

ST. Louis German social groups

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Was your ancestor involved in an organized German social group? Considering the huge number of groups in St. Louis between the 1870s-1920, it's quite possible! Germans formed groups for many purposes and often carried out multiple activities within a single group. The most widespread types of organizations were:

- **Benevolent / protective associations.** Before insurance, pensions, unions or Social Security, such groups collected dues that would be distributed to members who met with misfortune. They also visited the sick and attended funerals. Such associations could be founded based on shared home region, skill or job type, and other factors. They strengthened their bonds with social activities.
- **Turnvereins**, or Turners. Germans gathered for group physical fitness, singing, and socializing (some Turner had taverns).
- **Singing societies.** These could be standalone organizations, or a sub-activity within another larger group.
- **“Landmannschaftliche” Vereins.** These groups representing a specific Germanic region of origin might be purely social, or they might have a benevolent / protective function.

Research strategies

Groups had officers, whose names were listed in publications by and about the group. Maybe your ancestor was one!

Even if you don't know German, be alert for these words in a document or newspaper article. They could be tips that your ancestor was involved in one of these groups:

Bund (Band)

Verein (Union)

Gesellschaft (Society)

Zirkel (Circle)

Directory listing German social groups

Deutscher Vereins-Almanach, 1910: <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/Lib488>

Using city directories to research German social groups

Look for the “Societies” section, usually at the end of the volume. Many Germans belonged to “mainstream, ” national or international fraternal organizations (Druids, Elks, Woodmen etc.) These groups had numerous chapters and the larger ones have their own subheadings in the directory.

- Look for German-centric lodge names: Allemania, Concordia, Germania, Goethe, Harmonie, Humboldt, Lessing, Schiller, Teutonia – especially if your ancestor was living nearby

There were also national organizations that were formed specifically by and for Germans:

- Sons of Hermann – mutual aid, founded 1840
- Harugari – mutual aid, founded 1847
- Allgemeiner Deutscher Unterstützungs Verein – mutual aid, founded 18??
- Steuben Society of America –fraternal, founded 1919

Also try looking under Miscellaneous. Clues: words in the German language, German place names, or simply the word *German*.

Selected background reading on Germans and immigration in St. Louis

Search for these in the MHS library catalog: <https://mohistory.searchmobi.us.org/search>

Crawford, Ruth Elizabeth. *The Immigrant in St. Louis: A Survey*. St. Louis: [St. Louis School of Social Economy], 1916. <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/Lib264>

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

Kargau, Ernst D. *The German Element in St. Louis*. Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 2000 (translation by Tolzmann and Bek.) This book recreates the feeling of walking through a St. Louis German neighborhood in the 1850s-70s.

Padberg, Daniel L. “German Ethnic Theatre in Missouri: Cultural Assimilation.” Dissertation, 1980.

Stadler, Ernst Anton. 1965. *The German Settlement of St. Louis*. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas.

Wanko, Andrew. “The glories of Germanhood: a history of the Turnverein in St. Louis, Missouri.”

Maps

Map of the city of St. Louis: German population, Census of 1930: <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/Lib380-030>

Map showing density of population East of Grand Ave, 1900: <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/Lib-OCLC-42946854>

Resources on specific groups

Available at the
Missouri Historical Society Library & Research Center (in person or online)

Turnvereins / Turners

Search for information about individual Turnverein groups here:

<https://mohistory.searchmobius.org/search?option=subject&query=Turnvereins--Missouri--Saint%20Louis>

MHS archives and photos relating to the Turners:

<https://mohistory.org/collections?text=turnverein&images=0>

“Landmannschaftliche” Vereins - representing a Germanic region

Most links are to MHS library catalog or archives finding aids

- **Deutsch-Oesterreichischer Unterstuetzungsverein** (Austria)
 - [25-year history](#) (1909)
- **Gruetli Verein** (Swiss)
 - Records: <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/A2932>
- **St. Louis Plattduetschen Club**. (*note the unusual spelling; this is not a typo*)
 - [100-year history](#) (1976).
- **Rheinisch Frohsinn** (Rhineland)
 - [75th anniversary history](#) (1931)
- **St. Louis Badischer Unterstutzungs Verein** (Baden)
 - Artifacts: <https://mohistory.org/collections?text=badischer&images=0>
- **St Louis Bayern-Verein** (Bavaria) [50th anniversary history](#) (1933).
 - MHS Library also has 25-year history; Bylaws.
- **St. Louis Schwaben Unterstutzungs-Verein** / St. Louis Schwaben Freund (Swabia)
 - Photos: <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/P0403-03791>

German theater

- *Geschichte des Deutschen Theaters* [History of the German Theater], 1842-1902.
 - Digitized version: <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/A1624-00097>

Singing societies

- Herwegh Saengerbund records, 1901-194: <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/A0691>
- Socialer Saengerchor records, 1866-1880: <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/A1537>