

# H-Net Reviews

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**Christian Gellinek.** *Going Dutch–Gone American: Germans Settling North America.* Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2003. xiv + 222 pp. EUR 19.50 (paper), ISBN 978-3-402-05182-5.

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A positive advantage of the growth in interest in Atlantic history in the past two decades has been a renewed focus on, and investigation of, American ethnic history. Starting in the 1970s scholars, including A.G. Roeber, M.S. Wokeck, and A.S. Fogelmann, have cleared a path for many historians of German America to follow.[1] These studies have successfully highlighted the general fascination with, and keen interest in, America which peaked in German-speaking Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From the closing decades of the eighteenth century German-language publications looked to America with a curious, yet sympathetic, eye.[2] One can find in the German-language literature of the early nineteenth century two pictures of America: one, emphasizing its rawness, newness, hypocrisy, and materialism, cursed by a gross reliance on slavery; the other, representing the United States as a country where the refugees of Germany could find freedom from class systems, from secret police, from bureaucracy and censorship, and from a standing army.[3] Significant publications from this period became the common currency in the exchange of opinions about America. These works awoke a new audience to the possibilities, and potential, of America as a site of success and a resource for refuge. Such sentiments were not uncommon from the earliest years of the United States. In his *Vaterlandschronik* of 1787, Charles Frederick Daniel Schubart wrote of the “thirteen golden gates in the Republic . . . open to the victims of intolerance and despotism,” and hailed America as the hope of mankind, and the seat of “a future universal culture.”[4] Heinrich Heine’s *Europamärchen* was at this time, it seemed, best remedied by a stimulating America. Countering Heine’s positivism, the poet Nikolas Lenau freed his fantasy on

the roar of Niagara and other locations in North America, writing parodies on Yankee Doodle and referring to the United States as the “verschweinte” instead of the “Vereinte Staaten.” Lenau found everything wrong, from American beds and the climate which gave him rheumatism, to the American government.[5] To a friend he wrote, “I have not seen here a courageous dog, a fiery horse, or a passionate human being” in America.[6]

The subject of German interest in America, and of German emigration to America, has thus preoccupied authors in both affected nations for a very long time. Christian Gellinek, author of *Going Dutch–Gone American: Germans Settling North America*, has worked in the fields of German Studies and German philology for over thirty years and, latterly, more specifically in the history of German migration to North America.[7] This contribution is a result of Christian Gellinek’s combined interests in the migration of German-speaking people to America and the resultant impact of these people on language development and toponymy in North America. In *Going Dutch*, Gellinek demonstrates the most important features of the migration process of Germans—both low and high and predominantly northwest Germans (p. xi)—to North America from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Gellinek shows how Germans were involved in other European colonial movements, particularly those of the Dutch, yet in this volume there is little or no engagement with Dutch historiography, or the extensive historiography of the Dutch overseas, despite the title.[8]

The author’s epistemological approach to this study is “four-pronged” (p. xii): nautical, geographical, topographical, and perceptual-linguistic, and his text is subdivided into six parts: chapter 1, “Pre-Emigration and

Transportation” (pp. 1-23); chapter 2, “Formation History” (pp. 25-51); chapter 3, “Founding History” (pp. 53-160); chapter 4, “Assimilation and Acculturation Problems” (pp. 161-190); chapter 5, “The Going Dutch” (pp. 191-204); and chapter 6, “Bibliographical Data” (pp. 205-221). The author begins his study with a pre-history of German trans-Atlantic emigration, examining the role of German traders, the Hansa, and the tramping traditions of Europe, including the craftsman’s journey *auf die Walz* for training (pp. 1-4). From the outset, Gellinek, as Giles Hoyt notes in his introduction to the volume, hopes to see how “smaller details of life and language are teased out of broader contexts and examined” (p. viii).

The author of the preface notes that, “while the methodological path may appear meandering, it in fact sets up the background for examining aspects of both colonial and post-colonial American history” (p. vii), yet this reviewer remains unconvinced. The narrative style—reliant on the first person—is curious and the text lacks a clear, overall structure. The relaxed, at times careless (and carelessly proofread) prose is also disappointing. Examples abound: “I do have spattered information about American officers” (p. 47); “I do not want to denigrate Duden overly much” (p. 43); “The first part of 1835 that Duden had in front of him to review, made his review the fourth, but first negatively written one in German” (p. 41); “I read the whole book with a mental reservation until I reached the author’s Note in the end” (p. 29). Other errors prove irritating: “Magdalen’s College [sic]” (p. 9, n. 12); and, in a text on German history, the inexcusable use of “Habspurg” (p. 3) and not Habsburg, even if condescending to local spelling practice elsewhere.

There are interesting gems of information in Gellinek’s book, such as his novel, and convincing, suggestion for the origin of the derogatory *Kraut* (p. 51, n. 53). But these passages are tempered, often immediately thereafter, by points that seem more opportune than pertinent, and at best highly debatable. Take, for example, the following: “This U.S. motto [*E pluribus unum*], as well as the Canadian motto, *A Mari Usque Ad Mare*, use Latin as a patina of respectability, and yet both are Germanic in spirit” (p. 51, n. 54). Surely this is not the case. These mottos or maxims are in Latin as that has been, and remains, the language of heraldry. While both may be “Germanic in spirit,” this is little more than coincidence. The many place names listed in chapter 3, “Founding History” (pp. 53-137), which examines the various processes of village and town naming in North America, may prove more interesting, certainly to the amateur genealogist commencing work on his or her

family history. Indeed, it is this audience that will gain most from this work. Clearly a labor of love, and the fruit of many years’ dedicated investigation and antiquarian-like collection, this is a work which will prove of great value to the American of German ancestry in search of clues to family history. For others, it will, unfortunately, prove rather less useful.

#### Notes

[1]. Most notably in: A.G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty, and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Marianne S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Aaron S. Fogelman, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717-1775* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

[2]. See, *inter alia*, Hildegard Meyer, *Nord-Amerika im Urteil des Deutschen Schrifttums bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Eine Untersuchung über Arnbergers “Amerika-Mäden”* (Hamburg: Friedrichsen, de Gruyter & Co., 1929); Heinrich Schneider, “Lessing und Amerika,” *Monatshefte für Deutschen Unterricht* 30 (1938): pp. 424-432; Walter Wehe, “Das Amerika-Erlebnis in der deutschen Literatur,” *Geist der Zeit* 17 (1939): pp. 96-104; James T. Hatfield and Elfriede Hochbaum, “The Influence of the American Revolution upon German Literature,” *Americana Germanica* 3 (1900): pp. 338-365.

[3]. Meyer, *Nord-Amerika*, pp. 38-39, 41, 60.

[4]. Carl Wittke, “The American Theme in Continental European Literatures,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 28.1 (1941): p. 7; Paul C. Weber, *America in Imaginative German Literature in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), p. 4; Gerhard Desczyk, “Amerika in der Phantasie Deutscher Dichter,” *Jahrbuch der Deutsch-Amerikanischen Historischen Gesellschaft von Illinois* 24-25 (1928): pp. 7-142; Guy S. Ford, “Two Eighteenth Century German Publicists on the American Revolution,” reprinted from *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* in *On and Off the Campus* (1938), pp. 264-297.

[5]. Weber, *America in Imaginative German Literature*, pp. 162 ff.

[6]. Anton X. Schurz, *Lenau’s Leben*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1855), p. 204.

[7]. See, *inter alia*, Christian Gellinek, “Those damn Dutch”: *The Beginning of German Immigration in North America during the Thirty Years War* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1996).

[8]. The historiography on the Dutch Atlantic and Dutch America is comprehensive, impressive, and extensive; see, for example, Gerald de Jong, *The Dutch in America 1609-1974* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975); Donna Merwick, *Possessing Albany, 1630-1710: The Dutch and English Experiences* (New York: Cambridge University

Press, 1990); David G. Hackett, *The Rude Hand of Innovation: Religion and Social Order in Albany, New York, 1652-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Wim Klooster, *The Dutch in America, 1600-1800* (Providence: John Carter Brown Library, 1997); Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering, *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2001); and the most recent studies include Paul Otto, *The Dutch-Munsee Encounter in America: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Hudson Valley* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2005).

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