Gemutlikeit, Schnitzelbank, and Kitsch

German American Caricature in Vintage Postcards
Postcards provided a ubiquitous portrait of everyday culture in the 20th century, documenting buildings and streets, events and community life, business advertisements, and people and places of interest. There was also a category of comic postcards that contained cartoons and caricatures on every topic. As part of this category, there were cards illustrating German American life. Many of them showed a stereotyped view of German American heritage – beer, sausage, pretzels, lederhosen, and dialect.
Often these stereotypes were carried over from Germany by immigrants and perpetuated by or re-created in the United States by German Americans themselves. They became a source of cultural identity.

But when is an image a straightforward rendering or a stereotype? At what point does an image shift from a faithful graphic representation to exaggerated caricature?
Caricature and stereotype represent a cultural method to deal with the unfamiliar, and for political, religious, economic, and social reasons to “pigeonhole” a particular group. Caricature is a way to assert control on both sides of an issue.
In 1869, a joke was printed in the Ouachita Telegraph in Monroe, Louisiana. As was the custom for many of the nation’s newspapers at the time, stories and anecdotes from around the country were picked up by local papers for their readership. In this instance, the joke came from Cincinnati. As it went, an Englishman is sitting in a saloon in Cincinnati, drinking his mug of ale. In comes a German and sits down next to him, calling for a beer from the bartender. The Englishman glances at his neighbor, notices he is “German” and says, “Tell me, sir, do you find lager beer more intoxicating than ale?” The German looks at him, carefully considers the question, and thoughtfully replies, “Vell as to dat, I don’t know. I haf from fifty to sixty glasses each day, but I don’t know vat woulde happen ef I vas to make a pig of myself!”
A hot bird, a pretty maid and a cold stein, Makes Life worth living, all of the time.
“Every man for himself, and the brewer for us all.”
Typically the shift comes about at times of societal stress or fear resulting from basic access and competition for resources – political influence, religious influence, jobs and housing, or even for what would be considered as tension over the social and moral order of a community, for example. Germans, like any other immigrant group – or newcomer in any society for that matter – were being characterized not only by their obvious habits and cultural proclivities, but by the perceived traits of their ethnicity and heritage as well.
Postcard caricatures of German Americans played upon the connection to lager beer as an everyday aspect of their lives, as well as part of gluttonous appetites, even to the extent that it figure in their ethnic “evolution.”
Hof-Bräu Cafe

SAN FRANCISCO – PACIFIC BLVD.
COR. MARKET & 4TH STS.

Wen Würste und Schinken
Mit Sauerkraut winken,
Gedenkt auch der Säue
In Liebe und Treue.
Sam Learning to be a glassblower

Ode Jolly

How is Harry and the jin he gave you?

Lena Po.
Beste Gesundheit

I wish you all the "Luck" a human being can offer.

Ach! I am so contented I wish you was here.
IF DRINKING INTERFERES WITH YOUR BUSINESS GIVE UP BUSINESS.
“I’m Now Touring In My Popular, Old Model” –
As another example, the image of working-class Germans as lecherous men was one that began as political cartoons in mid-19th century newspapers and tabloids, and would continue in comic postcards well into the 1950s.
I raise mein stein to Voman-kind,
und makes dis leettle jokes,
she vas der clingin' vine so veak,
und we der sturdy Oaks;
but ven in bed so sick ve lay,
'Ah, ha!' was youst de oder way.
OH BOY! WHAT A PARTY

A BEER... A PRETZEL AND YOU!
The so-called “Sauerkraut Triangle” cities of Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee all demonstrated their German heritage in a variety of ways. The sentiment “Vas you efer in Zinzinnati?” graced several cards from 1905 to 1920, as did any other card that could show off a Cincinnati German accent.
Ein Tenorist fast ohnegleichen.
Das ist der Schneidermeister Zwirn,
Das hohe C kann er erreichen,
Gestiegen ist es ihm in's Hirn.

Saengerfest des Arbeiter-Saengerbundes des
Nordwestens. Cincinnati, im Juni 1913.
Postcards from Milwaukee emphasized that city’s German elements of beer, pretzels, and sausage as did no other. It almost seemed that it was a campaign by the Chamber of Commerce as postals from the era of 1900 to 1920 frequently showed tourists being squired about on a tour of the city’s famous breweries, riding in buses or wagons built of beer barrels with beer stein lights and pretzels and sausage as part of the vehicles’ mechanisms.
A Close Game
In Milwaukee
"How Ish Dot For High"

ONE VIEW OF "MILWAUKEE"

CLARK ENGRAVING & PRINTING CO., MILWAUKEE
"I'M ALL ALONE, BUT IN GOOD SPIRITS"—IN MILWAUKEE

I will see you on the 4th, expect to get there about the 3rd. How is everything?

"HOW ISH DOT FOR HIGH LIFE IN MILWAUKEE"
One of the mainstays of comic German American imagery over the last century has been the Katzenjammer Kids. Created by German immigrant Rudolph Dirks for the Sunday comics in William Randolph Hearst’s *The New York Journal*, Hans and Fritz Katzenjammer made their debut on December 12, 1897.
Along with “Mamma” and “The Captain,” the boys spoke in a broken German-tinged accent, and were frequently being spanked for their mischief. This postcard, along with the preceding image, were promotional items distributed by the newspaper. When heated with an iron, a secret image appeared to explain the cartoon.
Temperance and prohibition issues were part of American life since the Colonial period, but by the mid 19th century an increasing focus of these matters was aimed at immigrant groups. By the turn of the 20th century, the domination of the national brewing industry by German Americans increasingly drew the attention of Prohibition advocates who saw the elimination of the beer and liquor trade exasperated by what they considered an urban foreign element.
Mailed from Milwaukee to Cincinnati in 1906, this postcard shows the effects of the passing of Prohibition legislation. German brewers who must “hang together” in light of the bans speaks to the fact that they felt the laws were ethnicity-based and that they must combine their self-interests into one. According to Mark L. Louden of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the phrase “side by each” was a “shibboleth of earlier Milwaukee English, assumed to be some kind of Germanism,” though he thinks it doubtful, as there are geographical sources elsewhere.
A postcard from 1923 shows the sarcastic dream of the end of Prohibition when German lager would flow once more.
On vaudeville stages, the “Dutch” comedian became a staple of ethnic caricature, along with African Americans and the Irish. The postcard from vaudevillian and musician Poppy Mayer shows him in the standard image of the stage German.
The “Dutch” comedian image developed from such characters as Groucho Marx’s “Professor Schnitzelbank” and comedy teams such as the one shown here. The most popular team was that of Joe Weber and Lew Fields as “Mike and Meyer,” whose slapstick antics featured a fractured German dialect. However, as World War I developed, the acts became less popular.
The temper of the times was changing. After the United States entered the war in 1917, national feeling about German American citizens quickened to a flashpoint of ethnic prejudice and recrimination. The intent was clear: faced with the elements of tension and fear, the views of the Progressive Era when America ostensibly sought to fully assimilate the immigrant, fight against machine politics, and to clean up the nation’s cities figuratively and literally, were recast in a time of war as emphasizing the German as Hun.
I'LL LICK ANY TWO HUNS

Ach, himmel! Vor vy you don't write
After World War II, an *erzatz* element of German Americanism began to emerge, typified by German-style restaurants, many of which had been in business for decades. Pseudo-Bavarian themes were revived, along with lederhosen-clad hosts and buxom servers. Traditional German foods were the features of the menus. Diners sat on benches at wooden tables, raising their steins and swaying to the catchy, but banal, singalong standard, the *Schnitzelbank Song*. It was a new way to stereotype German heritage, and promotional postcards created by restaurants illustrate this image very well.
“Here comes my pride” sings Karl the Chef as Miss Bunny Hare leaps proudly up to the waiting Herr Dimple Dumpling. They’ll join hands for ever and say “I DO” as they prepare for their leap into the steaming kettle, rich and bubbling over with delicious spices ... flavored to your taste. All are invited to the ceremony which is held every Thursday during the season. The reception starts at 11:00 A.M. and lasts until 8:30 P.M. It's a treat to eat Chef Karl's HASENPFEFFER MIT KLOESSE — Rabbit Stew with Dumpling.

Hasenpfeffer Mit Kloesse
Every Thursday

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AMERICA’S FAMOUS
MADER’S GERMAN RESTAURANT
1037 N, Third Street Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Greetings from 86th St. Brauhaus, N. Y.
By the 1970s community German American festivals grew in popularity, many of them labeled “Oktoberfest” and patterned after the famous – and centuries old – Oktoberfest of Munich. But how faithful were these festivals in sustaining a true German heritage? This question and others engage scholars today. Is all of it a contrived notion of “Germanism” or is real in the sense that it fosters pride in ancestry – albeit with modern American touches from the Chicken Dance to non-German beer?
What part of German history in America is a holdover from the Old World to the New? What is authentic, or, a useful blending of cultures? And do we as archivists and historians, as linguists and social scientists, move sufficiently beyond the *kitsch* caricature of good-natured, costumed folks who are large-bellied and full of beer and sausage?
And how do German Americans characterize themselves today? As inheritors of certain language and linguistic patterns, or as caretakers of cultural survivals or revivals? Or, as descendants of a significant immigrant group who require scholarly investigation and interpretation? Postcards trace at least one aspect of German American heritage.