

## St. Louis Freie Gemeinde

“Freethought” came to St. Louis by way of the many Germans that arrived after the failed revolutions of 1848. Freethinkers believed in a strong central government and rational thought (instead of church dogma), wanting to break free from the authority of their homeland. The Freie Gemeinde (Free Community) of North St. Louis was founded in 1850, and was the first of its kind in the United States. The organization performed many functions of a church, but without the religion, including providing a school that taught German. Its members were influential in politics. They also held festivals, brought in speakers, had a library, sold cemetery plots, and more. It disbanded in 1972, although their numbers became progressively smaller throughout the 1900s due to anti-German sentiment and other factors. The Emerson History & Genealogy Center holds four microfilm rolls that contain the records of the organization, including membership lists, if you’d like to see if you have an ancestor who was a member!

For more information:

“Freethought” Wikipedia article:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freethought>

Film guide at the State Historical Society of Missouri:

<https://files.shsmo.org/manuscripts/saint-louis/S0037.pdf>

Records at the Missouri Historical Society:

<https://mohistory.org/search?text=freie%20gemeinde>

Freie Gemeinde in Sauk City, Wisconsin, at the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies:

<https://mki.wisc.edu/exhibits/virtual-exhibits-2/sauk-city-wisconsin-freie-gemeinde/>

Last surviving group in Sauk City:

<https://www.freecongregation.org/home.aspx>

SLCL *PastPorts* article:

<https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/pastports-10-2017.pdf>

The St. Louis Freie Gemeinde is mentioned in several books about Germans in St. Louis at the Emerson History & Genealogy Center, including:

*The German Forty-Eighters in the United States* by Charlotte L. Branceforte (R 973.0431 G373)

*German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* by Alison Clark Efford (R 973.0431 E27G)

*The German Element in St. Louis: A Translation from German of Ernst D. Kargau's St. Louis in Former Years: A Commemorative History of the German Element* by Ernst D. Kargau, et al. (R 977.866 K18G)