Sophia Rouse earned a Bachelor of Arts in History and German in May 2022. Her immediate plans post-graduation are to attend Texas A&M University in the fall to work towards her graduate degree in history. She wants to continue studying German American immigration history in the southeastern United States and hopes to be able to understand how the formation of Germany and the Reconstruction era in the United States, both in the late-nineteenth-century, influenced German political involvement. While at Memphis, Sophia has been active on campus as a member of Alpha Delta Pi, Helen Hardin Honors College, and the Student History Society.

Sophia Rouse

Germanic Emigrants of Memphis, 1865 - 1880

Faculty Sponsor

Dr. Susan E. O'Donovan

Abstract

During the nineteenth century, Germanic people from modern-day Germany and surrounding countries including Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland integrated into Memphis. By 1865, Germanic emigrants had begun to transform Memphis as their new home. Despite being outnumbered by Irish emigrants, between 1865-1880 through educational involvement, Germanic emigrants enriched Memphis to further establish the city. After the Civil War, Memphis transformed their public school system as education-related legislation developed across Tennessee. Germanic Memphians aided in the establishment of public schools and public education in Memphis during the formational years of the Shelby County Board of Education. Moreover, the expansion of public schools included the creation of black schools and developing segregation in the south. Understanding what role Germanic emigrants had in this development as Germanic teachers taught at both black and white schools, provides more understanding into the creation of this system. While integrating into the City of Memphis, Germanic Memphians founded churches that created communities within the larger city. Although some German churches had parochial schools, Germanic Memphians still served on the Board of Education and as teachers to help advance the school system in their new home. Germanic influence helped to establish Memphis during the late 19th century and expand the city after the Civil War. By studying Germanic emigration in a city where Irish emigration is the main focus, more insight to Memphis' educational and political histories is offered.

Introduction

Between 1865-1880, almost 2,000 Germanic emigrants resided in Memphis. Much of the historical scholarship on nineteenth-century Memphis describes a city dominated by black and white Southerners. While that is true, it was also a multi-national, multi-ethnic place that included a sizeable population of European immigrants, including around 1,946 of Germanic origin.[i] Germanic emigrants embedded themselves in the Bluff City, especially through their growing involvement in politics and public education. Political engagement, in their new home and their former home, was common among Germanic emigrants. In post-Civil War Memphis, Germanic immigrants participated freely in the city's politics, unlike the formerly enslaved African Americans. Through their involvement in the city government—the Board of Aldermen, the Board of Education, and the Common Council—Germanic Memphians enriched their city and became active in the proceedings of their new home.

As the City of Memphis grew in the early 19th century, the growth aligned with the prioritization of public education by the state. In Memphis, the lack of a well-funded school drew distinct attention from the state legislature. According to the Tennessee state government in Memphis and in Tennessee, while private and religious schools existed, there was still the need for well-funded public schools. Although the Irish founded some of the first public schools in Memphis in 1848, Germanic emigrants helped expand the Memphis public school system directly through teaching and serving on the Board of Education during the school system's formational years after the emigration waves of the mid-nineteenth century. [ii]

Methodology

Most historians of Memphis history and historians of German Americans in the Reconstruction era have focused primarily on the shifting relationships between black and white southerners. Beverly Bond and Janann Sherman's *Memphis in Black and White* (2003) examines the changing social and economic relationships between black and white Memphians during the late nineteenth century. Beverly Bond and Susan O'Donovan's *Remembering the Memphis Massacre* (2020) and Beverly Bond's chapter, "Educating the Common Man," in John M. Amis and Paul M. Wright's *Race, Economics, and the Politics of Educational Change: The Dynamics of School District Consolidation in Shelby County, Tennessee* (2018) concentrate on specific events and legislation that highlight the changing relationships between black and white Memphians in their narratives.[iii]

The abundant scholarship on Germanic immigration to the United States has focused primarily on Germanic immigration to the northern United States and the Midwest due to their larger communities. Walter Kamphoefner's *Germans in America, A Concise History* (2021), focuses on Germanic immigrants in the Midwest. Although Kamphoefner touches on some southern states, he limits his attention to Texas. David Blackbourn's *The Long Nineteenth Century, A History of Germany, 1780-1918 and Matin Kitchen's A History of Modern Germany*, 1800 to Present discuss Germanic immigration to the United States during the mid-nineteenth century, but both books specify northern or midwestern cities as destinations. In more recent years, scholarship has begun to investigate Germanic immigration to the southern United States. Kathleen Condray's *Das Arkansas Echo* (2020) and Ellen C. Merrill's *Germans of Louisiana* (2005) focus on southern states.[iv] Yet few historians have investigated the almost 2,000 Germanic emigrants who settled in Memphis during the mid-nineteenth century as Memphis' second largest immigrant group.[v]

Understanding the Origins of Germanic Memphians

Understanding the Germany that Germanic Memphians emigrated from provides insight about their involvement in the Shelby County Board of Education. The 1840s saw a change among the German states as the identities and priorities of residents changed. The revolutions brought by the differing ideas of a German Confederation forced some Germanic emigrants to leave Germany for religious reasons, but most left in the wake of failed political revolutions. Germanic emigrants who grew up during the formation of the German Confederation experienced the differences between the Germanic states rather than a unified Germany. After the Congress of Vienna, there was a call for reform among the Germanic states and regions. The idea of what reform would look like varied among the different states. However, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic regime helped to create a temporary sense of German nationalism among the states. Prussia and southern Germanic states had disparities with their different constitutions, governments, and economies.[vi]

In 1848, the Frankfurt Parliament attempted to piece together and form a singular "Germany." However, cultural, linguistic, geographical, and historical aspects limited the expansion and concise formation of the German Confederation. The variations among the states and populations created a mosaic region and further complicated the "German" identity. Moreover, the Frankfurt Parliament attempted to piece together a Germany that excluded states within the modern borders of Germany, such as Holstein

and Schleswig. The individual wars with these states in order to incorporate them into the German Confederation further individualized the Germanic identity. Moreover, the Frankfurt Parliament pushed to expand the German Confederation to also include Bohemia and Poland. By the latter part of the 1840s, widespread poverty and a lack of political representation among multiple economic classes began to spark revolutions in the Germanic regions. Violence began occurring throughout the Germanic states and regions. While Prussia and Austria experienced the most violence, areas like Frankfurt, Munich, and Baden also faced upheavals. [vii]

Germanic emigrants came from these individual provinces rather than a distinct unified country. Although the modern borders of Germany include the states of Baden, Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hessen, and Saxony, Germanic emigrants came from these individual provinces rather than from a distinct unified country. The surrounding countries of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, and Prussia also contained "Germans." 86,000 Germanic inhabitants lived in the neighboring countries of Belgium and the Netherlands; both were considered "Little" Germany. The thirty-eight states that formed the German Confederation in the mid-nineteenth century each had their own government. Most were monarchies, though they also participated in the Bundestag. Each state responded to the 1848 revolutions differently, thus furthering their individuality. [viii]

The 1860 federal manuscript census illuminates the complexity of "German" identity prior to the formation of Germany (see Figures 1 and Table 1).[ix] According to the census taker, while 895 Germanic Memphians identified "Germany" as their home, nearly as many (638) associated "home" with specific areas such as Baden, Prussia, Sachsen, Saxony, and Württemberg. Germanic emigrants were one of the only groups, aside from two distinct families from the United Kingdom, to list specific cities such as Bremen, Hannover, and Heidelberg, thus implying a different connection to their homeland's identity and potential reasons for leaving.[x]

Homeland	People from Each Region *N*
"Germany"	805
Prussia	151
Switzerland	101
Baden	102
Bavaria	56
Northern Germany (Hannover, Bremen, Hamburg)	53
Württemberg	42
Hessen	39
Sachsen	31
Denmark	18
Holland	13
Austria	10
Miscellaneous Cities	8
Poland	8
The Netherlands	2
Total	**1439**

Table 1. Germanic Memphians Places of Birth, 1860 - by Number

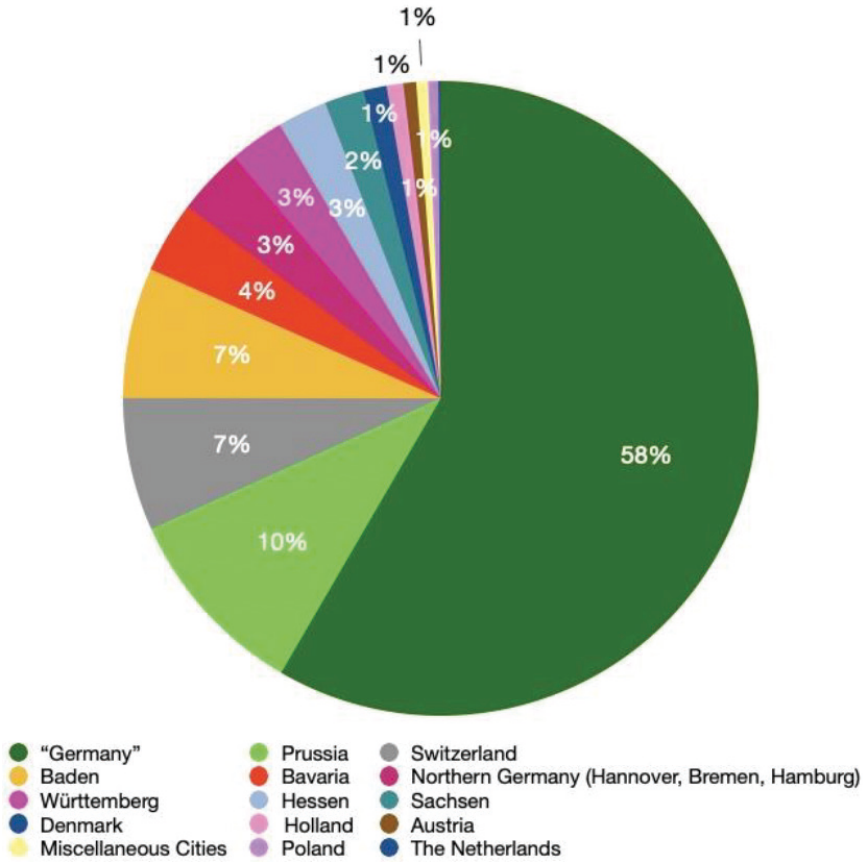


Figure 1. Germanic Memphians' Place of Birth, 1860 - in percentages

These ties to specific homelands did not erode very quickly. Indeed, according to the data collected for the 1870 federal census, the connection to the German identity as Germanic emigration to Memphis increased.[xi] The 1870 census shows a more diverse group of Germanic Memphians. The Germanic population expanded from 1,533 to 1,856 during the second major wave of Germanic emigration (see Figure 2. and Table 2.).[xii]

Homeland	People from Each Region *N*
"Germany"	580
Prussia	532
Bavaria	217
Switzerland	135
Baden	110
Northern Germany (Hannover, Bremen, Hamburg)	57
Württemberg	50
Poland	38
Hessen	35
Sachsen	35
Holland	24
Miscellaneous Cities	20
Austria	12
Denmark	7
The Netherlands	2
Westphalia	2
Total	**1856**

Table 2. Germanic Memphians Places of Birth, 1870 - by number

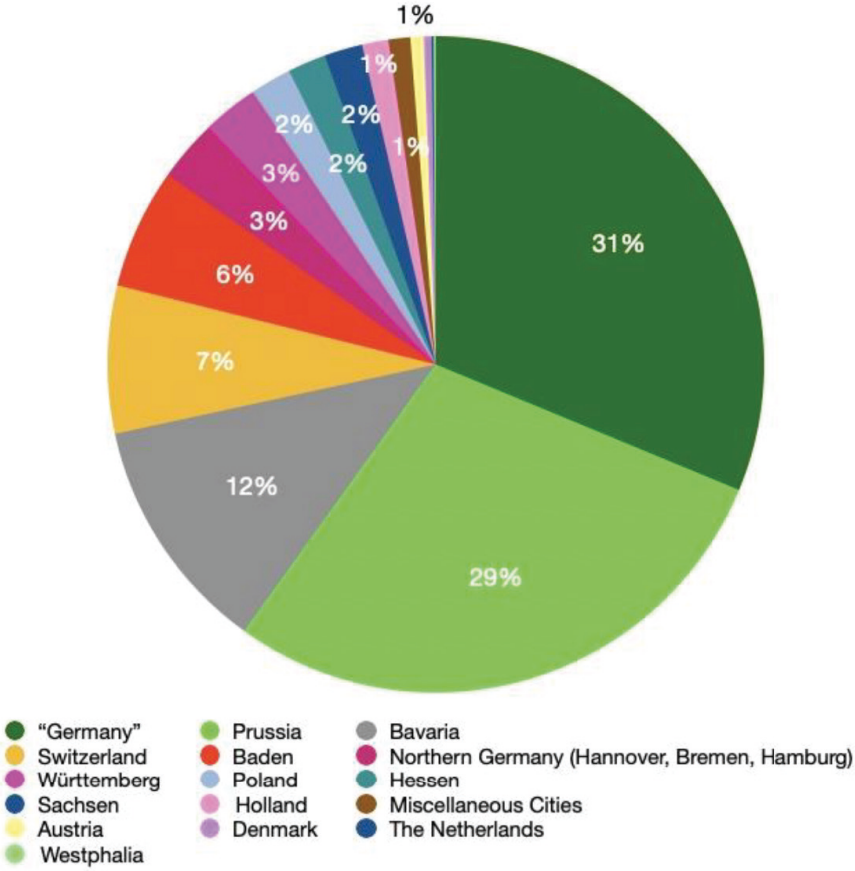
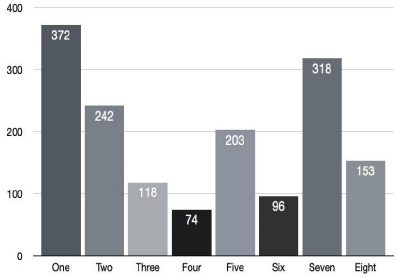


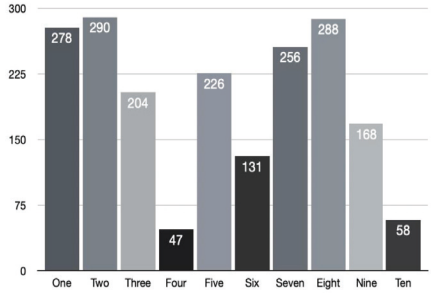
Figure 2. Germanic Memphians Place of Birth, 1870 - by percentage



Number of Germanic Emigrants per Ward 1860

Wards	Germanic Emigrants
One	372
Two	242
Three	118
Four	74
Five	203
Six	96
Seven	318
Eight	153

Figure 3. Germanic Distribution in Memphis 1860



Number of Germanic Emigrants per Ward 1870

Wards	Germanic Emigrants
One	278
Two	290
Three	204
Four	47
Five	226
Six	131
Seven	256
Eight	288
Nine	168
Ten	58

Figure 4. Germanic Distribution in Memphis 1870

The census was voluntary, so it can be assumed that some "Germans" were not included. The number of Memphians who identified "Germany" as their place of birth decreased to 580, with Prussia now at 532.[xiii]The Germanic emigrants in Memphis coincided with patterns of emigration from the German confederation in the mid-nineteenth century. Prussia's Rhine Valley and northern areas like Saxony, Mecklenburg, Württemberg, and eastern Prussia experienced heavy waves of emigration to the United States.[xiv] While "Germany" remained the primary place of birth for most emigrants, Prussian-born emigrants consistently represented a quarter of the Germanic emigrants in each ward in 1870. Moreover, the Germanic varied as only 31% claimed "Germany" as their place of birth in 1870, whereas the rest of Germanic emigrants claimed specific provinces and cities.[xv] Germanic emigrants lived throughout the city and concentrated within different wards (see Figure 3). A majority of the shops were located near the Germanic churches and Germanic culture clubs in the first through fifth wards (see Figure 4)[xvi]. These businesses kept Germanic Memphians in Memphis and aided in their desire to participate in politics.[xvii] Moreover, the grouped-together locations of these businesses and German-language institutions furthered the Germanic identity in Memphis.

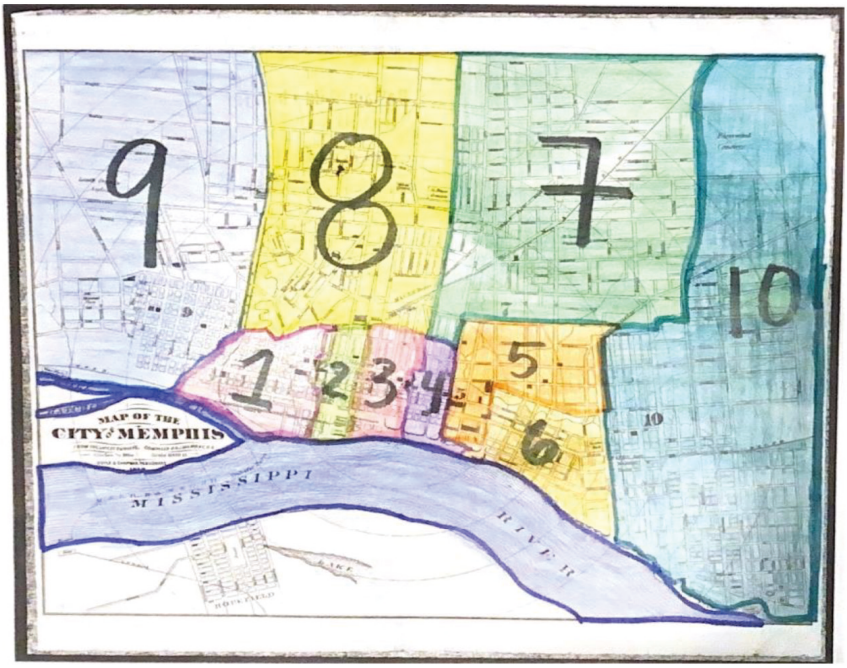


Figure 5. Map of Memphis Wards, 1872

Figure 6. Map of Germanic Memphis.

Germanic emigrants were in but not necessarily of their new home. Although embedded into the city's social and economic structures, they nonetheless retained connections to their European roots. The census records reveal clear distinctions among the different identities of Germanic emigrants. While they unified to form German-language organizations and religious institutions, the newcomers also maintained ties to their specific homelands, creating something of a mosaic pattern that kept Germans visible even as they contributed to the city's well-being more generally through education.

Germanic Involvement in Memphis Board of Education

Many German-language immigrants voted and were active in school board politics. [xviii] In the 1860s, as the number of Germanic immigrants increased, Germanic leaders supported the addition of German language instruction in public schools throughout the United States. [xix] Their interests in the Board of Education shows their integration into Memphis. In 1865, after the Civil War, German-language emigrants not only ran for positions on the Board of Education, but also actively voted and supported it.

The government of the City of Memphis changed after the Civil War, mainly due to education and an increase in population. Germanic immigrants were involved in each aspect. Until 1868-1869, the Board of Aldermen included an education standing committee. In 1869, the state of Tennessee officially founded the Board of Education for the City of Memphis. Prior to this, the board of school visitors had allowed for one elected citizen from each ward to be involved in the discussions about public education, while the Board of Aldermen still had the primary jurisdiction about public education. But after 1869, the Board of Education became a separate, distinct entity of the City of Memphis that included two elected members from each ward.[xx] Aldermen functioned as members of the education subcommittee until the establishment of the Board of Education. [xxi] The late 1860s saw the prioritization of education in Memphis. There was a desire, among many but not all, to create schools for African Americans and to get more children to attend school in Memphis. [xxii] Germanic immigrants participated in politics as teachers, voters, and members of the Board of Education.

The most significant contribution of Germanic emigrants was the expansion of the Board of Education. According to Dr. Walter Kamphoefner, Germanic immigrants valued education. The focus on education was a common trend among Germanic immigrants throughout the United States as Germany also concentrated on the accessibility of education. Religion and politics influenced the Germanic involvement in education. Freethinkers

and German-speaking Jews supported public education, whereas Germanic Catholics and Lutherans supported private education. However, all preferred schools included the German language. [xxiii] In Memphis, Trinity Lutheran School and the school at St. Mary's German Catholic Church with German Jews on the Board of Education reflects this pattern.

Many Germanic immigrants immersed themselves in public education. During the 1865 Board of Education elections, Germans voted for reform to expand public education. While some newspapers such as the *Memphis Daily Appeal* speculated that there were underlying attempts to add German and Dutch lessons to schools, no evidence was ever produced.[xxiv] However, a push to add the German language instruction to public schools would not have been misplaced considering the involvement of Germanic immigrants in public education. The Board of Education purchased supplies for schools from local Germanic merchants such as F. Katzenbach and Charles Damman. While Damman served on the Board of Education with the School House and Furniture committee, Katzenbach was a music professor as well. [xxv]

German-language voters voted for Germanic candidates—"Germanic candidates" included German-language speakers, candidates from Germany, or people supported by a cohort of Germanic citizens. According to Germanic voters in 1865, in order to have reform in public schools, Richard Hines, the superintendent, needed to be replaced. While voting allowed many Germanic male emigrants to participate in their community, many also ran to enact reform in schools.[xxvi] Joseph Gronauer, Dr. Laski, John Hollywood, John Fuerst, Hans Lemon and Dr. Jacob Peres were among the candidates Germanics voted for to replace Richard Hines.[xxvii] While those candidates opposed Hines, Germanic candidates ran in other wards and occasionally against each other. Dr. Jacob Peres and T.W. Buttinghaus were among the Germanic candidates that won.[xxviii] During the 1860s most Germanics lived in Ward One and Ward Six.[xxix] The election results printed in the Memphis Daily Bulletin show the influence of Germans as both candidates and voters. Of the twenty-one candidates, ten were either German or Dutch or had support from Germanic voters thus reinforcing both the integration of Germans in Memphis and their position as the second largest immigrant in Memphis during the nineteenth-century. [xxx]

In 1867, Germanic emigrants occupied positions on the school visitors board as funding for schools became a debated topic. Moreover, two of the aldermen who served on the school subcommittee, J.C. Holst and E.W. Wickersham, were of Germanic descent. [xxxi] Both Holst and Wickersham favored giving money from the city government to the public schools, implying a dedication to education. While several aldermen debated funding the

schools, the German-language aldermen favored the improvement of the public schools.[xxxii]

For every election year between 1865 and 1880, Germans held positions in the school system, whether on the school board, school board visitors, or as teachers. The exception was 1868, when no Germanic Memphians held positions as school board members and no Germanic aldermen served on the school committee.[xxxiii] In 1869, Germanics had one person to represent them on the board.[xxxiv] The following year saw four Germanics as members of the Board of Education.[xxxv] While Germanic emigrants occupied positions on the Board of Education, they were not longstanding members. Many held positions for a year with the exception of a few who remained on the board for two years; others held positions consecutively for two terms.[xxxvi]

Irish immigrants constantly outnumbered Germanic immigrants. The Irish population was double that of the Germanic population between 1865-1880. While on the board of education, Germanics held positions within the board itself, such as board secretary, finance committee, and building committee. Each member typically held one to two committee positions.[xxxviii] The number of Germanic immigrants on the board of education never exceeded four at a time while the twenty positions were available.

Education provided the gateway for female Germanic immigrants to contribute significantly to their community. Teaching allowed for some female Germanic immigrants to shape Memphis. As Germanic men expanded and rejoined the board of education, Germanic teachers taught at schools for both white and black students.[xxxviii] Through teaching, Germanics expanded education in Memphis. Annie Reudelhuber migrated to Memphis after being born in New Orleans to German emigrants. Reudelhuber taught at the Market School near Third street. The school welcomed students primarily of foreign birth.[xxxix]

Women such as Reudelhuber and her sister, Pauline, established leadership roles as principals of schools. [xl] The Shelby County Board of Education prioritized principals to energize schools and provide results.[xli] In 1874, Annie Reudelhuber transitioned from teacher to principal. [xlii] The job of principal was originally reserved for men. Therefore, female teachers, including the German teachers, worked to expand their leadership role over the schools during the Board of Education's first years.[xliii]

Germanic Parochial Schools in Memphis

Nationally, Germanic emigrants funded German-language parochial schools.[xliv] Although the number of schools increased in Memphis during

the late 19th century and Germanics were active in public schools, they also funded the parochial school at Trinity Lutheran Church, the "German Church." [xliv] In the Midwest, Lutheran Germanic emigrants funded schools that catered to their group. [xlvi] The school at Trinity Lutheran was no different. Trinity Lutheran school promoted both the Lutheran religion and Germanic culture.[xlvii]

The church organized the school in 1855, upon the establishment of the church. While the school was open to the public—the public that could pay—the school catered to German-language emigrants, displaying an inclusive exclusivity. Moreover, the city directories did not advertise the school at Trinity Lutheran Church, and they did not always advertise the church. In O.F. Vedder's *A History of Memphis, Tennessee Vol. II*, Trinity Lutheran does not list a school.

The school functioned as a Germanic school that welcomed all children from the neighborhood located in the Third Ward. Classes were taught in English, but the church required teachers to be fluent in both English and German. While the church welcomed members and school children, primarily of German descent, the school board prioritized having a German Lutheran teacher. By prioritizing who taught the children and enforcing a German-Lutheran school teacher, the church imposed a level of exclusivity in order to maintain a specific identity.[xlviii] By having specific religious and language requirements, the church school committee could ensure the influence of a certain identity. However, the church did not require a teacher's ethnicity to be German. Trinity Lutheran was founded and formed primarily by German-language Lutheran emigrants who were also involved in the City of Memphis.

Conclusion

Germanic Memphians contributed to the overall expansion of education in the City of Memphis. While they founded parochial schools in order to maintain their Germanic identity, they integrated into the City of Memphis by being elected to the board of education and city government. As government officials, they involved themselves in the greater fabric of Memphis. Although in Memphis, Germanic emigrants continued their political involvement in their homeland through education.

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