:<sup>4</sup> the editors and the coauthors; the transcribers of documents and the taggers of metadata; the grandchildren as interview partners, along with their other family members who preserved the memories and traditions of their grandparents; the collection processors; Grandma Thekla and Tanta Roberta, as unofficial family archivists; and of course, the authors of the original documents themselves. Each in their own way created accounts of the past based on the evidence of experience. Each in their own way added new layers of meaning about the past for the present. The chapters to follow are just the current versions of these stories. We hope you will return for more stories about the Kiefer-Scholz family, for they will almost certainly fill another issue of *German Migration to Missouri* in the future.

The editors and authors of this book would like to thank the many colleagues who provided our team with scholarly lectures that informed our research. We would also like to thank Dorris Keeven-Franke, of the Missouri Germans Coalition, and Dr. Sabine Bamberger-Stemmann, director of the Hamburg Agency for Civic Education, for their support for this project.

4 Andrew Stuart Bergerson: “La Volksgemeinschaft de Theodora: una historia personal del Servicio de Trabajo del Reich (1938-39),” *Ayer*, 133, No. 1 (forthcoming 2024).

# THE FAMILY BACKGROUND OF THEKLA E. SCHOLZ

A PROSOPOGRAPHY

In the first years of the new twentieth century, there was a lot happening to the Scholz family of Langenbrück. Called Moszczanka today, this village in Upper Silesia belonged to Germany at the time and is today part of Poland. Breslau (today Wrocław) was the capital of Silesia and the fifth largest German city; Langenbrück is located about 120 kilometers south of it. At the turn of the century, the children of Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) and Josef Scholz were teenagers and young adults. In the years around 1910, each of them made decisions about their future path in life. For several of them, this path led them far from home.

Thekla Elisabeth Scholz was born in 1888. In 1911, she migrated to the USA, where she married Robert Johann Kiefer in 1922 and started a family. We learn about her Silesian family and friends through close investigation of the many letters, postcards, photographs, and devotional pictures that Thekla kept throughout her life as well as the stories of her grandchildren recorded in narrative interviews by members of our research team. This prosopography or collective biography seeks to lay the foundation for the other chapters in this book by describing what we know — so far — about the Scholz family of Langenbrück around the year 1910.

We begin with some peculiarities of letters as scholarly sources. Because archival collections are often created by individuals, they often preserve only one side of a correspondence. It is also the case here: Thekla Scholz collected these artifacts, so she stands at the center of this network of letters, photographs, postcards, and other documents. As a result, we have many pieces of mail written to her but hardly any written by her. She sent her own letters out into the world — where most were lost. The postcard in Figures 1 and 2 is one of the

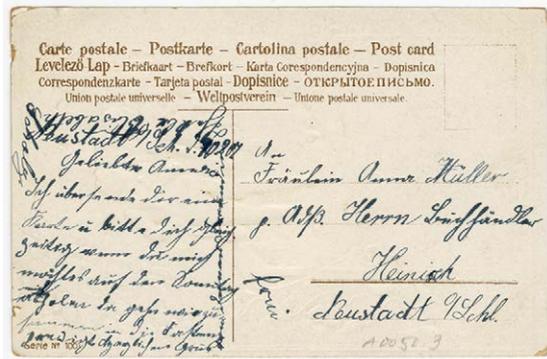


Figure 1 and 2. Postcard, Thekla Scholz to Anna Müller, from Neustadt on 1 September 1907, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., P9070207-TA0050.3a-b.

few surviving pieces of writing that Thekla wrote herself. It gives an impression of the handwriting of our main protagonist, about whom we otherwise have only indirect information.<sup>1</sup> This imbalance raises the question whether we can conclude anything at all about Thekla under these circumstances or only about the other historical actors in her network. Yet letters and postcards are always addressed to a concrete person or persons. The authors write not only about themselves but also react to the addressees, asking them questions or commenting on their lives. In this way, scholars can infer information about the recipients indirectly.

A second peculiarity of letters relates to their content. The authors of letters exist mostly in a prior relationship, so they can take certain facts for granted. For this reason, some information remains obscure and has to be inferred from the context. For example, none of the authors directly describe what kind of work Thekla's parents Hedwig and Josef Scholz performed to earn a living. From the content of the letters, however, it can be deduced that they ran a small farm in Langenbrück. The address information on several documents indicates that Josef Scholz also worked as a "Bahnwärter" or signaller for the Prussian State Railroad. The siblings who wrote these correspondences of course knew their father's occupation, so they did not have to refer to it in their letters. We know it from the fact that his title was sometimes listed before his name, as was common in Germany at the time. We also learn more infor-

1 Postcard, Thekla Scholz to Anna Müller, from Neustadt on 1 September 1907, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9070207-TA0050.3a-b.

mation from the address. In Figures 3 and 4, which is the earliest postcard addressed to Thekla, her address is listed as “am Bahndamm,” which means “at the railroad embankment.”<sup>2</sup>

The family tree seen in Figures 13 and 14 (p. 37/38) is necessarily provisional. We are not certain, for instance, whether Thekla’s mother was actually named Hedwig (born Müller) Scholz. She may also have been called Maria Josefa (born Fietz). Hedwig and Josef Scholz also had many children, but we are not quite sure just how many. We know of at least eleven; the oldest was born in the 1870s and the youngest in the 1890s. They can be seen on the family portrait that adorns the cover of this book.



Figures 3 and 4. Postcard, Paul Scholz to Thekla Scholz “in Langenbrück am Bahndamm,” from Hartmannsdorf and Holz Kirch on 10 August 1899, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P8990809-TA0100.3a–b.

We have been able to gather a lot of information on the living conditions of the Scholz family, however. Agnes and Berthold Scholz worked with their mother in Langenbrück in agriculture and on the side.<sup>3</sup> The two may have been the youngest siblings. Josef, the eldest brother, had worked as a miller in Dresden

- 2 Postcard, Paul Scholz to Thekla Scholz, from Hartmannsdorf and Holz Kirch on 31 August 1899, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P8990809-TA0100.3a–b.
- 3 Letter, Berta Scholz (born Sperlich) to Thekla Scholz, from Langenbrück on 31 January 1915, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9150131-TL0119.1a and letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, from Langenbrück on 22 June 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9200622-TL0276.1a; “Die Agnes wird sich überall ihr bischen Brot verdienen;” “Berthold ist dieses Frühjahr fleißig auf Arbeit gegangen und hat sich ganz schönes Geld verdient.”



Figures 5 and 6. Postcard, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, from Bremerhaven in Summer 1907, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9070729-TA0072.4a-b.

and Colditz in Saxony.<sup>4</sup> By 1910, however, he may also have been employed by the railroad in Langenbrück, and his wife was Berta Sperlich. Sister Maria lived in the larger town of Neustadt, now called Prudnik, not quite ten kilometers from Langenbrück. Her husband was Franz Streibel. All other siblings were not yet married. Working in domestic service was one of the most common forms of gainful employment for women at that time. The sisters Hedwig, Martha, and Thekla Scholz worked as maids in Neustadt; Rosalia Scholz also worked as a maid in the city of Gleiwitz (today Gliwice) 155 kilometers away from home and in Munich in Bavaria 670 kilometers away. Meanwhile, the brothers Paul, Franz

Josef, and August Scholz had formally trained and taken positions as beer brewers. Paul worked in Holzkirch, today Kościelnik,<sup>5</sup> while Franz did so in Magdeburg in Sachsen-Anhalt, which meant that he was already about 600 kilometers away from Langenbrück. Military service had even taken the young man to Saarbürg in Lothringen, now Saarebourg in Lorraine, France.<sup>6</sup>

- 4 Postcard, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, from Saarbürg in Lothringen on 1 January 1902, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9010216-TA0028.2a-b. P9020103-TA0019.1a-b and Postcard, Paul Scholz to "Müller/Müller" Franz Scholz, 15 January 1909, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9000115-TA0027.1a-b.
- 5 Postcard, Rosalia Scholz to Paul Scholz, from Königshütte in Silesia on 18 May 1900, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9000518-TP2014a-b.
- 6 Postcard from Martha and Thekla Scholz to Franz Scholz, from Langenbrück on 5. January 1901, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9010103-TP2025a-b.

All of this internal migration within the German Empire, sometimes quite far distances, arguably encouraged Franz Scholz to dare an intercontinental migration: he was, after all, the first of the siblings to leave Europe for North America. In 1907, he travelled to the United States.<sup>7</sup> The family followed his project with interest, as seen in Figures 5 and 6. Before his departure from Bremerhaven on the North Sea on the *Express Liner Kronprinz Wilhelm*, the 29-year-old wrote a postcard to his younger sister Thekla. “Once again as I depart, [I] say ‘fare thee well’ from my heart. I have ordered all of my affairs. As soon as I am on the other side, I will write again.”<sup>8</sup>

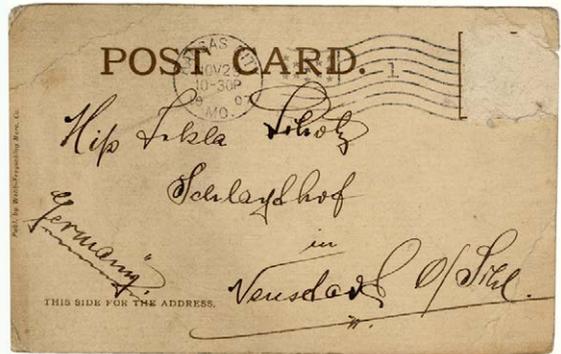


Figure 7 and 8. Postcard, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, from Kansas City on 30 October 1907, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9071129-TP2070a-b.

Who or what motivated Franz Scholz to embark on this adventure is not known, but he served as the model for the other siblings to consider the possibility of intercontinental migration. We see one of his first postcards from Kansas City from October 1907 in Figures 7 and 8. He asked: “Will Hedwig come? Paul will probably come over.” Jokingly, he added to Thekla: “Cross your fingers. Maybe I can also find you a rich husband.”<sup>9</sup> Although Franz did

- 7 “Scholz, Franz,” *U. S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Form No.1 IP, 1853-P-571, Ancestry.com, accessed 21 July 2020.
- 8 Postcard, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, from Bremerhaven in Summer 1907, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9070729-TA0072.4a-b; “Sage dir bei meiner Abreise von hier noch mal ein herzliches Lebewohl. Meine Sachen habe ich alles geregelt. Sobald ich drüben bin, schreibe ich wieder.”
- 9 Postcard, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, from Kansas City on 30 October 1907, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9071129-TP2070a-b; “Wird Hedwig kommen? Paul kommt wohl hierher [...] Halte den Daumen. Vielleicht kann ich Dir auch mal einen reichen Mann verschaffen.”

not succeed in *that* task, three of his siblings followed his example in a typical example of chain migration. Paul followed in 1908 at the age of 26, August in 1910 at the younger age of 18, and finally, their 23-year-old sister Thekla followed in 1911. The chapters to follow describe how the four Scholz siblings fared in in the “New World” and how their family and friends in Silesia responded to their migration. Hedwig, who was asked on the postcard from October 1907 if she would also come, did not follow their example, however. She remained in Silesia.

We also wish we knew more about Thekla Scholz’s schooling and/or vocational training. As a young girl from a working-class family living in a small village, she probably did not receive a good education. The addresses on individual postcards prove that she already lived with another family in Neustadt at the age of eleven, probably working for them as a maid.<sup>10</sup> In addition, she seems to have attended an “Ober Schule” or high school in Langenbrück at the age of thirteen.<sup>11</sup> Such an arrangement was common at that time. Even very young girls lived with other people’s families, where they earned their own bed and board by working in the household. They also learned practical skills at house-keeping in the process.<sup>12</sup> Thekla Scholz’s addresses thus changed as she found herself “im Dienst” or “in service” with several different families.<sup>13</sup> Already in September 1899, she was working in the household of Monica and H. Sicker in Neustadt for the first time,<sup>14</sup> where she was probably also working when she departed for the United States and with whom she remained in communication years later. The authors of the letters give H. Sicker two different titles: either “Schlachthausdirektor/Director of the Slaughterhouse” or “Tierarzt/

- 10 Postcard, unknown (probably a family member) to Thekla Scholz, from Langenbrück, 3 September 1899, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P8990903-TA0051.4a–b.
- 11 Postcard, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, from Saarburg in Lothringen on 16 February 1901, Kiefer-Scholz coll P9010216-TA0028.2a–b.
- 12 See Donna R. Gabaccia, *From the Other Side, Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U. S., 1820–1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Katharine M. Donato and Donna R. Gabaccia, *Migration, From the Slavery Era to the Global Age* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2015); Jessica Richter, “Brüchigkeit als Normalität – Mobilitäten und Stellenwechsel in Selbstzeugnissen von Hausgehilfinnen (Österreich, ca. 1900–1938),” in: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 29/3 (2018), 97–119.
- 13 Postcard, Hedwig Scholz to Thekla Scholz, from Bad Ziegenhals in Schlesien on 4. September 1899, “An Schülerin Thekla Scholz bei Herrn Lehrer Böhm, Langenbrück, Kreis Neustadt O/S,” Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P8990907-TA0096.4b.
- 14 Postcard, unknown (probably a family member) to Thekla Scholz, from Langenbrück on 3 September 1899, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P8990903-TA0051.4 a–b.

Veterinarian.” It was probably in Neustadt that Thekla Scholz also met her close friend Otilie (“Tielchen”) Kiefer. She too worked as a maid and later became Thekla’s sister-in-law. The earliest surviving piece of mail from Otilie to Thekla can be seen in Figures 9 and 10. Writing from Neustadt on 4 September 1902, Tielchen also mentions Thekla’s place of work with the Sicker family in Neustadt. The two friends were 14 years old at the time.<sup>15</sup>

The mobility of the Scholz siblings is the main reason why we have so many pieces of correspondence from this family in the first place. Since they were physically separated from each other, they had to write if they wanted to stay in contact. They did so even though they were not very skilled at it. Consider the handwriting of the letters written by their mother Hedwig Scholz. They offer particularly impressive testimony both to her lack of formal education and also to her lack of opportunity or need to write regularly in her daily life. She was probably born in the 1850s. In the rural regions of Upper Silesia, most people were illiterate until the end of the



Figures 9 and 10. Postcard, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, from Neustadt on 4. September 1902, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9020904-TA0021.4a-b.

15 Postcard, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, from Neustadt on 4. September 1902, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9020904-TA0021.4a-b.

19th century.<sup>16</sup> A farm worker, it is unlikely that she went to school for more than a few years. Still she wrote pages of letters to her children living travelling far and wide because she had to and apparently wanted to do. This conclusion is supported in the negative by the fact that no letters or postcards have survived from her husband Josef Scholz. Either he had no interest in writing — or he could not do so himself because he was illiterate.

The letters also make visible Thekla Scholz' personal network that included several friends. Mutual greetings and reports prove that Tielchen Kiefer was well acquainted with the Scholz siblings. Among the friends and family who were women, there was considerable discussion through letters and postcards around 1910 about their respective plans for the future. This aspect of the collection makes these documents rare as historical sources. Thekla even toyed with the idea of entering a religious convent. Two of her sisters Rosalia and Martha Scholz both chose this path. Rosalia became Sr. Fortunata Scholz, Martha Sr. Bertholdine. In this capacity, Sr. Fortunata lived in Berlin among other places while Sr. Bertholdine migrated to such places as the Netherlands, Africa, and Vienna.<sup>17</sup>

We know comparatively less about the Kiefer family. Robert Johann Kiefer was born in 1886 to Johanna (born Thomas) Kiefer and Johann Kiefer, perhaps of Silesia as well. We have no further information about the parents so far. Robert had at least three siblings: Ottilie "Tielchen," Josef, and a less well-attested sister named Maria Kiefer. We have just a single letter from her, which Maria wrote to her "dear brother" as early as 1906 from the hospital in Neustadt.<sup>18</sup> Robert was a carpenter and musician who travelled around German-speaking Central Europe with an orchestra. Individual postcards indicate that he was in the region of Bern, Switzerland, from 1911 and 1912.<sup>19</sup> In October 1913, Tielchen Kiefer reported to Thekla of a face-to-face meeting with her two brothers Robert and Josef, who had enlisted. "I had not seen the oldest (the civilian) for 8 years. As you can imagine, our mutual joy was enormous. We also

16 See Rainer Block, "Determinanten der preußischen Alphabetisierung im 19. Jahrhundert," in: *Historical Social Research*, 21/1 (1996), 94–121.

17 Sr. Bertholdine Scholz was mentioned in: Katharina Stornig, *Sisters Crossing Boundaries: German Missionary Nuns in Colonial Togo and New Guinea, 1897–1960* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 218.

18 Letter, Maria Kiefer to Robert Kiefer, from Neustadt on 24 April 1906, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9010919-TP2089a and b and L9060424-TL0005.1a–b.

19 For instance, Postcard, Berta Bolli to Robert Kiefer, from Interlaken in Switzerland on 19 September 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9010919-TP2089a–b.

spend several happy hours together.”<sup>20</sup> A studio photograph was taken on this occasion (Figure 15, p. 39). Tielchen was no longer working as a maid by 1913; she had been able to successfully translate her work experience into a career in the “sales office” of a construction company in Berlin. By 1913, Berlin was of course the prosperous capital of Germany and a cosmopolitan metropolis. Her professional success in Berlin was thus as impressive an accomplishment as Thekla’s transatlantic migration to Kansas City. Robert Kiefer had apparently moved to Berlin by this point as well.

Sometime in this period, Thekla and Robert may have met personally in Missouri. When he returned to Germany, she apparently wrote him a postcard. He responded to her in the fall of 1915 with the postcard seen in Figures 11 and 12. He wrote:

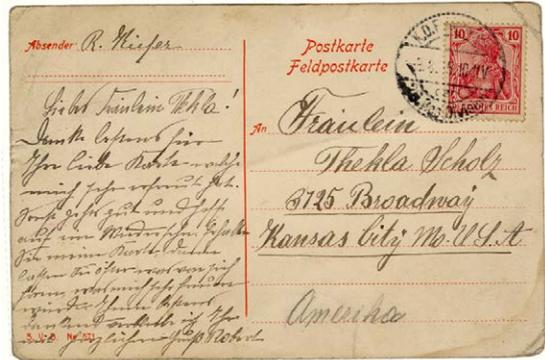
“Dear Miss. Thekla! Many thanks for your dear card, which brought me great joy. Things are well otherwise, and [I] hope we will see each other again. If you receive this card, then allow me to hear from you more often, which would make me very happy. With sincere thanks, I remain, cordially yours, Robert.”<sup>21</sup>

This postcard is the first surviving communication in what became a courtship by mail. It is adorned with a propagandistic portrait of German Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg. By the fall of 1915, the Entente and Central Powers had been fighting World War I for more than a year. To an unprecedented extent, the brutality of this war affected all areas of life, including the civilian population.

As a German citizen, Robert Kiefer had been drafted in 1914; he served as a medic and a musician. The first surviving letter from Robert to Thekla is dated November 1915. He wrote it while on leave with his sister Tielchen in Berlin “after 12 long months of war.” Perhaps the 29-year-old veteran received positive signals from Thekla in her correspondence or perhaps he just

20 Letter, Ottilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, from Berlin on 8 October 1913, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9131008-TL0071.1a-d; “[Den] älteren (den Civilisten) hatte ich schon 8 Jahre nicht gesehen. Du kannst dir denken wie groß die gegenseitige Freude war. Wir haben auch gemütliche Stunden mit einander verlebt.”

21 Postcard, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Field Post (no location), from autumn 1915, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9150309-TP2115a-b. “Liebes Fräulein Thekla! Danke bestens für Ihre liebe Karte welche mich sehr erfreut hat. Sonst gehts gut und hoff auf ein Wiedersehen. Erhalten Sie meine Karte, dann lassen Sie öfter was von sich hören, was mich sehr freuen würde. Ihnen bestens dankend verbleibe ich Ihr mit herzlichem Gruß Robert.”



Figures 11 and 12. Postcard, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Field Post (no location), from autumn 1915, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9150309-TP2115a-b.

felt courageous. For whichever reason, he now openly expressed his interest in this woman who lived so very far away. A longer quotation is appropriate here, given the significance of this moment in their lives and the lives of their descendants:

“Oh, I wish you could be here, dear Thekla [...] I have thus far always received your post well, even if after many long weeks. [...] Through all the long years that you have already spent in America, your heart remains truly German, which is very nice of you. I would count myself among the most happy, if I could call this dear heart my own. After all, I stand alone in a wide world. [...] The war is horrible. [...] Still, these sacrifices shall not be in vain. Even if my destiny should be other than for what I hope, then I may still say, dear Thekla, [that] I have not sacrificed my life in vain. I have fought for a dear heart in a far way place. That thought alone makes me the happiest person, and all hardships and dangers will be surely overcome. May I think this way, dear Thekla?”<sup>22</sup>

- 22 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, from Berlin on 25. November 1915, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9151125-TL0121.1a-b. “Och, könnten Sie doch hier sein liebe Thekla. [...] Ihr Post habe ich bis jetzt immer gut erhalten wenn auch nach langen Wochen. [...] Bei all den langen Jahren welch Sie nun schon in Amerika sind, ist Ihr Herz noch gut deutsch geblieben, was sehr schön ist von Ihnen. Ich würde mich höchst glücklich schätzen wenn ich dieses Liebe Herz mein eigen nennen könnte. Stehe ich doch auch allein auf der weiten Welt [...] Der Krieg ist schrecklich. [...] Doch werden diese Opfer nicht umsonst sein. Sollte es auch mir anders bestimmt sein, als ich hoffe, dann darf ich wohl sagen, liebe Thekla, mein Leben habe ich nicht umsonst geopfert. Ich habe gekämpft für ein liebes Herz weit in der Ferne. Der Gedanke allein macht mich zum glücklichsten Menschen und alle Strapazen und Gefahren werden sicher überwunden. Darf ich so denken, liebe Thekla?”

This letter shows that Thekla Scholz and Robert J. Kiefer were already in regular contact by mail, however, her mail to Robert on the front has not been preserved. At the same time, this letter marks the beginning of their formal courtship, which Robert requested apparently with success.<sup>23</sup> This letter also marked a change in mode of address from the formal to the informal form of the second person pronouns. Whereas this letter is still written to “Liebe Thekla” or “Dear Thekla,” he later addressed her as “Mein süßes Mädel” or “My sweet girl!” and even later as “Meine liebe Braut!” or “My dear bride!” These changes in salutations marked the turning points in their love story.

The outcome of the story is known: The emigrant from Silesia married her compatriot in Kansas City in 1922. Incidentally, Thekla did the same as her brothers before her. All three married a spouse not only from Germany but also from Silesia. We know Franz’s wife Anna Müller was friends with Thekla in Silesia. Thekla even seems to have actively encouraged her brother to consider Anna as an option for marriage. As he wrote in June 1910:

“You have written me often enough about Miss. Anna Müller, and I must admit, I think about her incessantly every day. Her photograph, that I have in a frame, pleases me exceptionally; and if it is God’s will, then she should also become the one my heart chooses.”<sup>24</sup>

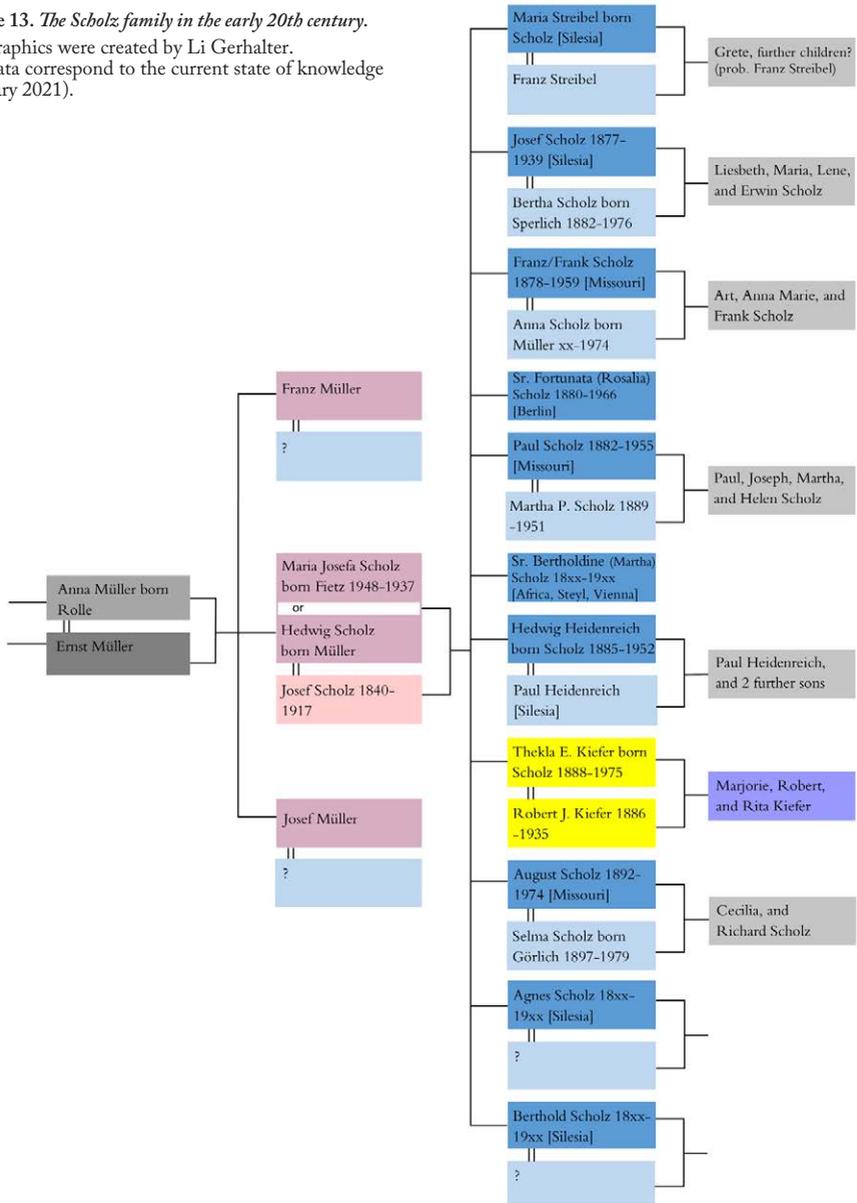
The love and life story from Anna and Franz Scholz was thus also established at a distance by means of letters and photographs, with Thekla serving as the mediator. Apparently, Thekla also had a hand in the marriage of her other brother: Selma Goerlich contacted her by letter in 1914. She was working in St. Louis as a maid at the time and asked Thekla to arrange employment for her in Kansas City.<sup>25</sup> The two young women did not know each other personally at first but established a friendship through letters. Selma later married August Scholz. These kinds of communicative networks are typical of chain

- 23 See also Christa Hämmerle, “Mit Sehnsucht wartent...” – Liebesbriefe im Ersten Weltkrieg. Ein Plädoyer für einen erweiterten Genrebegriff,” *Geschichte der Gefühle: Einblicke in die Forschung*, <https://www.history-of-emotions.mpg.de/texte/liebesbriefe-im-ersten-weltkrieg>, downloaded 7 October 2020.
- 24 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, from Kansas City on 2 June 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100602-TL0011.1a–b; “Du haßt mir jetzt schon genug von Frl. Anna Müller geschrieben und ich muß es frei gestehen, ich denke jeden Tag immerzu an sie. Sie gefällt mir ausgezeichnet auf dem Bild, das ich im Rahmen habe und wenn es Gottes Wille ist, so soll es die auserwählte meines Herzens werden.”
- 25 Letter, Selma Goerlich to Thekla Scholz, from St. Louis on 2 July 1914, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9140702-TL0096.1a–b. “Auf Anraten meines Bruders und meiner lb. Schwägerin Selma, habe ich mich entschlossen nach Kansas City zu kommen u. ich werde Ihnen sehr dankbar sein, wenn Sie mir dazu behilflich sein wollen.”

migrations. One migrant helped and supported the next with the difficult tasks of finding a good workplace and sometimes even a good spouse.

No doubt, Thekla Scholz preserved these particular written documents for the same reason that we find them so useful today as scholars. They were the primary medium through which she built a new life for herself in the United States and the medium through which she maintained strong relationships with the people she left behind in Langenbrück. Throughout her life in Kansas City, these documents reminded her of the many courageous steps she took in the course of her biography. They serve us now as the medium through which we can learn more about her life, the lives of her family and friends, and the experience of German migration to Missouri in the early twentieth century.

Figure 13. *The Scholz family in the early 20th century.*  
 The graphics were created by Li Gerhalter.  
 The data correspond to the current state of knowledge  
 (January 2021).



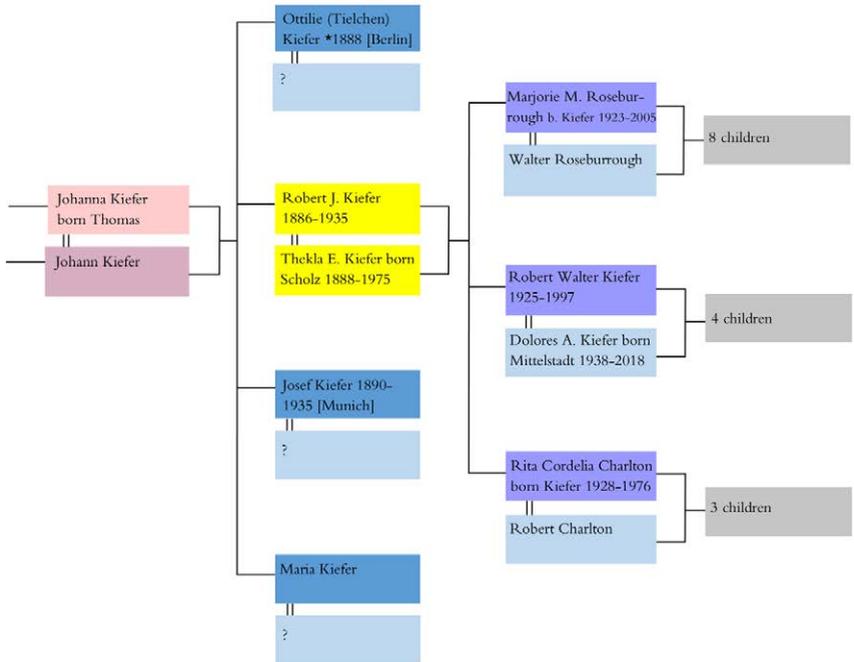


Figure 14. *The Kiefer family in the early 20th century.*  
 The graphics were created by Li Gerhalter.  
 The data correspond to the current state of knowledge (January 2021)



Figure 15. *The Kiefer siblings Josef, Ottilie (“Tielchen”), and Robert J. Kiefer, Berlin, October 1913.*  
Kiefer-Scholz Coll. B9xxxx-TX3414a.



KATHARINA BURGSTALLER-MÜHLBACHER, TIM FINKE,  
ZOE HONECK, MAYMOUNA TINE-LEHMANN

## “YOU WANTED IT YOURSELF”

THEKLA SCHOLZ’S MIGRATION TO MISSOURI

„Maschine stopp, Ruder langsam Steuerbord,” shouted the captain. “Stop the engine. Helm to starboard.” The order struck her like lightning. She knew it could only mean one thing: the steamer was about to dock, and with it, a different chapter of her life could begin. While getting lost deep in thought, she ventured onto the deck and gazed at the scenery of the coastline. For weeks before the journey, she had wondered about this moment when she would first be able to lay eyes on the shores and the silhouette of a statue symbolizing a land of opportunity. The United States of America was the same land that she had heard and read so much about. Growing up, many people around her referred to the United States as the gateway for a better life. She was just mere minutes away from taking her first step on American soil, yet she still did not know how to explain the mixed emotions she felt: the sorrow of leaving behind friends and family interspersed with the joyful excitement of being reunited with family members who already awaited her arrival in the New World. If nothing else, she remembered what provoked her to think about leaving in the first place: her idealized expectations of a greater life in the United States.

The young woman of this fictive scene could have been Thekla E. Scholz. She represented just one of the millions of German immigrants crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After entering the United States in 1911, the twenty-three-year-old traveled across the country to Missouri, where three of her brothers and a sister-in-law already lived. Thekla and her family represent one example of the German Migration to Missouri. An examination of the Scholz family’s migrant story allows historians to gain greater insight into the migrants’ adaptability to a foreign country. The aim of this microhistory is to understand Thekla’s expectations as a migrant and compare them to her experiences, insofar as they are represented in photographs

and letters. How did work life in America differ from work life in Germany? How did the experiences of the Scholz family in Missouri fare in comparison to their expectations? How did they create a living for themselves in this new city? The photographs and letters in the Robert J. and Thekla E. (Scholz) Kiefer Collection provide intimate insight not only into the life and thoughts of a young woman migrant coming from a rural village in Upper Silesia but also into the lives and thoughts of her family, friends, and acquaintances. Despite initial difficulties after arriving in the United States, Thekla found work, started a family, and established herself in her community.

## GERMAN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Around 1850, the popular emigrant song, “Song of America” was written at a time of dynamic movements of emigrants from Europe to America. It expressed the unbroken fascination of the United States as an immigration country.

“Now is the hour, We’re moving to America.  
 The car is already at the door,  
 With wife and children we go.  
 Farewell, friends and kin’,  
 Shake hands for the last time.  
 We’ll never see each other again.  
 Oh, do not cry, do not cry so much!  
 And as one floats on the water,  
 It’s where they sing songs.  
 We fear no falling water.  
 And think: God is everywhere.  
 And when we get to Baltimore,  
 We raise our hand up, And call out: Victoria!  
 Now we are in America!”

*“Amerikalied” (“Song of America“, ca. 1850)<sup>1</sup>*

1 Brunner, Bernd, *Nach Amerika: Die Geschichte der deutschen Auswanderung* (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 67; „Jetzt ist die Stunde da, Wir ziehen nach Amerika. Der Wagen steht schon vor der Tür, Mit Weib und Kindern ziehen wir. Adjes, ihr Freunde und Verwandt’, Reicht uns zum letztenmal die Hand. Wir sehn einander nimmermehr! O weinet nicht, weint nicht so sehr! / Und als man auf dem Wasser schwimmt, Da werden Lieder angestimmt. Wir fürchten

The verses of the *"Amerikalied"* playfully reveal the many fears and hopes of migrants at this time. Emigration was a dangerous affair, and many factors often scared migrants such as separation from the family and wider social networks as well as the insecurity and dangers of the journey across the Atlantic followed by an unpredictable future.<sup>2</sup> Despite the difficulties that lay ahead,<sup>3</sup> the idealized dream of a better life in America inspired hope of a new beginning.

German migration to the United States was more prominent in cities with a strong German heritage. Midwest cities such as Saint Louis, Chicago, and Cleveland became hubs for German migrants. These cities embraced German heritage. German emigrants settled in specific sections of these cities; and there, among fellow German migrants, many continued to speak German and incorporated German culture into their daily lives.

The first German immigrants settled in the British colonies of North America as early as the seventeenth century. In the following centuries immigration from the German-speaking regions remained steady, especially from the southwestern areas. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, German-speaking Central Europe experienced a rapid increase in the population with no change in employment opportunities. The unemployment crisis was a leading factor for mass migration to the United States in the nineteenth century.

In addition to widespread unemployment, religion played a pivotal role in drawing German migrants to the United States. Religiously motivated emigrants hoped to find a utopia of a peaceful and equal world. Historian Petra DeWitt argues that "the early immigrants to Missouri followed their religious leaders" wishing to "secure greater freedom to worship."<sup>4</sup> Religious German migrants flocked to Eastern and Central Missouri during the mid-nineteenth century. In 1839, Martin Stephan, on behalf of the Saxon Settlement Society, brought

keinen Wasserfall / Und denken: Gott ist überall. Und kommen wir nach Baltimor, Da recken wir die Hand empor/ Und rufen aus: Viktoria! Jetzt sind wir in Amerika!<sup>4</sup>

- 2 Brunner, *Nach America*, 8.
- 3 Jankowiak, Daniela, *Die deutsche Einwanderung in die USA und ihre Auswirkungen* (Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag, 2018), 15.
- 4 Petra DeWitt, *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German American Community during World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 10.

a group of Lutheran clergymen to the state.<sup>5</sup> The group established Lutheran principles in the vicinity of St. Louis.<sup>6</sup> In 1847, Wilhelm Kiel established a religious commune in Bethel, a town located in Shelby County, in Northeast Missouri. The commune attracted large numbers both nationally and globally, for Kiel promised equality.<sup>7</sup> Everyone, regardless of gender, worked the same jobs. One visitor described the commune as a place where “every house had a garden with vegetables and flowers” and “each family had cows, pigs, poultry” in addition to “milk, butter, eggs, and meat.”<sup>8</sup> Missouri also appealed to German Catholics. Primarily settling on the Mississippi River, German Catholics established parishes.<sup>9</sup> Immigrants settling in Missouri for religious purposes wished to preserve their religious faith.

Religion was not the only factor driving migrants to Missouri; social and economic motives proved to be more of an influence than faith. Missouri gave the opportunity to acquire land to immigrants with a “drive to improve one’s economic situation.”<sup>10</sup> The desire for a financially stable life brought an influx of migrants to the United States. German societies in the United States were established to bring large groups of migrants to America.<sup>11</sup> Societies accomplished the task in part because of the further development of the shipping industry but also through partnerships with emigration companies. Additionally, emigration was advertised on a large scale in Germany. Large numbers of handbooks and emigrant reports were easily accessible. An early, prominent example of this type of literature is Gottfried Duden’s *Report on a Journey to the Western States*, published in 1829. Duden praised the state of Missouri for its wonderful weather and the ability to find work there. In his report, Duden wrote about the land where he lived, being able to hire help, and how nice Americans were.<sup>12</sup> His book, coupled with letters boasting about their economic successes from German migrants back home, helped persuade Germans

5 DeWitt, *Degrees*, 10.

6 DeWitt, *Degrees*, 10.

7 Robyn Burnett and Ken Luebbering, *Immigrant Women in the Settlement of Missouri* (Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 2005), 67.

8 Burnett/Luebbering, *Immigrant Women*, 67.

9 DeWitt, *Degrees*, 11.

10 DeWitt, *Degrees*, 11.

11 Burnett/Luebbering, *Immigrant Women*, 7.

12 Burnett/Luebbering, *Immigrant Women*, 7.

to move to the United States. Steam navigation shortened the travel time considerably while allowing more passengers on the ship. Despite these improvements, the crossing remained not only extremely expensive but also a risky adventure. Cramped into the "tween" decks, with too many people and too little air, there was always the risk of the spread of disease or the ship sinking. The passenger list of the USS Grant, the ship on which Thekla Scholz went to America, revealed that she could only afford a third-class ticket and thus had to start the journey into her new life in that uncomfortable tightness of the tweendeck.<sup>13</sup> The *"Amerikalied"* lyric expressed the helpless situation aboard those ships: "We fear no waterfall. And think: God is everywhere." To lighten the mood, music was played below deck and songs such as this one were sung. Franz Scholz, brother of Thekla Scholz, migrated to the United States of America in 1907. He told Thekla shortly before her own crossing in 1911 that, "when it's time to go on board, everything is as lively and cheerful as before. And the music plays merry marches."<sup>14</sup> Franz's description, much like letters sent back to Germany, omitted the negatives of the travel. Rather than focusing on the cramped decks and risks of travel across the Atlantic Ocean, Scholz focused on the positives and joyfulness of travel.

For many immigrants, the journey did not end once arriving at Ellis Island. Many immigrants continued their travels to their destinations, whether that be a state away or across the country. That was the case for Thekla Scholz, who went to Missouri to follow her three brothers.

## LABOR MIGRATION IN AMERICA

At the heart of every migration is a new beginning. For Thekla Scholz, her new beginning was a chance of financial stability through various job opportunities. Her decision to leave Germany was not an easy one. Push and pull factors heavily influenced not only her decision to migrate but also several other migrants in her social network. Push factors refer to the pressures at home to

13 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany, Hamburger Passagierlisten, Band: 373-7 I, VIII A 1 Band 237, Seite:1546, Mikrofilnummer:K\_1819.

14 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 15 May 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110512-TL0017.1a; „wenn es auf's Schiff geht alles ist munter und fröhlich wie zuvor. Und die Musik spielt lustige Märsche."

leave, while the pull factors refer to enticements abroad to come. Often individuals made these decisions under economic constraints.<sup>15</sup>

For Thekla, industrialization represented a push factor. Industrialization changed German agriculture. The “government attempts to modernize agriculture” hurt rural farmers.<sup>16</sup> Industrialization led to the decline of a feudal agriculture system. Furthermore, the focus of the German economy shifted from agriculture to industry. Many farmers, including the Scholz family, struggled to make a profit. Coming from an agrarian family, Thekla had few opportunities for financial stability. For this reason, she considered her future career possibilities very carefully. With Thekla’s siblings Franz, August, and Paul already living in the United States, Thekla believed that she could achieve financial stability by migrating. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, labor migration for industrial purposes became popular. The story of the Scholz siblings thus gives readers a rare insight into the lives of the other transatlantic labor migrant workers from the lower social class at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The United States offered a plethora of opportunities, especially for unskilled workers. Industrialization and urbanization allowed for the creation of many jobs. Oftentimes, labor migrants worked factories and slaughterhouses. Slaughterhouses became one of the more popular industries for immigrant workers. These jobs did not require the workers to have formal education or to speak English. In a letter back home, Paul Scholz describes his brother August’s work at a slaughterhouse in the following terms:

“It is one of the largest slaughterhouses in the world. You’d be amazed [see original] if you saw something like that. The machinery is so cleverly set up that, in 10 hours, 5000 head of cattle and 8-9000 pigs are slaughtered, and perhaps 2-3000 sheep. Indeed, meat is delivered from there to the whole world.”<sup>17</sup>

15 Dirk Hoerder, *Geschichte der Deutschen Migration: Vom Mittelalter bis heute* (München: C.H. Beck, 2010), 12.

16 Robert W. Frizzell, *Independent Immigrants: A Settlement of Hanoverian Germans in Western Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 29.

17 Letter, Paul Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 3 February 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110203-TL0014.1b; “Es ist ja eines der größten Schlachthäuser der Welt, da würdest du staun staunen, wenn du so etwas sehen solltest. Die Maschinerie ist ja raffiniert eingerichtet, daß in 10 Stunden 5000 Stück Rindvieh und 8-9000 Schweine geschlachtet werden und vielleicht 2-3000 Schafe, es wird ja von da Fleisch in die ganze Welt geliefert.”

Paul boasts about the technological advancements in the United States. With industrialization and mass consumerism, factory work became the center of American commerce. Paul's detailed account illustrated the need for migrant work in these facilities in order to keep up with consumer demand.

Unskilled labor was not the only work open to migrants, but given the competitive market, it was difficult for craftsmen to find a career. Upon arriving in the United States, many immigrants expected to begin an apprenticeship program of some kind, however they quickly realized that there was often no equivalent in the United States. Many of these migrants already possessed skilled trades; but without apprenticeship programs, numerous individuals found themselves working unskilled labor jobs. In a letter, Paul Scholz reports that his brother August was unable to find work in his skilled leather trade. Paul wrote that

"August has now been working in the slaughterhouse for almost 3 weeks, but he must first see that he gets into his trade, since the strike of the leather workers has not yet been fully settled."<sup>18</sup>

Not all skilled workers worked unskilled jobs. The Scholz brothers Paul and Franz were both trained as brewers in Neustadt in Upper Silesia. Their experience in Germany made them skilled workers on the American labor market. It is hardly coincidental that the brothers chose to settle in Missouri with its large breweries. It is not yet known whether so-called "forerunners" — relatives or acquaintances from Silesia — had already come to Kansas City or if the Scholz family researched where, in the United States, they would have the best prospects of success with their knowledge and skills.

Economic and social historian Annemarie Steidl concluded that single women were most likely to permanently change their place of living when migrating, while men more often migrated in order to find temporary work of a shorter duration.<sup>19</sup> This pattern does not hold true for the Scholz siblings, as the brothers served as permanent forerunners for Thekla. Only two years after he

18 Letter, Paul Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 3 February 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110203-TL0014.1b; "August schafft jetzt beinahe 3 Wochen im Schlachthaus, er muß aber auch erst sehen, daß es später in sein Handwerk drein kommt, da bis jetzt der Streik der Lederarbeiter noch nicht gesättelt ist."

19 See Annemarie Steidl, "Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 19, no. 1 (2008): 36.

emigrated himself in 1907, Franz Scholz boasted to Thekla, who still lived in Silesia at the time, about his economic successes. He wrote, “I can earn good money this spring, since the beer business is starting up fast and the brewery is expanding again.”<sup>20</sup> In fact, three-quarters of the beer industry remained in German ownership, and production increased steadily since the end of the nineteenth century. The famous Schlitz Brewery started with 400 barrels a year when it was founded in 1849. By 1907, it produced more than 1.5 Million barrels in 1907.<sup>21</sup> This constant expansion of production and production facilities is reflected in Franz Scholz’s narrative. The growth of the beer business was not only worthwhile for the brewers but also for the many farmers in the region, who supplied the raw materials such as barley, malt, and hops for the production.

The Scholz brothers all worked for the Schlitz Brewery in Kansas City. Thekla’s granddaughter Margie McHale confirmed in a 2020 interview that the Scholz brothers were master brewers and that their portraits still hang there today. As she said, “our heritage is hanging in the Schlitz brewery with our great uncles up there on the wall!”<sup>22</sup> These stories of successful migration are still remembered generations later as part of the Kiefer-Scholz family’s German-American heritage.

## LABOR MIGRATION WITHIN THE GERMAN EMPIRE

Prior to making the voyage to America in 1911, Thekla Scholz struggled in her low social class. She grew up in Langenbrück, a village in Silesia that was then in Germany.<sup>23</sup> The economy was primarily agricultural at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most people, including the Scholz family, struggled to live off small farms. Poverty was common.<sup>24</sup> Thekla saw few chances to

20 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 12 March 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100312-TL0010.1b; “Fürs zweite kann ich dieses Frühjahr schönes Geld verdienen, da jetzt das Biergeschäft flott anfängt und die Brauerei wieder bedeutend vergrößert wird.”

21 Rudolf Cronau, *Drei Jahrhunderte deutschen Lebens in Amerika: Eine Geschichte der Deutschen in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Hamburg: Severus Verlag, 2013 [1909]), 394.

22 Interview, Maggie McHale, conducted by Kathleen Foster, 6 July 2020, GMM 200628, 10.

23 Langenbrück is now known as Moszczanka, a Polish village.

24 Tomasz Przerwa and Joanna Wojdon, “The History of Silesia,” Lecture for the course German Migration to Missouri, Kansas City and Wrocław, 2019.

improve her social status. She grew up with very little, as she came from a large family. Trying to overcome these obstacles, Thekla searched for jobs away from her village. That is, she already considered moving from home to pursue her career long before she decided to emigrate to the United States.

Thekla looked for work as a maid in the nearby city of Neustadt, also in Silesia.<sup>25</sup> Her willingness to move showcased the mobility of not just our protagonist but also other young women in this era. Contemporary commentators described this search for work away from home by the rural poor as *Landflucht* or rural exodus. Thekla and other labor workers were known as *Landflüchtige*, people who migrated from rural areas to the cities. These rural economic refugees moved across the German Empire to find new ways and places to earn a living.<sup>26</sup> In her book, *Deutsche Dienstmädchen in Amerika 1850–1914*, historian Silke Wehner-Franco argues that young German women of the rural lower class were already characterized by a high degree of mobility at home; migration from the countryside to the city was seen as an integral part of personal development for women of this class.<sup>27</sup> Thus, working as a maid or a domestic servant in a nearby city was pretty common. Helma Lutz calls this mobility “a period of transition.”<sup>28</sup> It marked a temporary phase in the life of young women from the lower social class between graduation and marriage.<sup>29</sup> Thekla’s path differed from the traditional sense of this transitional period insofar as her departure from Silesia became permanent.

The twenty-three-year-old woman bravely migrated to the United States hoping to find better working and living conditions. Her decision was most likely influenced by the exciting letters that her family received from her brothers, boasting about life in the United State, however Thekla Scholz did not make her decision to migrate to the United States lightly. By 1909, Thekla struggled to decide between two very different options for her future: either to

25 Neustadt is now known as Prudnik, a Polish town.

26 Silke Wehner-Franco, “Einleitung,” in: Wehner-Franco (ed.), *Deutsche Dienstmädchen in Amerika 1850–1914* (Münster: Waxmann, 1994), 3.

27 Wehner-Franco, “Bedingungen der Auswanderung junger alleinstehender Frauen,” in: Wehner-Franco (ed.), *Deutsche Dienstmädchen in Amerika 1850–1914*. (Münster: Waxmann, 1994), 130.

28 Helma Lutz, “At your Service Madam! The Globalization of Domestic Service,” in: *Feminist Review*, 70 (2002), 95.

29 Wehner-Franco, *Deutsche Dienstmädchen*, 130.

migrate to the United States like three of her brothers or to join a convent and become a nun like two of her sisters, Martha who became Sr. Bertholdine and Rosalia who became Sr. Fortunata. In a letter from 1909, her friend and future sister-in-law Otilie Kiefer responded negatively to the news that Thekla chose to join a convent; indeed, Otilie questioned Thekla's decision.

"I received the news today that you want to join the convent. I almost fell over from shock. Think carefully about that. You are not consequent enough in your decisions. A few weeks ago you wanted to undertake a trip across the sea."<sup>30</sup>

This letter indicates that Thekla constantly thought about her future and struggled to decide which alternative was best. Furthermore, it reveals that, as far as Thekla was concerned, secular German society did not offer her a viable option for living a prosperous life. By contrast, the convent seemed to offer an avenue for stability. The two girlfriends discussed this option several times in their correspondence and not just for Thekla. In a letter to Thekla, Otilie acknowledged that she too considered joining a convent.<sup>31</sup> They even talked about joining a convent together. By February 1911, Otilie wrote to Thekla questioning her why Thekla decided to emigrate to America in the end. Otilie appeared confused about this decision.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the discouragement from Otilie, Thekla most likely decided to cross "the Pond," as the Atlantic was colloquially called, after optimistic letters from her family in the United States. In 1911, Franz Scholz and his wife Anna lived in Kansas City, Missouri. Franz and Anna wrote to Thekla to update the family about prosperous times in their new country. From the letters, it is easy to infer that Thekla expected to achieve her desired economic independence in Missouri. For instance, Anna told her sister-in-law that a domestic worker earns a substantial amount of more money in Kansas City than in Silesia.<sup>33</sup> At

30 Letter, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Crossen in Thuringia, 19 March 1909, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9091319-TL0007.1b; "Erhielt diese Tage die Nachricht daß du jetzt ins Kloster gehen willst. Ich wär vor Schreck bald umgefallen. Prüfe Dich gut. Du bist zu wenig fest in deinen Entschlüssen. Vor wenigen Wochen wolltest du noch eine Reise übers Meer antreten."

31 Letter, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Crossen in Thuringia, 19 January 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100113-TL0008.1b.

32 Letter, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Crossen in Thuringia, 13 February 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110213-TL0016.1b.

33 Letter, Anna Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 13 February 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110213-TL0015.2b

the time that Thekla was considering migrating, an annual salary for a maid in the United States could be 40 to 50 Reichstaler, whereas it would be 7 to 8 Reichstaler in Silesia.<sup>34</sup> In a plea to convince his sister to join him in Kansas City, Franz instructed her not to listen to people's talk about the dangers that might lurk in America.<sup>35</sup> Rather, Thekla should focus on better wages and financial stability. Furthermore, friends and relatives were available to help in many cases. With Thekla's family in Missouri, her decision to start over in a foreign country was less risky than for other single women traveling to the United States without knowing anyone.<sup>36</sup> Most likely, it was the notion of better working and living conditions that intrigued Thekla about Kansas City.

Yet Franz and Anna's letters probably only demonstrated the reality that they wanted others to perceive of them. They wrote of economic prosperity upon arriving in the United States. For Thekla, a woman whose limited options of stability included a convent, seeing her brother succeed in a foreign land was appealing. His letters showed that people from the lower social class in the German Empire could improve their social and economic position in America.<sup>37</sup> Through these reports from relatives, Thekla no doubt built an idealized expectation of American life.

Convinced by Franz and Anna's words, Thekla Scholz boarded the President Grant in August 1911. She and her companion Martha Müller, a 21-year-old woman from Langenbrück, traveled across the Atlantic Ocean to a land where they are promised prosperity. The trip concluded with a lackluster arrival. Thekla quickly discovered that living in the United States did not automatically make her rich, as finding a job tended to be difficult. Wehner-Franco claims that single women, like single men, had to look for work after their arrival, however women had a more difficult time finding a job, as they had fewer options. Due to the lack of training and language skills, domestic work was the most frequently chosen alternative on the labor market for women

34 Wehner-Franco, *Deutsche Dienstmädchen*, 132.

35 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 12 May 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110512-TL0017.1a

36 Wehner-Franco, *Deutsche Dienstmädchen*, 131.

37 Wehner-Franco, *Deutsche Dienstmädchen*, 127.

alongside factory work.<sup>38</sup> Despite moving thousands of miles away from her village, Thekla therefore continued to work as a maid.

Wealthy Americans welcomed German maids. Such acceptance was based on stereotypes about German women and their moral attitudes.<sup>39</sup> It allowed German migrants to enjoy a highly valued reputation in the upper social classes in the United States from the middle of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the First World War. However, it does not mean that single women migrating from the German Empire were not exploited by their new employers or that the women did not have to work hard.<sup>40</sup> According to the first two letters Thekla wrote after her transatlantic migration that she seemed to regret her decision to move to the United States. Thekla complained about the food and her work. In a letter from September 1911, her sister Hedwig Scholz felt sorry for her and encouraged her to stay strong. She advised Thekla to give the first impression a second chance, and she reminded Thekla that it might take a while to settle in.<sup>41</sup> Oddly enough, after Hedwig comforted Thekla, she criticized her for making the decision to leave Silesia. “You wanted it yourself,”<sup>42</sup> she wrote, blaming her sister. It was Thekla’s own fault, Hedwig continued, as Thekla had ignored the advice from her parents and sister not to go.

After that interaction, Thekla’s letters stopped discussing any regrets that she may or may not have had. Given the lack of information, it is hard to assess what occurred. Thekla could have changed jobs or finally settled into American life. It is also possible that she did not want her family back in Germany discussing the mistake that she made. For this reason, she may have made a conscious decision to only write about topics that would make her trip to the United States seem like a success story rather than a failure. Either way, that simply reinforced the myth that migration to the United States often ended in financial and personal success.

38 Wehner-Franco, *Deutsche Dienstmädchen*, 129.

39 Wehner-Franco, “Das Bild der deutschen Frau in Amerika,” in: (ed.), *Deutsche Dienstmädchen in Amerika 1850–1914*. Waxmann: Münster, 1994, 101f.

40 Wehner-Franco, *Deutsche Dienstmädchen*, 110ff.

41 Letter, Hedwig Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 22 September 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110922-TL0018.1a

42 Letter, Hedwig Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 22 September 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110922-TL0018.1a; “Du hast es ja selbst gewollt.”

## MIGRATION PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

A letter in 1912 from Thekla Scholz's sister-in-law, Berta Scholz, suggest that most of the early influences regarding migration to the United States happened at a very young age. For example, Berta's children spread stories around their small town of future migration. "Mitzl and Lisl tell everyone that Aunt Thekla is taking them to America, where they'll will earn lots of money as grown-ups."<sup>43</sup> This early and persistent image of a bright future in a distant place had undoubtedly left a large impact on these children. That same misconception continued through adulthood. Such tales of hope convinced several million individuals to migrate in the hope of becoming prosperous abroad. Of course, they understood all too well that migration to the United States still amounted to an enormous gamble. There was no guarantee of a job or housing. Hedwig expressed this concern in her letter to Thekla. "I have wondered and I'm still wondering how you have mustered the courage to go over the ocean."<sup>44</sup> Those who traveled to the United States were thus optimistically brave. If the United States offered them the prospect of stability, seeking it out was still always a leap of faith.

That risk seemed justified, however, considering the worsening economic situation in Silesia. In 1910, Thekla's former employer, H. Sicker, compared the grim economic situation in Silesia to this vision of prosperity in the United States.

"The living conditions in America are certainly brighter, a.[nd] I could almost develop a desire to emigrate there myself, if it were only not so far a.[nd] the big ocean did not lie in between."<sup>45</sup>

43 Letter, Bertha Scholz (born Sperlich) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 1 April 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9120401-TL0049.1a; "Mitzl u. Lisl erzählen allen Leuten daß sie Tante Tekla nach Amerika holt wo sie viel Geld verdienen werden wenn sie werden groß sein."

44 Letter, Hedwig Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 8 April 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9120408-TL0036.1a; "Ich habe mich gewundert und wundere mich jetzt noch, daß Du so viel Chourage zum Rübermachen gehabt hast."

45 Letter, H. Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 23 March 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9120323-TL0033.1b; "Die Lebensverhältnisse sind ja freilich in Amerika glänzender u. man könnte beinahe selbst Lust bekommen, dorthin auszuwandern, wenn es nur nicht gar so weit u. das große Wasser nicht dazwischen wäre."

Then Sicker complained about the economic situation in Germany. He told Thekla that “the businessmen here are doing very poorly for the most part.”<sup>46</sup> Upon reading this letter, Thekla most likely was comforted that she had made the proper decision to travel abroad. This tendency to exaggerate the differences between economic prosperity in the United States and economic uncertainty in rural Silesia helps to explain why Germans held such high expectations for their migration.

Various letter writers subtly but noticeably displayed these unrealistic expectations. In 1912, Thekla sent her former employer a photograph of herself wearing a nice blouse and a hat, and staring at the camera, waiting for the paid photographer to take the image (perhaps Figure 1). In his letter back to Thekla, Sicker remarked that she seemed to be dressing more elegantly than when she was in Silesia, “for you don’t even look like our Thekla anymore, but rather like a fine American, like a millionaire in the making.”<sup>47</sup> The half-joking comment reinforced the myth that every migrant to the United States prospered.

The Scholz family must have sent other images and letters depicting them living a comfortable life the United States. In 1916, Thekla Scholz’s former employer, Monica Sicker, implied that the entire Scholz family living overseas had become wealthy. In her letter, she wrote that “you all will probably come back to your old home like a rich Croesus.”<sup>48</sup> Here, she referenced the Lydian king who since ancient times has been a symbol of extraordinary wealth. The use of such a superlative demonstrates the degree to which she expected Thekla’s immigration to lead to financial success. Yet such a high level of expectation resulted in sizable social pressure. How Thekla herself might have been affected by it is hard to tell due to a lack of direct sources that provide us with her perspective. In light of the short time span between her arrival in the United States and the letter from her former employer, however, it is hardly conceivable that her economic situation improved so quickly. It is more likely

46 Letter, H. Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 23 March 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9120323-TL0033.1b; “Hier geht es den Geschäftsleuten zum großen Teil sehr schlecht.”

47 Letter, H. Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 29 June 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9120629-TL0041.1a; “denn Sie sehen auf derselben gar nicht mehr wie unsere Thekla aus, sondern wie eine feine Amerikanerin, bzw. wie eine angehende Millionärin.”

48 Letter, Monica Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 28 April 1916, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9160428-TL0132.1b; “Sie werden wohl alle einmal als reiche Crösus in Ihre alte Heimat zurückkehren.”



Figure 1: *Thekla Scholz*, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., B029-LP0322A.

that her image in the photographs was not an actual representation of her life. Rather, the photographs that she sent to family and friends in Germany were more likely a representation of the kind of person who Thekla still yearned to become in Kansas City.

## BUILDING A NEW HOME IN THE NEW WORLD

Much like all immigrants, the hope for better living conditions became the main priority of the Scholz family. Unsurprisingly, they often discussed their improved quality of life in letters sent back to Silesia. Much of this talk included individuals writing about their fortunes in the United States. Franz Scholz proudly recounted his savings in a letter. “All in all, I have now calculated [that I have] saved about 4800 M[arks] and still lived well.”<sup>49</sup> Franz bragged about Paul’s success when he mentioned that Paul “is also saving diligently. [He] has already saved over 2000 T[aler].”<sup>50</sup> Such savings not only reinforced the decision of Scholz siblings to migrate to the United States but also allowed the Scholz family to establish their financial stability and thus allowing them to live comfortable lives in Kansas City.

In addition to money, the Scholz family enjoyed discussing their new living conditions. With his savings, Franz Scholz purchased a house and furnished it with elegant furniture. In one letter, he proudly discussed his new acquisitions. “We moved into our home on the 17th of last month. [...] And now it is nobly furnished.”<sup>51</sup> Franz meticulously listed both the items that he bought for the house and its modern features: “fine furniture, beds, etc., as well as gas for cooking and heating, and water pipes in the house, in short, nice furnishings.”<sup>52</sup> His reasons for boasting back home about his new living conditions may have been good-natured. He may have wanted to give his friends and relatives a clear picture of his life in this new world. Conversely, Franz Scholz

49 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 2 June 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100602-TL0011.1b; “ich habe mir jetzt, alles in allem gerechnet ca. 4.800 M gespart und doch gut dabei gelebt.”

50 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 12 March 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100312-TL0010.1b; “Paul spart auch fleißig. Hat schon über 2000 T[aler] gespart.”

51 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 2 June 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100602-TL0011.1b; “Wir sind nämlich seit 17. vergangenen Monats in unser Heim selbst rein gezogen (...) Jetzt sind wir aber nobel eingerichtet.”

52 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 2 June 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100602-TL0011.1b; “Feine Möbel., Betten usw. ff. auch Gas zum Kochen u. Heizen, sowie Wasserleitung im Haus, kurz und gut, nett eingerichtet.”

may have wanted to present his reality as a comfortable one to reaffirm that he made the right decision to migrate after all.

A similar interpretation can be made from the letter that Anna Müller-Scholz wrote in 1911, shortly after she arrived in the United States, to her sister-in-law Thekla, who was still living in Neustadt at the time. She talked about her new living situation.

"Now that we are nicely furnished, I like it very much. [We] have 3 very nice rooms, a carpet in the front, armoire, a beautiful wardrobe, a cute table, (two) three leather armchairs, and some chairs. The room looks excellent."<sup>53</sup>

We do not know Anna's economic circumstances before her marriage to Franz, but she assumedly came from the same social class of rural farmers. In enumerating all of the relatively luxurious furnishings in her new home, she displayed a mixture of expectation and enthusiasm. She may have hoped to live this lavish lifestyle upon arriving in America, but her tone indicates that she was ecstatic to have already achieved this level of prosperity and respectability.

Housing and furniture were not the only ways in which the Scholz family showcased their wealth. Gifts sent back home to Silesia played a vital role in displaying their success as recent migrants to the United States. The actual process of buying a gift demonstrated that the individual had an expendable income. The Scholz family in Silesia was not wealthy: items such as jewels and furs were only for the rich. Perhaps, therefore, Anna made the point of providing a detailed description of the lavish Christmas gifts she received.

"Franz gave me a jacket made entirely of fur and a black hat. From Paul a goose and two bottles of wine. From Mis Gaier a set of (glass) butter dish with bell."<sup>54</sup>

Such descriptions of comparatively lavish gifts reinforced the story that moving to America was worth the risk. Franz's description of their savings, Anna's

53 Letter, Anna Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 13 February 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110213-TL0015.1a; "Nachdem wir jetzt recht nett häuslich eingerichtet sind gefällt es mir gut. Haben 3 recht schöne Zimmer, im vorderen einen Teppich, Vertiko einen schönen Kleiderschrank ein niedlichen Tisch (zwei) drei Ledersessel u. noch einige Stühle. Das Zimmer macht sich ausgezeichnet."

54 Letter, Anna Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 13 February 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110213-TL0015.1b; "Vom Franz hab ich bekommen ein Chaket ganz aus Pelz u. einen schwarzen Hut. Von Paul eine Gans u. zwei Flaschen Wein. Von Mis Gaier ein Servies (Glas) Butterdose mit Glocke."

of their Christmas, and both of their new living conditions play into the myth of the American Dream. No doubt, these letters back home in turn helped to convince Thekla that Kansas City would provide her with a similar degree of financial stability. Most likely, she expected to become rich when she decided to migrate.

## **BECOMING “REAL AMERICAN”**

In a letter dated 1910, Franz Scholz described the people who previously inhabited their new home: “the tenants, real Americans, would have left our beautiful house in ruins.”<sup>55</sup> This remark is interesting in two different ways. On the one hand, Franz created a classification that defined belonging in American society. According to his statement, the previous tenants were not just Americans but true, authentic embodiments of this category. On the other hand, Franz purposefully distanced himself from both the category and the people whom he described as “real Americans,” despite having already arrived in the United States three years earlier in 1907.

What did it mean, then, to be an American from an immigrant’s point of view? When Franz referred to the tenants as “real Americans,” he implied that, if they were recent immigrants at all, these prior tenants had already to some significant degree acclimated to American society and assimilated to American culture. Insofar as he distinguished himself from them, Franz’ letters indicate that he did not yet feel truly “American.” This distinction raises two related questions: How did the Scholz family determine who was and was not a “real” American? And when, how, and to what degree did they too assimilate? Scholars identify three stages in the process of acculturation. With regards to German migrants, they began the first phase as German-speaking immigrants; the second once they started to identify as German-Americans and adopt American culture and language; and the third once they identified primarily as just an American, without the sense of still being an immigrant, though they may still retain some elements of German language, culture, and

55 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 2 June 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100312-TL0011.1b; “die Mieter, echte Amerikaner hätten uns unser schönes Häuschen zu sehr verlottert.”

traditions. It is not uncommon for this entire process to span across generations.<sup>56</sup>

The socio-cultural context of migration also shaped the acculturation process. As we have already seen in the case of the Scholz family, migrants often mobilized wide social networks to gain information about potential locations for migration in advance and to provide themselves with a support network once they arrived. The most effective medium for this flow of information was mail from family members who had already emigrated and then reported back home. Not infrequently, the relatives followed in so-called chain immigration, which became a major factor in German immigration in the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup> When Thekla Scholz emigrated to Missouri in 1911, she followed her three brothers Franz, who emigrated in 1907, Paul in 1908, and August Scholz in 1910. In Kansas City, she met her future husband Robert J. Kiefer, who was also the brother to Otilie ("Tilchen"), Thekla's very close friend. Immigrants from the same hometown often travelled together and relied on the same networks. Such was the case in Thekla's friend and travel companion Martha Müller. These networks then encouraged settling in ethnocultural communities in their new homes.

Chain migration of Germans to American cities thus led to the establishment of German districts: so-called "Little Germanies."<sup>58</sup> Insofar as many German-speaking immigrants remained within German-American milieus after immigrating to the United States, they faced less pressure to interact with other ethnic groups outside of those network and thus less pressure to acculturate. Franz Scholz seemed to have preferred not just a German-American milieu but Silesian women in particular. As he complained in a letter, "the girls from our region don't want to come over themselves. In that regard, the Bavarians and Austrians are more courageous."<sup>59</sup> Franz's interest in Silesian girls was not just a matter of taste. He had a very clear family goal in mind. He reported that he had now achieved everything and lacked

<sup>56</sup> Hoerder, *Deutschen Migration*, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Jankowiak, *Deutsche Einwanderung*, 50.

<sup>58</sup> Jankowiak, *Deutsche Einwanderung*, 50.

<sup>59</sup> Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City (Ms.)(MO), 12 March 1910 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100312-TL0010.1b; „zum selbst rüberkommen haben die Mädels aus unserer Gegend halt keine Lust, da haben die Bayern u. Österreicher Mädels doch mehr Courage.“

only a wife.<sup>60</sup> He also clearly wanted to choose a woman from Silesia. “So I decided one day to take my other half from my beloved homeland, and I can’t stop myself from doing so [now].”<sup>61</sup> Not surprisingly, he married Anna Müller from Neustadt after the successful mediation by his sister Thekla. Notably, he completely ruled out a connection with an American woman. He criticizes the flighty and selfish character of American women. “The girls here simply want to get married right away,” he complained, “so they don’t have to work anymore.” Then he clarified: “I mean the American women.”<sup>62</sup> Arguably, recent immigrants like Franz were less interested in these “real” American women as marriage partners because the self-confident pursuit of their own self-interest did not fit into his views of the proper role of a traditional German woman. He concluded soberly, “I don’t want an American woman at any price.”<sup>63</sup>

In addition to their personal lives, migrants also delayed the progression of acculturation by similarly restricting their business and work relationships. For instance, Franz Scholz worked at a brewery. The working environment was predominantly German-American. Likewise, much of Franz’s social life was deeply embedded in German culture. Anna Müller described a surprise party in 1911 on the occasion of her marriage to Franz as being an extremely “German” celebration in terms of food, drink, and entertainment.<sup>64</sup> This scene, which took place in Scholz’s home, clearly demonstrated that reaching the goal of emigration did not immediately mean giving up one’s own culture. Everyone may have taken different positions vis-à-vis the dominant American society and culture situationally, but they tended to group together in this initial stage of immigration. Indeed, they still drew traditional cultural and linguistic distinctions between their homelands in the various regions

- 60 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 12 March 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100312-TL0010.1b; “Eigenes Bett Schrank, Tisch Schaukelstuhl usw., blos die Frau fehlt.”
- 61 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 2 June 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100602-TL0011.1b; “ich habe es mir nun einmal vorgenommen, meine Hälfte aus meiner lieben Heimat zu holen, und davon hält es mich nicht mehr zurück.”
- 62 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 12 March 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100312-TL0010.1a; “Die Mädchen wollen hier einfach gleich heiraten, damit sie nix mehr zu schaffen brauchen. Ich meine die Amerikanerinnen”
- 63 Letter, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 2 June 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100602-TL0011.1b; “Ich möchte doch keine Amerikanerin haben um keinen Preis.”
- 64 Letter, Anna Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 13 February 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9110213-TL0015.1a & b.

of German-speaking central Europe. No doubt from the perspective of their American neighbors, however, they were uniformly perceived as "Germans."

No wonder then that Franz could not yet feel like an American when he was only in the first stage of acculturation. While he was proud of his successes in the United States, he still strongly identified with his German heritage. Already in these early years before the First World War, however, he began to make subtle changes to his habits and practices. He learned the English language, and even the 'un-American' Franz changed his name to Frank. The reason might well have been to make things easier on himself in his English-speaking environment. It nonetheless marked a major first step of adaptation to the dominant culture of his new home.

## CONCLUSION

The members of Scholz family often battled with their image and how they wished to be perceived. They were not alone with this insecurity. In this era, people flocked to photography studios to create images that depicted them in keeping with their self-image. This is particularly true of portrait photography, since clients have more control over how they wish the public to view them. For these same reasons, scholars can use photographs to evaluate how our historical figures wished to be perceived. This image of Paul and Martha Scholz (Figure 2) illustrates this point. Sometime in the 1920s, the family had themselves photographed as well dressed, healthy, and enjoying enough disposable income to spend on a photographer. Images such as these were often sent back to friends and relatives overseas to demonstrate their successful adjustment to life in America.

Unfortunately, Thekla Scholz never fully experienced the success that she imagined at these photographs. Her granddaughter, Margie McHale, recalled not having "a whole lot" growing up.<sup>65</sup> This was of course not due to lack of trying. McHale clearly states that Thekla worked hard to establish financial stability for herself and her family. Before settling in Missouri, she worked as a cook in California. Then, she found work as a maid in Kansas City,

65 Interview, Margie McHale, conducted by Kathleen Foster, 6 July 2020, GMM 200628, 9.



Figure 2: Family Portrait. Paul and Martha Scholz with their four children Martha, Joseph A., Helen, and Paul J., ca. 1920s. Kiefer-Scholz Coll., B004-LP0301A.

moved closer to family, and began to construct her new life. Other members of the Scholz Family achieved a new standard of living as skilled workers in Missouri's thriving brewery business. But the young migrant most likely never had the kind of resources that she seemed to imply in the photographs she sent home to Silesia.

Thekla's financial troubles were caused by unavoidable factors. First, she may have overestimated how much she would succeed. Growing up, she may have heard stories of those from her villages and the German Empire leaving the area and becoming wealthy in America. These individuals rose above their lower-class statuses and became successful entrepreneurs. Thekla could have thought that she too would encounter the same types of fortune. Second, she unexpectedly became a single mother raising children on her own. After the passing of her husband, Robert Kiefer, on 9 October 1935, the 47-year-old mother of three became the sole breadwinner for the family.<sup>66</sup> With her income cut-in-half, Thekla struggled to stay afloat. She survived thanks to her strong work ethic. While Margie indicates that it was never a lot, she also concluded that her grandmother provided for her family.

That is, immigrants had to adjust expectations to the realities of everyday life, creating an intricate social dynamic of self-presentation, misrepresentation, and pragmatic accommodation. Even if Thekla did gradually become more financially stable than she could have been in Silesia, she nonetheless knew that she had not lived up to the unrealistic expectations of life in the United States back home. But if she could not completely alter the reality of migration, a determined Thekla could still influence how her personal migration story was told. Photographs of her new life in Kansas City laid claim to the status of financial success from the start. Thekla even offered money back to her family in Silesia on multiple occasions — money that she most likely did not have. In these ways, she constructed a narrative of her migration that justified her decision to leave as the correct one. At the same time, her drive to be perceived as a success story seems to have dwindled over time, as she became more comfortable and more acculturated to life in Missouri. Otilie Kiefer wondered as early as 1912 whether her friend no longer seemed to value her friendship as before. "Have you forgotten about me, Thekla? Am I just not there for you

66 Interview, Margie McHale, conducted by Kathleen Foster, 6 July 2020, GMM 200628, 10.

anymore?”<sup>67</sup> While Thekla may not have acquired the lavish mansion and millions of dollars which are always addressed jokingly in the correspondences, she built a successful life for herself and her family in Kansas City. Along this personal journey, it was her bravery and independence that enabled Thekla to take control of her life and become not just a successful immigrant but a successful person.

67 Letter, Ottilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin-Friedenau, 12 December 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9121212-TL0053.1b; “Hast Du mich wirklich vergessen liebe Thekla, bin ich nicht mehr für Dich da?”

EMILY BUCHER, LINDA GOLDNAGL, SASKIA PACHER, CHRISTOPHER STEINBISS

## “CONTACT ME SOMETIME, WILL YOU?”

SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS AFTER MIGRATION IN THE 1920S

While letters and postcards have been around for quite some time, they became exponentially more popular during the twentieth century — an international phenomenon. Due to increasing literacy across social classes, letters and postcards allowed people to describe their situation and lives to others across vast distances. Literary critic Marina Dossena explains that, long before the time of the internet and sending around messages and pictures in a matter of seconds, “[a]ll impressions of distant places had to be conveyed almost exclusively by means of language,” so it was “the written word that had to paint a thousand pictures”<sup>1</sup> for those far away who did not have a chance to see that distant reality for themselves. These documents now provide scholars with rich insight into not only the lives of the correspondents but also the social and historical contexts in which they lived. Historian Sonia Cancian recognizes the epistemological potential of historical self-testimonials. She highlights correspondence between migrants and non-migrants as valuable sources that provide various disciplines with the means to examine an array of subjects.<sup>2</sup>

How then does sending modern writing and imagery relate to transatlantic migration? Were letters and postcards used in different ways? If so, why? What role did correspondence play in the everyday life of writers and recipients in the context of migration? Keeping in touch with friends and family could be extremely challenging for many emigrants. It cost money to send letters and for many, money was hard to come by. This chapter explores the topics of language, communication, intimate relationships, and self-expression in the context of migration and travel. It addresses these topics from historical, art

- 1 Marina Dossena, “‘Many strange and peculiar affairs’: Description, Narration and Evaluation in Scottish Emigrants’ Letters of the 19th Century,” *Scottish Language*, 27, 2009, 1.
- 2 Sonja Cancian, “The Language of Gender in Lover’s Correspondence, 1946–1949,” in: *Gender History Across Epistemologies*, edited by Donna R. Gabaccia and Mary Jo Maynes, 235–45 (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 763.

historical, and linguistic perspectives as well as the findings of everyday life studies (*Alltagswissenschaft*).

## THE USE OF POSTAL MEDIA IN THE KIEFER-SCHOLZ COLLECTION

The Robert J. and Thekla E. (Scholz) Kiefer Collection consists of multiple objects, pictures, and written testimonials. While there were many contributors to the collection, it mainly focuses on Robert J. Kiefer and Thekla E. Scholz, whose courtship took place in the early twentieth century. Their story is particularly interesting, as they both migrated from Germany to the United States — but not at the same time. They created and maintained their relationship over several years exclusively through transatlantic mail. Their correspondence with friends and family as well as with each other thus holds great potential for an analysis of written communication by migrants at the beginning of the twentieth century.

This correspondence took place within the period that historians Ingrid Bauer and Christa Hämmerle describe as the long “age of the letter.” Since a lot of scholarly analysis of private writing has concentrated primarily on eighteenth century intellectuals and artists, these two historians extend the scope of scholarly research to include more recent periods, the lower classes, and a wider variety of correspondence in order to shed light on historical gender relations.<sup>3</sup> According to their approach, letters between loving couples do not have to contain a declaration of love to be relevant for research on love letters. They propose to work with the more broadly defined term “couples’ correspondence” (*Paarkorrespondenz*). These types of private letter writing include a wide range of self-testimonies. The generic boundaries are fluid: the ‘love letter’ should not be seen as a distinct, clearly defined genre of text but remain broad to include a wide range of hybrid forms of self-expression.<sup>4</sup> Such an open conceptualization means that scholars should treat the exchange of material objects such as photographs and gifts as part of the correspondence, since these

3 Ingrid Bauer and Christa Hämmerle (ed.), “Liebe und Paarbeziehungen im ‘Zeitalter der Briefe’ – ein Forschungsprojekt im Kontext,” in: *Liebe schreiben. Paar-Korrespondenzen im Kontext des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 12.

4 Bauer/Hämmerle, “Liebe,” 13.

things often help to constitute intimacy and connection in the relationship.<sup>5</sup> Bauer and Hämmerle also highlight the different stylistic characteristics in such texts, the abolition of a dialogical letter structure often found in couples correspondence, and the frequent disregard for the requirement to respond to letters immediately or to adhere to certain writing practices — the so-called “epistolary pact.”<sup>6</sup>

The postcards and letters from the Kiefer-Scholz Collection evidence the sincere wish of Robert and Thekla to sustain their transcontinental relationships with each other, their friends, and their relatives. Because the collection consists mostly of correspondence sent to and preserved by Thekla, this chapter will explore how Robert conveyed his desire to remain close to his family, his friends, and his dearest Thekla through his writings.

## BRIEF GREETINGS

As the twentieth century rapidly approached, stories of travel and mobility erupted in private correspondence, forming a semi-public sphere of intercontinental message sending and receiving. The letters and postcards from this period describe everyday activities and concerns, which in turn reveal subtle shifts in the traditions of German written language. Moreover, some correspondence featured iconic, nostalgic, cite-specific, religious, and even comedic imagery along with the hand-written passage in keeping with the new, modern, and substantial means of transatlantic communication — the postcard.

While postcards are often perceived as a medium of communication similar to a letter, these forms of postal messages are quite distinct in terms of substance and intimacy. One defining difference between them is the size of the medium. The author of a postcard is restricted by its small size, which only allows for a short message. This is not to be regarded as a weakness of the medium but as an opportunity: postcards allow the writer to send short messages in a convenient way, which contributed to the popularity of this new medium in the

5 Bauer/Hämmerle, “Liebe,” 14.

6 Bauer/Hämmerle, “Liebe,” 14.

early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Another difference concerns the openness of the correspondence to the public. A letter is sent inside an envelope, which, according to postal law, can only be opened by the intended addressee. By contrast, the text on a postcard is public and visible to everyone who encounters it, including postal service workers or any other person that comes across it. For this reason, historian Jan-Ola Östman considers the postcard to be a semi-public medium, for it only provides the author and addressee with a superficial degree of privacy while being widely accessible in reality. The sender cannot be certain who else will read their message, which means that they adapt their manner of communication to the possibility of public scrutiny.<sup>8</sup>

Postcards come with a third feature usually not present in letters. They are equipped with some sort of graphic, be it a printed text, a picture, or a photograph. These motifs, chosen first by the publisher and then by the postcard writer, represent their own form of communication. The postcard communicates additional meanings through the image and also through the connection between its text and its graphic. Serving as a type of data storage, the author of a postcard utilizes both its motif as well as their writing to tell a story.<sup>9</sup>

Painters and photographers used postcards to create aesthetically beautiful and strategically framed images; they captured a timeless experience based on the premises of identity, personality, and intention.<sup>10</sup> Postcard imagery of either home or away was vast and prolific, filling shelves and stores throughout Europe and the United States. The global rise of national identity, local pride, tourism, and outdoor recreation inspired many to venture into a world beyond their homeland. Encouraged by the Grand Tour, when the bourgeoisie followed aristocrats on exploratory vacations around the European continent, artists and critics popularized the landscape genre by the mid-nineteenth century. In this genre, the artist used sweeping diagonals, general landscape elements, region, and thoughtful architectural additions to create a natural scene

7 Ceri Price, "Postcards from the Old Country. Finessing the Landscape to Fit our Fables," in *Literary Geographies I* (2), 2015: 159.

8 Jan-Ola Östman, "The Postcard as Media," *Text & Talk: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse & Communication Studies* 24, no. 3 (2004): 2005: 428-431.

9 Price, "Postcards," 157.

10 Karin Almasy, "The Linguistic and Visual Portrayal of Identifications in Slovenian and German Picture Postcards (1890–1920)," *Austrian History Yearbook*, no. 49 (April, 2018): 41.

according to the precise management of design principles.<sup>11</sup> In some locations over the summer season, popular landscape postcards often sold in the tens of thousands.

The international Art Nouveau or "New Art" movement coincided with this energetic shift in postcard collection and popularity. Art became easier to produce thanks to the development of offset and lithographic printing technologies. Cards were cheap and widely available to growing audiences, especially the bourgeois class of connoisseurs and the working class.<sup>12</sup> Historians trace the drastic reduction in cost to send a message to Austria around the same

time. The recent and rapid emergence of the landscape genre inspired artists to reproduce grandiose scenes of Swiss countryside on postcards. As people grew increasingly mobile, the phrase "Gruss aus" meaning "greetings from" began to appear on postcards as well. A postcard craze riveted the United States; by 1919, over one billion postcards had been mailed out. Printers were manufacturing millions of postcards in just one day.<sup>13</sup> Fresh and innovative, postcards could be collected, transported, and shared for their mutual delight on their own or in social settings. Postcards serve as a tangible memento allowing many to indulge and share in their collective qualities.

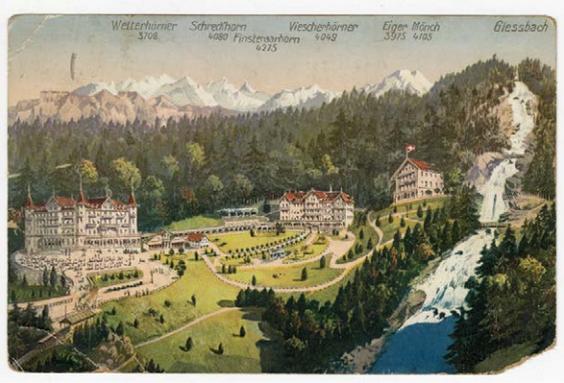


Figure 1. Postcard, "Grandhotel Giessbach," W. May, Brienz, to Robert Kiefer, Kansas City, 5 August 1923. Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9230806-TP2188a.

- 11 Malcolm Andrews, "Landscapes and Western Art," in: *Oxford History of Art*: Oxford University Press, 2005: 18-19, 22.
- 12 Giovanni Fanelli and Ezio Godoli, "Art Nouveau Picture Postcards," *Graphis* 42 (July 1986): 60.
- 13 Daniel D. Arreola, "Postcards," in: *Postcards from the Sonora Border: Visualizing Place Through a Popular Lens, 1900s-1950s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 25-27.

The Kiefer-Scholz Collection contains one of the finest and most popular examples of Swiss tourism fused with Art Nouveau. Switzerland's exceptional geography, local costumes, skiing excursions, and sublime landscape encouraged the investment of capital and appealed to tourists near and far. Artists provided vibrant oil paintings depicting this craggy and magnificent backdrop as souvenirs for the rich, while publishers made less expensive, but far more numerous mementos such as postcards and etchings available to the masses.

Consumers exploited the postcard medium in an unprecedented fashion. Figure 1 portrays the charming and romantic Grandhotel Giessbach resort, a world-renowned tourist destination at the height of the Swiss hotel trade. Picturesque views of mountains, forests, waterfalls, and meadows echo with an enchanting aura experienced by many artists, poets, and philosophers that have passed through the ethereal Swiss countryside. As consumers of the tourism trade, many travelers send warm greetings home through purchased imagery inspired by these very same artists. In this postcard, someone named Wilhelm Mayer wrote Robert Kiefer from Switzerland: "Dear Friend, Heartfelt greetings from the Bernese Oberland. Contact me sometime, will you? Kind regards, W[ilhelm] May[er] (Greetings from Kübler)."<sup>14</sup> As the collection attests, many other friends and family members wrote to Robert and Thekla throughout the course of their life. They expressed "Greetings from" famous places and attractions in Europe and throughout the United States. This simple message encapsulates an elemental aspect of communicating through postcards. Wherever in the world the correspondents might have been, they kept their connection alive. By sending a picture postcard, W. Mayer does not have to elaborate on his stay. His greetings (along with those of a mutual friend Kübler) as well as the corresponding image of the resort are enough to give context to his request to hear from his friend.

## MESSAGE THROUGH A PICTURE

With the dawn of the twentieth century, the world began to become more and more globalized. Increased mobility sparked a need for quick and easy inter-

14 Postcard, Wilhelm Mayer to Robert Kiefer, Brienz in the canton of Bern, 5 August 1923, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9230806-TP2188a; "Lieber Freund, Liebe Grüße aus dem Berner Oberland. Lass auch mal etwas von dir hören. Liebe Grüße, W.[ilhelm] May[er] (Grüße von Kübler)."

continental communication. Postcards had the ability to bridge over these never before experienced distances and ultimately deal with separation.<sup>15</sup> Writings provided an impression of the author’s identity.<sup>16</sup> An example for this phenomenon is the communication between Robert Kiefer and Thekla Scholz in the 1920s. The pair had had a long-distance relationship for quite a while, as she lived in the United States and he stayed in Germany. They had been sending each other letters and postcards across the ocean. On 18 January 1920, however, Robert wrote to Thekla to say that “[I] very much wish I had some news of you.”<sup>17</sup> This request indicates a break in their communication.

The postcard he used (Figure 2) has quite an interesting motif — one of the works of the French artist Jean Francois Millet. The painting depicts a young couple in the countryside, standing on a potato field. Wearing farmers’ clothing, the pitchfork and wheelbarrow by their side further suggests the



Figure 2. Postcard. Robert Kiefer, Berlin, to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City, 18 January 1920. Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9200118-TA0003.4a.

humility and earthiness of the pair in a praying position. In the far distance, the silhouette of a church is revealed. The postcard, labelled *The Evening Bell*, suggests the farmers are taking time to pray, as the bell rings over the field.<sup>18</sup> The text of the postcard reads as follows:

- 15 Peter Gilderdale, *Hands Across the Sea: Situating an Edwardian Greetings Postcard Practice* (Auckland: Auckland University of Technology, 2013), 173.
- 16 Karin Almasy, “The Linguistic and Visual Portrayal of Identifications in Slovenian and German Picture Postcards,” *Austrian History Yearbook*, no. 49 (2018): 41.
- 17 Postcard, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 18 January 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9200118-TA0003b; “Hätte von dir gern eine kleine Nachricht.”
- 18 Postcard, “Das Abendläuten,” Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 18 January 1920. Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9200118-TA0003b.

“My dear Thekla, I would like to have a short message from you. I have been ill for three weeks, had an intense cold, but now I am healthy again. Peace has taken hold now, but without the US who have yet to sign [the peace treaty]. The bad days could now be over. What did you do on Christmas? You have gotten my new year’s card, haven’t you? I will write you a letter in the next few days. Kind regards and kisses, your dear Robert.”<sup>19</sup>

Robert told Thekla about new happenings in his life in Germany. His motivation for sending the card did not seem to be the conversation about his illness or the peace treaty, but to check in. Evidently, he asked Thekla Scholz to send him a message. He announced that he would write her a letter in the next few days.

The purpose of a postcard is not to have long conversations but to send short messages in a quick manner. A letter is more ideal when discussing matters such as the ones that Robert mentions quickly.<sup>20</sup> It seems that his intent was to reconnect with Thekla, who seemed to have stopped writing him. The postcard was sent in mid-January and Robert asked her about Christmas. He must not have received any sign of life from her for at least a month. The wording of his postcard presents two possible reasons which might have led to this break in their communication. Firstly, the fact that he asked if she received his last message indicates the possibility that his letters did not reach her. Secondly, the fact that he asked her to write to him again may be an indication of his belief that she did not write him in the first place. Robert wants to hear from his partner and friend. Is Thekla doing alright? What has been going on in her life? Perhaps this is the reason he asks her about the recent New Year’s card that he sent to her.

The authors of postcards occasionally use an image motif to convey subliminal messages. While the description on the postcard reads *The Evening Bell*, the real title of the painting is *The Angelus*. It has been the subject of many different

19 Postcard, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 18 January 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9200118-TA0003b; “Meine innig geliebte Thekla. Hätte von Dir gern eine kleine Nachricht. Bin 3 Wochen krank gewesen, hatte mich stark erkältet, bin aber jetzt wieder gesund. Der Friede ist jetzt in Kraft getreten, aber ohne Amerika welches noch nicht unterzeichnet hatt. Die schlimmen Tage dürften mithin vorüber sein. Wie hast Du Weihnachten verlebt? Meine Neujahrskarte hast Du doch erhalten. Schreib Dir die nächsten Tage einen Brief. Herzliche Grüße u. Küsse dein lieber Robert.”

20 Price, “Postcards,” 159.

interpretations. Some have hinted that the main figures represent a farmer and his maid, or more prominently, a hard-working and religious peasant couple. A faint church rises in the background, further affirming the couple's devotion to one another and a faith embedded in everyday German life.<sup>21</sup> Robert's postcard presenting this painting as its motif could indicate his wish to reconnect with Thekla, wanting to be with her, and to live a “simple” life by her side. It underlined his love for her and his uncertainty after not having heard anything from her in quite some time.

### NO NEWS IS BAD NEWS?

Although — due to its popularity — the postcard seemed to herald the end of letter writing for some, it was ultimately not a substitute for the letter. For many, the postcard became a valued addition to everyday correspondence practices.<sup>22</sup> This pattern can be observed in Robert Kiefer's mixed, sometimes even simultaneous use of the two different formats for corresponding.

Robert also seemed to desperately desire a restoration of contact with Thekla Scholz in a letter he wrote to her on 17 March 1920. Not having received an answer from his dearest for a few months, he grew concerned and even started doubting her love for him. He was aware of the fact that a lot of mail was lost in delivery, however.<sup>23</sup> According to him, this was “already the fourth letter, and I have written three cards to you as well, but still there is no word.”<sup>24</sup> It must have been frustrating that a message which was written in a matter of minutes or hours might take weeks to arrive at its destination. Many people had to wait even longer for answers to their questions, replies, requests, news, and words of longing or happiness. Being apart puts a strain on any relationship, and it is especially hard when not only an ocean but also a war and its lasting consequences, including a global influenza pandemic, separated this couple and

21 Susan Foley, “A Great and Noble Painting. Léon Gambetta and the Visual Arts in the French Third Republic,” *French History & Civilisation*, vol. 4 (2011): 113-114.

22 Bauer/Hämmerle, “Liebe,” 12.

23 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9200317-TL0194.1a; “Einige Post scheint auch verlorengegangen von mir, denn Du erwähnest nichts davon in deinen Briefen.”

24 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 March 1920, L9200317-TL0194.1a; “Dieses ist schon der vierte Brief und auch 3 Karten schrieb ich Dir, aber immer noch keine Nachricht.”

prevented them from being together. By the time he sent his letter in March 1920, Robert and Thekla had been planning on meeting in either Germany or America for such a long time; this unforeseen break in the couple's communications drove him to frantic conclusions. In the above-mentioned letter, he urged Thekla to write him or even to have someone else put down a few lines for her, if she was perhaps too sick to be able to do so for herself. In that case, he suggested, a postcard would suffice.<sup>25</sup>

This example demonstrates how differently the smaller medium of postcards were used in contrast to longer and more elaborate letters. Not every communication had to be long and detailed at this time. For a quick message or update, a postcard provided a more convenient and colorful method of keeping in touch; and since the postman had access to those words, sensitive material was typically not shared between the sender and receiver that way. By contrast, the letter is a piece of writing which is sealed and enclosed in an envelope, so it often contains information intended only for the eyes of the addressee, though perhaps also for the eyes of their families and friends, as group readings of news from abroad were not uncommon at the time. Writing a letter provides the opportunity to get personal, be intimate, to reveal details, to express elaborate sorrows, and to use individual language and phrases that maybe only the specific recipient would appreciate and understand. Thus, every letter is tailored to its addressee, and its style, phrases, and language is adapted to the relationship the writer and receiver share. One can tell quite early on whether a letter is written out of love and longing or out of a sense of duty, bad conscience, or simply the feeling that an answer is expected.

Concentrating on the language of a written document draws attention to the individual using the pen and emphasizes the writer's personal views. As the linguist Emma Moreton wrote, "the reality of the authors' lives — or the way in which the authors construe their experiences — is revealed through the language contained within the letter."<sup>26</sup> It is important to understand the set-

25 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 March 1920, L9200317-TL0194.1a; "Solltest Du sehr krank sein, dann laß bitte jemand für Dich schreiben und wenn es nur wenige Zeilen auf einer Karte sind."

26 Emma Moreton, "Profiling the Female Emigrant: A Method of Linguistic Inquiry for Examining Correspondence Collections," in *Gender History Across Epistemologies*, edited by Gabaccia/Maynes (Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 98.

ting and circumstances in which a letter was created and consider the “context of culture” by which Moreton means “the social pressure for the author to perform in a particular way — by writing the letter in the first place and by respecting a particular culture of letter writing when doing so.”<sup>27</sup> The documents in the Kiefer-Scholz Collection suggest that the authors sometimes had to wait a long time for replies and many letters were left unanswered. The correspondents filled a lot of space on paper with complaints about having not yet received a response or with excuses and justifications for why a reply failed to appear sooner if at all.

This is exactly the case in Robert’s letter to Thekla. He continued to write while still awaiting to receive some sort of word or message from her — and fearing the worst. It is expected to answer cards and letters, and if a response is not forthcoming, it was cause for worry. Robert even goes as far as to write that he needed certainty that Thekla was still in love with him, otherwise he did not want to live anymore.<sup>28</sup> Not hearing from her troubled him so much, that he became hopeless; this uncertainty robbed him of all his lust for life.<sup>29</sup> Unable to read what was happening to her from her own perspective, he could not help but be miserable.

When reading through various letters, one cannot miss the fact that they can be very formulaic; and even in his desperation, Robert stuck to a few of those conventions. Nicola McLelland studied nineteenth century emigrant private correspondence and notes that “just over 70% of the letters use a closing formula ‘*nun will ich schließen*’ (and variants), distributed very evenly between the genders.”<sup>30</sup> At first glance, this seems like an odd thing to do, because the signature, best wishes, and greetings at the end of a letter or postcard typically make it obvious that there is nothing more to say. In the Kiefer-Scholz

27 Moreton, “Profiling,” 98.

28 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 March, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9200317-TL0194.1a; “Schreibe mir doch ich muß Gewißheit haben, sonst will ich nicht länger leben.”

29 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9200317-TL0194.1b; “Ich bin unglücklich und trostlos. Diese Ungewißheit raubt mir die ganze Lebensfreude.”

30 Nicola McLelland, “‘Doch Mein Mann Möchte Doch Mal Wissen...’ A Discourse Analysis of 19th-Century Emigrant Men and Women’s Private Correspondence,” in: *Germanic Language Histories from Below (1700-2000)*, ed by Stephan Elspaß, Nils Langer, Joachim Scharloth, and Wim Vandenbussche, 45–68. Berlin, 2007: 55.

Collection, there are many cases when the author announces the imminent conclusion of the missive. In his letter to Thekla, however, Robert combined his concluding phrase with the plea for a response: “I want to close for today while profoundly begging you: write to me soon.”<sup>31</sup> For, it was the continuation of their correspondence that he most desperately desired.

## LONGING FOR CONNECTION

A letter as a medium of communication not only reveals something about the sender but can also disclose a lot about the recipient. Most correspondence consists of two sides, but often only one side has been saved and is therefore available for scholarly analysis. The letters sent between Robert Kiefer and Thekla Scholz fall into the latter case. The two maintained a transatlantic relationship for several years before marrying in 1922. Only Robert’s letters have been preserved by the family over the years. Nonetheless, they allow us to gain an insight into how love letters function in relation to self-expression and communication. Like historian Sonia Cancian, we wonder: “How can words of romantic love and yearning contribute to historians’ understanding of amour-passion, letter-writing, and transnational relationships? [...] What do they tell us about ordinary lives and migration experiences?”<sup>32</sup>

Robert’s letters highlight the role that written communication played during this period. They were the primary medium through which he and Thekla negotiated war, emigration, family, and love in the context of their private lives. By looking at Robert’s writings throughout the years of their correspondence, we can observe changes in their relationship and the way he expressed his thoughts and feelings to Thekla. We can also gather which external influences played a role in the development of their relationship and how confidence and uncertainty about the future appear side by side in these letters.

Since only Robert’s side of the correspondence has stood the test of time, these are the only letters we can read. But even during an exchange of letters,

31 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9200317-TL0194.1b; “Ich will für heute schließen mit der innigen Bitte schreibe mir bald.”

32 Cancian, “Time of Migration,” 91.

one-sided correspondence can arise: specifically, when the recipient does not reply. In this case, we know when Thekla finally wrote to him again by looking at the letter he wrote to her on 9 April 1920:

“I am finally released from uncertainty. I received three letters from you within eight days. I was very happy and am very content. It was close to my heart, and I would not have been able to get over it if you hadn’t written to me anymore. I registered the third letter that I sent you in mid-March. It is written in a desperate mood. I was really worried about you; but now that I know that you still think of me with true love, I am calm.”<sup>33</sup>

Robert and Thekla’s relationship was largely dependent on correspondence. They were not lovers before she emigrated to the United States. His sister Ottilie (“Tilchen”) Kiefer was a very close friend, but it is unclear how much contact the couple had before their intimate correspondence. Moreover, written contact between Thekla and Robert was at times affected by war and characterized by long pauses and one-sidedness.

“Finally after 3 long years, I can send you a message again. I have had to go through difficult times, but I returned from the war healthy. And how are you my dear Tea? Please write to me right away so that I can be freed from the uncertainty. I hope for a healthy and happy reunion, and greetings to all your loved ones and you, whom I hold in my heart, your faithful Robert (many greetings from Tilchen and Josef)”<sup>34</sup>

- 33 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 9 April 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9200409-TL0191.1a; “Endlich bin ich erlöst aus der Ungewissheit. Drei Briefe von Dir erhielt ich innerhalb acht Tagen ich habe mich sehr gefreut und bin sehr glücklich. Es ging mir doch sehr zu Herzen und hätte es nicht überwinden können, wenn du mir nicht mehr geschrieben hättest. Der 3. Brief welcher Mitte März an Dich ab ging habe ich einschreiben lassen. Er ist in verzweifelter Stimmung geschrieben. Ich war doch in großer Sorge um dich, doch jetzt nach dem ich weiß, daß Du mir noch in treuer Liebe gedenkst bin ich ruhig.”
- 34 Postcard, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 23 July 1919, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9190723-TA0022.2b; “Endlich, nach 3 langen Jahren kann ich Dir wieder eine Nachricht zukommen lassen. Schwere Zeiten habe ich müssen durch machen, bin aber gesund zurück gekehrt aus dem Kriege. Und wie geht es dir meine liebe Tea? Bitte schreibe mir gleich damit ich von der Ungewißheit befreit werde. Ich hoffe auf ein gesundes frohes Wiedersehen und grüße alle deine lieben Angehörigen und dich auf das herzlichste und behalte lieb Deinen treuen Robert. (Viel Grüße v. Tilchen u. Josef)”

Despite shorter or longer interruptions in their correspondence, the two kept in touch and shared their feelings with each other. Some of Robert's letters contain very personal perspectives on their relationship. He writes of his love for Thekla, the longing he feels for her, and his anticipation of a life together.

“Oh, if I had you in my arms; but unfortunately, the time has not come yet, and it will be a long time before we belong together forever. I think my little Thekla will stay devoted to me after all, or is it taking too long for you? certainly, you will think a lot about how it will all work out in the end, but my darling, the belief in a better future and the trust in God will turn our fate for the better. Or does it bother you because we have not yet seen each other face to face? You think maybe we will not like each other or we will not get along with each other. But my darling, you should not have such thoughts. You will get melancholic. Once I'm with you, I will chase away all these concerns.”<sup>35</sup>

A reoccurring relationship practice that can be found in the letters Robert sent to Thekla is the assurance of his affection and loyalty. Historian Sonja Janositz argues that “[g]iving certainty, ensuring continuity, and creating trust thus become the central communicative practice of establishing a relationship.”<sup>36</sup> These relationship-building practices can also include adapting the social environment. The correspondence itself creates a social network and positions the writers of these love letters at its center. Family members, friends, and acquaintances can also belong to this network and thus play decisive roles in the development of the courtship. Reference to these friends and relatives can create closeness between the writers and increase mutual commitment.<sup>37</sup>

35 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 3 May 1920, Kiefer Coll. L9200502-TL0193.1a; L9200502-TL0193.1b; “Ja, wenn ich Dich in meinen Armen hätte aber leider ist es noch nicht so weit und es wird noch eine ganze Zeit dauern bis wir uns für immer angehören. Ich denke doch meine kleine Thekla wird mir doch treu bleiben oder dauert es Dir etwa zu lange? Du machst Dir gewiß manchmal recht viel Gedanken wie Alles noch kommen wird, aber mein Liebling der Glaube an eine bessere Zukunft und das Vertrauen auf Gott wird schon unser Schicksal zum Guten lenken. Oder macht es dir vielleicht Kummer weil wir uns noch nicht persönlich gesehen haben? Du denkst vielleicht wir gefallen uns gegenseitig nicht oder wir werden nicht aus kommen mit einander. Aber mein Liebling solche Gedanken sollst Du nicht haben. Du wirst ja noch schwermütig. Wenn ich erst bei Dir bin, will ich all' diese Sorgen von dir verscheuchen.”

36 Sonja Janositz, “Entwurf eines gemeinsamen Lebens. Die Briefe der irischen Migrantin Annie O'Donnell,” *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 25/1, Heiraten nach Übersee (2014): 74.

37 Janositz, “Entwurf,” 79.

For instance, Robert often makes mention of people in his letters with whom Thekla is also familiar. He talks about his siblings, specifically his sister Ottilie (Tilchen), and frequently refers to Thekla's family.

"I went to Tilchen's yesterday. She would also like to come over [to the United States], but she thinks it costs too much money. I have not yet received any news from Josef. On Pentecost, I will go to Silesia and also visit your dear mother."<sup>38</sup>

Robert's correspondence make it possible to analyze the practices of letter writing through which he and Thekla built their transatlantic relationship in midst war and global migration. Scholars only have even this limited insight into their everyday life at the beginning of the twentieth century thanks to the life stories they inscribed in their love letters. These cultural artifacts are valuable sources for expanding our knowledge of the intimate and private lives of both migrants and non-migrants alike.<sup>39</sup>

## UNITED FROM AFAR

The Kiefer-Scholz Collection demonstrates the vast amount of effort, work, and time invested in order to sustain relationships from afar. Through words and images, it was possible for the members of the Kiefer-Scholz social network to stay in contact while building new connections. Their communication through letters and postcards was multifaceted and rich. Significant, especially in the context of this couples' correspondence, was the mix of media used in the example shown. Robert shared his desires, emotions, stories, travels, and greetings through a careful selection of words and phrases, and he enhanced the written message with images. In spite of the fact that this particular collection did not preserve both sides of the correspondence, we can still gain much insight from the communicative space that he and Thekla created through this mix of media. This utilization of postcards and letters to communicate

38 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 8 April 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9200408-TL0190.1b; "Bei Tilchen war ich gestern. Hätt auch Lust mit rüber zu kommen, doch findet sie daß es zu viel Geld kostet. Von Josef habe ich noch keine Nachricht. Zu Pfüngsten werde ich nach Schlesien runter fahren und auch deine liebe Mutter besuchen."

39 Cancian, "Time of Migration," 105.



Figure 3. *Robert Kiefer (left) visiting the family of Thekla Scholz in Langenbrück. In front: her mother Hedwig Scholz (born Müller), sister Hedwig Heidenreich (born Scholz) and the latter's two little boys. The white dress she is wearing was sent by Thekla Scholz from Kansas City. Back: presumably sister-in-law Berta Scholz (born Sperlich), brother Josef Scholz and brother-in-law Paul Heidenreich. Langenbrück, Spring 1920. Kiefer-Scholz Coll. B099-LP0345A.*

complex emotions is a great example for the application of postal media in the early twentieth century. Research into everyday life in the past can only benefit from access to such rich expressions of emotion in the context of transnational relationships through historical testimonies such as the letters and postcards from this collection.

KATHLEEN FOSTER, ALEXANDRA ELEONORE IMPRIS,  
GARY C. SHARP, BOB SWEARENGIN

## “WELL, THE SKY IS STILL FULL OF VIOLINS”

MAINTAINING AND ADAPTING GERMAN CULTURE  
TO POST-WWI AMERICA

“There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism,” former president Theodore Roosevelt bellowed in a speech on 12 October 1915 in New York City. “Our allegiance must be purely to the United States. We must unsparingly condemn any man who holds any other allegiance.”<sup>1</sup> Roosevelt relinquished the presidency six years prior, but his remarks added to the xenophobic fervor directed at German communities in the United States during the First World War. Though German immigrants were considered a well-integrated part of American society by the turn of the century,<sup>2</sup> those attitudes changed as the United States went to war with Germany in 1917. Citizens with German origins or ancestry experienced persecution and confronted serious efforts to progressively eliminate German language and culture from the United States.<sup>3</sup> Rather than eradicating Germanness per se, these attacks accelerated the process of adaptation and Americanization already effecting the cultural practices of German-American communities.

While Missourians of German descent did not entirely escape suspicion or charges of disloyalty, their treatment differed in several ways from the hysteria elsewhere in the nation. German-Americans in an urban center like Kansas City, for example, were not the subject of widespread hate crimes and ethnically targeted legislation that they experienced in other parts of the Midwest including St. Louis. As historian Petra DeWitt suggests, aggression toward

- 1 Mary J. Manning, “Being German, Being American: In World War I, They Faced Suspicion, Discrimination Here at Home,” *Prologue* (Summer 2014), 15.
- 2 Manning, “Being German,” 18.
- 3 Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), xiii.

German-Americans in Missouri during World War I occurred mostly in non-urban communities. Rather than ethnicity alone, suspicions there were more often the result of personal animosities, a desire to locally enforce the national guidelines for the war effort, or both.<sup>4</sup> The Missouri state legislature neither convened during the war nor did the governor perceive a legitimate need for an emergency session. Thus, Missouri's prevailing "Show-Me" attitude encouraged individual decision making as well as minimal government interference in traditional social and economic structures.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the Missouri Council of Defense, the local organization in official charge of the war effort, strenuously opposed any form of mob violence. The Council persistently advocated volunteerism and appealed to the German-American community to persuade the hesitant among them to become enthusiastic patriots.<sup>6</sup>

These endeavors to encourage patriotism resulted in both coordinated and individual efforts to curb German cultural practices, including attempts to undermine the use of German music, language, and cuisine. While there were no official statutes barring its use, for example, pressure on the local level in Missouri led to the discontinuance of German language use in public as well as schools and churches. Many German speakers resumed using German in business settings and religious services after the war, but war-time animosity toward the use of German played a role in the increased use of spoken English in German-American communities.<sup>7</sup> Prior historians like Frederick Luebke have suggested that anti-German sentiment was largely responsible for a widespread decline in German culture in the United States after World War I.<sup>8</sup> As historian Petra DeWitt notes, however, this story is much more complex, particularly for German-Americans in Missouri.<sup>9</sup> They had already begun gradually adapting their culture to the American majority prior to the First World War. While outside forces like anti-German sentiment played a role

4 Petra DeWitt, *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community during World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 3.

5 Richard J. Hardy, Richard R. Gohm, and David A. Leuthold, *Missouri Government and Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 25.

6 DeWitt, *Degrees*, 21.

7 DeWitt, *Degrees*, 162.

8 Luebke, *Bonds*, 245–259.

9 Luebke, *Bonds*, 21.

in the Americanization of German-American communities during the war,<sup>10</sup> DeWitt argues that it was also the result of their own desire to adopt American cultural customs.<sup>11</sup>

This microhistorical case study examines the cultural practices of the family of Thekla Kiefer (born Scholz), a German-American family who settled in Kansas City between 1907 and 1922. Using documents from the Robert J. and Thekla E. (Scholz) Kiefer Collection, the authors of this chapter analyze the ways in which the family’s language, music, and culinary traditions changed over time. Based on the stories that emerge from the private letters and social correspondence of Thekla and her husband Robert as well as narrative interviews with their grandchildren, we challenge the conventional wisdom that the persecution of everything German resulted in the eradication of German culture in the United States. Ultimately, the experiences of the Kiefer-Scholz family suggest that, while anti-German sentiment may have induced members of the family to abandon some of their German cultural practices, this influence did not uniformly impact all aspects of their culture. Instead, the enduring cultural practices that emerged after the First World War were largely the product of a gradual process of generational shifts and Americanization in the German-American community.

## SPRECHEN SIE AMERICAN?

Before America’s entry into the First World War, German was the most common foreign language studied in American high schools. In 1915, one in every four students (25%) learned German; but just seven years later in 1922, only one in every 167 students (0.6%) were learning the language.<sup>12</sup> Following their entry into the war, Americans began to look upon their German-American peers with suspicion. In some cases, just speaking German in public was enough to

10 Wolfgang Helbich, Walter D. Kamppgoefner, and Ulrike Sommer, *Briefe aus Amerika: Deutsche Auswanderer schreiben aus der Neuen Welt 1830-1930* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1988), 16–17.

11 Annemarie Steidl, “Ein ewiges Hin und Her. Kontinentale, transatlantische und lokale Migrationsrouten in der Spätphase der Habsburgermonarchie,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geisteswissenschaften*, no. 19 (2008), 34.

12 Helbich et al., *Briefe*, 29–30.

have their loyalty towards America questioned. Historians Wolfgang Helbich et al. emphasized the impact of the war on schools, stating that German language classes were taken out of the curriculum immediately, causing a drastic decline in the teaching of the German language.<sup>13</sup> Historian Carl Wittke adds that, in some communities, high school students “tossed their German textbooks into public bonfires to the accompaniment of patriotic airs by the village band.”<sup>14</sup> Clearly, national efforts to eliminate the German language impacted its usage. The decision by German-Americans to start predominantly using English in public was not entirely a result of fear from authorities, however; as DeWitt describes, it was also a product of “local peer-pressure” within their community to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the war, German-Americans in Missouri displayed their patriotism to the United States by joining nationalistic organizations and renaming their stores. Local pressure and legislation limited freedom of speech, attempted to halt printing in German, and effectively shut down some German language newspapers in Missouri.<sup>16</sup> Many German-American entrepreneurs overcame wartime difficulties by adapting their businesses and removing German connotations, including Americanizing their surnames.<sup>17</sup> German street and building names were changed. In Kansas City, for instance, the German Hospital was founded in 1886 by the German Hospital Association, a group of German-American residents.<sup>18</sup> It was renamed Research Hospital in 1918.<sup>19</sup> National efforts as well as peer pressure from within the German-American communities influenced the public use of the German language in Kansas City.

Personal transitions, however, demonstrated that German-Americans made changes at their own pace. Correspondences found within the Kiefer-Scholz

13 Helbich et al., *Briefe*, 28-29.

14 Carl Wittke, “American Germans in Two World Wars,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 27, no. 1 (1943), 12.

15 Petra DeWitt, “Degrees of Allegiance, Missouri and the Great War, Part 3,” *Our Missouri Podcast*, State Historical Society of Missouri, 19 November 2018, 32:00–34:00, <https://shsmo.org/our-missouri/season-1/episode-5>.

16 Petra DeWitt, *Degrees*, 20:00–23:00.

17 Katja Wüstenbecker, “German-Americans during World War I,” last modified 19 September 2014, <http://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/>.

18 Research Medical Center. “Research Medical Center History.” Research Medical Center, accessed 16 August 2020, <https://researchmedicalcenter.com/about/rmc-history.dot>.

19 Petra DeWitt, *Degrees*, 34:01.

Collection show that individual choices to Americanize existed prior to the national pressure caused by the First World War. While some German-Americans started to Anglicize their names in response to anti-German sentiment, Thekla's brother Franz shows that this process began in the Scholz family prior to 1917 or even 1914. Franz immigrated to Missouri in 1907, and his family referred to him using the anglicized Frank as early as 1911. His wife Anna Scholz (born Müller) mentioned him in a letter to Thekla in which she addressed him as Frank rather than Franz.<sup>20</sup> It is unclear when Franz permanently changed his name to Frank, but this example shows that the tendency toward Americanization preceded the anti-German atmosphere of World War I.

Letters written by Thekla Scholz's brother August while working on a military base in Waco, Texas, shows his journey in adjusting to English. On 11 October 1918, August complained to Thekla about his attempt to respond to a friend named Reuter in English. (It is unclear if he meant Anna Reuter or if he is referring to a completely different person.) "I had worked particularly hard a.[nd] written in English a.[nd] it's pretty hard for me. I sweated like a s[ow]." August clearly still preferred to write in German; the fact that he mentioned his frustration shows that English was not at all his preferred language. Yet he wrote "English" and "hard" in English rather than using the German equivalents of "Englisch" and "schwer."<sup>21</sup> In other letters, he included even more English terms such as the word "carpenter"<sup>22</sup> and "company"<sup>23</sup> rather than their German equivalents "Tischler" and "Truppeneinheit" or even "Kompanie"; and he frequently began his sentences with the English interjection "Well."<sup>24</sup> To be sure, he sometimes Germanized English terms such as the word "gesettelt,"<sup>25</sup>

20 Letter, Anna Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 13 February 1911 Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9110213-TL0015.1a.

21 Letter, August Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Camp "McArthur" in Texas, 11 October 1918, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9181011-TL0146.1a; "Hatte mich besonders angesträngt u. english geschrieben u. es ist ziemlich hard für mich. Habe geschwitzt wie ne S[au] dabei."

22 Letter, August Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Camp "McArthur" in Texas, 25 August 1918, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9181011-TL0146.1b.

23 Letter, August Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Camp "McArthur" in Texas, 22 December 1918, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9181222-TL0151.1a.

24 Letter, August Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Camp "McArthur" in Texas, 3 November 1918, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9181103-TL0148.2b.

25 Letter, August Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Camp "McArthur" in Texas, 9 November 1918, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L91812xx-TL0153.1a; „Wünsche blos das es bald gesettelt wird, dann könnte ich vielleicht in paar Monaten daheim sein.“

which applied the German prefix and suffix for the past participle “ge-t” to the root form of the English verb “settle.” Four months after mentioning how hard it was for him to respond in English, however, he began to write whole sentences in German that used a more English style. He even directly translated English phrases into German. “All I can say is I feel fine,” he wrote. “Just had two days of fine weather.”<sup>26</sup> The incorporation of these phrases into his letters highlights a potentially unconscious process of integrating English into his everyday speech, perhaps accelerated by his time among English speakers and other American soldiers at the military base.

Arguably, August Scholz not only accepted but welcomed the transition into English in the long term. This interpretation is further supported by a letter from 1 January 1919. August wrote to Thekla that, “[I] have been to midnight church service and to English confession for the first time. *Well* [in English], I really enjoyed it in the church.”<sup>27</sup> The fact that this church offered English services suggests that it was responding to anti-German sentiment. Prior to the First World War, however, there was already internal pressure for German speaking churches to add an English-language mass. By 1910, most German Methodist churches had adopted English as the main language of their congregations. German Catholics also began to transition to English during this time, as pressure from within the congregation began to grow. Therefore, when outside forces, such as the American Defense Society, attempted to eliminate the use of German in public, the church was able to seamlessly make this transition.<sup>28</sup> August and other German speaking Americans appeared to not only have accepted this change but even enjoyed it.

The biggest impact on language ability in the family seems to have been generational. According to Thekla’s grandson Robert “Bob” Kiefer III, each succeeding generation lost more of the ability to communicate in German. During the 2020 interviews, he recounted:

26 Letter, August Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Camp “McArthur” in Texas, 12 February 1919, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9190212-TL0155.1b; “Was mich anbelangt, so kann ich nur sagen ich fühle fein. [...] Hatten letzte zwei Tage feines Wetter.”

27 Letter, August Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Camp “McArthur” in Texas, 1 January 1919, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9190101-TL0154.1a; “Bin in Mitternacht Messe gewesen u. das erste mal englisch Beichten. Well, es hat mir sehr gut gefallen in der Kirche.”

28 DeWitt, *Degrees*, 165.

“While my Dad could speak German, I don’t think he could really read it well. I think Aunt Marge could actually read it fairly well. And by the time we came along, it’s just — they weren’t teaching us German so much.”<sup>29</sup>

By contrast, the members of the immigrant generation struggled to navigate between German and English. McHale told our research team the following story about Clara Seeley. She was called “*Tante Clara*” using the German label but was in fact not a blood relative; rather she was a very close family friend. She often wanted to write letters in English to her friends and relatives in Germany. Unfortunately, Margie added, “*Tante Clara* ‘murdered’ English and could not write English well.” So Margie’s mother would

“always take care of *Tante Clara*’s correspondence for her. *Tante Clara* would periodically come over to [...] our house, and she would call and tell Mom, she said, ‘Well, I need you to write some cards for me, or write some letters back to somebody in Germany.’”<sup>30</sup>

According to Margie, Clara wanted to correspond in English rather than German because she “wanted people to think that she now wrote in English, so she would,” Margie laughed, “have my mom write these letters in English.”<sup>31</sup> Where August Scholz’ increased use of English appears to have been part of a gradual process of adaptation, Clara Seeley seems to have made a conscious decision to appear more Americanized to her German friends and relatives. Their respective journeys with the English language demonstrate that the process of Americanization consisted of both unconscious and conscious efforts.

The family’s dominant language shifted to English over the subsequent generations, but a few German expressions managed to survive in family discourse, as evidenced by the oral history interviews conducted by Alexandra Kern and Kathleen Foster, members of our research team. Margie McHale, the granddaughter of Robert and Thekla Kiefer, for example, still uses the German word “*Tante*” when referring to both her fictive and actual aunts, including “*Tante*

29 Interview, Robert “Bob” Kiefer III, by Alexandra Kern and Kathleen Foster, 28 June 2020, GMM 200628-01.01, 01:43:16.

30 Interview, Margie McHale, by Kathleen Foster and Alexandra Kern, 6 July 2020, GMM200706-03.01, 45:30.

31 Interview, McHale, GMM200706-03.01, 46:40.

Selma,” the wife of Thekla’s brother August Scholz.<sup>32</sup> German language and traditions have largely been removed from daily life for the grandchildren’s generation, however. In their interviews, Bob Kiefer and Margie McHale both seem to confirm this trend as they listed who continues to speak German<sup>33</sup> and who kept which tradition alive.<sup>34</sup> According to historian Marcus Lee Hansen, the assimilation process for an immigrant family usually starts with the second generation.<sup>35</sup> Sociologist Milton M. Gordon expanded that argument, explaining that “complete assimilation occurred when former ethnics entered the clubs and institutions of the core society.”<sup>36</sup> Especially through educational but also religious and other institutions, the children and grandchildren of German immigrants were immersed in what was becoming a predominantly English-speaking environment and were therefore more likely to adopt English as their primary language. This generational shift appears to be the primary factor in the declining use of the German language in the Kiefer-Scholz family.

## GERMAN MUSIC UNDER ATTACK

During the First World War, few other elements of German culture were so savagely attacked as German music.<sup>37</sup> Both in Germany and in the German-American communities of the United States, music was a defining aspect of German culture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before the war, musical compositions of German composers were faithfully performed at organized productions. Works by Romantic composers Ludwig van Beethoven and Richard Wagner were extremely popular in the United States. As a US-German conflict loomed in the early twentieth century however, German-American citizens who consumed German music or

32 Interview, McHale, GMM200706 -03.01, 14:08.

33 Interview, Kiefer, GMM 200628-01.01, 01:43:16.

34 Interview, McHale, GMM200706-03.01, 01:32:19–01:34:30.

35 Bradley Jake Hustad, “Problems in Historiography: The Americanization of German Ethnics,” in *Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects*, (Mankato: Minnesota State University–Mankato, 2013), <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1140&context=etds>, 10.

36 Hustad, *Problems*, 16.

37 Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 183.

practiced German musical traditions were gradually associated with support for Imperial Germany. Many super-patriots and nationalist organizations attempted to “protect” American audiences from the contamination of disloyal music.<sup>38</sup> According to historian Christopher Capozzola, the American Defense Society claimed that German music was “one of the most dangerous forms of organized propaganda because it appeals to the emotions and has power to sway the audience.”<sup>39</sup> The ostracization of German music appeared in the barring of German canonical works and German performers from American concert halls. J. E. Vacha notes how “German concert artists such as former Austrian army officer Fritz Kreisler and soprano Frieda Hempel encountered difficulties in arranging schedules, as violinist Kreisler was barred from Pittsburgh and St. Louis, and both were shut out of Youngstown.” Certain cities targeted composers rather than performers. For instance, “Pittsburgh also pressured the Philadelphia Orchestra to keep music of all German composers off a pair of concerts scheduled for that city.”<sup>40</sup> Such restrictions on German music and German musicians perpetuated the fear and retaliation that non-German-Americans felt towards German-American citizens.

Not all German-Americans accepted the repression of their culture, however. Some embraced their culture while distancing themselves from the policies of the Reich government and showing enthusiastic support for the American war effort during the First World War.<sup>41</sup> In Columbia, Missouri, a newspaper article from *The Evening Missourian*, dated 18 November 1917, mentioned a Dr. Max F. Meyer, representing a proposed branch of the organization Friends of German Democracy. As Meyer lamented,

“the German government has long believed that, in any and all of its enterprises, it could count on the support of those Americans who are of German descent [...]. Here is our opportunity of demonstrating to the government of

38 Luebke, *Bonds*, 249.

39 Capozzola, *Uncle Sam*, 183.

40 J. E. Vacha, “When Wagner was Verboten: The Campaign against German Music in World War I,” *New York History*, 64, no. 2 (1983), 173: 171-88, accessed August 4, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/23173920](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23173920).

41 Capozzola, *Uncle Sam*, 183.

Germany, and to its subjects, that the government of the United States has the enthusiastic support of those American citizens who are of German descent.”<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, they also argued that the First World War should not be an excuse to eradicate German culture and music. Meyer explains that the Friends of German Democracy can help the United States war effort by convincing non-participating German-Americans to give more patriotically to the American war effort. Doing so, he wrote,

“will prevent even the possibility of this war degenerating into a racial war [...] We are in this war for the realization of political ideals and not the purpose of exterminating everything German — the German people, German industry, German commerce, German literature, German music, and whatnot.”<sup>43</sup>

George A. Warren, a public correspondent for the same newspaper, *The Evening Missourian*, remarked sarcastically in an article from 9 July 1918 in a similar vein.

“Music, like language, is a mode of expression; therefore, should German music be heard in our land? When marriages are celebrated should we tolerate the Wedding March from “Lohengrin” or that from Mendelssohn’s ‘Midsummer Night’ Dream? When Christmas hymns are sung, is Haydn’s ‘Holy Night’ to be omitted?”<sup>44</sup>

Given their deep desire to continue practicing their music and culture, German-Americans tried to make the case that their cultural traditions also belonged to the rich fabric of American culture.

Robert Kiefer’s musical practices highlight the ways in which German immigrants integrated their musical traditions into the American bricolage. During the nineteenth century, traveling bands were a popular way to expose the provincial populations of German towns to German musical works.

42 “German-Americans to Attend Meeting,” *The Evening Missourian*, Columbia, Missouri, 18 November 1917, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89066315/1917-11-18/ed-1/seq-3/>.

43 “German-Americans,” *Evening Missourian*.

44 “The German Language,” *The Evening Missourian*, Columbia, Missouri, 9 July 1918, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89066315/1918-07-09/ed-1/seq-2/>.

These bands were mostly amateur musicians, though a few professional bands did exist: and they typically played military marches and polkas, selections from popular operettas, and the works of the Germanic musical canon.<sup>45</sup> Prior to the First World War, Robert performed in several traveling bands in Europe. He used his musical talents in the German military bands of World War I as well. Though living in America in 1914, Robert was not a naturalized American citizen. Therefore, he was required to return to the German Empire to fight in the war. Margie McHale, the granddaughter of Robert and Thekla, noted during a 2020 interview, that he did not want to enlist.



Figure 1: *Sheet Music by Wilhelm Lüdecke, Nr. 38 Frohsinn u. Jugendlust and Nr. 39 Pardon!*, Robert Kiefer, Unknown Date, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. D9xxxxxx-TD0119.04.

“I believe Grandpa would have been a conscientious objector in today’s terms. He did not want to carry a gun, but he was a medic in as much as that he ran out onto the battlefields to carry off the wounded [...] He was a musician, and [...] he played with the band, but he also was on the frontlines.”<sup>46</sup>

Robert’s wartime service in Germany no doubt revived many of his German customs. Even after the war, he was forced to remain in Europe and work as a musician and carpenter. Thus the eight years that Robert spent in Europe not only delayed his naturalization as an American citizen but also the process of cultural adaptation to the culture and language of the United States. Still, his desire to live in Kansas City never wavered; and in 1922, Robert’s return to Thekla Scholz reinitiated the process of Americanization.

45 William Everett, “German Traveling Bands in the Early 20th Century,” Lecture for the course *German Migration to Missouri*, Kansas City, 2018.

46 Interview, McHale, GMM200706-03.01, 01:12:51-01:14:29.

The Kiefer-Scholz Collection contains several examples of sheet music (Figure 1) that Robert played during his time as a traveling and military musician. It consists of music by prominent German composer Wilhelm Lüdecke, who wrote various collections of marches, polkas, and other traditional musical forms at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Robert was a proficient flugelhornist, and the sheet music shows that he played the principal, or lead, part on this musical collection.

Family stories illustrate not only Robert's musical skill but also his attempts to continue his German musical traditions after the war. His grandson Bob Kiefer noted that,

“before the war and after the war, [an] interesting thing — my Grandfather could play the mandolin, the trumpet, the French horn, [and] I think the guitar, but I'm not sure. But [...] when he couldn't find work in cabinetry, especially in the winter, he would go to Switzerland and play in bands at ice skating rinks.”<sup>47</sup>

That is, Robert continued his tradition of playing in traveling bands after the war prior to his return to Missouri. Robert also attempted to continue playing German music while in Kansas City, then with the colorfully named group “Professor Adolf von Blitzen's Little German Band.” Bob Kiefer recalled the following family story about this band in the 1930s.

“My grandfather [...] played in a local band that played traditional German music at the time, kind of like ‘oompah’ or whatever. But they had a weekly radio show every Sunday on WHB, a station that still exists. And they would play the show for several hours.”<sup>48</sup>

Referring to a photograph of the band (Illustration 2), he noted that, “obviously everybody had fake mustaches.”<sup>49</sup> These fake beards and mustaches made the players seem more stereotypically German while simultaneously diluting

47 Interview, Kiefer, GMM 200628-01.01, 23:23.

48 Interview, Kiefer, GMM 200628-01.01, 14:03.

49 Interview, Kiefer, by Alexandra Kern and Kathleen Foster, 25 July 2020, GMM 200725.01, 52:07.



Figure 2: Photograph. Robert Kiefer in Professor Adolph von Blitzen's Little German Band, ca. 1930s, Kiefer-Scholz Coll.B199-LP0611A.

the threat of German culture for non-German-Americans through comedy. Though strange, this strategy allowed for Robert and Professor Adolph von Blitzen's Little German Band to continue to practice and disseminate their musical culture in the postwar period.

Musicologist Pamela Potter contends that “music has come to represent one of Germany's most important contributions to Western culture, impressing the rest of the world with a reputation for superior achievement and serving as a source of national pride, especially in times of low morale and insecurity.”<sup>50</sup> Yet paradoxically, against Potter's claim, German-Americans were unable to fall back on their long-practiced traditions of music during the First

50 Pamela M. Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), x.

World War. The Kiefer-Scholz Collection tells a different story, particularly when paired alongside interviews with the family. The suppression of German culture caused the thriving German-American communities in the United States to distance themselves only partially from their previous enjoyment of Germanic repertoire and musical traditions. Though not persecuted for their music as harshly as in St. Louis or Pittsburgh, German-Americans in Kansas City certainly did adapt their musical culture. Yet these adaptations allowed for German-Americans and non-German-Americans alike to consume the traditions of German musical culture as part of an emerging American mass culture.

## A RECIPE FOR AMERICANIZATION

While there were some incensed responses to German-American eating habits during the war, these reactions were fueled more by fears of the amount of food that German-Americans consumed rather than the foreignness of their cuisine. As the Federal government encouraged citizens to conserve food to support the war effort, “some feared that, in the absence of strong laws, German-Americans would ‘buy and eat and hoard all the wheat they possibly can.’”<sup>51</sup> Producers of German beer, which had become popular in the United States by the turn of the twentieth century, also became a target for anti-German fervor. “Patriotic Americans,” historian Donna Gabaccia suggests, “especially hated beer dynasties” like the Anheuser-Busch family.<sup>52</sup> Temperance supporters were particularly vehement in their outrage, with many alleging that the lack of regulation on their beer production meant “that ‘alcoholic German-American traitors’ could continue to waste good grain by making it into alcohol.”<sup>53</sup> For German-Americans like the Kiefer-Scholz family, however, postwar connections to their culinary heritage seemed to be informed less by wartime sentiment than a national trend towards the Americanization of ethnic foods.

51 Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 30.

52 Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 135.

53 Veit, *Modern Food*, 21.

The animosity lobbed at beer producers did not seem to impact the consumption of German food products in most American households, German-American or not. As Gabaccia notes, "few Americans were disposed to forgo the pleasures of the food marketplace for Puritan simplicity, self-reliance, and self-denial."<sup>54</sup> Letters written to Thekla Scholz in the last year of the war appear to confirm that German-Americans were unlikely to abandon their traditional cuisine during this period. Writing to his sister Thekla from U. S. army camp "McArthur" in Texas in October of 1918, August Scholz wished that he "could be at the party next Sunday, then I would surely down a couple of dozen glasses of beer. I am really thirsty."<sup>55</sup> Another letter sent to Thekla in 1918 from her friend Anna Renter suggests that German-Americans still cherished the dining practices of their homeland. In the letter dated 13 January, Anna wrote that "Amalia and I enjoyed liver sausage for breakfast. Then we bought sauerkraut, and we both had the pleasure of having a real dinner like back home."<sup>56</sup> Over the decades, German fare in the Kiefer-Scholz family seemed to become relegated to holidays. Thekla's grandchildren most vividly remembered her laboring to make *Pfefferkuchen*, a thin, spiced cookie, and *Streuselkuchen*, a coffee cake, for Christmas. The annual preparation of the *Pfefferkuchen* in particular was a "huge act of love," as they took weeks to make and the ingredients were rather expensive.<sup>57</sup> Her grandchildren also remembered Thekla and her daughters preparing other German dishes like *Rouladen*, a traditional rolled meat dish, for Sunday dinners. Oral history interviews with Thekla's grandchildren thus indicate that the family continued to enjoy German foods well into the twentieth century.

Nonetheless, their diets increasingly featured what they considered to be American foods. As Thekla's granddaughter, Lisa Weis, recalled

54 Gabaccia, *We Are*, 136.

55 Letter, August Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Camp "McArthur" in Texas, 4 October 1918, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9181004-TL0145.1a; "Wünschte, könnte nächsten Sonntag bei der Party sein, würde dann sicher paar dozen Glas Bier hinter die binde giehsen. Habe nämlich einen mordsmähnsigen Durst."

56 Letter, Anna Renter to Thekla Scholz, 13 January 1918, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9180113-TL0142.1a; "Amalia und ich haben uns Leberwurst zum Frühstück gut schmecken lassen. Dann haben wir uns Sauerkraut gekauft und wir beide hatten ein Vergnügen noch einmal ein richtiges dinner zu haben wie zu hause."

57 Interview, Kiefer, GMM 200628-01.01, 30:27 and Interview, McHale, GMM200706-03.01, conversation begins at 1:32:19.

“She [Thekla] made great spaghetti and meatballs. You know, you’re thinking, [she was] German, but yeah, she did cook good German food too. I just remember she would fry pork chops up, and there’s nothing better than the smell. I don’t know what the heck she did, but those pork chops were delicious. And, of course, there was gravy on everything [...] But that was it. It was like — stuff was chicken fried, but I mean, her food was good.”<sup>58</sup>

This blending of German and American cuisine supports Gabaccia’s assessment of the Americanization of the ethnic diet. Modern Americans, she offers, eat what linguists call a “creole,” suggesting their propensity for “tolerance and curiosity” as well as a willingness to incorporate multi-ethnic dishes into their own identity.<sup>59</sup> Like other ethnic groups in America, “German-Americans eat a diet that mingles foods of their ancestors with those of their many neighbors.”<sup>60</sup> Thekla traveled across the American southwest as a nanny before settling in Kansas City with her husband Robert Kiefer in the 1920s, so it is likely that she tasted and learned how to prepare different regional and cultural cuisines. No doubt these experiences encouraged her to infuse these new foods into her own cooking.

Thekla certainly enjoyed the ethnic food traditions of her Kansas City neighbors. Her grandson, Bob, recalled a story in which Thekla, a Catholic, would make her German speech sound like Yiddish when shopping from her Jewish neighbors. “She bought the rye bread from the Jewish bakery. And she would go to Jewish bakery to [emulating Thekla’s accent] ‘Get the good rye breads. Oh, I love the good rye breads.’”<sup>61</sup> She also worked popular American products into her cooking, including, as her granddaughter Margie McHale recalled, roasting her hams in 7up soda to keep them moist.<sup>62</sup> Bob recalled a particularly infamous “Thekla invention” called “Juice-la.” It “consisted of pineapple juice, a ton of sugar, and the stuff that got the astronauts to the moon, Tang,” the popular orange drink powder. Thekla created this sugary drink, Bob remembered, to commemorate America’s role in the Space Race of the 1960s:

58 Interview, Lisa Weis, Interview by Kathleen Foster and Alexandra Kern, July 1, 2020, GMM 200701-02.01, 35:36.

59 Gabaccia, *We Are*, 9.

60 Gabaccia, *We Are*, 227.

61 Interview, Kiefer, GMM 200628-01.01, 9:03.

62 Interview, McHale, GMM200706-03.01, 29:54.

“She thought that America, her country, getting to the moon was just absolutely amazing. Apparently, she was fascinated with everything. So, she created [this] drink [...] And that became a staple. At family gatherings, there would always be Juice-la.”<sup>63</sup>

Immigrants adapted and reimagined their own eating habits to fit American culture, as historian Jennifer Jenson Wallach suggests, but they also found many ways to “leave their culinary imprint on the nation.”<sup>64</sup> German-Americans were no different, sharing their traditions with other communities. Lisa, for example, remembers Oktoberfest celebrations in the 1970s held at her Catholic parish, Sacred Heart. She noted that the congregation had changed from being primarily German in the earlier part of the century to being largely Hispanic, but the festivals were still popular events that also allowed German congregants to share their food and heritage.<sup>65</sup>

Wallach argues that “German-Americans taught other Americans how to appreciate lager-style beer and adapted sausage-making traditions to create the uniquely American frankfurter.”<sup>66</sup> It seemed that this venture succeeded in Kansas City as well. For the later generations of the Kiefer-Scholz family, these originally German creations had become American staples. Though Bob interpreted family parties as a part of his family’s German tradition, the beer and hotdogs that they consumed at the party seemed to take on less of a German quality than the act of gathering itself.<sup>67</sup> The memories of Thekla and Robert’s grandchildren ultimately suggest that the features of German-American food traditions that have endured were created not by a singular event but in a long process of cultural mingling that is a hallmark not only of American cuisine but much of American culture.

63 Interview, Kiefer, GMM 200628-01.01, 32:08.

64 Jennifer Jenson Wallach, *How America Eats: A Social History of U. S. Food and Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 86.

65 Interview, Lisa Weis, by Kathleen Foster and Alexandra Kern, July 16, 2020, GMM 200716-02.01, 16:26.

66 Wallach, *How America*, 8.

67 Interview, Kiefer, GMM 200628-01.01, 1:52:17.

## BECOMING GERMAN-AMERICAN

On 4 October 1918, August Scholz wrote to his sister using the old German expression found in the title of this chapter: “Well, the sky is still full of violins.”<sup>68</sup> It was an expression of hope for better times ahead. While August’s words refer specifically to his personal hope for an end to the First World War, these words also reflect the sentiment and optimism of the German-American experience. Prior to World War I, German immigrants to the United States were sensitive to the social and political demands to conform. In the years before the war, however, they had been adept at preserving much of their culture and language for generations while gradually adopting many American customs. During the second and third generations, interactions between German-Americans and their neighbors of other ethnic backgrounds were more significant for the Kiefer-Scholz family and had more of an impact on the decline of their German-specific customs than the First World War.

Though this study is a window into the life of a single family in Kansas City, it represents a part of a larger story of cultural interaction and diversity. In Missouri, the war did not deliver the singular, devastating impact on German-American culture that some historians have suggested. The Kiefer-Scholz Collection demonstrates the degree to which German-American families not only recovered from the deliberate attempts to eradicate their German traditions but in some ways were able to assert their influence on American culture like other ethnic groups. As historian Steve Rowan suggests, Germans “came to transfer a whole way of life, and they intended to stay forever.”<sup>69</sup> Much like the optimism that August Scholz expressed in his letter, the confidence of German-Americans in the strength of their traditions allowed them to adapt and retain aspects of their German culture as a distinctly German-American identity within the multiethnic fabric of the United States.

68 Letter, August Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Camp “McArthur” in Texas, 4 October 1918, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. L9181004-TL0145.1b; “Well der Himmel hängt ja noch immer voller Geigen.”

69 Steve Rowan, “German Migration to Missouri to 1914,” lecture for the course *German Migration to Missouri*, St. Louis and Kansas City, 2018, 40:56.

KAREN JOHNSON, MARIA PRCHAL, MAREN SACHERER, ZEHUA YIN

## THE SUPPLY SITUATION IN SILESIA AFTER WORLD WAR I

ILLUSTRATED THROUGH LETTERS FROM THE KIEFER-SCHOLZ COLLECTION

“The shameful peace has been signed, a[nd] now the difficult conditions must be fulfilled. We all imagined it differently.”<sup>1</sup> These lines were written in 1920 by 32-year-old Ottilie Kiefer to her best friend Thekla E. Scholz. Thekla Scholz had emigrated to Missouri ten years earlier and was in a relationship with Ottilie’s brother, Robert Kiefer. The letter is part of the large set of written correspondences, photographs, postcards and other family documents in the Robert J. and Thekla E. (Scholz) Kiefer Collection. These historical documents describe, among other topics, the conditions of society in Upper Silesia, Germany, and Austria from 1915 to 1923.

During and after the Great War, Central Europeans faced dire economic conditions. Along with an unprecedented hyperinflation,<sup>2</sup> supplies like food, clothing, and other necessities were scarce in Germany and Austria. The first reason for this circumstance lays in the Allied blockade of Germany that lasted from 1914 until 1919.<sup>3</sup> The second contributing factor was an insufficient workforce in the agricultural sector, due to the fact that the Central governments drafted a lot of farmers and workers and sent them to the various war fronts. Many of these men died, landed in captivity, or returned injured, traumatized, or disabled, which led to ongoing labor shortages after the war. Germany and

- 1 Letter, Ottilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, no date, Berlin, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L92001xx-TL2019.1b; “Der schmachvolle Friede ist unterzeichnet u[nd] nun heißt es die schweren Bedingungen erfüllen. Wir hatten es uns alle anders gedacht.”
- 2 Ute Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen in der Kriegsgesellschaft: Beruf, Familie und Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 168–182; Eberhard Wühle, “Lebensmittelkarten im Spiegel ihrer politischen Ereignisse,” 29 December 2006, <http://www.dgwev.de/dgw-pdf/lebensmittelkarten.pdf>: 1-3, accessed 18 August 2020.
- 3 Charles Paul Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger: the Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915-1919* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985).

Austria in turn suffered a quasi-famine as a result.<sup>4</sup> In response to the scarcity of basic necessities including food and fuel, the German as well as the Austrian government introduced rationing in 1915, meaning that they distributed daily necessities based on a system of stamps. Women who did not work on the front lines in this period took over everyday responsibilities for organizing daily life and struggled to support their families in these challenging times.<sup>5</sup>

The extant documents of the Kiefer-Scholz family from 1915 to 1923 consist of correspondence from the Scholz siblings who emigrated to the USA, specifically Thekla, Frank, and August Scholz, to the rest of their family and friends who stayed in Europe. Their personal letters contain a treasure trove of information about everyday life on both sides of the Atlantic in both quantitative and qualitative terms. To research this chapter, our team searched the documents from this period for references to checks, money, groceries, rationing, hunger, relief packages, and other forms of remittances. Insofar as these topics appeared in correspondence sent from various places in Europe (like Langenbrück, Neustadt, Berlin, and Vienna) to various places in United States (including Kansas City, MO), those whole conversation can only be inferred from those documents because the collection did not include many items sent from the United States to Europe. Yet, the protagonists of this chapter are not the migrants to the United States per se but the friends and family of the Scholz siblings who stayed back in Europe and had to make do during these hard times.

We begin by contextualizing their everyday lives in the macrohistorical context of pre-war politics and society in Upper Silesia. Then we analyze the microeconomic impact of the war and hyperinflation on family finances. The bulk of the chapter then focuses on a close reading of these documents to better understand the nature of how this transnational network of friends and family served as a community for mutual support in a situation of scarcity. When framed in the economic and social context both locally and globally, these admittedly incomplete sources nonetheless provide a good understand-

4 Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen*, 183.

5 Li Gerhalter and Ina Markova, "Geschlechterspezifische Un\_Ordnungen in Österreich 1914-1918/19: Innenansichten," *Zeitgeschichte* (Forthcoming: 2021).

ing of how one transnational network of friends and family experienced and reacted to the hardships of this period.

## UPPER SILESIA FROM 1871 TO 1919

On 18 January 1871, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck symbolically united many of the disparate German states under Prussian leadership in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. Unification had been attempted before, most recently during the 1848 Revolution. But a coalition of middle-class Germans dedicated to liberal principles struggled to join forces with a set of more left-leaning radical groups who demanded better working and living conditions among other things. They could neither resolve the tensions between “large” and “small” versions of this united Germany nor elicit the support of the key monarchs of the Great Powers. The many failures of the 1848 Revolution in Germany resulted in 60,000 Germans emigrating to the United States.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, German continued immigrating to the United States for various reasons, so that by 1900, over 50,000 Germans lived in St. Louis and 22, 825 lived in Jackson County, Missouri, the home of the Kiefer-Scholz families.

Bismarck’s 1871 unification of Germany brought significant changes to Silesia, from whence the Scholz siblings hailed. A region rich in mineral wealth such as iron, Silesia had been acquired by Prussia during the Austrian Wars ending in 1740 and became crucial for the *Realpolitik* of Bismarck. The Prussian and later German Chancellor believed that the security of the new German nation state lay in a strong military and continued industrialization. Silesia was key to both aspects of this plan. However, Silesia was also home to a sizable Polish population; and Polish nationalism, along with nationalism throughout Europe, was on the rise. In order to counter the potential growing strength of a Polish movement for independence or just more autonomy, Bismarck started his policy of *Kulturkampf*, meaning “culture struggle.” Ostensibly intended to strengthen German culture and pride, it was actually designed to attack Catholicism as anti-German and weaken the institutional power of the Ro-

6 Immigrationtotheunitedstates.org, “European Revolutions of 1848”, *Immigration to the United States*, <https://immigrationtounitedstates.org/487-european-revolutions-of-1848.html>, accessed 11 September 2020.

man Catholic Church in Germany. The oppressive anti-Catholic actions of the government lasted until 1891, and they caused conflict between Catholics and the state. The *Kulturkampf* was particularly strong in Silesia, as many Silesians were Catholic, including the Scholz family. Two of the Scholz daughters became nuns. Sr. Bertholdine, who was born Martha Scholz, noted in a letter dated February 1920 that Thekla Scholz also contemplated joining a Catholic religious order.

“You, d[ear] Thekla, write to me of your intention to enter the monastery. That is very enjoyable and praiseworthy. But first, test yourself seriously and ask God the Holy spirit quite fervently for his light of grace.”<sup>7</sup>

Besides the religious differences between the Polish Silesians and the German Silesians, there were also strong socio-economic differences. A majority of the Polish people of Silesia worked in low income, low status occupations, whereas the Germans tended to be better educated and had better paying jobs. This resulted in social stratification.<sup>8</sup> Yet the Scholz family were relatively poor peasants.

In 1914 when the war began, the German government attempted to unite the people behind the war effort. Both Poles and Germans were drafted into the army. Silesia faced constant fear of invasion from the East. The Germans were desperate to retain control over Upper Silesia due to its coal fields, which produced 21% of Germany’s coal. But food and other necessities were in short supply. In 1916/17, a severe winter made conditions intolerable; Silesians almost starved to death and, as a result, strikes against the government and the war became more common. To stop the civil unrest and to prevent nationalist Poles from organizing a movement, the government lifted some of the stricter prohibitions, including the law against the holy mass conducted in Polish.<sup>9</sup>

7 Letter, Sr. Bertholdine (Martha) Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Vienna, 22 February 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200222-TL0235.1b; “Du, [liebe] Thekla, schreibst mir von Deinem Vorhaben ins Kloster zu gehen. Das ist sehr erfreulich und löblich. Doch zuvor prüfe Dich ernstlich und bitte Gott den Heiligen Geist recht inständig um Sein Gnadenlicht.”

8 See Peter Leśniewski, “The 1919 Insurrection in Upper Silesia,” *Civil Wars* 4, no.1 (Spring 2001): 24.

9 James Bjork, *Neither German Nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 76.

At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the question of what to do with Silesia was hotly contested. US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points promised the restoration of an independent Second Polish Republic. The Poles wanted to include Silesia in their nation state. Wilson's principle of self-determination implied that at least some of Silesia should belong to the Poles, insofar as there were ethnic Poles living there. Point thirteen famously read:

“An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.”<sup>10</sup>

But the Germans wanted to retain all of Silesia for themselves. They countered that they needed the coal fields, tax revenue, and workers in order to pay the reparations demanded by France. In the end, the decision was left up to the people themselves. Germany won the plebiscite, but questions arose about the result and neither side was satisfied. Unable to find an acceptable resolution through arbitration, the matter was turned over to the newly formed League of Nations. In the final negotiations, Poland was awarded about half the land and most of the industrial area of Upper Silesia. It remained part of Poland until the Nazi regime invaded in 1939.

## FAMILY FINANCES IN THE HYPERINFLATION

The eight years from 1915 to 1923 brought hardship for many people in Germany and Austria.<sup>11</sup> A main macroeconomic challenge was inflation, which impacted both the German soldiers at the front and the civilians at home.<sup>12</sup> The German Mark was relatively stable before World War I. Historian Gerald

10 “Transcript of President Woodrow Wilsons 14 Points (1918),” *U. S. National Archives & Records Administration*, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=62&page=transcript>, accessed 11 September 2020.

11 William Milberg, “Gerhard Colm and the Americanization of Weimar Economic Thought,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 993.

12 Frederick Tyler, *The Downfall of Money: Germany's Hyperinflation and the Destruction of the Middle Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 30.

D. Feldman claims that the exchange rate between the German Mark and the U. S. dollar rose from 1:4.2 in 1914 to 1:80 in 1919. The instability of the Mark significantly reduced the purchasing power of the population.<sup>13</sup> On 28 April 1916, Monica Sicker, Thekla Scholz's former employer in Neustadt, complained more than once to Thekla in Kansas City about the skyrocketing cost of goods in Upper Silesia during the war. She wrote: "Around us, meat prices have risen dramatically, and 1 lb meat costs 1 Mark 80 Pfennig, 1 lb butter 2.40 [Marks], and a pot of eggs 2 to 2.25 [Marks], but nevertheless there is enough to go around, and England will not succeed in starving us out."<sup>14</sup> By April 1916, the exchange rate of the German Mark to the U. S. dollar had risen by 29.45% from 1:4.21 to 1:5.45.<sup>15</sup> The price of one egg was already about 15 Pfennig. By January 1917, nine months later, Thekla Scholz's dear friend Anna Renter stated in her letter that the price of a dozen eggs had risen to 75 cents, which averaged to 35 Pfennig per egg in German currency.<sup>16</sup>

When the war was over, Germany's inflation changed to hyperinflation. According to the American economist Phillip D. Cagan, a region is in hyperinflation when its inflation rate reaches 50% per month, or 13,000% per year, and continues for a period of time.<sup>17</sup> This extreme rate of devaluation made it difficult to buy food and other necessities. In May of 1919, H. Sicker, a businessman and Thekla Scholz's former employer, wrote to her about this increase in the cost of food. "A small loaf of bread currently costs 4 Mk., 1 pound of pork 15 Mk., 1 pound of beef and veal 9 and 10 Mk. And so it is with all the things you need."<sup>18</sup> In December 1919, Bertha Scholz, living in Langenbrück, wrote to her sister-in-law Thekla, that the price of a pair of shoes had risen

- 13 Gerald D. Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation 1914-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.
- 14 Letter, Monica Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 28 April 1916, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9160428-TL0132.1a; "Bei uns sind Fleischpreise besonders sehr gestiegen und kostet jetzt 1 lb Fleisch 1 M. 80 pfg Butter 1 lb 2,40 Eier d. Wandel 2-2,25 aber trotzdem es alles teuer ist langt es doch zu und England wird es nicht gelingen uns auszuhungern."
- 15 Feldman, *Disorder*, 5.
- 16 Letter, Anna Renter to Thekla Scholz, Sewickley, [Pennsylvania], 11 January 1917, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9170111-TL0139.2b.; "Die Preise in Lebensmittel sind recht hoch hier. Das dutzend frische Eier 75 Cent und die Storagen-Eier sind sogar 62 Cent."
- 17 Phillip David Cagan, "The Monetary Dynamics of Hyperinflation," in *Studies in the Quantity Theory of Money*, ed. Milton Friedman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956): 25f.
- 18 Letter, H. Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 6 May 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200506-TL0184.1b; "Ein kleines Brot kostet zur Zeit 4 Mk., 1 Pfund Schweinefleisch 15 Mk., 1 Pfd Rindfleisch und Kalbfleisch 9 und 10 Mk. Und so ist es mit allen Sachen, die man benötigt."

from 10 Marks before to 130 Marks after the war. She estimated in general that prices had risen 20 times since the beginning of the war.<sup>19</sup>

By 1920, prices were skyrocketing. In a letter from April 1920, Robert Kiefer complained about the housing situation to Thekla Scholz. He wrote: “How do your married brothers [Frank and Paul Scholz] get along with their wages? Here in Germany it is bad. Nothing gets built throughout the war and now there is a great shortage of housing.”<sup>20</sup> Evaluating the housing costs and income in Kansas City were a logical concern for Robert, as he was planning his emigration at this time. Also, in April 1920, Hedwig Scholz mentioned in a letter from Langenbrück to her daughter Thekla that the price of the pair of shoes had risen fiftyfold. She recorded that “a pair of shoes here costs me 500 marks; in the past, you paid 10 marks.”<sup>21</sup> It means that, just compared to the price of 130 Marks in December 1919, the price of the shoes was four times more expensive only four months later. In the same letter, Hedwig also noted the fiftyfold rise in the price of clothing. “A dress suit that used to cost 20 M now costs 1000 M. If that doesn’t change, it will get very bad. The old ones still have some, but the youth will be loitering around.”<sup>22</sup> Most likely, Hedwig Scholz was referring to herself as one of the older generation who still had enough clothing to survive, but she also shared her concern for the future generation thanks to the fast devaluation of the Mark.

By April 1920, hyperinflation reduced the value of the Mark internationally by 93% from 1:4.21 to 1:59.64.<sup>23</sup> The bad economic situation reached its climax. The harsh economic environment can be read in a letter dated 8 July 1923 sent

- 19 Letter, Bertha Scholz (born Sperlich) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 8 December 1919, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9191208-TL0169.2b; “Ein Paar Schuhe für mich kosten 130 Mk. Früher 10 Mk. Und so ist alles 20fach teurer.”
- 20 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 9 April 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200422-TL0001.1a; “Wie kommen denn deine verheirateten Brüder aus mit dem Lohn? Hier in Deutschland ist es schlecht. Den ganzen Krieg ist nicht gebaut worden und jetzt besteht eine große Wohnungsnot.”
- 21 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 22 April 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200422-TL0001.1a; “Bei uns kosten ein paar Schuhe für mich 500 Mark früher zahlte man 10 Mark.”
- 22 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 22 April 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200422-TL0001.2a; “[E]in Anzug der früher 20 M gekostet der kostet jetzt 1000 M wenn sich das nicht ändert da wird es einmal sehr schlecht die alten haben ja noch was aber die Jugend wird abblumpen.”
- 23 Feldman, *Disorder*, 5.

from Neustadt by a person named Franz (perhaps Streibel), who was a nephew of the Scholz family. He lists costs as follows: “A loaf of bread without food stamps: 24,000 Marks. A piece of butter: 3,600 Marks etc., and the earning opportunities are getting worse and worse.”<sup>24</sup> Even relative to May 1920, the price of a loaf of bread, before settling in around 4 Marks, had risen almost 6,000 times by July 1923.

In this situation, many families in Germany relied on remittances from their relatives living in the United States to survive. Hedwig Scholz received money from her emigrated children Thekla and August. In a letter from April 1920, she thanked them for the remittances.

“Many thanks for the money. [...] I sent the 200 Mk to Josef with Agnes and Marie was with me for the holidays, so I gave her 200 M. I have not yet been paid the 5000 M because there was a big uprising in Berlin again.”<sup>25</sup>

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923
January	4.21	4.61	5.35	5.79	5.21	8.20	64.80	64.91	191.81	17,972
February	4.20	4.71	5.38	5.87	5.27	9.13	99.11	61.31	207.82	27,918
March	4.20	4.82	5.55	5.82	5.21	10.39	83.89	62.45	284.19	21,190
April	4.20	4.86	5.45	6.48	5.11	12.61	59.64	63.53	291.00	24,475
May	4.20	4.84	5.22	6.55	5.14	12.85	46.48	62.30	290.11	47,670
June	4.19	4.88	5.31	7.11	5.36	14.01	39.13	69.36	317.14	109,966
July	4.20	4.91	5.49	7.14	5.79	15.08	39.48	76.67	493.22	353,412
August	4.19	4.92	5.57	7.14	6.10	18.83	47.74	84.31	1,134.56	4,620,455
September	4.17	4.85	5.74	7.21	6.59	24.05	57.98	104.91	1,465.87	98,860 <sup>a</sup>
October	4.38	4.85	5.70	7.29	6.61	26.83	68.17	150.20	3,180.96	25,260 <sup>b</sup>
November	4.61	4.95	5.78	6.64	7.43	38.31	77.24	262.96	7,183.10	2,193,600 <sup>b</sup>
December	4.50	5.16	5.72	5.67	8.28	46.77	73.00	191.93	7,589.27	4,200,000 <sup>b</sup>
Average	4.28	4.86	5.52	6.58	6.01	19.76	63.06	104.57	1,885.78	534,914 <sup>b</sup>

Table 1. *Dollar Exchange Rate of the Paper Mark in Berlin, 1914–1923 (in monthly average)*, (Legend: a = in thousands, b = in billions). Feldman, *Disorder*, 5.

- 24 Letter, Franz (perhaps) Streibel, to his aunt and uncle (probably Thekla Scholz and Robert Kiefer), Neustadt, 28 July 1923, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9230728-TL1013.1a; “Ein Brot ohne Marken, 24000 Mark ein Stückchen Butter 3600 Mark usw. und die Verdienstmöglichkeit wird immer schlechter.”
- 25 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 4 April 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9220706-TL0306.1b; “Herzlichen Dank für das Geld. [...] ich habe dem Josef die 200 Mk mit Agnes geschickt und Marie war zu den Feiertagen bei mir da habe ich auch 200 M gegeben die 5000 M habe ich noch nicht ausgezahlt bekommen weil in Berlin wieder ein großer Aufstand.”

The checks ranged from 200 to 5,000 Marks, but the money itself got divided between the members of the Scholz family and their friends living in Silesia. In June 1920, the denomination of the check to Hedwig Scholz rose to 25,000 Marks; and though it was mailed in a letter by Paul, the money itself came from August.<sup>26</sup> By 1923, such remittances were rare, as the exchange rate between the dollar and the Mark soared to 1:4,200,000,000,000, with rates changing by the hour. The paper Mark had lost all practical value as a convertible currency.<sup>27</sup>

In term of financial health, the friends and relatives of the Kiefer-Scholz family who still lived in Silesia faced a dire economic situation, and it was even worse after the war than during it. To a large degree, they depended on the money sent to them from their relatives in the United States. These remittances were most valuable when the international exchange rate exceeded the rate of inflation. Furthermore, these extreme economic conditions may have led to higher emigration rates after the war. Some 386,634 Germans immigrated to the United States in the 1920s, which represented a significantly higher rate than in the preceding or following decades (1910s: 174,227; 1930s: 119,107).<sup>28</sup> Transnational networks thus helped ameliorate some of the worst effects of this economic crisis.

## LEARNING TO “DO WITHOUT”

Along with the hyperinflation, scarcity presented a major challenge to ordinary people in Silesia. Many basic necessities such as clothes, food, and fuel were already limited during the war and became even scarcer afterwards.<sup>29</sup> So even if people had the necessary financial resources to purchase these goods, there were often no goods to buy. After considering how this scarcity was

26 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 12 June 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200612-TL0197.1b.

27 Jens O. Parsson, *Dying of Money: Lessons of the Great German and America Inflation* (Boston: Wellspring, 1974), 15.

28 United States, Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2008*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2009, 5 and 8.

29 Mary Elisabeth Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace: Women and Children in Germany, 1914–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

discussed by economists and managed by governments, we will explore how friends and relatives of the Kiefer-Scholz family discussed and responded to this dire situation in their correspondence. In response to the need to “do without,” the Kiefer-Scholz family once again mobilized its transnational network.

Academic observers both recognized the impact of this economic crisis on ordinary people in practical terms but also downplayed its seriousness in the abstract. For example, the German economist Hermann F. Crohn-Wolfgang published a piece in 1919 on “Our Supply of Raw Materials and the Economic War.”<sup>30</sup> On the one hand, Crohn-Wolfgang admitted that the scarcity of ordinary commodities would continue, and doing without basic necessities would be a difficult pill to swallow for German society. He noted, for instance, that it would be a challenge to get the German people to substitute cotton and wool with “paper tissue.”<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, he insisted that the embargo against Germany, which was one cause for the lack of supplies after the war, simply could not continue for long because of the need for reciprocal trade in a global economy. The other countries could not stop trading with Germany since they too needed German currency and goods in exchange.<sup>32</sup> He concluded that “the German nation cannot be missed on the world market.”<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately for Germany and the global economy, his prognosis was too optimistic; he also failed to anticipate the drastic effects of the Treaty of Versailles that came into effect in 1920. Nonetheless, Crohn-Wolfgang was correct in that ordinary Germans did not passively accept conditions of scarcity. During and after the war, they found different ways to replace necessities that they could no longer purchase in the local market. For one, they used substitutes such as turnips instead of potatoes for cooking. After the war, authorities admitted that they were fully aware of the fact that, when they advised the use of substitutes, they were not providing the people with enough nutrients.<sup>34</sup> In

30 Hermann F. Crohn-Wolfgang, “Unsere Rohstoffversorgung und der Wirtschaftskrieg,” *Journal of Economics and Statistics*, 57 (112), no. 1 (1919): 58-80.

31 Crohn-Wolfgang, *Rohstoffversorgung*, 60 and 61; „Papiergewebe.“

32 Crohn-Wolfgang, *Rohstoffversorgung*, e.g. 75.

33 Crohn-Wolfgang, *Rohstoffversorgung*, 75; “kann die deutsche Nation auf dem Weltmarkt nicht entbehrt werden.”

34 Anne Roerkohl, *Hungerblockade und Heimatfront: Die Kommunale Lebensmittelversorgung In Westfalen Während Des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1991), 227.

yet another strategy, farmers withheld food from the government-sanctioned rationing system and sold it for extraordinary prices on the black market. In response, the residents of provincial towns and large cities, both women and men, traveled to rural areas, where they tried to buy food from farmers directly. This so-called “hamstering” was prohibited by law.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, urban populations often depended on it.

In the pre-war era, women had been largely left out of economic discussions. During the war, however, women were most directly affected by scarcity because of their gendered responsibilities to provide not only for their families and in part too for their men on the war front. They had to know about political and economic developments in order to adapt their shopping, storing, and cooking to wartime conditions. Already in 1914, Germany started a state campaign to teach women how to manage their household budgets more effectively.<sup>36</sup> Yet the gendered restrictions imposed on women finally backfired. “Hunger riots” took place in the cities during the war, where mainly women took to the streets and protested the failure of government to provide fairly for its citizens.<sup>37</sup> The protesters were labelled as rioters by the authorities, and their newfound agency was dismissed as hysteria. Nonetheless, women reconquered public space for themselves.<sup>38</sup>

There are no mentions of hunger riots in Langenbrück, as they mostly took place in the cities. In fact, we do not know for sure if people even suffered from hunger in Langenbrück. Still, the friends and relatives of the Kiefer-Scholz family in Langenbrück felt the scarcity of the times and wrote to Thekla Scholz complaining that the food stamps provided too little. In 1915, Ottilie Kiefer was still quite optimistic in her letter to her dear friend Thekla. She wrote: “We are all happy a[nd] healthy. We just have to live in a simpler way because

35 For example: Ernst Langthaler, “Vom transnationalen zum regionalen Hinterland – und retour. Wiens Nahrungsmittelversorgung, vor, in und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg,” in: Stefan Karner and Philipp Lesiak (eds.), *Erster Weltkrieg. Globaler Konflikt – lokale Folgen, Neue Perspektiven* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2014), 307–318.

36 Roerkohl, *Hungerblockade*, 200–202.

37 Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen*, 168; Gerhalter/Markova, “Geschlechterspezifische Un\_Ordnungen,” 3–9.

38 Veronika Helfert, *Frauen, wacht auf! Eine Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte von Revolution und Rätebewegung in Österreich, 1916–1924* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2021).

salaries are low and the cost of living is high.”<sup>39</sup> Yet a couple of years later her former employers in nearby Neustadt talked about the stark uptick in prices in a letter from 1923. “Now everything that you need here is sinfully expensive and simple, whereas everything had been good and inexpensive before the disastrous war.”<sup>40</sup> In a letter to Thekla Scholz from June 1923, Monica and H. Sicker only listed the rising prices for food and other supplies in Neustadt; they did not write that they were starving or hungry.

“Just some words to indicate what prices we have to pay at the moment. 1 lb [pound]: of meat, 8000-9000 M[ark]; 1 lb of butter 95000 M[ark]; [...] sugar 1300 [Mark] it is said, that it will cost 16000 soon. Flour, a good one, 2000 per pound. Clothes and fabric for suits goes into the millions, so you can imagine that we can buy nothing.”<sup>41</sup>

In their analysis of comparable correspondence from Austria during the hyperinflation, historians Li Gerhalter and Ina Markova described the same phenomenon. Instead of writing that they were hungry, people listed the precise amount of food on their stamps.<sup>42</sup> In our case, the Silesian authors reported the exceptionally high prices for ordinary commodities, going into millions of Marks. As Monica Sicker wrote to Thekla Scholz on 23 June 1923 about everyday life in Neustadt, “it requires chasing and hustling to ensure your survival; and it can drive you to madness when you hear the prices and then have to pay them.”<sup>43</sup>

- 39 Letter, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 15 September 1915, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9150928-TL0114.1a; “Wir befinden uns noch alle wohl u. munter, nur müssen wir bei der gegenwärtigen Zeit recht einfach leben, weil der Lohn niedrig und die Lebensbedürfnisse teuer geworden ist.”
- 40 Letter, Monika Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 6 May 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200506-TL0184.1a; “Bei uns ist jetzt alles, was man gebraucht, sündhaft teuer und schlicht, während früher vor dem unseligen Kriege Alles gut und billig war.”
- 41 Letter, H. Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, June 1923, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9230422-TL1008.1b; “In kurzen Worten will ich Ihnen andeuten was wir zur Zeit für Preise zahlen müssen. 1 lb: Fleisch 8000 - 9000 M. 1 lb Butter 9500 M. [...] Zucker 1300 später soll er sogar 1600 kosten. Mehl gutes 2000 das Pfund. Kleider und Anzugstoffe geht bald in die Millionen, da können Sie sich denken, daß man sich nichts kaufen kann.”
- 42 Gerhalter and Markova, *Geschlechterspezifische Un\_Ordnungen*, 4.
- 43 Letter, Monica Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 23 June 1923, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L92306xx-TL1009; “Es ist ein Jagen und Treiben um den Lebensunterhalt zu bestreiten und es grenzt fast an Wahnsinn, wenn man die Preise hört und sie auch bezahlen muß.”

Several letters from friends and family members in Upper Silesia tried to appease Thekla Scholz by insisting that everything was fine. For example, her sister Hedwig Heidenreich (born Scholz) wrote the following lines in September 1919 to her: “You need not trouble yourself about hardship and hunger [on our part].”<sup>44</sup> The only person who attested explicitly to suffering from hunger and hardship is Robert, Thekla Scholz’s prospective husband at the time. Reflecting back on his experiences during the war, he wrote to her in 1919: “Goods and food became sparse quickly, and hunger was a constant guest in the German homeland.”<sup>45</sup> Yet even this complaint was framed within a very intimate relationship and yet described in general terms of collective rather than individual suffering.

One letter stands out among the others: a pledge for donations from Thekla Scholz’s sister Sr. Bertholdine (born Martha) Scholz. Sr. Bertholdine, a nun, was appointed to the Viennese Children’s Home in 1920. In an appeal for monetary aid, she wrote extensively about the starving Austrian people. She described the situation in dramatic terms:

“With our over 300 children in this institution, how often would we have had to starve if we had not received food aid from the European Children’s Fund since June of last year [...] Lately it even occurred that children were butchered to satisfy one’s hunger with human-flesh. As sad and terrible these stories are, they actually are based on truth.”<sup>46</sup>

There is no evidence for such horrible allegations, though it seems reasonable to believe that Sr. Bertholdine Scholz heard these rumors. And since she

44 Letter, Hedwig Heidenreich (born Scholz) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 21 September 1919, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9190921-TL0168.1b; “Wegen Not und Hunger brauchst du dir keine Sorgen machen.”

45 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 September 1919, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9190917-TL0166.1a; “Die Rohstoffe und Nahrungsmittel waren früh knapp geworden und der Hunger war ein ständiger Gast bei der deutschen Heimat.”

46 Letter, Sr. Bertholdine (Martha) Scholz to her siblings and beneficiaries, Vienna, 15 February 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200215-TL0181.1b; “Wie oft hätten wir hier mit unseren über 300 Kindern der Anstalt schon am Hungertuch nagen können, wenn wir nicht von der ‘Amerikanischen Kinderhilfsaktion’ seit Juni vorig. Jahres jeden Monat eine Lebensmittelzubüße erhielten. [...] In letzter Zeit kam es sogar vor, daß man Kinder hingeschlachtet hat um an Menschenfleisch seinen Hunger zu stillen. Wie traurig und entsetzlich diese Aussagen sind, sie beruhen tatsächlich auf Wahrheit.”

was soliciting donations from her friends and relatives, she may have included these stories to gain sympathy.

The reasons for the scarcity and suffering were systemic and multicausal. Still, people like the married couple Monica and H. Sicker pointed towards the German people in general in search for a culprit.

“The people had to be brought down a peg, for they had become too overconfident and hedonistic. But in spite of all hardship and inflation, the people have not yet come back to their senses, but rather they dance on the smoking volcano and the masses charge blindly towards the abyss.”<sup>47</sup>

They did not blame any external factors, structural issues, or even particular political figures for their collective distress, but the Germans themselves — almost as if they deserved their misery.

## SENDING RELIEF PACKAGES

Immediately following World War One, it was more common for migrants to send monetary remittances. Checks in particular were an easy way for recently migrated family members to support the financial needs of friends and family back home. On 1 February 1920, Robert Kiefer described in a letter to Thekla Scholz the steps he was taking to cash a check from her. “I will withdraw the money from the bank next week.”<sup>48</sup> On 17 March 1920, he then reported back to her that the bank finally paid out these funds. “I have now received the money from the bank. I thank you with all my heart.”<sup>49</sup> Yet Thekla Scholz’s relatives often did not seem to have requested this monetary support. On the contrary, they often insisted that it was not necessary for her to send them

47 Letter, H. Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 6 May 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200506-TL0184.1; “dem Volke mußte mal ein solcher Dämpfer kommen, denn es war schon zu übermütig und genußsüchtig geworden. Aber trotz aller Not und Teuerung ist das Volk noch nicht zur Vernunft zurückgekommen, sondern es tanzt auf dem rauchenden Vulkan und blindlings stürmen die Massen dem Abgrunde entgegen.”

48 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 1 February 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200201-TL0223.1b; “Das Geld werde ich diese Woche von der Bank abheben.”

49 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200317-TL0194.1b; “Das Geld habe ich von der Bank jetzt aus bezahlt bekommen. Ich dank[e] Dir von ganzem Herzen.”

funds. In particular, Thekla's mother, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) repeated multiple times that Thekla should keep her money.

"I received your letter yesterday with the money check from you and August, for which we thank you very much. But dear children, I have written to you so many times [that] you should not do so much for us, you are going to need it yourself someday."<sup>50</sup>

Increasingly, emigrated members of the Kiefer-Scholz family helped their Silesian friends and family survive this period of shortage by sending goods. These relief packages contained items that the recipients had specifically requested, gifts from emigrated friends and family members, or both. As the shortages in Silesia and Germany worsened, Thekla Scholz sent parcels back to Langenbrück, Neustadt, and Berlin. She mostly sent food and clothing. Sometimes she also sent luxury goods. In all cases, the intent of the package was to help ameliorate the scarcity caused by the rationing of supplies.

In this chapter, we refer to these transfers of goods as relief packages. An alternative German term for those parcels could be *Liebesgaben*, meaning gifts of love, which describes shipments of goods typically organized by charity institutions or family members. The problem within that particular concept is that most of the research literature on it refers to "front gifts" (*Frontgeschenke*), meaning packages sent mostly by women and children to soldiers. Front gifts were promoted by the state government and charitable initiatives as a way to provide the troops with extra rations of food and to help lift their spirits.<sup>51</sup> In other sets of correspondence from the twentieth century, the authors do use the term "gifts of love" to describe relief packages sent from emigrated friends or family members to their home countries.<sup>52</sup> Due to the common association

50 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 28 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200328-TL0182.1a; "Deinen Brief von dir habe ich gestern erhalten mit dem Geld Scheck von dir und August wofür wir uns herzlich bedanken aber liebe Kinder ich habe Euch schon so oft geschrieben ihr sollt nicht so viel für uns tun ihr werdet es doch selber ein mal brauchen."

51 For example, see: Volker Ilgen, CARE-Paket & Co. *Von der Liebesgabe zum Westpaket*. (Darmstadt: Primus, 2008); see also: Christa Hämmerle, "Hab Dank, Ihr Wiener Mägdelein . . .: Soldaten und weibliche Liebesgaben im Ersten Weltkrieg," *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 8, no. 1 (1997): 132-154.

52 Gerhalter/Markova, *Geschlechterspezifische Un\_Ordnungen*, 10, 16.

drawn between “gifts of love” and “front gifts,” however, we chose to refer to them by the more neutral term of relief packages.

Thekla Scholz also sent goods as presents for her loved ones. For instance, Robert Kiefer received a packet of tobacco and a pipe for his birthday in 1920.

“Dear Thea, you have made me very happy for my birthday with your parcel. So many beautiful and good things were inside. The tobacco is very good, and I have already smoked a lot with that little pipe.”<sup>53</sup>

Sometimes people even explicitly “ordered” items from acquaintances abroad. On 17 March 1920, an anonymous author — who was perhaps the father-in-law of either Paul or Frank Scholz, one of Thekla’s brothers — inquired about the status of goods requested for a mutual relative. “We are all waiting for news, especially our d[ear], good Grandmother; if possible, just send some coffee a[nd] sugar; also [a] few stockings for Grandmother.”<sup>54</sup>

Another example was a letter from H. Sicker sent from Neustadt to Thekla Scholz in Kansas City in March 1920. Due to the supply shortages, even wealthy people, like H. Sicker, a director of a slaughterhouse, were dependent on their transnational connections to migrated acquaintances. He was Thekla Scholz’s former employer, so this request marked a significant reversal of the social hierarchy.<sup>55</sup>

In this case, Thekla Scholz had already sent a parcel with goods and an accompanying letter to H. Sicker. We know this because he expressed his thanks in a corresponding letter back to her. Interestingly, he then used the occasion of his reply to request a list of things for which, he insisted, he was also prepared to pay.

53 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 20 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200320-TL0187.1b and a; “Liebe Thea Du hast mir eine große Freud[e] gemacht zum Geburtstag mit Deinem Paket. So viele schöne und gute Sachen waren drin. Der Tabak ist sehr gut und hab schon viel geraucht aus dem kleinen Pfeifchen.”

54 Letter, Unknown (probably the father-in-law of Paul or Frank Scholz), to Unknown (probably to his daughter), 17 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200317-TL0186.2a; “wier warthen ja Alle auf Nachricht besonde[r]s die [liebe] gute Großmutter wenn es geht schicke Ihr nur was Kaffee u[nd] Zucker auch [ein] paar Strümpfe für Großmutter.”

55 See also Gerhalter/Markova, *Geschlechterspezifische Un\_Ordnungen*, 5.

“I was also pleased that you wanted to send us a package with various good things including a box of cigars for me. I must entrust it to your ingenuity that you [will] pack them so as not to be discovered. It’s just a pity that you cannot send me more, because 25 of them will be used up very quickly. Couldn’t you have a box made with a double bottom, in which you stick cigars underneath and rice, cocoa, coffee and the like on top.”<sup>56</sup>

On the one hand, H. Sicker’s offer to pay for the shipment perhaps signaled that he was not asking for charity from his former maid but instead suggesting a deal. On the other hand, this offer implied that he did not lack for money but for goods. He also explained in detail the way Thekla Scholz should conceal the items within a double bottom in the package. This potentially indicated that customs officials were searching the packages upon exit from the United States or more likely upon entry into Germany; and it might also point to a growing criminalization of black-market goods. These assumptions are corroborated by a side note on this particular letter that read: “Address the parcels only to my wife, so that no suspicion arises.”<sup>57</sup>

Other letters suggest that packages were not only being searched but perhaps items were also being selectively stolen. Hedwig Scholz said as much in a letter from April 1920 to her daughter Thekla:

“We received your two letters and the check with the money intended for Sister Agnes [...]. The cardigan from August indented for Berthold was not there [in the parcel]. The coffee was still there, I was surprised that they left the good coffee[.] But they must have had enough from the many thousands of parcels, since they only stole the most valuable things [... and] they had repacked it in a carton [...] it is a pity about the shoes.”<sup>58</sup>

- 56 Letter, H. Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 9 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200309-TL0185.1a; “Ferner habe ich mich gefreut, daß Sie uns ein Paketchen mit verschiedenen guten Sachen schicken wollen und auch mir ein Kistchen Zigarren. Ich muß es Ihrer Fündigkeit überlassen, wie Sie dieselben verpacken um nicht entdeckt zu werden. Es ist nur bedauerlich daß Sie mir nicht mehr schicken können denn 25 Stück sind ja sehr bald verbraucht. Könnten Sie mir nicht einen Karton mit doppeltem Boden machen lassen, in welchem Sie unten hinein Zigarren stecken und obendrauf Reis, Kakao, Kaffee und dergleichen.”
- 57 Letter, H. Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 9 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200309-TL0185.1a; “Adressieren Sie die Pakete nur zu meiner Frau, damit kein Verdacht entsteht.”
- 58 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 22 April 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200422-TL0001.1a; “Deine beiden Briefe und den Schek mit dem Gelde welches für Schwester Agnes bestimmt war haben wir erhalten [...] die Strickjake von

Hedwig clearly suggests that relief packages were singled out and valuable items stolen from them. The parcels were then repackaged and shipped to the intended recipients. Given the high amounts of money being remitted, it becomes clear that the transatlantic transmission came with major risks and costs. No wonder, then, that the correspondents often recounted in detail the quantities of each of the goods shipped and received: this form of accounting was an understandable response to their fear of what could be taken from them and their way of lamenting what they actually lost. As Hedwig wrote to her daughter Thekla earlier in March 1920: “We have already received 5 packages. The 1 with the new shoes must have been lost. Stop now with the shipments. We have already used some of them to trade for other things we need [...] You need [the stuff] yourself.”<sup>59</sup> Given the severe increase in prices in Germany in the 1920s, the bemoaning of these lost shoes seems understandable.

It is hard to overestimate the emotional toll of waiting for weeks or months for a letter, a check, or a package only for it to go missing or arrive incomplete. This situation was particularly true for Robert Kiefer since he was engaged in a long-distance relationship with his beloved Thekla Scholz and they had been apart for years. In March 1920, he wrote: “This is already the fourth letter, and I have also written 3 cards, but still no message. I am very concerned about you and I am fretting endlessly.”<sup>60</sup> One way to potentially prevent such losses was to register their letters or packages, though that additional measure only increased the cost of these already expensive shipments. Robert took this step during the political upheavals that followed the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch on 13 March 1920. He reported the following to Thekla Scholz on 17 March: “The general strike has broken out, railroad, mail, road traffic — nothing. I don’t

August war nicht drinen [im Paket] welche für Berthold bestimt war[.] Der Kaffee war noch da ich wundere mich das sie den guten Kaffee gelassen haben[.] Aber von den vielen tausende Paketen werden sie genug gehabt haben da haben sie blos die Wertvollsten Sachen gestohlen [...] sie hatten es um gepackt in einen Karton [...] es ist recht schade um die Schuhe.”

- 59 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 28 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200328-TL0182.1b; “Wir haben schon 5 Paketchen bekommen das 1 wird sein verloren gegangen mit den neuen Schuhen da laß jetzt[t] das schicken [denn] wir haben schon uns etwas ersetzt [...] du brauchst es doch selber.”
- 60 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9200317-TL0194.1a; “Dieses ist schon der vierte Brief und auch 3 Karten schrieb ich Dir, aber immer noch keine Nachricht. Ich bin in großer Sorge um Dich und gräme mich unendlich.”

know when I will be able to send this letter. I'll have it registered, so you will surely receive it.<sup>61</sup>

The sending of relief-parcels and monetary aid from the United States to Germany made a real difference in the lives of the recipients, but it came with problems. Packages had to be packed cunningly to avoid customs or theft. Furthermore, the mail delivery was put in peril by the political upheavals of the postwar period. And some items just got lost on their way across the Atlantic. The sending of relief packages and remittances from Kansas City to Silesia thus incurred high risks and high costs not only in monetary and material terms but also in terms of the emotional impact of long period of concern, anxiety, and loss. These transnational networks of mutual support were thus both the solution to the problem of supply shortages as well as a source for new forms of worry and insecurity.

## CONCLUSION

This condensed analysis of only a small section of a large collection of historical documents illustrates the benefits of viewing complex historical situations through the lens of ordinary people. The Silesian friends and family of the Scholz siblings managed the hardships of this decade from 1914 to 1924 through a long-distance network of mutual support. Their American connections provided not only money and goods across the Atlantic but also the emotional support that these transfers symbolized for the human beings on both sides of these exchanges.

In many ways, the post-war situation challenged established power dynamics and status hierarchies. Rural farmers benefitted at the expense of urban middle and upper classes because the former had steady access to material resources that retained their value relative to cash, while the latter depended on monetary incomes particularly vulnerable to hyperinflation.<sup>62</sup> Another

61 Letter, Robert Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 17 March 1920, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., 1920L9200317-TL0194.1b; "Der Generalstreik ist ausgebrochen Bahn, Post Straßenverkehr alles nicht. Wann ich diesen Brief abschicken kann weiß ich nicht, werde ihn einschreiben lassen, damit Du ihn bestimmt erhältst."

62 Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen*, 183-215.

challenge was the decimated workforce: many men were stationed at the front, died there, or returned home unable to work due to injury or trauma. Thus, women often assumed new roles in the workforce and expanded the scope of their agency in everyday life. Especially during the hunger riots, they made their voices heard and reclaimed public spaces in the process.<sup>63</sup>

We see this surprising reversal of power and status in the relationship between Thekla Scholz and the Sickers, a middle-class family for whom she worked as a domestic servant in Upper Silesia. As seen in previous chapters, Thekla Scholz could not achieve great financial prosperity even after her migration due to her socio-economic background. Nonetheless, it placed her in a position of relative privilege, very different from her situation at home in Silesia, that empowered her to make a real difference in the lives of friends and family when they needed her most.

63 Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen*, 100-106.

ORHAN AKKAYA, ALEXANDRA KERN, BARBARA TOBLER, MICHELE VALENTINE

## SEPARATED IN LIFE, CONNECTED IN FAITH

MIGRATION AND TRANSATLANTIC CATHOLICISM

In early 1913, Thekla E. Scholz received a heartfelt New Year's wish in a letter penned by Otilie Kiefer, her friend and future sister-in-law. Otilie's sentiment, "God be with you in the new year," revealed their devout faith in God.<sup>1</sup> As a Catholic German immigrant living in Kansas City for more than a year, Thekla likely read two primary hopes in her friend's wishful declaration: for God's protection in the coming year and for Thekla's enduring commitment to the Catholic faith.

Thekla, her three brothers, Franz, Paul, and August Scholz, and her future husband Robert Kiefer joined many Germans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who migrated to the United States. The Scholz siblings migrated from Upper Silesia, which is today located in Poland, and sought improved economic opportunities in Kansas City as well as relief from the *Kulturkampf*, a period of German governmental restrictions imposed against Catholic communities. The story of their migration is partially revealed through the correspondence, prayer cards, and other ephemera found within the Robert J. and Thekla E. (Scholz) Kiefer Collection as well as interviews with family members. Our chapter will explore the immigration and integration of this rural, lower-class, Catholic German family into Kansas City society through the lens of their religious practices. This microhistory will reveal the fascinating history of an intergenerational family linked by enduring faith.

During the nineteenth century, German immigrants flooded into the United States due to fluctuating economic and political conditions in German-speaking Central Europe. Soon after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the German

1 Letter, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Berlin, 12 September 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9121212-TL0053.1b; "Gott mit dir im neuen Jahr."

territories experienced a series of economic hardships spawned by overpopulation, overcrowding, mechanization, and overproduction. Struggling farmers supplemented their income with part-time trade while traditional artisans experienced devastating losses.<sup>2</sup> The failed revolutions of 1848 and Germany's national unification in 1871 in turn prompted a period of sustained political conflict, as Germans debated the expansion of civil, political, and economic rights to different social groups.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, westward expansion opened vast territories in the United States, making land available either free or at reasonable cost. Between 1830 and 1860, immigration increased, peaking in 1854 with approximately 215,000 Germans entering the United States in a single year. During a second major wave of immigration between 1881 and 1892, approximately 1.7 million Germans entered the United States during the eleven-year period.<sup>4</sup> Reports of American economic opportunities and political freedom successfully enticed German immigration to the United States.

## TRANSATLANTIC PRACTICE OF CATHOLIC FAITH

In 1871, the German government led by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck began instituting a series of discriminatory legislation directly targeting Catholics. During this so-called *Kulturkampf*, the German government depicted the Catholic Church as an opponent of state authority as well as cultural, national, economic, and political progress due to its deference to the Pope. In response, the German government enacted laws designed to dismantle the Center Party, the political affiliation largely supported by German Catholics.<sup>5</sup> The German government most notably exerted state control over Catholic monasteries, seminaries, and religious-based public schools. Additionally, defiant priests and bishops were expelled. Because this situation left numerous parishes devoid of clergy in Germany, the *Kulturkampf* promoted German migration among monastic orders to the United States to support both new and growing settlements of German Catholics. For instance, the Redemptorists, a congregation of missionary priests and brothers founded in

2 Walter D. Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), Chapters 1-2.

3 Dietrich Orlow, *A History of Modern Germany: 1871 to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2-6.

4 Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 28-29.

5 Orlow, *History*, 20-21.

Europe in 1732, first arrived in the United States in 1832 and immediately began transcontinental migration to serve burgeoning German immigrant populations out West.<sup>6</sup> The German Friars Minor similarly migrated from the province of St. Elizabeth in Thuringia to New Jersey. The Capuchins, an order of Franciscan friars, left Westphalia and Bavaria and settled in Pittsburgh before expanding as far west as Kansas. Likewise, women of several religious orders immigrated to the United States including the Sisters of St. Benedict, the Sisters of Divine Providence, and the Ursulines. Many of them worked as teachers and directly served German immigrant communities.<sup>7</sup> As historian Mathew Anthony Pekari concluded in 1925, the “German Catholics in America in all their settlements showed a lively faith,” establishing churches and schools in the Midwest throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>8</sup>

In the Kiefer-Scholz Collection, we examined approximately fifty prayer cards in German and English. Two of these devotional cards prove particularly interesting in that they derive from religious communities that migrated from Germany to the United States. The first example (Figure 1) depicts “The Holy Elisabeth of Thuringia”<sup>9</sup> as a graceful young woman holding a basket of roses, a symbol of her service to the “poor, sick and needy.”<sup>10</sup> Though undated, the back of the card features a prayer printed in German and includes three inscriptions in pencil: “In memory of my taking the habit[,] Sister Maria Fortunata” at the top of the card; “Ask for an Ave Maria” located at the bottom; and “Thekla” written along the right-side.<sup>11</sup> The card was produced by Franz Schemm, a printer in Nuremberg active from 1871 and through the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> The personalized card was gifted to Thekla Scholz in celebration of her older sister’s entry into a religious order and the associated

6 Matthew Anthony Pekari, “The German Catholics in the United States of America,” *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 36, no. 4 (1925): 352.

7 Pekari, *German Catholics*, 353–55.

8 Pekari, *German Catholics*, 342.

9 Document, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., D9xxxxxx-TD0221a; “Die heilige Elisabeth von Thüringen.”

10 Document, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. D9xxxxxx-TD0221b; “Armen, Kranken und Nothleidenden;” Linda Burke, “A Sister in the World: Saint Elizabeth of Hungary in the ‘Golden Legend,’” *The Hungarian Historical Review* 5, no. 3 (2016): 531.

11 Document, Kiefer Coll., D9xxxxxx-TD0221b; “Andenken an meine Einkleidung[,] Schwester Maria Fortunata[,] Bitte um ein Ave Maria[,] Thekla.”

12 Adolph Russell, *Gesammt-Verlags-Katalog des Deutschen Buchhandels: Ein Bild Deutscher Geistesarbeit und Cultur*, 8 (Munster: Adolph Russell’s Verlag, 1883), 1327.



Figure 1. Prayer Card *St. Elizabeth of Thuringia*.  
 Front of prayer card n. d. Kiefer-Scholz Coll. D9xxxxx-TD0221 (left);  
 Back of prayer card, n. d. Kiefer-Scholz Coll. D9xxxxx-TD0221b (right)

change of her name, as Rosalia Scholz became Sr. Maria Fortunata.<sup>13</sup> Breakage along the perimeter of the prayer card's lace border suggests that Thekla used the memorabilia with reverence.<sup>14</sup>

A prayer card for the Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Missouri, (Figures 2 and 3) provides an example of the Catholic practice of eternal adoration and possibly pilgrimage, both devout practices documented

- 13 We do not yet know exactly when Rosalia Scholz entered the monastery. Nonetheless, the name "Sr. Fortunata" is mentioned for the first time in the letter from Anna Alker (probably a former employer) to Thekla Scholz in December 1912. Letter, Anna Alker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 7 December 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9121207-TL0024.1a and L9121207-TL0024.1b.
- 14 For more on the expression "In Erinnerung an ..." see: Christine Lehmann, "Weibliche Erinnerungskultur zwischen Individualität und Standardisierung: Freundschaftsbeteuerungen in Frauenstambüchern aus dem 18. und 19. Jahrhundert," in: Sabine Eickenrodt and Cettina Rapisarda (eds), *Querelles: Jahrbuch für Frauenforschung* 1998, Band 3: Freundschaft im Gespräch (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler: 1998), 266-275.

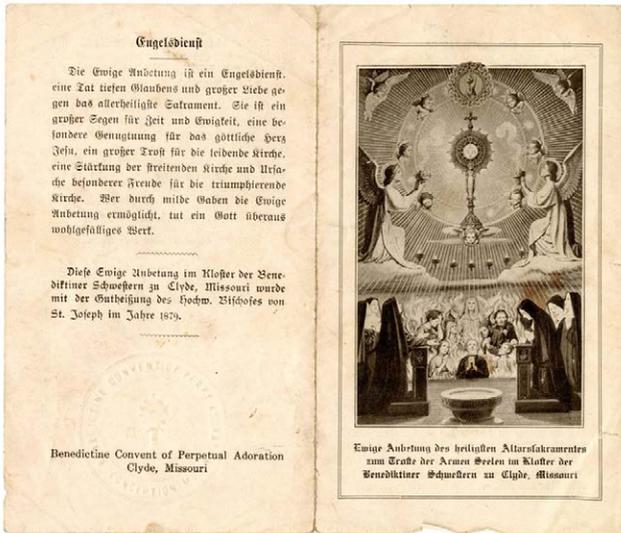


Figure 2. *Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament*, Kloster der Benediktiner Schwestern zu Clyde, Missouri, 15 May 1925, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. D9250315-TD0224a.

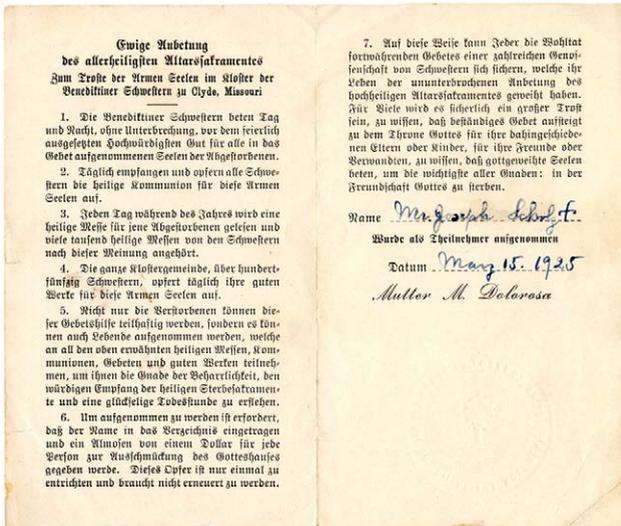


Figure 3. *Ewige Anbetung des Allerheiligsten Altarsakramentes*, Joseph Scholz, Kloster der Benediktiner Schwestern zu Clyde, Missouri, 15 May 1925, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. D9250315-TD0224b.

by the Scholz's family living in Upper Silesia. The convent was founded in 1874 by Mother Mary Anselma Felber and four other Sisters who emigrated from Switzerland. They combined efforts in Missouri with the nearby Benedictine Monks at Conception Abbey to serve the growing German immigrant commu-

nity.<sup>15</sup> The interior of the card, inscribed with the date 15 May 1925, announced that Joseph Scholz – Thekla's father, who had died in 1917 – “was accepted as a participant” in “eternal adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar for the comfort of the poor souls in the monastery of the Benedictine Sisters in Clyde, Missouri.”<sup>16</sup> “Participation” in this spiritual community for either a deceased or living parent, family member, or friend could be acquired through the giving of alms in a minimum of one dollar, which were then used for decoration of the church. The payment of the required donation was likely made in person, which possibly indicates that Thekla Kiefer or someone in her immediate family completed a pilgrimage to the Benedictine Convent. Located approximately one hundred miles north

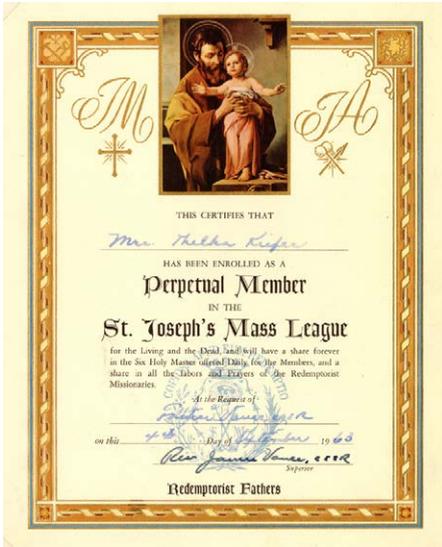


Figure 4. *Thekla Kiefer's Certificate for Enrollment in the St. Joseph's Mass League, 4. September 1963, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. D9630904-TD0302a.*

of Kansas City, the lengthy journey to the convent in 1925 by automobile required planning, preparation, and effort — all characteristics demanded of a pilgrimage. The date of Joseph Scholz's membership proves symbolic as it coincided with the eighth anniversary of his death<sup>17</sup> as well as the recent birth of Thekla's son Robert Walter Kiefer in April 1925.<sup>18</sup>

15 “Brief History,” *Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration*, <http://www.benedictinesisters.org/subsectioncontent.php?secid=6&subsecid=20>, accessed 25 July 2020.

16 Document, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., D9250315-TD0224b; “wurde als Theilnehmer aufgenommen.”

17 Postcard, Sr. Bertholdine (Martha) Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Steyl in the Netherlands, 1 April 1918, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., P9180401-TP2151a; “Mütterchen teilte mir den seligen Heimgang uns. [unseres] lb. [lieben] gut. [guten] Vaters mit, den am 8. Mai 1917 der lb. [liebe] Gott von seinem langen schweren Leiden erlöste.”

18 The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; St. Louis, Missouri; WWII Draft Registration Cards for Missouri, 10/16/1940–03/31/1947; Record Group: Records of the Selective Service System, 147, Box 177.

This pilgrimage, if undertaken, probably felt to Thekla like an appropriate means of memorializing a loved one. Nearly forty years later on her seventy-fifth birthday, Thekla Kiefer received a similar perpetual membership in the St. Joseph's Mass League (see Figure 4). This initiative was introduced in 1919 by St. Louis Redemptorist Father Christopher McEnniry in response to the turmoil left by World War I and the 1918 Influenza pandemic. McEnniry conceived of it as a means "to help people in times of joy and sorrow," whereby the St. Joseph Mass League ensured the perpetual remembrance of members in prayers and daily Masses. Thekla's membership, granted at the request of Redemptorist Father James Vance, speaks to her lifelong devotion to the Catholic Church in Kansas City. These two examples illustrate the Scholz family's familiarity with the Catholic practice of eternal adoration.

## PRACTICING CATHOLICISM IN LANGENBRÜCK

Migration deeply affected Langenbrück, Thekla Scholz's hometown, which is today the Polish village of Moszczanka. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Langenbrück was German-speaking and to a large extent Roman Catholic, as indicated by Thekla's correspondence from her family and friends. The emigration trends in Upper Silesia paralleled those seen in German territories during the nineteenth century. Silesian villages were adversely affected by the increasing mechanization of agriculture and the decline of traditional textile manufacturing, leading to widespread unemployment. Furthermore, historian Konrad Fuchs argued that Upper Silesia's remote location and limited access to the economic markets resulted in a negative wage differential for the population.<sup>19</sup> As historians Tomasz Przerwa and Joanna Wojdon have suggested,<sup>20</sup> such economic hardships resulted in widespread migration. Many Silesians participated in *Landflucht*, or migration within Germany from rural areas to urban centers. Others chose transnational migration within Europe or transatlantic immigration to the United States, which peaked in the second half of the nineteenth century. Areas in Upper Silesia were so significantly impacted by migration that high birth rates only partially compensated for the recorded population decline. This trend was noted in the administrative dis-

19 Konrad Fuchs, "Vom Deutschen Krieg zur Deutschen Katastrophe (1866-1945)," in: *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas*, ed. Norbert Conrads. (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 2002), 558.

20 Tomasz Przerwa and Joanna Wojdon, "History of Silesia (Home of the Scholz Family)," lecture for the course German Migration to Missouri, Kansas City and Wrocław, 2020.



Figure 5. Postcard *Catholic Church of Langenbrück*, Postcard, Josef (surname unknown), Langenbrück, to Robert Kiefer, Berlin, 29 August 1919. Kiefer-Scholz Coll. P9190829-TP2155a.

trict of Oppeln, now Opole, where Langenbrück was located. Local chronicles do not specifically mention emigration from Langenbrück, but the district experienced a decrease in population at the end of the nineteenth and in the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup>

Anti-Catholic legislation enacted during the *Kulturkampf* directly affected Langenbrück. Przerwa and Wojdon described an incident in the 1870s in which state authorities appointed a clergyman for the Catholic Church in Langenbrück (Figure 5). The women of Langenbrück boycotted the new priest because he was not appointed by the Bishop of Breslau, the local authority of the Catholic Church. As a result, Langenbrück's Catholic Church did not hold services for approximately six years. Przerwa noted that it was not until the 1880s that the effects of the *Kulturkampf* subsided and church services

21 Przerwa/Wojdon, "History."

resumed.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, the dramatic events of the *Kulturkampf* did not reduce the strength of the German Catholic community but only reinforced its commitment to Catholicism and parish life.<sup>23</sup>

Religiosity and piety were common themes in the letters from Thekla's friends and family, especially her mother. In two letters written during the final months of 1912, Hedwig Scholz, born Müller, greeted her "dearest daughter Thekla" with the traditional Catholic greeting "Praised be Jesus Christ!"<sup>24</sup> Hedwig undoubtedly missed her twenty-four-year-old daughter, who left Germany more than one year earlier. Her letter dated 5 November 1912 opened with appreciation for the letter and cards sent by Thekla as well as an apology for her own slow response. Hedwig also shared a report on family matters, described the autumn harvest in Langenbrück, and inquired about the weather in the United States. Most telling, however, is Hedwig's concern for her daughter's moral condition.

"But it is really for you that I have the most concern [...], because girls are exposed to the greatest dangers. Pray very diligently [that] the good Lord leads you on the path of virtue and that you remain a well-behaved child [...] I include you every day in [my] prayers."<sup>25</sup>

This mother's admonition reveals her belief that Thekla was particularly vulnerable out in the world on her own because of her youth and gender. Uncertainty regarding Thekla's new life in the United States certainly compounded Hedwig's fears. Thus, the mother implored the daughter to remain vigilant in her faith as a prophylactic against immorality. These warnings combined maternal concern with contemporary Catholic moral concepts.

22 Przerwa/Wojdon, "History."

23 Orlow, *History*, 21-23.

24 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 5 November 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9121105-TL0038.1a, L9121105-TL0038.1.b; "Gelobt sei Jesus Christus! Innigs[t] geliebte Tochter Tekla."

25 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 5 November 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9121105-TL0038.1b; "grade um dich habe ich immer großen Kummer [...], denn die Mädchen sind den größten Gefahren ausgesetzt [...] Bette nur recht fleißig das dich der liebe Gott auf dem Wege der Tugend führt und du ein recht braves Kind bleibst [...] ich schliesse dich ja alle Tage in das Gebet ein."

Personal pilgrimages proved to be a devout religious practice in the Scholz family. In a November 1911 letter, Thekla's brother, possibly Berthold, shared news of a pilgrimage undertaken for her benefit. "On August 15, sister Hedwig, brother Josef, and I made a pilgrimage to Maria Hilf, so that you would have a successful trip."<sup>26</sup> Berthold neglected to provide further details presumably due to Thekla's familiarity with the location from her youth. The Silesian pilgrimage site Maria Hilf is probably located in today's Zlaté Hory in the Czech Republic. From Langenbrück, the pilgrimage distance measured approximately ten kilometers, an achievable distance of six miles by foot in one day. Just three days earlier on 12 August 1911, the young woman departed Hamburg on the ship *President Grant* bound for New York.<sup>27</sup> Nearly one year later in a letter dated 26 August 1912, Thekla's sister, also named Hedwig, reported their mother's pilgrimage to the Franciscan monastery of St. Annaberg in Upper Silesia.<sup>28</sup> Today known as Góra Świętej Anny, St. Annaberg first became a pilgrimage site in the seventeenth century. It also became a political landmark in Upper Silesia following the return of the Franciscans after their expulsion during the *Kulturkampf*.<sup>29</sup> Although Hedwig did not specifically address their mother's reason for participating in the pilgrimage, St. Annaberg historically hosts pilgrims for the annual feast day of the Assumption of Mary on August 15. As these three examples suggest, the Scholz family's regional pilgrimages not only demonstrated effort, mindfulness, and love for family but also their devout Catholic faith in God.

The Catholic Church's response to the *Kulturkampf* prompted political activism, which in turn generated opportunities for Upper Silesia's faithful. The priest Arnold Janssen founded the Mission Society of Priests and Brothers in 1875 in the Dutch border village of Steyl to promote Catholic missions in the German

- 26 Letter, unknown sender to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 18 November 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9111118-TL0022.1a, L9111118-TL0022.1b; "am 15 August [1911] bin ich mit Schwester Hedwig und Bruder Josef nach Maria Hilf Wallfarten gegangen damit du solltest eine glü[c]kliche Reise haben."
- 27 Staatsarchiv Hamburg; Hamburg, Deutschland; Hamburger Passagierlisten; Band: 373-7 I, VIII A 1 Band 237; Seite: 1546; Mikrofilmnummer No.: K\_1819.
- 28 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 26 August 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9120826-TL0045.1a; "Die Mutter ist jetzt gegenwärtig in St. Annaberg auf der Wallfahrt."
- 29 Hugo Weczerka, *Handbuch der Historischen Stätten: Schlesien* (Stuttgart: Kröner Alfred GmbH & Co, 1977), 469.

Empire<sup>30</sup> and to recruit personnel for missions to the German colonies. These Steyl Missionaries, also known as the Society of the Divine Word, later founded the mission house Heiligkreuz in Neisse, the first in Prussia since the *Kulturkampf*, which is today located in Nysa, Poland.<sup>31</sup> In 1889, Father Janssen founded the Servants of the Holy Spirit, a women's congregation organized to support the globally active men's order.<sup>32</sup> The missionaries detailed their work in the German empire through published reports which circulated throughout Catholic parishes in Upper Silesia.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the missionaries actively shared updates directly with congregations. In a November 1912 letter written to Thekla, an unknown author (probably a former work colleague) reported that: "we had now eight days of sp[iritual] exercises and the missionaries again gave very beautiful and instructive sermons."<sup>34</sup> Perhaps influenced by these reports, two of Thekla's sisters joined the new religious order.



Figure 6. Photograph Sr. Bertholdine (Martha) Scholz, n. d., Courtesy of Lisa Weis.

## MARRIAGE, MONASTERY, OR MIGRATION: PROSPECTS FOR UPPER SILESIAN WOMEN

Martha Scholz, in particular, appreciated the opportunity for a professional career as Sr. Bertholdine.<sup>35</sup> In May 1913, she wrote Thekla regarding a "joyful

30 Katharina Stornig, "Auf Mission im 'gelobten Land': Österreicherinnen und Österreicher in Togo," *Österreich Geschichte Literatur Geographie* 58, no. 4 (2014): 379–392.

31 Weczerka, "Handbuch," 336.

32 Stornig, "Auf Mission," 380.

33 Stornig, "Auf Mission," 380.

34 Letter, unknown sender to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 14 July 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9120714-TL0044.1b; "Wir hatten jetzt acht Tage die Hl. Exerziezen und haben die Missionäre wieder sehr schöne und lehrreiche Predigten gehalten."

35 We do not yet know exactly when Martha Scholz entered the monastery. One early indication can be found in: Letter, Ottilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Crossen in Thuringia, 19 January 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100113-TL0008.1b.

event”:<sup>36</sup> news of her missionary assignment to Togo in West Africa. In 1897, Steyl missionary nuns began working in Togo following its new status as a German protectorate in 1884.<sup>37</sup> To prepare for her assignment, Sr. Bertholdine spent considerable time at the Motherhouse of the Missionary Sisters in the Herz-Jesu Monastery in Steyl. Here, she reported studying the Ewe language for her impending work in a kindergarten, one of the primary activities of the missionary nuns. Through its work abroad, the Catholic missions in Upper Silesia certainly benefited from its role as a stakeholder within Germany’s imperial expansion. Besides bolstering the image of the Catholic Church in Germany, missionary work undertaken to spread Catholicism in faraway lands provided new career opportunities for young women in Upper Silesia.

For a girl from a rural environment like Sr. Bertholdine who previously found work as a maid, joining a religious order was an attractive career choice. Thekla Scholz’s friend Marie Otte believed entering a convent was equally as viable



Figure 7. Postcard, Train Station in Langenbrück (today Moszczanka), 1910. Public Domain.

- 36 Letter, Sr. Bertholdine (Martha) Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Steyl in the Netherlands, 25 May 1913, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9130526-TL0065.1a, L9130526-TL0065.1b; “Noch ein anderes freudiges Ereignis veranlaßt mich, Dir, lb. [liebe] Schwester Thekla, zu schreiben.”
- 37 Stornig, Katharina, “... denn die ganze Sorge der Schwestern war darauf gerichtet, die Lage des weiblichen Geschlechts zu verbessern.” *Geschlecht, Religion und Differenz in der Missionspraxis deutscher Ordensfrauen im kolonialen Togo (1896-1918)*, in: Rebekka Habermas and Richard Hölzl (eds.), *Mission global: Eine Verflechtungsgeschichte seit dem 19. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), 113.

as marriage.<sup>38</sup> In a postcard written to Thekla in 1917, her brother Franz reported on a domestic squabble in Langenbrück and teased, “Don’t you want to become a farmer’s wife?”<sup>39</sup> This gentle joking clearly indicated some degree of distaste for rural life. For her part, Thekla vacillated between these choices of emigrating from Germany or entering a religious order. She viewed both options as viable opportunities to achieve economic success and security; they were certainly more attractive alternatives in comparison to the struggles of farm life and her work at that time as a maid in Neustadt, today Prudnik, in Upper Silesia alongside her friend Otilie.<sup>40</sup>

Still, a religious career involved certain responsibility and restrictions, as the family came to understand. While Sr. Bertholdine prepared for her assignment in Togo, her contact with family and friends was strictly controlled by religious superiors. This practice of “censorship” was often enacted by the Motherhouse during preparation for missions.<sup>41</sup> Letters between Thekla and her friends discussed a worrisome period of no postal contact with Sr. Bertholdine.

“I am very sorry that you are so sad about Martel [Martha]. [...] But I am convinced that she feels happy. [...] I can feel it in your mind how you are grieving. The thought that she is alive and yet dead for us is unspeakably difficult.”<sup>42</sup>

Friends Marie and Otilie similarly comforted Thekla that there was nothing wrong: her sister was just not allowed to write.<sup>43</sup> For young women in Langenbrück and Upper Silesia, the choice to enter a religious order thus meant leaving family and friends behind and wholly dedicating themselves to

38 Letter, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Crossen in Thuringia, 19 March 1909, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9090319-TL0007.1a, L9090319-TL0007.1b.

39 Postcard, Franz Scholz to Thekla Scholz, Kansas City [MO], 16 December before 1911, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., 9171226-TA0052.3b; “Hast du nicht Lust Farmersfrau zu werden?”

40 Letter, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Crossen in Thuringia, 13 January 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100113-TL0008.1a, L910113-TL00081b.

41 Stornig, “Auf Mission,” 392.

42 Letter, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Crossen, Thuringia, 19 January 1910, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9100113-TL0008.1a, L9100113-TL0008.1b; “Es Tut mir sehr leid, daß Ihr so betrübt seid, wegen Martel. [...] Aber ich bin überzeugt, Sie fühlt sich glücklich. [...] Ich kann es Euch nach fühlen wie Ihr Euch grämt. Der Gedanke Sie lebt u. ist doch tot für uns, ist unsagbar schwer.”

43 Letters, Otilie Kiefer to Thekla Scholz, Crossen in Thuringia, 19 March 1909, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9090319-TL0007.1a–b; “Doch wird sie noch keine Erlaubnis kriegen”; and 13 January 1910, L9100113-TL0008.1a–b; “Sie wird nicht schreiben dürfen.”

their relationship with God. If this represented a pragmatic and respected decision within the Catholic community, it came with social and personal costs; and ultimately, Thekla rejected it.

## SADNESS TO SOLACE: EARLY LIFE IN KANSAS CITY

When Thekla Scholz arrived in Kansas City in 1911, she encountered an American Midwestern city populated by approximately 250,000 people, nearly thirteen times the 1905 population of Neustadt.<sup>44</sup> To be sure, her brothers Franz, Paul, and August welcomed her when she arrived, for they had immigrated to the United States in 1907,<sup>45</sup> 1908,<sup>46</sup> and 1910<sup>47</sup> respectively; still Thekla wrote of her initial dissatisfaction with her new life in the United States. In a letter dated 20 January 1912, H. Sicker, Thekla's former employer in Neustadt, regretted supporting her emigration financially not because of the expense but her apparent experience. He commiserated that "your first letters were of course very sad."<sup>48</sup> In contrast, Hedwig Scholz, Thekla's mother, expressed happiness and relief nearly one year later when Thekla reported having found a Catholic priest to serve as her confessor, providing comfort when she was "in sad circumstances."<sup>49</sup> Born to a devout Catholic family, the young migrant assuredly found solace in the familiar rhythms of daily prayer and Catholic traditions practiced throughout her formative years in Germany.

44 Ralph Anton, "Neustadt O.-S.-S.: Kreisstadt im Königreich Preußen Provinz Schlesien, Regierungsbezirk Oppeln," *Deutsche Schutzgebiete.de*, <https://deutsche-schutzgebiete.de/wordpress/projekte/kaiserreich/koenigreich-preussen/provinz-schlesien/neustadt/>, accessed 30 July 2020.

45 "Scholz, Franz," *U. S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Form No.1 IP, 1853-P-571, Ancestry.com, accessed 21 July 2020.

46 "Scholz, Paul," *U. S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Form No.1 IP, 1853-P-741, Ancestry.com, accessed 21 July 2020.

47 "Scholz, August," *U. S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Form No.1 IP, 1853-P-1307, Ancestry.com, accessed 21 July 2020.

48 Letter, H. Sicker to Thekla Scholz, Neustadt, 20 January 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9120120-TL0028.1a, L9120120-TL0028.1b; "Ihre ersten Briefe waren freilich sehr traurig und es hat mir leid getan, daß auch ich mit dazu beigetragen habe Ihre Auswanderung zu unterstützen."

49 Letter, Hedwig Scholz (born Müller) to Thekla Scholz, Langenbrück, 9 December 1912, Kiefer-Scholz Coll., L9121209-TL0048.1b; "in traurigen Verhältnissen."

Thekla's correspondence from her family and friends divulge few details regarding her religious practice upon her immediate arrival in Kansas City. For recently arrived German immigrants like her, Kansas City included a thriving Catholic diocese with twenty-eight parishes.<sup>50</sup> The parishes of Saints Peter and Paul established in 1866,<sup>51</sup> Our Lady of Sorrows in 1890,<sup>52</sup> and Guardian Angel in 1909<sup>53</sup> were specifically organized to serve German-speaking congregations and, unlike a traditional parish, their "open" boundaries allowed anyone in Kansas City to attend. For German-Americans and German immigrants, these parishes certainly fostered a cultural community, offering masses and confession in the German language. These German parishes provided parochial education with German-language instruction and often served as community centers.<sup>54</sup> In this way, Kansas City's Catholic diocese aspired to meet the spiritual, cultural, and social needs of recent immigrants and American citizens within the German community.

Information gleaned from the Kiefer-Scholz Collection and interviews with family members, however, indicate that, soon after she arrived in Kansas City, Thekla Scholz probably began attending Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish Redemptorist Church, located at 3333 Broadway. Thekla's decision was perhaps partially influenced by limited access to transportation resources and her ability to travel the city safely and efficiently on foot. Between December 1911 and 1912, Thekla received postcards addressed to 3716 Jefferson Street, Kansas City, the home of Henry and Marie Zahner, both children of German immigrants.<sup>55</sup> An advertisement posted by the Zahner family in *The Kansas City Star* in 1909 read: "Wanted — White Girl for General Housework."<sup>56</sup> Thekla Scholz filled this position in 1911. Located approximately .7 miles from Redemptorist Church, the Zahner's home was situated within Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish boundaries. Furthermore, the Zahner family, led

50 Thomas Hornbeck, "Historical Geography of the Catholic Church in Kansas City, Missouri, 1822-1930" (M.A. Thesis, University of Kansas, 2009), 134.

51 Hornbeck, "Historical Geography," 33.

52 Hornbeck, "Historical Geography," 51.

53 Hornbeck, "Historical Geography," 68.

54 Hornbeck, "Historical Geography," 32.

55 1910 Census Record, Jackson County, Missouri, Population Schedule 8A, Ancestry.com, accessed 30 July 2020.

56 "Classifieds," *The Kansas City Star*, 26 September 1909.

by Henry's father and uncle, William E. and Andrew Zahner, respectively, were noted donors to Redemptorist as well as Our Lady of Sorrows.<sup>57</sup> In light of this information, it seems likely that the Zahners introduced Thekla to Redemptorist, perhaps even attending with them. In 1913, Thekla's correspondence indicated a new address and position with Frank and Cordelia Ferguson, who resided at 3125 Broadway,<sup>58</sup> a convenient five-minute walk to Redemptorist. Thus, Thekla's introduction to Kansas City's Catholic community was almost certainly influenced by her employers and their proximity to places of worship.

Upon its founding in 1888, Redemptorist served a diverse population of new Americans of German, Irish, Italian, Slavic, and Hispanic descent. With the City Beautiful Movement of the 1890s, the area surrounding the new parish developed quickly with the addition of paved roads, sidewalks, streetlights, and other amenities. Immigrant communities settled in newly established neighborhoods built to the immediate west of Redemptorist.<sup>59</sup> The growing Catholic community in the parish necessitated a larger church building. Construction began in 1907 and, during the laying of the cornerstone, more than fifteen thousand people attended the celebration, which included a procession of religious clergy and organizations led by police and "bands played the music of the people, Irish, German, Italian, Slavic and Hispanic."<sup>60</sup> Thekla thus arrived in Kansas City at an exciting time, as the new church opened for this vibrant community in May 1912.

Her introduction to Redemptorist also coincided with the presence of three German priests serving the parish, most notably the appointment of Father Thomas Distler as Head Pastor between 1910 and 1915. Born in New Orleans to German immigrants, Distler spoke German and personally understood the

57 Catholic Dioceses of Kansas City-St. Joseph, "Memories," *Golden Jubilee of the Redemptorist Parish*, Catholic Kansas City, Missouri: Catholic Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, 1928, 45-46, 49, <https://pendergastkc.org/collection/11756/ca-parish-open-b029-0001/memories-golden-jubilee-redemptorist-parish>, accessed 18 July 2020.

58 1910 Census Record, Jackson County, Missouri, Population Schedule, 9B, Ancestry.com, 30 July 2020.

59 Hornbeck, "Historical Geography," 57; Marty Denzer, "History of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Intertwined with History of City," *The Catholic Key* (May 21, 2012), <https://catholickey.org/2012/05/21/history-of-our-lady-of-perpetual-help-intertwined-with-history-of-city/>, accessed 15 August 2020.

60 Denzer, "Perpetual Help."

immigrant experience. After assignments in Chicago at a German national church and St. Louis, he brought a set of skills and maturity well suited to serve as Thekla's confessor and to counsel her personal and spiritual growth. Additionally, two Assistant Pastors, Morris Frische and Peter Bragenzer, were both born in Illinois to German immigrant parents.<sup>61</sup> Redemptorist's robust German community offered a sense of security and belonging, while its diversity afforded her social and professional opportunities. Undoubtedly, Thekla's early experiences with Redemptorist fostered her enduring relationship with the parish.

Yet Thekla's arrival in the United States also coincided with a growing nativist movement demanding that immigrants assimilate or Americanize. Learning the English language became an integral marker of Americanization. In 1910, as American historian Frederick Luebke noted, twenty-three percent of approximately thirteen million immigrants, aged ten years and older, did not speak English.<sup>62</sup> Luebke analyzed the ensuing foreign language debates which targeted German-Americans and German immigrant communities living in Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming but with a special focus on Missouri's neighbors, Kansas, and Nebraska. Three primary types of legislation resulted from these debates and demonstrated varying public viewpoints: laws that legalized educational instruction in foreign languages for immigrant communities; laws that established English as the language of American public education; and laws that allowed English-speaking students to receive foreign language instruction.<sup>63</sup> Historian Petra DeWitt proposed a more nuanced interpretation of German immigrant conditions in pre-World War I Missouri. She argued native-born Americans and Missourians "did not always object to ... the usage of German because German-Americans had adapted to American culture."<sup>64</sup> For DeWitt, individual

61 1910 Census Record, Jackson County, Missouri, Population Schedule, 7A, accessed through Ancestry.com, 30 July 2020.

62 Frederick C. Luebke, "Legal Restrictions on Foreign Languages in the Great Plains, 1917-1923," in *Languages in Conflict: Linguistic Acculturation on the Great Plains*, ed. Paul Schach. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).

63 Luebke, "Legal Restrictions," 3.

64 Petra DeWitt, *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community During World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 34.

“settlement choices, religion, occupation, class mobility, and interaction within the ethnic group, with Americans, and with other ethnic groups were the most important factors that contributed to their becoming German-American or Americans of German descent in Missouri.”<sup>65</sup>

Following DeWitt, we argue that Thekla Scholz’s individual decisions afforded her some degree of insulation from nativist discrimination. She lived with her employers as partial compensation for her work as a nanny and housemaid. Her early social network included her brothers as well as friends and acquaintances likely encountered at church. In this context, Redemptorist served as a trusted institution that exposed Thekla to American culture — and the English language — through religious services, activities, and events. Thus, Thekla, as a newcomer, likely experienced greater freedom to Americanize on her own terms during her early years in Kansas City.

## GERMANS IN AMERICA AND THE GREAT WAR: BANS AND OPPRESSION

The outbreak of World War I in Europe in 1914 and the entry of the United States in 1917 undoubtedly complicated Thekla Scholz’s relationship with her new American home, especially as her future husband Robert Kiefer fulfilled his obligations for military service as a German citizen in the German army. German language bans were enacted across the United States, even in Kansas City and within its Catholic community.<sup>66</sup> Kansas, with a large German-American population, enacted a measure that required all public, private, and parochial schools to use only English for instruction. Nebraska further banned German from churches, public meetings, German-language newspapers, and, surpris-

<sup>65</sup> DeWitt, *Degrees*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> “Will Teach Less German. Cleveland’s Grammar Schools Won’t Offer Foreign Languages,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 10 August 1917; “Nebraska Hits German Press. Defense Council Demands Anti-American Propaganda Be Stopped,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 19 August 1917; “A German Weekly Suspended. Wisconsin Publisher Will Get Out English Language Daily Instead,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 16 October 1917; “Duluth Schools Ban German. The Change Will Take Effect at End of Present Scholastic Year,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 8 December 1917; “Texas Would Oust German. Legislature Discusses Removing Language from School,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 7 March 1918, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/browse-pub?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A1126152C152E4978!Kansas%2BCity%2BStar>, 19 July 2020.

ingly, even the telephone.<sup>67</sup> In 1918, several Missouri cities near Kansas City, including Sedalia and Odessa,<sup>68</sup> enacted similar German language bans. In May 1918, the board of the Kansas City Public School District — including city leaders J. C. Nichols and William Volker, a German immigrant himself — voted to remove “enemy language from the curriculum.”<sup>69</sup> The Catholic diocese in Kansas City felt pressure to decree the use of English for all church services. In June 1918, Father Roach, pastor of Guardian Angel, faced opposition from his congregation, but he justified his decision. As he explained, “I am an American, so the services will be in English instead of German.”<sup>70</sup> Bishop Thomas Lillis defended the all-English services at Guardian Angel. “Whenever priests have asked permission to change services from German to English,” he explained, “I not only have permitted them, but have urged them to do so. The time is not far off when all church services in this country will be in English.”<sup>71</sup>

In addition to German language bans, Kansas City’s Catholic community participated in acts of patriotism. Federal government initiatives — including the American Protective League designed to identify domestic espionage, the National Security League, and the American Defense League — provoked grass-roots “anti-German hysteria through indiscriminate attacks on German-American churches, schools, societies, and newspapers, describing them as inhibitors of assimilation and as agents of a worldwide Teutonic conspiracy.”<sup>72</sup> Luebke detailed incidents in which German-Americans were lynched, threatened, beaten, forced to relocate, tar-and-feathered, forced to

67 Luebke, “Legal Restrictions,” 7-12.

68 “Sedalia Bans German in Schools,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 17 February 1918; “A Telephone Co. Bars German. Odessa, Mo., Line Adopts ‘English Only’ Rule,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 27 April 1918, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/browse-pub?p=WORLDNEWS&ct=pubname%3A1126152C152E4978!Kansas%2BCity%2BStar>, 19 July 2020.

69 “Bars German in Schools, the Board Strikes Enemy Language from Curriculum,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 17 May 1918, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/browse-pub?p=WORLDNEWS&ct=pubname%3A1126152C152E4978!Kansas%2BCity%2BStar>, 19 July 2020.

70 “Guardian Angel Quit German: Only Two Catholic Churches Here are Using Language Now,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 11 June 1918: 1, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/browse-pub?p=WORLDNEWS&ct=pubname%3A1126152C152E4978!Kansas%2BCity%2BStar>, 19 July 2020.

71 “Guardian Angel,” 1.

72 Luebke, “Legal Restrictions,” 4-5.

participate in American flag-kissing ceremonies, and experienced significant property destruction.<sup>73</sup> DeWitt asserted that Missouri Germans “were not the subject of widespread hate crimes and ethnically targeted legislation German-Americans experienced in midwestern states such as Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.”<sup>74</sup> She conceded, however, that news of these various hate crimes spread through “metropolitan publications such as *The Kansas City Star*.”<sup>75</sup>

To avert charges of American disloyalty, the Catholic diocese purposefully participated in patriotic acts. For example, Redemptorist publicly purchased and helped sell war bonds.<sup>76</sup> Redemptorist and Guardian Angel also initiated patriotic events subsequently reported in the *Kansas City* press. In August 1917, more than 1,500 dignitaries and church members attended the spirited dedication of a new flagpole at Redemptorist.<sup>77</sup> Less than a year later, Redemptorist unveiled a new service flag featuring one-hundred and twenty-one stars, one for each parishioner called for military service.<sup>78</sup> Not to be outdone, Guardian Angel introduced a new service flag in August 1918 to honor its thirty men serving in the United States military.<sup>79</sup> Like the German language bans, the anti-German cultural movements during World War I prompted political activity within Kansas City’s Catholic community.

73 Luebke, *Bonds*, 3–24.

74 DeWitt, *Degrees*, 2–3.

75 DeWitt, *Degrees*, 63.

76 Catholic Diocese of Kansas City–St. Joseph, “Memories,” 23.

77 “New Flagpole Is Dedicated,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 6 August 1917, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/browse-pub?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A1126152C152E4978!Kansas%2BCity%2BStar>, 19 July 2020.

78 “Church has 121 in Service,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 3 June 1918, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/browse-pub?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A1126152C152E4978!Kansas%2BCity%2BStar>, 19 July 2020.

79 “Church Honored Its Soldiers,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 21 August 1918, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/browse-pub?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A1126152C152E4978!Kansas%2BCity%2BStar>, 19 July 2020.



Figure 8. *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, n. d., Inside cover, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. D9xxxxx-TD0208.02.

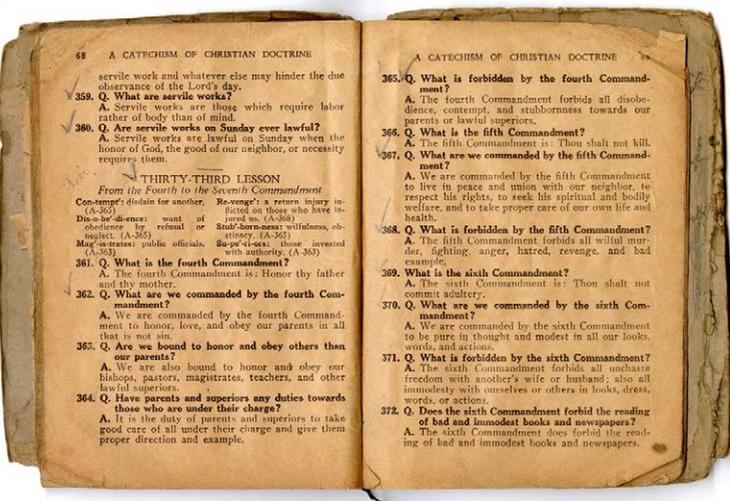


Figure 9. *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, n. d., pp.68-69, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. D9xxxxx-TD0208.29.



Figure 10. *Easter Card made by Rita Kiefer, n. d., Front and back, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. B123-LP0369B.*



Figure 11. *Easter Card made by Rita Kiefer, n. d., Interior, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. B123-LP0369A.*

## ASSIMILATION THROUGH CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE: THE SECOND GENERATION

Thekla Scholz's reaction to anti-German sentiment during the period remains unknown, but her strong relationship with Redemptorist appeared unchanged and continued after the war's end. Indeed, Redemptorist continued to serve as the cultural institution aiding Thekla's assimilation into American society. By 1935, she was still not a naturalized citizen; yet her husband Robert's premature death from colon cancer left her in a difficult situation.<sup>80</sup> Lisa Weis, their grandchild, recalled that, "when my Grandfather died, [my Grandmother] was an immigrant woman, who didn't speak English all that well. And she had three

small children. And so, you talk about hardship."<sup>81</sup> Bob Kiefer, another grandchild, shared that Robert Kiefer Jr., Thekla and Robert's son, spoke German as a first language.<sup>82</sup> These oral histories raise the basic question of the degree to which English-language immersion resulted in actual Anglicization for German immigrants and their children like the Kiefer-Scholz family.

80 "Funerals," *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), 11 October 1935, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/browse-pub?p=WORLDNEWS&ct=pubname%3A1126152C152E4978!Kansas%2BCity%2BStar>, 19 July 2020.

81 Interview, Lisa Weis, by Kathleen Foster, 1 July 2020, GMM 200706-3.01, 5:21.

82 Interview, Bob Kiefer, by Alexandra Kern, 28 June 2020, GMM 200628-1.01, 1:43:16.

Churches and schools were essential resources for teaching English and Americanizing immigrant families. A well-worn copy of *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine* is a case in point. Inscriptions on the inside of the front (Figure 8) and back covers disclose the book's owner as Rita Kiefer, the youngest daughter of Thekla and Robert, as well as its use during her fourth and fifth grade years at Redemptorist School. This didactic summary of the principles of the Catholic faith presented religious instruction in English through a system of rote learning supported by a question-and-answer format. Interestingly, many of the pages include the expected annotations of a student. In Figure 9, a barely visible "Fri." to the left of "THIRTY-THIRD LESSON," possibly signifies an upcoming exam, while the checkmarks potentially denote questions mastered in preparation for the test. Undoubtedly, Rita used this very worn copy faithfully for class and study. The question-and-answer format encouraged study with a classmate, sibling, or parent. Thus, for an immigrant family, it also served as a tool for assimilation into American society by encouraging parent-child educational exchanges in English, particularly helpful when English was not the primary language spoken in the household.

Redemptorist and its parish school also assisted Thekla, now Kiefer, in her most challenging parental role — instilling devout Catholic faith in her children. A heartwarming example certainly credited to Thekla's faithful effort features a red, handmade cross clipped from construction paper and adhered to white paper (Figures 10 and 11). Signed "from Rita," the greeting in English simply reads, "Happy Easter." Rita, however, included revealing information on the left interior section of the card, which recorded her devotional activities possibly during either Lent or Holy Week. Rita reported that she attended five Masses and received "H.[oly] Communion" four times. Interestingly, Rita also recorded that she prayed "300 asparation [sic]," or one-line prayers said throughout the day. Many Catholics pray aspirations from memory and include examples such as "Blessed be the Name of the Lord!" or "Mother of Mercy Pray for Us!" For Rita, the card was an appropriate gift for her mother as evidence of her Catholic devotion. Rita's card validated the Catholic ideals that Thekla strove to impart to her children. Rita's card is thus an emblematic symbol of Thekla's devout Catholic faith, a belief system handed down from her parents to her children — and sometimes in opposition to expectations of American assimilation.

## KEEPING THE FAITH: CONTINUITY IN TRANSATLANTIC CATHOLICISM

Oral histories conducted by Alexandra Kern and Kathleen Foster for our research team with three of Thekla and Robert Kiefer's grandchildren in the summer of 2020 offer further insight into the continuity of German-American Catholicism. Robert Kiefer died before his grandchildren were born and thus their knowledge of him is limited to family folklore; but Margie McHale, Bob Kiefer, and Lisa Weis remember their Grandmother fondly. These interviews deepen and enrich our understanding of this migrant family's experiences across more than one hundred years and four generations.

The three grandchildren remember how Grandma Thekla entertained them with tales of her travels working as a nanny and treasure hunts throughout her home. The children found pennies hidden in nail boxes in her cabinets and in the drawers of her Singer sewing machine, but her secret cash stash inside the Blessed Mother statue on her bedside table went undiscovered until after Thekla's death in 1975.<sup>83</sup> "Faith and the church were very important to my Grandparents and my parents their whole lives," Bob Kiefer explained. "It was part of the grounding tradition of the family."<sup>84</sup> According to the grandchildren, Robert and Thekla went to mass every week, said their rosaries each night, and diligently passed their religious practices to their children, who then strived to do the same. "If we ever spent the night at [Thekla's] house, she would always make sure that we were saying prayers before we went to sleep," Margie said of her grandmother.

"My mom did the same thing. We always had a holy water fountain at home. So, when you'd go to bed, Mom would say, 'Bless yourself with the holy water.' And so, we'd go over the little fountain, put our fingertips in, and make the sign of the cross before we'd go to bed."<sup>85</sup>

Historian Thomas Stefaniuk examined the German American Catholic experience beginning in the 1890's. "German-American Catholics were not fully at home among any of their ethnic, religious, or national kin," he wrote.

83 Interview, Marjorie McHale, by Kathleen Foster, 22 July 2020, GMM200722-03.02.

84 Interview, Bob Kiefer, by Alexandra Kern, 25 July 2020, GMM200725-01.02.

85 Interview, Marjorie McHale, by Kathleen Foster, 22 July 2020, GMM200722-03.02.



Figure 12. Photograph, *Robert and Thekla Kiefer's wedding portrait, 1922*, Kiefer-Scholz Coll. B026-LP0319A.

“They were different from most other Americans because of their German ethnicity and language and Catholic faith, different from other German-Americans because of their religion (the majority of German-Americans were Lutheran), and different from other ‘American’ Catholics because of their German ethnicity.”<sup>86</sup>

In spite of these pervasive differences, the Kiefer-Scholz family was able to find and flourish within a German-American immigrant community near their home at 30<sup>th</sup> and Belleview. “When I grew up, I used to think all these people related to us,” Lisa Weis said of her grandmother’s neighbors, “because they were at every [family event], and so I just figured they were family.”<sup>87</sup> Lisa described this immigrant community as “tight knit.” They shared food from their gardens with one another and hand-me-down clothing that their children had outgrown. “You know, they talk about how ‘it takes a village.’” Lisa laughed. “Well, in Kansas City at 30<sup>th</sup> and Belleview, it took a block. It took a block to raise everybody.”<sup>88</sup>

The church played a major role in shaping these ethnic neighborhoods. “Initially the Catholic Church contributed to the separation of nationalities [in Kansas City], particularly Irish and Germans, into distinct neighborhoods with individual churches,” historian Thomas Hornbeck has argued. “Over time society countered these trends and brought these people into the general culture.”<sup>89</sup> Hornbeck comes to this conclusion by comparing the rationale listed in the diocesan archives for establishing individual parishes within the time period covered by this study. Thirteen of the first seventeen parishes in Kansas City that were formed between 1847 and 1891 mention ethnicity. Of the last twenty parishes, formed between 1892 and 1930, only five mention ethnicity.

Thekla Kiefer had likely already established a relationship with the Redemptorist community at Our Lady of Perpetual Help while working for the Ferguson family, which she maintained when she moved in with Robert at 3016 Belleview. Three generations of the Kiefer-Scholz family were married

86 Thomas Stefaniuk, “Joseph Jessing, German-American Catholics, and National Myth-Making in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” *American Catholic Studies* 126, no. 1 (2015): 2.

87 Interview, Lisa Weis, by Kathleen Foster, 16 July 2020, GMM 200716-02.02.

88 Interview, Lisa Weis, by Kathleen Foster, 1 July 2020, GMM 200706-03.01, 37:25.

89 Hornbeck, “Historical Geography,” 101.

in this French-Gothic-style cathedral, with its grand vaulted ceilings and imported Italian marble altar. It was a 22-minute walk from the church to the home where Thekla and Robert raised their three children. Marjorie, Robert II, and Rita Kiefer each attended the Redemptorist parish school for grades one through twelve. Even a few of Marjorie's children went to Redemptorist High School before it closed in 1968.

At the turn of the century, German-American Catholics were facing the threat of the "Americanist Crisis." Americanism in the Roman Catholic church was a movement headed largely by Irish Catholics, who sought to unify immigrant parishes through an anglicization and liberalization of the faith to better assimilate into American culture. As Stefaniuk explains:

"During those years, tensions mounted over the so-called 'German question' – German-American Catholic insistence on the practice of their own language and culture in parishes, and the competition between German-Americans and English-speaking Americans over the appointment of bishops."<sup>90</sup>

Hornbeck similarly describes the importance of establishing and maintaining German national parishes for immigrant communities at this time.

"German Catholics in the United States also relied heavily on the parish as a social center with more devotional societies, life insurance organizations, music societies, and military groups than the Irish. This attitude may have been the result of Catholicism being a minority religion among Germans. German Catholics, both in their native land and in America, saw threats to their religion from outsiders and therefore placed greater importance on maintaining a parish community."<sup>91</sup>

In an article in the German-language newspaper *Ohio Waisenfreund* on 23 June 1897, German Catholic immigrant and anti-Americanist activist Joseph Jessing wrote about their predicament:

"We left Germany and have nothing more to do with German politics, since we are only observers from this side of the ocean. We are no longer Ger-

90 Stefaniuk, "Joseph Jessing," 2.

91 Hornbeck, "Historical Geography," 32.



Figure 13. Photograph, *Marjorie and Walter Roseburrough's wedding portrait, 1942*, courtesy of Lisa Weis

maners, but rather Americans. But we can remain Germans at the same time and we want to remain that. We want to keep our language and all the good things that are associated with it and we want to pass it on to our children. At the same time, we want to be the best patriots, proper Americans, fully aware that the institutions of this country give us the full freedom to maintain our language, customs, and ways.<sup>92</sup>

Our research team found no concrete evidence relating to which side — if either — in this ideological debate Robert and Thekla aligned themselves during their early days in Kansas City. But we do know that Robert refused

to discharge his weapon against an American while fighting for Germany in World War One. Instead, he played his flugelhorn on battlefield bandstands and risked his life as a medic carrying wounded soldiers back behind German lines. “He fell in love with America,” Bob Kiefer III told us. “He didn’t hate Germany [...], but he considered himself an American.”<sup>93</sup> The three grandchildren also reported that, although Robert and Thekla taught their children Marjorie, Robert II, and Rita to speak German as a first language, none of the

92 Stefaniuk, “Joseph Jessing,” 7.

93 Interview, Bob Kiefer, by Alexandra Kern, 25 July 2020, GMM200725-01.02.



Figure 14. Photograph, Dolores and Robert Kiefer II's wedding portrait, 1970, courtesy of Lisa Weis.

Marjorie Rosebournough, born Kiefer, raised her children as members of Sacred Heart, an English speaking, Irish leaning parish. Their house at 27<sup>th</sup> and Jarboe street was only a few blocks away from Grandama Thekla's home but was outside of Redemptorist's geographical bounds. Marjorie was the sacristan at Sacred Heart for more than 35 years. She attended 8 a.m. mass every day and cleaned the church with her children each week. Her daughter Lisa recalled washing Sacred Heart's twenty-foot stained glass windows on ladders with soft white towels and a dilution of white vinegar and dish soap until her hands were filthy, surveying the leaden came, which link the pieces of glass together, for cracks as she worked. As sacristan, Marjorie cleaned the priests' laundry and the altar linens in addition to her own eight children's clothing in her wringer washing machine. The linens she tended lovingly; she soaked them in bluing to brighten their whites — because bleach could degrade the fabric — before hanging them to dry outside on her clothesline. In order to prevent the wrinkle-prone fabric from appearing rumpled, Marjorie sprinkled the dry linens with water and wrapped them up in a plastic bag to cool in her refrigerator. Once cooled, she rolled newspapers into a tube that she covered with masking tape and employed one of her children to help stretch the linen along the makeshift roller while she worked the hot iron against dampened cloth, creating steam and banishing wrinkles without need of rare starch. "I know this sounds so convoluted," Lisa laughed as she recalled her mother's process, "but it's beautiful [...]. I've done the same thing to get my linens to look nice and pressed." She recalled that, even after Alzheimer's disease had ravaged her memory, her mother Marjorie could still be found walking to Sacred Heart near the end of her life, as if on autopilot.

grandchildren know more than a few words of what they understand to be German slang.



Figure 15. Photograph, *Marjorie McHale's wedding portrait*, 1964, courtesy of Marjorie McHale.

Eventually, her children were forced to confiscate her key to the church for her own safety.<sup>94</sup>

Despite her devotion to Sacred Heart parish, Marjorie and her husband were married at Redemptorist church, like her parents, on 17 October 1942, just one day after what would have been her parents Robert and Thekla's wedding anniversary. Marjorie's brother Robert "Walter" Kiefer II married his wife at Redemptorist as well. She described her brother (see Figure 14) as a kind man with big hands that he used to make cabinets and other carpentry, like his father. Like Marjorie, Robert "Walter" Kiefer II gave the labor of those hands to the church. He did woodworking for both Redemptorist and Guardian Angels Parish on Westport Road,

and he was quick to offer his assistance with any other parish's building projects. Similarly, Thekla's brother Frank helped build panels on the altar at St. Peter's Cathedral in downtown Kansas City.

That was at a time when immigrants and their first-generation American children needed a close-knit community to rely upon for personal, spiritual, and at times financial support. "Being German immigrants [...] you know, it wasn't easy," Lisa said. "It wasn't always easy," she repeated, "and people didn't want to acknowledge you."<sup>95</sup> Her grandparents had been treated with compassion by the Salvation Army during difficult times; it was important to Thekla to repay that kindness.

94 Interview, Lisa Weis, by Kathleen Foster, 16 July 2020, GMM 200716-02.02.

95 Interview, Lisa Weis, by Kathleen Foster, 1 July 2020, GMM 200706-03.01, 35:34.

“My Grandmother was not big on giving to charitable organizations. But she really felt very strongly about always giving to the Salvation Army [...] It was always there, and they were very, very kind. No matter who you were, where you came from, they were there to help [...] My Mother could not pass a bell ringer at Christmas time.”

At that time, the church was also the primary social outlet for parishioners, acting as a cultural touchstone for immigrant families. “Churches back then did a lot of it, you don’t see it quite so much anymore,” Lisa explained.

“They would do ice cream socials, to where like, you know, when the weather was nicer outside, it was usually in like June. And a lot of the Catholic churches that had German immigrants would do Oktoberfest. And I know we did those at Sacred Heart for a while where, you know, they’d get a polka band in, they would make all the German food.”<sup>96</sup>

Over the next two generations, the Kiefer-Scholz family’s involvement with the Catholic faith declined. It is true that Margie, Bob, and Lisa all married their spouses at Redemptorist church like their parents, but not all of Robert and Thekla’s grandchildren seem to have maintained their level of devotion to either Catholicism or their local parishes. Margie and Lisa’s oldest brother, Walter, raised all of his children at Saint Gabriel’s in the Northland. Bob Kiefer III’s own relationship with his faith also changed. “I go to church occasionally,” he said. “It’s not necessarily for saving of my soul, I just have



Figure 16. Photograph, *Lisa and Jeff Weis’s Wedding Portrait, 1990*, courtesy of Lisa Weis.

96 Interview, Lisa Weis, by Kathleen Foster, 16 July 2020, GMM 200716-02.02.

fond memories of attending mass with my parents, my cousins or whatever, and it's more of a tradition."<sup>97</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Historian Thomas Stefaniuk writes that, with the advent of the Americanist movement, “the era of the immigrant church in America was ending, and with it the immigrant brand of Catholicism that was imported from the old world.”<sup>98</sup> This process of disconnecting from the church, however, cannot be explained by generational entropy alone. It was also driven by suburbanization and gentrification. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, drove many families to the suburbs outside of Kansas City proper just as the building of Southwest Trafficway cut through immigrant enclaves on the West Side. Increasing dependency on cars and the advent of mobile communication technologies only furthered the alienation that Kansas Citians felt from their ethnic communities. “Replacing the combative European variety was a form of religion much more accommodating to American culture and its tenets of liberalism and individualism,” Stefaniuk writes, “the Catholic Church would in the long run be changed by American culture more than it changed American culture.”<sup>99</sup>

The same could be said of the Kiefer-Scholz family. Microhistories of migrant families such as theirs offer contemporary readers a richer and fuller appreciation for the everyday hopes and fears, challenges and achievements of migrants who risk everything for a chance at a new life. The private documents and oral histories preserved in the Robert J. Kiefer and Thekla Scholz Collection reveal a devoutly Catholic German-American family separated by migration across the Atlantic. Over the course of more than a century, their transnational and intergenerational history tells a story not just of growing assimilation and integration for these new Americans but also of the proud contributions that this family has made to their new community in Kansas City, precisely because of the culture and values that they brought with them.

97 Interview, Bob Kiefer, by Alexandra Kern, 25 July 2020, GMM200725-01.02.

98 Stefaniuk, “Joseph Jessing,” 24.

99 Stefaniuk, “Joseph Jessing,” 24.





MAREK DRYTKIEWICZ, MARIA FRAŃCZAK, KRZYSZTOF  
FRAŃCZAK, ANDRZEJ FRAŃCZAK, KRZYSZTOF WOJDON

## LANGENBRÜCK TODAY

A PHOTO JOURNAL OF MOSZCZANKA, POLAND, IN 2021

Photographs can be very valuable historical sources. Photos can reveal the remnants of the past in our present and how these places, linked to that past, have changed in the intervening years. That is why we decided to add a photo journal to this publication of the region in Upper Silesia where Thekla E. Scholz was born and raised. We took these photos and wrote the captions in the Winter of 2020-21. Most were taken by Krzysztof Frańczak. Maria Frańczak and Andrzej Frańczak also took one each and Krzysztof Wojdon took two. The captions were written by Marek Drytkiewicz. This photo journal may not tell us much about what these places looked like when Thekla was still living in Upper Silesia, but they bring us closer to her family's history by seeing what they look like in the present.

Moszczanka is located in the Opole Voivodeship, meaning province, of Poland. It is now known as a tourist village today, because it is situated in the shadow of the Opawskie Mountains or Zuckmanteler Bergland in German. The Żłoty Potok river, in German Goldbach, flows through the village with many bridges over it, which may explain the German name for the village of Langenbrück, meaning Long Bridge. Immediately after World War Two, it was called Długiemosty in Polish, which means Long Bridges; but in 1946, it was changed to Moszczanka. It is located very close to the city of Prudnik, which in German was called Neustadt or New Town.

We wanted to show the readers of this book some of the traces of history from before the Second World War that can still be found in the region. In particular, we emphasized places that were relevant to the Scholz family including the characteristic Catholic elements of the region. At the same time, we want to draw your attention to the fact that the current Polish residents of this region are aware of its past and seek to preserve its memory. We hope that this photo journal will help you better immerse yourselves in this history of the Scholz family by catching a few glimpses of what the region looks like today.



Figure 1. *One view of Moszczanka, home village of the Scholz family.*  
Photo by Krzysztof Wojdon.



Figure 2. *Another view of Moszczanka. In this photo, we can see the village Catholic church.*  
Photo by Krzysztof Wojdon.



Figures 3 & 4. *The only church in Moszczanka – the Triumph of the Holy Cross Parish.* Built in the years 1982 to 1988, this building replaced the previous one that had been destroyed during the bombing raids of 1945. Thekla Scholz and her family probably attended religious services in the original building, which was founded in seventeenth century and was located where a cemetery chapel currently stands (not the same chapels seen in Figure 5 & 6. Photos by Krzysztof Frańczak.



Figures 5 & 6. A roadside Catholic chapel in Moszczanka, built in 1827. This chapel was probably an important site for the Catholic Scholz family. It is listed in the registry of the Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa or National Heritage Board of Poland. It is an example of many buildings of this type in Silesian villages and roads. The residential house that stands behind the chapel is typical of homes of the well-off population in this region around 1900. Photos by Krzysztof Frańczak.





Figure 7. *The former Catholic convent in Moszczanka, which is now a private property. It was associated with the Mission House of the Holy Cross (ger. *Missionhaus Heiligkreuz*) in Nysa (ger. *Neisse*) seen in Figure 19. Two of Thekla Scholz's sisters, Martha (Sr. Bertholdine) and Rosalia (Sr. Fortunata), were nuns. The presence of this convent perhaps influenced their decision to choose this path as well. Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.*



Figure 8. A statue in one of the Moszczanka's cemeteries. It was part of the former German Catholic cemetery. Before World War Two, there was also an evangelical cemetery there, but it is now in a poor condition. Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.



Figure 9. The remaining German graves located in the Catholic cemetery in Moszczanka. They are remnants of the German past of Silesia. Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.



Figure 10. A memorial plaque in the Catholic cemetery in Moszczanka. It was placed in 2002 by current Polish and German residents of the village in memory of the former residents. Its inscription reads: "In memory of the former residents of Moszczanka and Łąka Prudnicka (ger. *Gräflich Wiese*) who found eternal rest here or far away from their homeland." Łąka Prudnicka is a village located next to Moszczanka. Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.



Figure 11. *The former train station in Moszczanka, which is now privately owned. The station was opened in 1875 and closed in 1971. Thekla Scholz's father worked at the railroad, so it was probably his workplace. Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.*



Figure 12. *The historical railway route near the former train station in Moszczanka. It was a part of the Central Rail Line between Legnica (ger. *Liegnitz*) and Katowice (ger. *Kattowitz*). Currently the tracks are still in use by Czech and Polish carriers. The residential address of the Scholz family was "am Bahndamm" or "at the railroad embankment." They therefore lived somewhere close to these tracks, perhaps in a house that the railroad company made available to employees. Photo by Andrzej Frańczak.*



Figure 13. *The railway viaduct over the river Złoty Potok (ger. Goldbach) in Moszczanka.* It was built in 1906 to replace one destroyed by the serious flood in 1903. It was probably funded by the last German empress, Augusta Victoria, wife of Wilhelm II. It is the most recognizable element of the village, located right at the entrance to it from the west. Thekla Scholz certainly knew it, as it had been a modern construction at the time. Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.



Figure 14. *The view on the river Złoty Potok flowing through Moszczanka and the Opatowskie Mountains, which can be seen in the distance.* Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.



Figure 15. *Some of the historical buildings in the middle of Moszczanka.* Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.



Figure 16. *The statue of St. John of Nepomuk on the market square in Prudnik, sponsored by seven wealthy citizens and built in 1733. Monuments of this saint are popular in Silesia thanks to a popular cult associated with him in the Habsburg monarchy during the eighteenth century. The presence of this statue demonstrates the Catholic character of this city. Thekla Scholz lived and worked as a maid in Prudnik (Neustadt) since she was eleven years old. This town is seven kilometers away from her home village Moszczanka. Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.*



Figure 17 & 18 (p. 165). *The Marian Column* (pol. "Kolumna Maryjna", ger. "Mariensäule") on the market square in Prudnik. It was constructed in 1694 and, similar to the statue to St. Nepomuk, illustrates the historical influence of Catholicism in the city. Thekla Scholz almost certainly ran errands as a maid in this marketplace. Photo by Krzysztof Frańczak.





Figure 19. *The Mission House of the Holy Cross (ger. Missionhaus Heiligkreuz) in Nysa (ger. "Neisse"), founded in 1892 by Fr. Janssen from the Society of the Divine Word. It was the first Catholic mission house in Prussia since the "Kulturkampf". Martha (Sr. Bertholdine) and Rosalia (Sr. Fortunata) Scholz joined this order. Sr. Bertholdine was even sent by them on mission to German colony of Togo in Africa. Perhaps they started their monastic life here. Photo by Maria Frańczak.*

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**Robert Swearengin** is a graduate student in art history at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and earned his dual Bachelor's degrees in history and art history from the University of Kansas. For the past few years, he has owned and directed a successful commercial art gallery in Kansas City. His main areas of study are the local and regional history of Kansas and Missouri.

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**Maymouna Tine-Lehmann** is a student of history and French literature in her last semester of her Bachelor's degree. Her main interests lie in medieval and early modern history with a special focus on the role of women in positions of power.

**Barbara Tobler** is a graduate student at the University of Vienna and plans to complete a Master's degree in European ethnology in 2021. Previously, she worked as a curator at an ethnographic museum.

**Michele Valentine** recently resumed her studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2019. She previously earned a Master's degree in art history with an emphasis in ancient art in 2010.

**Joanna Wojdon** is an Associate professor and chair of the Department of the Methodology of Teaching History and Civic Education in the Department of History at the University of Wrocław as well as a member of the Steering Committee of the International Federation for Public History. Her other areas of interest include the political influence on education and the history of the Polish Americans after World War Two.

**Zehua Yin** is an undergraduate student of history at the University of Hamburg. He is interested in both Western history and Chinese history, especially military history.







In 1911, Thekla E. Scholz migrated at the age of 23 from her rural village in Upper Silesia to work as a maid in the United States. She and her husband Robert J. Kiefer, an itinerate cabinet maker and musician, settled in Kansas City after he served in the German Army during the First World War. Thanks to Thekla Scholz's lifelong habit of preserving holy cards, letters, photographs, and postcards, scholars can study her migration and subsequent life in Missouri as well as the ongoing challenges faced by her family and friends in both countries.

In 2020, the Robert J. Kiefer and Thekla E. Scholz Collection became the primary focus of a collaborative international online research seminar and project involving four faculty members and more than thirty graduate students in art history, ethnography, history, and public history from the Universities of Hamburg, Vienna, Wrocław, Missouri-Kansas City and -St. Louis. *German Migration to Missouri 2.0* consists of student-authored microhistories focusing on this one German-American family. It offers rare glimpses into the experience of German-American migration and acculturation through the lens of a fascinating working-class woman.