

# Divided by a Common Language: The Babel Proclamation and its Influence in Iowa History

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MRS. FRANZ STRACKBEIN received a letter from her sister describing the events of November 11, 1918, in Lowden, Iowa. It was Armistice Day, celebrating the end of World War I, but the scene in Lowden was anything but peaceful.

Monday we had an awful time. People acted like savages. They came in mobs from towns all around and one mob got the minister and made him march through town carrying a flag. Then they made him stand on a coffin...and kiss the flag while a band from another town played [the] Star Spangled Banner. On the coffin was written, "Kaiser now ruler of Hell.".... Then he was ordered out of town.<sup>1</sup>

The minister, Rev. John Reichardt, served the Zion Evangelical German Reformed Church in Lowden, a German-language congregation in a town where the majority of people were of German heritage. His crime: maintaining pride in his German cultural roots and failure to abandon the language of the enemy.<sup>2</sup> The anti-German sentiment during World War I reached a point where "people speaking German on the street were attacked and rebuked."<sup>3</sup> Iowa Governor William L. Harding legitimized such expressions of prejudice and war-time fanaticism when he issued "The Babel Proclamation" on May 23, 1918.<sup>4</sup> Antagonism toward Germans and their language escalated nationwide, but Harding became the only governor in the United States to outlaw the public use of *all* foreign languages. Harding understood the connection between communication and assimilation. He was convinced that destroying the vital bond of language within ethnic communities would force assimilation of minorities into the dominant culture and heighten a sense of patriotism in a time of war. Harding's understanding of immigrant assimilation offers insight into subsequent efforts to superficially create unity through language legislation.

## **A Land of Immigrants**

Throughout the nineteenth century, Iowa, along with other Midwestern states, hoped to attract immigrants to increase the state's population. In 1870, the Board of Immigration published *Iowa: The Home for Immigrants*, in English, German, Dutch, Swedish, and Danish languages offering "useful information with regard

to the state for the benefit of immigrants and others.”<sup>5</sup> By 1900, German immigrants had settled in all ninety-nine Iowa counties and represented the largest immigrant group in the state.<sup>6</sup>

Historically, anti-German sentiment surfaced throughout the United States coinciding with waves of German immigration.<sup>7</sup> It reached a boiling point during World War I when German submarines attacked U.S. passenger and merchant ships in European waters. Americans were outraged. President Woodrow Wilson was reluctant to commit U.S. troops to a distant war that had already claimed millions of lives since its beginning in 1914. In addition, the public, including more than twelve million immigrants who had arrived in America since 1900, disagreed about the conflict and America’s role in it. “It was necessary for me by very slow stages...and with the most genuine purpose to avoid war to lead the country on to a single way of thinking,” Wilson wrote.<sup>8</sup> On April 2, 1917, Wilson delivered his war message to Congress. “The world must be made safe for democracy,” he stated.<sup>9</sup> Four days later, the United States declared war on Germany.

Wilson acknowledged that “millions of men and women of German birth and native sympathy live amongst us....Should there be any disloyalty it will be dealt with a firm hand of repression.”<sup>10</sup> War closed America’s doors to immigration and intensified nationalistic efforts to create a homogenous society. Once recruited as hardworking assets to the nation’s economy, German-Americans were viewed with suspicion. Could they be loyal Americans while still speaking the enemy’s language?

Governor Harding did not think so. The loss of one’s native language, Harding believed, was a “small sacrifice compared to the good it could do saving the lives of American boys overseas by curbing sedition at home.”<sup>11</sup> As he defended his language ban, Harding articulated his own fear that immigrant communities possessed enough political power to subvert the war effort. Ironically it had been the political strength of the German-Americans that propelled him into office in 1917.<sup>12</sup>

### **In the Name of Patriotism**

The systematic eradication of German language and culture proceeded in stages under the guise of patriotism. On November 23, 1917, the Iowa State Council of Defense resolved “that the public schools of Iowa, supported by public taxation, should discontinue the teaching of the German language...in the interest of harmonizing and bringing our people together with a common language, believing thus they would act more patriotically and more essentially with a common purpose.”<sup>13</sup> German language instructors were fired and German textbooks burned.

Parochial schools where German was the language of instruction became the next target. Immigrant communities relied on parochial schools to communicate their culture and traditions to the next generation. When that foundation was attacked, ethnic cultural identities deteriorated. Engaged in a battle to prove their loyalty to their adopted nation, German-Americans did not aggressively resist

efforts to restrict their language and traditions. “I am an American citizen of German birth,” wrote F. W. Lehman, in 1917. “Ancestry is one thing, and allegiance is another and very different thing, not in any way to be qualified by ancestry....”<sup>14</sup>

To escape the stigma of disloyalty, many German-Americans altered the spelling of their family names. Berlin Township disappeared from Clinton County; the more acceptable name of Hughes took its place. In Muscatine, Bismarck Street became Bond Street, and Hanover Avenue became Liberty Avenue. In Kossuth County, the town called Germania was renamed Lakota.<sup>15</sup>



“Where he can be kept out of mischief?”—In a November 1917 cartoon, *Des Moines Register* cartoonist J.N. “Ding” Darling illustrated the fear that German immigrants to the United States would support Germany in World War I, reinforcing the belief that German-Americans could not be trusted.

Eliminating all things German from the nation’s vocabulary meant that children no longer contracted German measles—they got liberty measles instead. German fries became American fries and sauerkraut became liberty cabbage. “Sauer Kraut is a drug on the Iowa market.... Folks won’t buy the food. They think it is of German origin.... The food used to be a big seller. It still would be if it wasn’t for the suspicious name.”<sup>16</sup>

German newspapers disappeared from circulation and businesses with German names were branded un-American; they were traitors in a time of war. In a letter dated 15 April 1918, Sam T. White, chairman of the Scott County Council of

National Defense, brought the unpatriotic activities of the German Savings Bank of Tripoli, Iowa, to the attention of H.J. Metcalf, secretary of the State Council of National Defense.<sup>17</sup>

Enclosed [is] a draft on the German Savings Bank of Tripoli.... You will notice...the German Coat of Arms on the face of it. It seems an awfully strange thing that a bank in this country can put out a check with the German Coat of Arms on it and go unmolested.<sup>18</sup>

Metcalf promised immediate action. “This is certainly a rotten proposition.... I am quite confident that it will be suppressed.”<sup>19</sup>

Communities often took punishment of “slackers” into their own hands.<sup>20</sup> Angry mobs doused the homes and businesses of suspected slackers with yellow paint while local authorities tolerated and sometimes even encouraged it. Harding was convinced that language diversity was the source of such discord. “After weeks of careful consideration on the part of the members of the state council of defense and Governor Harding,”<sup>21</sup> the prejudice many Iowans displayed toward their German-speaking neighbors was given the force of law when, on May 23, 1918, Harding used his power of proclamation to ban the public use of all foreign languages. Ironically, Harding thought the ban would eliminate controversy and unite people during a time of crisis, “preventing bloodshed and probable riot in Iowa.”<sup>22</sup>

### Speak Only American

While the spotlight of hatred was focused on German immigrants, other ethnic groups in Iowa were eager to climb aboard the anti-German bandwagon. However, it was a small leap from anti-German sentiment to disdain for all foreign traits. The Babel Proclamation aligned all non-English-speaking groups with the German-speaking scapegoats. According to Harding, all foreign languages provided “opportunity [for] the enemy to scatter propaganda.”<sup>23</sup> Non-German ethnic groups protested that their loyalty had been unfairly questioned. Bohemians, Scandinavians, French, Italians, and others of foreign birth sent messages to Governor Harding condemning the ban. “In practically every case the Governor [was] advised that the language of our allies and friends should not be classed with the language of enemies.”<sup>24</sup> Their complaints were to no avail. Harding asserted that all provisions of his proclamation would be strictly enforced. Without the vital bond of language, ethnic cultural institutions started to crumble. “Harding was riding the crest of a wave of intolerance, and all objectors were silenced.”<sup>25</sup>



William L. Harding

“The provisions of this proclamation,” Harding stated, “have the force and effect of law as authorized by acts of the Thirty-seventh general assembly.”<sup>26</sup> He also believed that the proclamation was legal under the first amendment.

The official language of the United States and the state of Iowa is the English language. Freedom of speech is guaranteed by federal and state constitutions, but this is not a guarantee of the right to use a language other than the language of this country—the English language.<sup>27</sup>

Harding’s proclamation required that English—or “American”<sup>28</sup>—be the only language of instruction in public and private schools; all conversation in public places, on trains and over the telephone should be in English; all public addresses must be in English; and those who could not speak or understand English were required to conduct their religious worship in their homes.<sup>29</sup>

Most violations resulting in arrest involved party line telephone conversations. Switchboard operators and eavesdroppers reported infractions of the law to authorities, fearing that people speaking German were collaborating with the enemy. It is not surprising that people were willing to report foreign conversations in light of the United States' nationwide propaganda campaigns. Giant posters prominently displayed in schools, post offices, and other public places portrayed Germans as "green-eyed monsters" and beasts who would destroy America.<sup>30</sup> Many states passed legislation establishing English as the official language, but Iowa's overzealous language restrictions made Governor Harding the laughing stock of the nation when five Scott County farm wives were arrested for speaking German during a party line telephone conversation.<sup>31</sup>

The end of the war did not stop xenophobic attitudes, although Harding repealed the Babel Proclamation on December 4, 1918. "In order to avoid any misunderstanding," Harding wrote, "notice is hereby given that said rules set out in the proclamation of May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1918, are no longer in force as an executive order."<sup>32</sup> However, Harding did not abandon his support for language restriction in Iowa. "National unity can be best maintained by the employment of a common



Anti-German hysteria was a nation-wide phenomenon in the United States during World War I. Propaganda posters such as this one, "Destroy This Mad Brute" by H.R. Hopps (ca. 1916), fueled the perception that Germans—the enemy—were beasts who must be defeated.



Wartime propaganda communicated simple, direct messages, creating an understanding that everything German was the enemy. Posters such as this one by Fred Strothmann (1918) were designed to elicit emotions including patriotism, sacrifice, outrage, and hatred. The madness was contagious.

vehicle of communication, and this vehicle in the United States...is the English language.”<sup>33</sup> He continued:

While we welcome enlightened and thrifty people...this is not with the view...of enabling them to establish themselves in communities by themselves and thereby maintaining the language and customs of their former country. [T]hey are welcome to come, but for the purpose of becoming a part of our own people, to learn and use our language, adopt our customs, and become citizens of our common country.<sup>34</sup>

In 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court guaranteed citizens the freedom to communicate in any language. Teaching German language courses in many Iowa schools resumed in the 1930s. Societal pressure for complete assimilation into the dominant culture no longer prevailed, but the once strong German-American community in Iowa had been irreparably harmed. Many of their customs and traditions were lost to wartime intolerance.

The resounding victory of the anti-pluralist opinion so weakened foreign-speaking communities in World War I that when, two generations later, opinion began to reverse, the communities to benefit were of different national origins than German.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Lens of History**

Iowans might rather forget this chapter from the state’s history, but the Babel Proclamation provides a lens through which subsequent language legislation may be understood. In 2000, Iowa’s governor was in a position reminiscent of Iowa’s early years as a state: recruiting immigrants to help bolster the state’s population and supplement a declining workforce. “[W]e need more people,” stated Governor Thomas J. Vilsack when he declared three Iowa cities—Fort Dodge, Marshalltown, and Mason City—model communities for new Iowans, making them a proving ground for 21<sup>st</sup> century immigration.<sup>36</sup>

Recent efforts to recruit immigrants are not without controversy. “I’m not naïve enough to think that this is going to be sort of a Pollyanna type of deal,” Vilsack said. “It’s going to be a struggle.”<sup>37</sup> As in the past, some Iowans find it uncomfortable to hear conversations they cannot understand, criticizing immigrants who do not abandon their own culture. Language is still central to the immigration debate, giving rise to the same fears, questions, and misunderstandings expressed toward German-Americans who remained set apart in close-knit ethnic communities:

Why [are] these people so self-contained? Why [don’t] they blend into the larger community? Why [do] they insist upon trading exclusively with each other and staying so close to home? And especially: Why [do] they keep talking in an alien tongue, generation after generation?<sup>38</sup>

On March 4, 2002, the Iowa English Language Reaffirmation Act formally reestablished English as the official language of government in Iowa. The law encourages “every citizen of the state to become more proficient in the English

language,” but does not “disparage any language other than English or discourage any person from learning or using a language other than English.”<sup>39</sup> Proponents claim that a common language is a unifying factor within a state. Others remain convinced that language legislation will not build cohesive communities.

“I had serious reservations about signing the English Language Reaffirmation Act bill,” Vilsack stated. “The bill actually did not change what was happening in the state. Most official documents were written in English.... [T]he impact of this bill was insignificant, but the symbolic nature was hurtful.”<sup>40</sup> Iowa is not alone in declaring English the official language. Twenty-six other states have approved similar measures.<sup>41</sup>



Thomas J. Vilsack

The key to understanding conflicts arising from immigration issues is rooted in history. For example, it is a common misunderstanding that nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigrants assimilated immediately. “All groups brought along cultural and religious practices; and all sought to perpetuate those practices not only for themselves but also for their progeny.”<sup>42</sup> Today, assimilation follows the same pattern that it has for generations. The children of immigrants adopt American habits. They learn English quickly, often translating for their parents. Public schools accelerate assimilation, as does America’s consumer society. Today, however, immigrants are learning English faster than earlier generations of newcomers.<sup>43</sup>

“The language issue is complex,” Vilsack admits. “For new Iowans it is about maintaining identity and preserving culture. For Iowans who were born, raised, or have lived here for a while, it is about security and concerns about a changing economy that makes it harder to accept new citizens....”<sup>44</sup> Language communicates elements of culture and heritage while forming strong bonds within communities. Historically, Governor Harding’s Babel Proclamation demonstrates the extreme measures citizens and governments are willing to employ to achieve “peace and tranquility”<sup>45</sup> at the expense of liberty during a time of national crisis. It is important to understand that forcefully shattering the bond of language to artificially unite all Iowans makes Iowa—and the nation—less safe for the ideals of democracy.

## Notes

1. Mrs. Franz Strackbein letter from her sister. 14 November 1918. Manuscript Collections, BL 318, folder 26, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

2. In July, 1917, Reichardt was arrested and charged with sedition under a law passed by the United States Congress on June 15, 1917. During a sermon delivered in German, Reichardt denounced a Fourth of July speech in Lowden that categorized Germans as monsters. Following the speech, a German flag had been tied to a goat that was sent running down Main Street in Lowden, and another German flag was dragged through dusty streets tied to the bumper of a car. Reichardt expressed his belief that German cultural traditions could be respected despite the “wrong-headed and mistaken” actions of the Kaiser. A year later, Reichardt was still considered a traitor in the eyes of a mob celebrating Germany’s defeat.

3. Nancy Derr, “The Babel Proclamation.” *The Palimpsest* 60, No. 4 (July/August 1979): 100.

4. William L. Harding, Governor’s Proclamation, 23 May 1918. Iowa Governors: Harding file, State Historical Library, Des Moines, Iowa. “Babel” refers to the biblical Tower of Babel (see Genesis, chapter 11) and the confusion associated with many languages spoken in one locale.

5. *Iowa: The Home for Immigrants*. Des Moines: Mills & Co. Printers and Publishers, 1870.

6. Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996): 186. The 1900 U.S. Census showed that there were about 2.25 million total Iowans in 1900. The German immigrant population, numbering 123,126, made up about five percent of the overall population and nearly half of the foreign born population.

7. Dennis Baron, “Official American English Only.” <<http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/officialamerican/englishonly>> (7 February 2005). Eighteenth-century critics accused Germans of “laziness, illiteracy, clannishness, a reluctance to assimilate, excessive fertility, and Catholicism.” Most notably among critics was Benjamin Franklin who in 1751 complained that Pennsylvania Germans were “swarthy” and feared that Pennsylvania, despite its founding by the English, would “become a Colony of Aliens...so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs....”

8. Woodrow Wilson in a letter to Cleveland H. Dodge, 4 April 1917. Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

9. Woodrow Wilson, War Declaration to Congress, 2 April 1917.

10. Ibid.

11. Nancy Derr, “Iowans During World War I: A Study of Change Under Stress.” Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1979: 406.

12. See Nancy Derr, “Lowden: A Study of Intolerance in an Iowa Community During the Era of the First World War.” *The Annals of Iowa* 50, no. 1 (Summer 1989). German-Americans supported Harding in the November 1916 gubernatorial election because Harding opposed prohibition. Members of German-American communities believed that prohibition with its denunciation of beer consumption was an attack on their culture and their civil rights. German-language newspapers sided with anti-prohibitionists in a successful campaign turn back a constitutional amendment supporting prohibition and elect Harding governor of Iowa

13. H.J. Metcalf Papers, MS 74, box 9, Iowa Council of National Defense Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City. See David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The*



*First World War and American Society*, for a discussion of the condemnation of German language education in other states.

14. F. W. Lehman, "National Service Knows No Hyphen," *American Loyalty by Citizens of German Descent* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on Public Information, August 1917): 7.

15. Occasionally new names did not stick. When the town council of Guttenberg, Iowa, made the patriotic effort to change the city's name back to Prairie-la-Porte—the French name used before German settlers arrived—no one would use that name. Guttenberg survived anti-German hysteria.

16. Undated release "for publicity." Metcalf Papers, box 10, folder 6: page 2 of 3. State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

17. Defense councils were formed in every state during World War I. States then formed county councils, and some counties formed community councils of defense. State councils were sometimes reduced to propaganda organs that fostered vigilantism against local dissenters and "slackers." See David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980): 116, 117.

18. Sam T. White, letter to H.J. Metcalf dated 15 April 1918. Metcalf Papers, Box 7, folder 8. State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

19. H.J. Metcalf, letter to Sam T. White dated 17 April 1918. Metcalf Papers, Box 7, Folder 8, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

20. Anyone who did not show a sufficient level of patriotism was labeled a slacker; this name was directed at immigrant groups who did not speak English which was interpreted as disloyalty to the American cause.

21. "Teaching of German Must Be Stopped." *The Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 26 May 1918.

22. *Ibid.* In numerous published speeches following the US entry into World War I, Harding predicted the war would take at least three to five more years to win. This understanding helped legitimize his efforts to eliminate German language on the homefront, preventing German speaking citizens from collaborating with the enemy. See Archie Ward, *Dubuque Times-Journal*, 7 April 1918.

23. William L. Harding. Letter dated 2 August 1918 "in response to an inquiry from a county attorney." H.J. Metcalf Papers, Box 9, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

24. "Mass Meeting to Protest Against Harding's Action." *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 28 May 1918.

25. Nancy Derr, "Iowans During World War I: A Study of Change Under Stress," Ph.D. diss., (George Washington University, 1979): 370.

26. "Harding Will Enforce Orders: Declares There Can Be No Half Way Measures in Using English." *The Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 27 May 1918.

27. Language Proclamation issued by Gov. William L. Harding, 23 May 1918. Iowa Governors: Harding file, State Historical Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

28. In defending the language proclamation, Governor Harding called the legal language "American" to avoid connections to British English which, he feared, his opponents might argue could legitimize speaking other European tongues in the United States.

29. Language Proclamation issued by Gov. William L. Harding, 23 May 1918. Iowa Governors: Harding file, State Historical Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

30. World War I Posters from the Ray Murray Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

31. Leland L. Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974): 252. The women were subsequently fined \$225, which was given to the local Red Cross

Chapter. According to Dennis Baron, "Official American English Only," as many as 18,000 people in the Midwest were charged with violating language statutes during the course of the war.

32. William L Harding, Executive Proclamation, 4 December 1918. Harding File, State Historical Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Nancy Derr. "Iowans During World War I: A Study of Change Under Stress." Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1979: 401.

36. Published report of the Marshalltown Model Community Task Force, 2002. Under the Pilot Communities Project, announced by Gov. Vilsack on Dec. 4, 2000, each of the three cities received \$50,000 to assess its labor force and develop plans to recruit and retain immigrants. The three model communities for immigration, selected because of their willingness to serve as pilot communities, are charged with the task of developing plans that could be duplicated in other communities.

37. Pam Belluck, "Short of People, Iowa Seeks To Be Ellis Island of Midwest," *New York Times*, 28 August 2000.

38. Nancy Derr, "The Babel Proclamation," *The Palimpsest* 60, no. 4 (July/August 1979): 106.

39. Senate File 165, The Iowa English Language Reaffirmation Act of 2001. On-line: <<http://www.legis.state.ia.us>>. On June 24, 2004, a bill for repealing the Iowa English Language Reaffirmation Act was introduced as house File 2122. Ford's bill has not come to a vote, but Iowa Governor Thomas J. Vilsack has indicated his support for repeal of this law.

40. Thomas J. Vilsack. Letter to the author, 22 February 2005. Vilsack signed the bill after legislative leaders promised more than \$1 million annually would be made available to schools for English language learners.

41. Constitutional Topic: Official Language, on-line <[http://www.usconstitution.net/constop\\_lang.html](http://www.usconstitution.net/constop_lang.html)> (7 February 2005). Today, most state measures to declare English as the official language are symbolic; they have little legal impact so far but they tend to ignite major ideological arguments.

42. Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press): 201

43. James Crawford, "A Nation Divided by One Language." *Guardian Unlimited*, 8 March 2001. On-line <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive?Article0,4273,4147870,00.html>> (24 February 2005).

44. Vilsack letter to the author, 22 February 2005.

45. Language Proclamation issued by Gov. William L. Harding, 23 May 1918. Iowa Governors: Harding file, State Historical Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

## Annotated Bibliography

**Primary Sources****Correspondence**

Becker, William. Letter to Eva Rhimes, 10 February 1919. William Becker Papers, FL 313 Folder 5, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

Born in 1874 to German immigrant parents, William Becker was a state representative in 1918. Perhaps German was spoken in his parents' home, but he was in complete agreement with the governor's edict. This letter expressed his view on the subject of foreign language study in public schools. This source surprised me because Becker was so against speaking the German language even though his parents were recent immigrants. It helped me understand how willing many people were to give up their ethnic heritage to become "American."

Rhimes, Eva. Letter to William Becker, 7 February 1919. William Becker Papers, FL 313 Folder 5, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

Eva Rhimes was the head of the Clayton County Women's Christian Temperance Unit. Her disdain for foreign languages was just about as powerful as her disdain for "demon rum." Her letter was important because it showed how involved citizens were in the language debate, even though they weren't directly affected as a result.

Strackbein, Mrs. Franz. Letter from an unidentified sister dated 14 November 1918. Manuscript Collections, BL 318, folder 26, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

I quoted this letter in the opening paragraph of my paper because it is a dramatic portrayal of anti-German sentiment in Iowa during World War I. Letters that served as a means of communication during this period in history now communicate to me the essence of those times and helped me understand how dangerous it had become for U.S. citizens who were suspected of supporting Germany during World War I. Governor Harding's attempt to force unity of culture and language upon all Iowans in the name of patriotism was a symbolic way for citizens to combat the "enemy" on the home front. But in the end it undermined very principles of democracy our nation was supposedly fighting for.

Vilsack, Thomas J. Letter to Stephen J. Frese, 22 February, 2005.

I requested an interview with Iowa Governor Thomas J. Vilsack, but the current legislative session didn't allow him time for a face to face meeting. He did, however, allow me to send him a list of interview questions. He sent his responses to me in a letter. His input was vital to my conclusion because it showed how language issues, especially as they relate to immigration and immigrant assimilation, are as much in the forefront today as they were in Harding's day.

Wilson, Woodrow. Letter to Cleveland H. Dodge, 4 April 1917. Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Wilson wrote this letter to his friend talking about how difficult it was to commit the country to war and the reasons he had delayed declaring war on Germany for so long. Uncertainty about how immigrants would respond, especially those born in Germany, played a key role in his decision and helped me understand more clearly the

extent of the threat that the some U.S. government officials feared foreign-born citizens might pose. I had seen a reference to this letter in a secondary source and wanted to read the full text of the letter for myself. I checked the Library of Congress web site but this letter was not among those digitized and available on line, so I used the web site's link for asking an archivist a question and before the end of the day was notified that a copy of the handwritten letter plus a typed transcript were already in the mail to me. It was great to discover how accessible their collections are, even to a high school researcher halfway across the country.

### **Personal Interviews**

Kehrli, Clifford A. Personal Interview by Stephen J. Frese. 14 May 2005.

While sharing my National History Day project with my maternal grandfather, I became more aware of the significance of language and culture related to immigration in history. Grandpa Kehrli's parents were born in the United States, but their parents immigrated to northeast Iowa from Germany and Switzerland. Grandpa Kehrli told me about his memories related to persecution of German-Americans during World War II when he was 10 years old. His mother grew up in a home where German was spoken, and she and her mother and sisters often spoke German on party lines so eavesdroppers could not understand their conversations. They had to stop that practice during World War II. Grandpa recalled a German neighbor's visits to their farm and listening to conversations about "the good Hitler was doing to get Germany out of an economic depression and reverse mass unemployment." But as World War II progressed the neighbor's views changed, as did their conversations. German was no longer spoken as frequently and neighbors who were originally from Germany endured acts of vandalism such as fences cut to let livestock escape. Our conversation illustrated how in times of war or national crisis, people to look for a scapegoat and act out against the identified enemy.

Vogt, Marth Tressau. Personal Interview by Stephen J. Frese. 11 May 2005. Tape recorded.

Born in Germany in 1905, Martha Tressau Vogt came to the United States with her family in 1909. She lived most of her life in rural Reinbeck, Iowa, and remembered the nearby town of Berlin changing its name to Lincoln during World War I. I interviewed Mrs. Vogt, who recently turned 100, in her room at a nursing home in Reinbeck. Mrs. Vogt recalled the challenges her family faced as they learned English and remembered "making do" at a time of food shortages during World War I. She also discussed ways her schoolmates communicated their hatred for immigrant children from Germany during the time when the U.S. was involved in the war. Mrs. Vogt confirmed the impact of the propaganda posters distributed during World War I. "I figured it couldn't be possible that people would be that cruel," she said of posters that depicted Germans with spiked helmets and bloody fingers. "My schoolmates believed it and all the people that were Americans believed it. It's hard now to understand why they did," Mrs. Vogt said. "People got to hate you, you know."

### **Governor William L. Harding Papers**

Harding, William L. Inaugural Address, 16 January 1919. State Historical Society, Des Moines, Iowa.

The Babel Proclamation nearly cost Harding the 1918 election. Had the foreign language speaking voters turned out on Election Day in 1918 as they had two years

previously when Harding won his first term, he would have been soundly defeated. Instead, their liberties had been so trampled they did not even vote, giving Harding a second term. Throughout all of this Harding still staunchly defended his position on the language ban. His inauguration speech showed me that even though the war was over and there was no further “need” to restrict languages, his disdain for foreign language pushed him to continue supporting the proclamation’s measures. “This union of states called America is a nation, not an asylum. We are big enough, old enough, and good enough to have a language of our own, loved and used by all citizens,” Harding stated in this speech. “If all loved the language, they would the more desire to use it, for it has a beauty of expression and directness possessed by no other language.”

Harding, William L. Governor’s Proclamation, 23 May 1918 (later known as “The Babel Proclamation”). Council of Defense Collection, Box 46. File: State Organizations. Gov. Harding, Personal. Feb. 1918-July 1918. File 13. State Historical Library, Des Moines.

“Every person should appreciate and observe his duty to refrain from all acts or conversation which may excite suspicion or produce strife among people, but in his relation to the public should so demean himself that every word and act will manifest his loyalty to his country and his solemn purpose to aid in achieving victory for our army and navy and the permanent peace of the world.” Through this proclamation Governor Harding went further to restrict foreign language use than any other governor in U.S. history; he outlawed the use of any language other than English. This is the reason I chose this topic. The discord and eradication of the immigrants’ communication ties resulting from this proclamation made the topic very interesting to explore. The restrictions on language coupled with the propaganda that the U.S. government employed caused the misunderstanding that all Germans, whether or not they were in cahoots with the Kaiser, were evil “green-eyed monsters.”

Harding, William L. Governor’s Proclamation. 4 December 1918. Council of Defense Collection, Box 46. File: State Organizations. Gov. Harding, Personal. Feb. 1918-July 1918. File 13. State Historical Library, Des Moines.

The guns of World War I were silenced but critics of foreign language were not. Gov. Harding proclaimed that “In order to avoid any misunderstanding, notice is hereby given that said rules set out in the proclamation of May 23d are no longer in force as an executive order.” This edict repealed the “Babel Proclamation,” but still demonstrated Harding’s understanding that English should be the only language to be spoken in Iowa. He closed the proclamation by saying: “All should understand that they are welcome to come but for the purpose of becoming our own people to learn and use our language, adopt our customs, and become citizens of our common country.” This illustrated how deep his prejudice ran against foreign language speakers.

Holland, H. M. Letter to Governor William L. Harding. 27 May 1918. Council of Defense Papers, Box 46, File 13: Governor Wm. L. Harding, Personal, Feb. 1918-July 1918. State Historical Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

Holland wrote to support Harding’s language ban. “Your proclamation regarding use of foreign language is fully and unanimously endorsed by the membership and pastor of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of Benton County.” This letter showed how some immigrant communities were willing to give up their language in order to promote national unity and to prove their loyalty to America despite the cost.

*Iowa and War: War Proclamations By Governor Harding.* Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, May 1918. William L. Harding Collections, Sioux City Public Museum Pearl Street Research Center, 407 Pearl Street, Sioux City, IA.

During World War I, The State Historical Society of Iowa issued monthly booklets containing the complete texts of all of Gov. Harding's proclamations issued during that month. Finding this publication in the Harding collections at the Pearl Street Research Center in Sioux City helped clear up a discrepancy that surfaced early in my research relating to the actual date Gov. Harding issued the Babel Proclamation. Nancy Derr's work (see secondary sources) was among the first material I consulted during my research, and she listed the date of the Babel Proclamation as May 14, 1918, footnoting this SHSI publication. The May 14, 1918 date is part of the signature and date of the proclamation immediately preceding the language proclamation in the booklet, but the way the booklet is laid out with proclamations running consecutively without page breaks, it was confusing. The language proclamation text begins in the middle of page 43 and concludes on page 47 with the signature and date information, "Done at Des Moines, this twenty-third day of May, 1918."

### Archived Collections

Campbell, Macy. Papers. MS 77, Box 1, File 1. State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

Macy Campbell was the chairman of the Liberty Loan Department for Blackhawk County. His papers were full of correspondence with Liberty Loan officers in Blackhawk County. The letters illustrate the extreme efforts of the Liberty Loan Department to make sure that foreign language ministers bought all the Liberty Loans they could—their fair share—so they didn't look unpatriotic. This demonstrated to me the fanaticism that surrounded the ideas of patriotism and loyalty during World War I.

Harding, William L. Governor's Proclamation For Release Saturday Noon, May 25<sup>th</sup>. Metcalf Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

This version of the Babel Proclamation is identical in wording (but not format) to the original document dated 23 May 1918. Finding this version as it was released to the press, dated 25 May 1918, helped me to verify the date of the Babel Proclamation and its application. I could find no mentions of the language ban as proposed by Governor Harding in newspapers prior to this press release. Because of a discrepancy in the date of the Babel Proclamation in other published commentary about the language ban, it had been suggested that perhaps the elements of the proclamation had been implemented in the weeks prior to its actual signing. Tracing the proclamation to the primary sources of its original versions enabled me to verify the date.

Harm, William H. "German Born Americans Must Know the Truth." Speech Transcript, 27 June 1918. State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

Throughout 1917 and 1918, an incredible number of public speeches on war-related topics were delivered to audiences throughout the United States. The public had a strong tradition of public meetings which became forums for oratories about politics, religion, and self-improvement. After the United States entered World War I, emotional appeals were used to mobilize public support for the war effort and these speeches functioned in the same way as the war posters. This speech transcript provided me an example of one such "stirring appeal," as it was labeled. Delivered by William Harm, the speech cautioned that, because they have been poisoned by

propaganda, “The German born citizens are loathe to believe the fatherland guilty of atrocities.” Harm reminds German immigrants that “we swore that we would renounce the German Emperor and the German government, and that we would support and defend this country against all enemies, and we must be true to our oath.” Harm, who had served mayor of Bloomfield, Nebraska, said he was not ashamed of his own German birth, but that he was “bitterly ashamed of that group of men, who in their mad ambition, in their insane desire, have reached out for world power and domination and brought this horrible war to the world...those who have brought disgrace and shame upon the German people that cannot be wiped out in a thousand years.” This speech helped me understand why the German-speaking people, weakened by the weight of the blame heaped upon them during the war, did not do more to resist language restrictions such as Gov. Harding’s Babel Proclamation.

Metcalf, Herbert J. Council of National Defense Papers. MS 74, Special Collections. State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

H. J. Metcalf worked for the U.S. Public Service Reserve and the Council of National Defense during World War I, primarily from 1917-1919. His papers were important to my research because they provided a valuable source of letters and other printed material related to mobilization of citizens on the home front in Iowa during World War I. I found these portions of his collections especially helpful to the development of my project:

Box 6—General Correspondence, 13 May 1917—14 January 1918.

As Secretary of Iowa’s State Council of National Defense, Metcalf received and responded to numerous letters relating to organization of the Council of Defense at the county level. Many letters reported “suspicious” activities such as a school superintendent accused of “causing trouble along unpatriotic lines.” Metcalf looked into the allegations and found them to be false, but the exchange of letters about this incident showed me how volatile the climate was in the state and how easy it could be to be branded a traitor with no evidence other than someone’s personal fears and suspicions.

Box 7—General Correspondence, 15 January—30 April 1918.

This file contained the letter I quoted in my paper regarding the German Savings Bank of Tripoli. It was very interesting to follow the communication trail related to this incident through the letters in this file. Other letters described the willingness of Iowa public librarians to dispose of “anything rotten” they find on their shelves. Their thoroughness had come to the attention of officials at the national level who were “much impressed.”

Box 9—Iowa Council of National Defense Documents

In my paper I quoted a resolution of the Iowa Council of National Defense dated 23 November 1917 that required schools supported by public taxation to discontinue the teaching of German language. That document along with a typed summary of responses Harding received relating to this and to the Babel Proclamation came from this portion of the Metcalf collection.

Box 10—Publicity

This file provided the publicity release describing the plight of sauerkraut because of its German-sounding name. The cabbage became a “drug on the Iowa market” that no one, reportedly, would consume. I also obtained the text of “An Act Relating to

Offenses Against the State of Iowa and Providing for Punishment for Violation Thereof" (24 April 1917) from this portion of Metcalf's collection. Broad definitions of unlawful acts made this a frightening proposal. In attempting to defend liberty, Iowans gave up a lot of their freedom.

World War I Posters. Ray Murray Collection. State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City Iowa.

When I was in special collections in Iowa City, Mary Bennett (head of the department) brought out some of the World War I propaganda posters from the Murray Collection for me to examine. Seeing these original posters was more amazing than I ever imagined, compared to smaller versions published in books and magazines. The large size of the posters helped me understand their impact. These monster-depicting posters made it easy for me to see why the Babel Proclamation worked as well as it did with little resistance. The posters made all Germans look like monsters and suggested that every German might be in cahoots with the Kaiser. One of my personal favorites is entitled: "Can vegetables, fruits and the Kaiser, too." It depicts the Kaiser pickled in a canning jar. These government sponsored works of art simplified issues and communicated information rapidly and efficiently in an era before radio and television broadcasting. My interview with Mrs. Vogt confirmed that the posters succeeded in conveying the intended message to the American public. The propaganda convinced Americans of the enemy nature of Germans and helped solidify public support for U.S. involvement in World War I. More than 20 million copies of the 2,500 posters were created and distributed throughout the country in support of the U.S. war effort.

### Museum Sources

Sioux City Public Museum, 2901 Jackson Street Sioux City, IA. 22 March 2005.

Governor William L. Harding (1877-1931) practiced law in Sioux City, and the museum features him in an exhibit. The artifacts related to his time as governor were interesting, including items related to his campaign for governor, inaugural ephemera, and World War I documents and propaganda posters. Permanent exhibitions on the history of Sioux City and the region housed in the museum helped me better understand Harding's background and the place and era that shaped his political and personal views.

Sioux City Public Museum Pearl Street Research Center, 407 Pearl Street, Sioux City, IA. 22 March 2005.

This museum research center contained many documents that were valuable to the development of my paper. The archivist was especially helpful, opening the facility for me on a day it is closed to the public. The things I accessed included:

William Lloyd Harding Correspondence File, SC-12, Folder #4.

Especially interesting in this file were long letters Harding wrote defending himself against accusations made regarding the effectiveness of his leadership or the appropriateness of some of the things he said in speeches.

William Lloyd Harding Speeches, SC-12, Folder #2.

Harding was known for his oratory abilities; in fact, he continued to be a favorite speaker for Republican party events long after his term as Iowa's governor had ended.



The speeches I accessed in this file related to wartime patriotism and defending his positions. Some of the copies were working drafts (and a few were handwritten), so it was interesting to see his editing and revisions.

Scrapbooks: Governor W.L. Harding Collection, Scrapbook #9, 1918.

Compiled by Governor Harding's wife, Carrie M. Lamoreux Harding, this scrapbook contained chronologically arranged clippings from a variety of Iowa newspapers related to the language proclamation, news of the Iowa Council of National Defense, and Harding's second campaign for governor. Clippings of importance to my research included:

"Bohemians Are Out After Governor Harding." *Sioux City Tribune*, 28 May 1918.

News of the Cedar Rapids Bohemian community's response to the language ban quickly spread across the state. Bohemian leaders described the governor's action as a serious mistake. However, their protests came too late to protect them from the overzealous language control measures. It seemed ironic to me that groups like the Bohemians were so willing to support efforts to suppress the rights of Germans, but when their own rights were challenged they believed the actions to be unconstitutional.

"Campaign Will Be An Exciting One." *Maquoketa Sentinel*, 5 March 1918.

This editorial, written prior to the language ban, supported what I learned in secondary sources about the influence of German-American voters in Harding's first campaign for governor, largely because of their stand on the issue of prohibition. The writer predicted that German voters were dissatisfied with Harding's support for their positions and would not vote for him again.

Candidacy announcement. *Grundy Center Republican*, 7 March 1918.

This announcement summarized Harding's "clean-cut 'America First' platform" for his second campaign for governor. The article refers to growing animosity of German voters toward Harding.

"Governor Harding Settles the Language Question for Iowa." Unidentified source, 25 May 1918.

This article was representative of hundreds of articles announcing the governor's language proclamation and publishing its provisions.

"Gov. Harding Will Enforce Orders: Declares There Can Be No Half Way Measures In Use of English." Unidentified source, 27 May 1918.

Direct quotes by Gov. Harding leave no doubt that he plans to enforce all provisions of the language ban with no exceptions. Many people at the time believed the proclamation's measures would be softened, but this article helped me understand Harding's convictions on this issue.

"Governor Has Ordered State to Ban German; No Foreign Languages are Permitted to be Taught in Schools During War." *Dubuque Times-Journal*, 26 May 1918.

With its announcement of the proclamation, this article began to speculate on its implications for the local community and the state.

“Harding Meant it All: Must Be No Language But English in Iowa,” *Fort Madison Democrat*, 27 May 1918.

People in Iowa were beginning to understand the extent of the restrictions in the governor’s language proclamation. “I meant just what I said,” the governor declared. “From now on until the end of the war there is to be no other language in Iowa but the English. It may inconvenience some, but it must be done.” When asked about Bohemian dissent in Cedar Rapids, Harding asserted that there would be no exceptions to the order. This helped me understand the role language plays in assimilation and the importance Americans placed on uniformity in language as a sign of Americanization.

“Harding Orders English Spoken Thruout [sic] State.” Unidentified source, 25 May 1918.

The reporter stated that the governor “declares these rules have been formulated only with the thought of eliminating controversy and uniting the people in the war crisis.” Many articles like this one attempted to justify the ban and soften its impact on the state.

“Harding’s Edict Stirs Up Action.” Unidentified newspaper from Keokuk, 27 May 1918.

This article describes efforts of German churches to observe the language ban (“It is conceded that there is no place for the German language in Iowa...”), but argues that other foreign language groups should not be subjected to the same restrictions.

*Iowa City Press Citizen* Editorial, 28 May 1918.

The editorial writer acknowledged that the trouble in some parts of Iowa over the use of the German language had become so intense that Harding responded with an official expression “rather than to permit troubles to develop through the action of self-constituted local committees.” The editorial cautiously supported Harding, expecting that “there will be explanations and interpretations which will serve to soften...the harsher aspects of the proclamation....” This article helped me understand how, when intolerance proceeds in small increments, extreme policies can be put in place that would not have been accepted if the full extent had been known up front.

“Iowa Should Act.” *The Des Moines Register*, 30 May 1918.

This editorial suggested that action should be taken to test the validity of Harding’s executive order, saying that his action damaged Iowa’s reputation and put the state in the same league with the Russian czar.

“Mass Meeting to Protest Against Harding’s Action.” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 28 May 1918.

The Cedar Rapids Gazette was a good source for articles critical of Harding’s language ban because it was home to a large population of Bohemians. This article described the language ban as a bad political move and reprinted critical messages that had been sent to Gov. Harding.

“Only One Language for Iowa.” *Waterloo Times-Tribune*, 28 May 1918.

This editorial raises questions regarding the governor’s power to issue such a sweeping language ban, and questions the necessity of the ban. “By common consent the German language was being eliminated everywhere. It was seen as German propaganda. . . . Elimination by common consent would have proved more satisfactory than elimination by governor’s edict.” Still, the writer asserts that it is justified to insist that immigrants conform to “our language and customs. If they do not wish this, they can move.” This helped me understand how strong the push was for total assimilation.

“Speak American Language or Don’t Talk in Iowa.” *Keokuk Gate-City*, 25 May 1918.

Notice of Harding’s language proclamation hit newspapers across Iowa on or soon after the text of the proclamation was released to the press on 25 May 1918. As the various headlines suggest, newspapers took a variety of positions on the ban and its meaning.

“Talk English or Keep Still in Iowa.” *Perry Chief*, 25 May 1918.

The extent of Harding’s language ban came as a shock to many Iowans who were supportive of banning German during the war, but not happy when the ban was formalized by executive proclamation to include all languages but English.

“Talk, Teach, Preach Only In English, Is Harding’s Mandate.” *The Ottumwa Courier*, 25 May 1918.

This headline captured the essence of Harding’s executive proclamation. Communication in schools, churches, and ordinary conversation were all impacted by the proclamation.

“Teaching of German Must Be Stopped: Much Feeling is Aroused.” *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*. 26 May 1916.

This article was important because it described the process by which Harding developed the language ban, in cooperation with the state council of defense. None of the documents I had located in collections of Hardings materials at the State Historical Society of Iowa described the process or motivation behind the proclamation.

“Use of German Language in Iowa During War Abolished by Harding: Against All Foreign Tongues Now.” *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 25 May 1918.

This article pointed out that German was no longer the only language targeted by language restrictions in Iowa during World War I and epitomized the resulting anti-foreign sentiment.

Ward, Archie. “Governor Harding Delivered a Strong Address at Dubuque College.” *Dubuque Times Journal*, 7 April 1918.

Ward quotes Harding as predicting that the war would last an additional three to five years. This information was important to me because it helped explain why Harding enacted the ban on foreign languages. It had seemed strange to take such a drastic action so close to the end of the war, but this article helped me understand that Harding expected “a long, hard war” that would take years to win.

“We Should All Unite On the American Language.” Unidentified source, 30 May 1918.

The editorial writer who contributed this piece described the “evil of perpetuating any foreign language” offering strong support for the Gov. Harding’s proclamation and sharp criticism of the Bohemian community in Cedar Rapids for their “hindrance to building up a patriotic spirit.”

### Newspaper Articles

Booth, William. “One Nation, Indivisible: Is It History?” *The Washington Post*, 22 February 1988: A1.

Booth offered historical perspective to current trends in U.S. immigration. He described today’s “second great wave of immigration” as severely testing “the premise of the fabled melting pot, the idea, so central to national identity, that this country can transform people of every color and background into ‘one America.’” This showed me that today’s immigration issues in Iowa mirror what is going on in the nation as a whole. It also conveyed that patterns and criticisms of immigration and assimilation have not changed.

Branigin, William. “Immigrants Shunning the Ideas of Assimilation.” *The Washington Post*, 25 May 1998: A1

Branigin profiles a family of Mexican immigrants living in Omaha, Nebraska, to illustrate attitudes toward assimilation among the new wave of immigrants. “*E Pluribus Unum* (From Many, One) remains the national motto, but there no longer seems to be a general consensus about what that should mean,” Branigin states. He credits today’s emphasis on diversity and ethnicity as making it easier for immigrants to avoid the melting pot all together. “Salad Bowl” and “Mosaic” metaphors are now used to convey “more of a sense of separateness in describing this nation of immigrants.” Branigin’s description of assimilation as a gradual process nationally confirmed what I had learned about assimilation of immigrants in Iowa from Dorothy Schwieder’s work.

Challender, Mary. “Hispanics Tie a Family Knot Where the Heart Is In Iowa.” *The Des Moines Register*, 15 May 2000: E1.

This article was part ten in a twelve-part series published by the *Register* to offer an historical perspective on immigration in Iowa. The series examined “Iowa’s Roots” based on four ongoing waves of immigration culminating with the current wave of Hispanic immigration to the state. This article—and the entire series—was helpful to my research because it showed that the patterns of immigration have not changed much over the years. People come to improve their lives (for economic reasons or to find political and religious freedom). They often settle in ethnic communities and try to keep their own cultural and religious practices alive. Adults have difficulty learning a new language because of the pressures of work and adapting to a new place. Children, especially those attending public schools, help their families with the transition. And each wave of immigrants faces the same criticisms: “they” won’t learn the language, and “they” refuse to assimilate.

*Marshalltown Times Republican*. Clippings related to immigration and English language legislation, 1994-2002.

In Marshalltown there has been an influx of Hispanic immigrants since the late 1980s. The articles that I reviewed were mostly about how Marshalltown citizens have

adjusted to their new neighbors. For instance, in 1996 the paper published an eight-part series introducing the community to the culture and traditions of new immigrants, most of whom come from Mexico, hoping to build trust and understanding with Marshalltown's established community. These articles helped me comprehend the conflict that arises when significant numbers of immigrants settle in communities where they maintain their language and other elements of their native culture.

Okamoto, Lynn. "House Declares English Iowa's Official Language." *Des Moines Register*. 26 February 2002.

This article announced that the Iowa House sent a bill to Governor Thomas J. Vilsack designating English the state's official language. Years of contentious debates, public hearings, and rallies on the issue lead to legislative approval of the Iowa English Language Reaffirmation Act. Okamoto's sources showed me how divisive the language issue had become and it also helped me write up questions for my interview with Governor Vilsack.

"Orders German Language Out of All Schools in Iowa." *Des Moines Register*, 26 May 1918: 10A

The date of publication was one of the most significant parts of this source for my research. This article begins: "Governor Harding yesterday issued the following proclamation:" then goes on to reprint the entirety of the Babel Proclamation as it was released to the press on 25 May 1918. Finding the article in *The Des Moines Register* enabled me to verify the timeline of the proclamation and its being enacted in Iowa. Some of the secondary sources I accessed listed the date of the proclamation as 14 May 1918, citing a 1918 State Historical Society publication containing reprints of Iowa war proclamations as the source for the date and content of the Babel Proclamation. Going back to the primary sources allowed me to verify the actual date of Governor Harding's executive proclamation banning foreign language use in public places throughout Iowa for the duration of World War I. This article was also helpful because at the end of the proclamation, there was a paragraph from an Associated Press report stating that the governor's language ban met with "vigorous protests by Bohemian citizens [in Cedar Rapids] who constitute a third of the population of this city." Telegrams were reportedly sent to the governor by men representing the Bohemians asking Harding to recall the proclamation, lending support to what I had learned about other ethnic communities supporting restrictions as long as those restrictions did not impact their own community; but when the restrictions hit home, it was too late for protests to have any impact.

### Internet Sources

House File 2122: A bill for an act repealing the Iowa English Language Reaffirmation Act and rules of construction for English language laws. 24 June 2004. Available online: <<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/GA/80GA/BillHistory/HF/02100/HF02122>> (7 February 2005).

This is the text of current bill before the Iowa House of Representatives introduced by Rep. Wayne Ford (D), House District 65. Iowa Governor Thomas Vilsack indicated that this bill will not likely be debated or passed this year, but that he does support repeal of the Iowa English Language Reaffirmation Act. Examining current legislation was important to my research in order to complete the part of my paper showing how disagreement over language issues have resurfaced in Iowa politics and culture today.

Iowa English Language Reaffirmation Act of 2001. Senate File 165. Available on-line: <<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/GA/79GA/Legislation/SF/00165>> (7 February 2005).

Much controversy led up to the passage of this law and it remains a controversial topic in Iowa today. Iowa became the 27<sup>th</sup> state to enact recent legislation declaring English as the state's official language. The law is mostly a symbolic measure with no real legal ramifications. Gov. Vilsack opposed the legislation but signed it because the legislature promised additional funding for programs for English language learners within the state.

Mujica, Mauro E. "The Iowa English Language Reaffirmation Act is a Victory for All Hawkeyes." U.S. English, Inc. Press Release, 2 March 2002. On-line: <<http://www.us-english.org/inc/news/preleases/viewRelease.asp?ID=26>> (7 February 2005).

Mujica's statement was issued as a press release by the organization U.S. English, Inc., hailing "the historic passage of official English legislation by the Iowa House of Representatives...and we are astounded by the exaggerated retorts from self appointed leaders of minority groups." Mujica went on to describe "howls of protest" aimed at the legislation despite polls showing that "majorities of Iowans had long wanted English as the state's official language." Coming from the self-described "oldest and largest nonpartisan citizens' action group preserving the unifying roll of the English language in the United States," I expected this source to be overflowing with support for English language legislation. Their views helped me to understand how volatile the language issue remains.

### Publications

"American Loyalty by Citizens of German Descent." *War Information Series* 6 (August 1917).

"It is a very unhappy paradox that I cannot escape," wrote C. Kotzenabe. His essay and six others were compiled to make this pamphlet. They all write about the same thing; they don't like the idea of going to war with their homeland, but since they are Americans they know they must. This collection of essays shed a little light on the difficulty that persons of German descent experienced when they were pressured to give up their heritage in order to be "American." They held on to what they could and then looked at what would be best for their neighbors and the new life that had lured them away from their homeland.

*Educating Iowa's English Language Learners (ELLs): A Handbook for Administrators and Teachers.* Des Moines: Iowa Department of Education, 2004.

This resource was especially helpful to me because its introduction highlighted the sociopolitical and educational impact of languages in Iowa schools today. There has been a significant increase in the number of languages represented in Iowa and in the nation. The handbook reflects the better understanding of the cultural and linguistic differences of today's public school students. The first chapter delves into the legal implications of educating English language learners. It provided an overview of federal legislation that "clarifies the current legal responsibilities of all United States School Districts for the education of English Language Learners." It showed me how important my topic is in history, and how significant it remains today.

*Iowa: A Home for Immigrants.* Des Moines, Iowa: Mills & Co., 1870.

This guidebook was published to attract foreign immigrants to Iowa. It advertised all of the opportunities within the state and included a map. Published in English, German, Dutch, Swedish, and Danish languages, the book was sent to eastern cities in the United States where there were large concentrations of foreign-born residents and to Europe, hoping to attract hard-working, industrious people to the state. I found it ironic that only a few decades later, an anti-foreign attitude permeated Iowa (and the nation as a whole) and foreign-born people along with their customs and languages were suspect. I found this resource in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City.

*Marshalltown, Iowa: Model Community for New Iowans.* Marshalltown Model Community Task Force: 2002.

This report summarizes the work of the Marshalltown Model Community Taskforce as it seeks to attract and welcome new residents, especially immigrants. As one of the governor's model communities, Marshalltown has invested a significant amount of resources to make the Hispanic population a part of the community. This report was very helpful to me because it illustrated how some Iowa communities today are working to welcome immigrants and solve the conflicts that arise.

## Secondary Sources

### Articles

Allen, Leola. "Anti-German Sentiment in Iowa During World War I." *Annals of Iowa* 42 (1974): 418-429.

Allen's article discusses the agencies created by the federal government during World War I that assumed control over traditionally private enterprises. Passage of a national sedition act increased governmental power over thought and speech, escalating concern for loyalty and patriotism to levels of paranoia in many places throughout the nation. This was an important issue in Iowa because many Iowans were of German birth or ancestry. Through this article I began to understand that the wartime fear of disloyalty gave William Harding an excuse to act on his own personal prejudices. Allen writes that Harding did not outwardly question the loyalty of German Americans, but believed that "the various nationalities living in Iowa could and should become more thoroughly Americanized." Harding believed that "misunderstandings" resulted from foreign languages. Harding's extension of restricting German language in Iowa to banning all foreign languages seems consistent with his beliefs.

Beiler, Rosalind J. "German-Speaking Immigrants in the British Atlantic World, 1680-1730." *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 18, No. 3 (April 2004): 19-22.

This article described patterns and reasons for German migration, examining the religious communication channels through which early information about the American colonies was disseminated to potential immigrants and the kinds of information (often promotional literature similar the one published by the Iowa Immigration Board in 1870 cited earlier) upon which Germans based their decisions to immigrate. It was interesting to learn that Germans were recruited to settle in British colonies in America during the period covered by this article, just as they were recruited in Iowa during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Beiler's article helped me understand the larger context from which the Iowa immigration story emerges.

Davidson, Margaret E. "The Homefront: Hamburg, Iowa." *The Palimpsest* 60, no. 4 (July/August 1979): 116-120.

The author describes growing up in an Iowa town near the Missouri border that had been settled by Germans, but had few people of German ancestry living there at the onset of World War I in Europe. Anti-German sentiment rose steadily in the community, ignited by the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915. German classes ceased at the high school and little children were taught to hate the Kaiser. Vandals broke windows and splashed yellow paint inside and outside the Lutheran church. On a fall day in 1917, Hamburg residents lit a bonfire and burned German books while the gathering crowd waved flags, yelled, danced, and tossed more books into the flames. The war came to an end in Hamburg, Iowa as Armistice Day crowds grew "larger and uglier and drunker until the whole block was packed solid with raging, screaming men" who were trying to lynch a merchant after smearing his store with yellow paint. For me, this account brings to life all of the letters and documents outlining policy that I accessed in the Metcalf papers. It made me wonder if those who set the policies had any clue how angry mobs would enforce them.

Derr, Nancy. "The Babel Proclamation." *The Palimpsest* 60, no. 4 (July/August 1979): 98-115.

This article is a condensed version of the chapter from Derr's dissertation cited below that deals specifically with the Babel Proclamation and its repercussions in Iowa during World War I. After reading the overview provided by this article, I acquired a copy of the dissertation for more in-depth information.

Derr, Nancy. "Lowden: A Study of Intolerance in an Iowa Community During the Era of the First World War." *The Annals of Iowa* 50, no.1 (Summer 1989): 5-22.

In her article Nancy Derr wrote: "Lowden, Iowa, experienced some of the most blatant forms of intolerance that flared up during the months of American belligerency in the world War of 1917-18." That was most certainly true. The people of Lowden were mostly of German descent and they did not relinquish their cultural roots easily; this unwillingness to assimilate made surrounding towns folk so angry that they came in mobs to "cleanse" the town. This article opened my eyes to how brutal and inhumane ways of enforcing the Babel became.

*Grand Lodge Bulletin* 38, no. 9 (November 1937): 316-320.

Governor Harding was a life-long member of the Masons. This issue of the *Grand Lodge Bulletin* was a tribute to Governor Harding. The strange thing was there was no mention of Babel Proclamation. In every other source with biographical information about Harding that I had read up until finding this bulletin, the language ban was the most prominent thing mentioned. This source did offer some insight into Harding's early years and helped me understand why he made some of the choices he did.

"It's the Law—Speak English Only!" *The Goldfinch Magazine* 3, no. 2 (November 1981): 12, 13.

In this issue of *The Goldfinch* there was a series of articles dealing with the waves of immigrants that came to Iowa. One of the articles was about Lowden, Iowa, a town that was hit very hard by the anti-German sentiment surrounding the First World War because of its citizens were mostly of German descent. These articles told of the sometimes hate-filled experiences the German-Americans were forced to endure. This



source showed me what it was like for a citizen of German descent to live through the Babel Proclamation and the suppression of their culture and language.

Kreimer, Susan. "Half of State Has German Past." *The Des Moines Register*, 27 March 2000: E1.

Kreimer's feature was part of a *Register* series focusing on immigration in Iowa history. The *Register* identified four ongoing waves of immigration over the last 200 years. Not only did the writer identify those waves of immigration, she also explained why they happened. But perhaps the most helpful element of this series was the timing of these articles was superb. The series was published during a time of growing anti-immigrant sentiment aimed at the most recent newcomers to Iowa; this article was written to remind readers that all Iowans came from different lands in the not so distant past.

Mitchell, Jane. "The New Kid in Town." *The Goldfinch Magazine* 3, no. 2 (November 1981): 10.

Written for students, this article gets you thinking about what it is like to move to a foreign country where you don't speak the language and all the customs—including food, clothes, and pastimes—are strange. The article provided important information for my research, helping me understand why people chose to move to America and the challenges they faced when they got here. It described how most ethnic groups that came to Iowa established schools, churches, and social halls so they could maintain their language and traditions and teach these things to their children. The information presented in this article confirmed what I have read elsewhere and observed among immigrants where I live: it is much more difficult for older immigrants to learn a new language and change their ways of doing things. Kids find it much easier to adjust and those who attend public schools usually assimilate quickly.

Phillips, Charles. "Images of War." *The Palimpsest* 59, no. 6 (November/December 1978): 176-181.

This article in the *Palimpsest* is a lot like *Wake Up, America: World War One and the American Poster*. There are a lot of awesome images of propaganda posters in the article. This helped me to understand how the American people viewed Germans after being conditioned by the images on the posters.

"Who Came to Iowa?" *The Goldfinch* 3, no. 2 (November 1981): 14.

This *Goldfinch* article consisted mainly of charts and graphs that made census data related to foreign-born Iowans easy to understand and compare. It was amazing to see the number of people that were affected by the Babel Proclamation.

Wilson, Robert. "Fear Itself." *The American Scholar* 74, No. 1 (Winter 2005): 4.

Wilson, editor of the Phi Beta Kappa Society journal, wrote this essay as an introduction to the Winter 2005 issue focusing on understanding Iraq. The title caught my attention because fear and misunderstanding seemed to be at the heart of most of what I have learned about the treatment of German-Americans during World War I. The ideas in his essay seem timeless—they seem to relate to all times of national crises showing how Americans want to "do something" when this nation is threatened, and sometimes what is done (such as language bans or relinquishing freedom for the illusion of safety) is more dangerous than the original threat.

Wrede, Steven. "The Americanization of Scott County, 1914-1918." *Annals of Iowa* 44 (1979): 627-638.

Wrede argues that the public attitude toward citizens of German descent "changed from positive to negative quite abruptly" when the U.S. entered World War I. This article was helpful to my research because Wrede first described the national context that gave rise to acting out on anti-German feelings, then provided examples from an Iowa community of the types of coercion that forced citizens of German birth or ancestry to give up their language, customs, schools, and social societies in order to prove their loyalty to America. The forced and accelerated assimilation was successful because the county council of defense had created such a climate of fear among the German-American population.

### Books

Bonvillain, Nancy. *Language, Culture, and Communication: The Meaning of Messages*. Fourth Edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003.

Bonvillain's chapter on multilingual nations discusses the role of the English language in many countries and described other countries' establishment of official languages. In countries other than the United States, identifying an official language does not seem to be such a divisive issue. In the section on the United States, Bonvillain summarized recent trends in laws governing minority language rights. This helped me understand Iowa's language conflicts in context of national trends.

Kennedy, David M. *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

This source was vital to my research because it established the landscape of anti-foreign bias at the national level during World War I that provided context to understand what was going on in Iowa at the time. While my project focused on Iowa, it was important to remember that this happened all across the United States since it was perceived that the language and culture of immigrant communities threatened the wartime quest for national unity on the home front. It also helped me to understand how the councils of defense were organized at the state, county, and local levels and how these councils often functioned as little more than vigilante groups to punish those who were suspected of being "slackers"—those perceived to be less than 100 percent supportive of the United States's efforts in the war. This volume explained the process President Woodrow Wilson went through to come to the decision to enter the European war, offering information I had not previously encountered. President Wilson was concerned that U.S. opinion would be fragmented because of the number of foreign born people in America, and he feared all the progressive reforms in labor and trust-breaking that had been accomplished would not survive a prolonged war.

Lafore, Laurence and Alan Spitzer. "World War I Posters from the Ray Murray Collection at the State Historical Society." Exhibit Commentary, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

According to Lafore and Spitzer, "The war posters of 1914-1918 are among the most remarkable and evocative reminders of what was known as the Great War. They were demonstrations of something new in the history of warfare: the attempt by governments to involve the entire population in the national war effort." Posters played on peoples emotions, convinced them to support Liberty Bond drives, and made it patriotic duty to devote industrial and agricultural resources to the war effort.

Posters were part of a highly successful propaganda drive because they appeared everywhere, were cheap to produce, and had strong visual impact. They communicated the message of America's war effort to educated and illiterate alike. This commentary accompanied the exhibition of some of the propaganda posters in the Iowa State Historical Society in Iowa City, Iowa.

Mills, George S. *Rogues and Heroes from Iowa's Amazing Past*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1972.

George Mills wrote for Iowa newspapers for decades including almost 30 years as a legislative reporter and political writer for *The Des Moines Register*. This book describes what Mills called the "cyclical flow of events" in Iowa history, an assessment that seemed fitting to my paper which examines the recurring theme of conflict over foreign language in the state. In this volume, Mills described an argument between then-governor of Iowa William Harding and Cyrenus Cole, editor of the *Cedar Rapids Republican* newspaper, provoked by former president William Howard Taft while the three ate breakfast together one morning. Cole maintained that the language ban was unconstitutional, even in a time of war. "I went so far as to tell the governor that if my mother were still living, I would call her up on the telephone and in his hearing talk with her in a foreign language. If he arrested me for doing that, I would announce myself as a candidate for office and defeat him," Cole stated. This exchange showed me that the press would be a good source for opinions opposing Harding's proclamation.

Rawls, Walton. *Wake Up, America: World War I and the American Poster*. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1988.

I spent hours going through this book examining all of the U.S. propaganda posters. Seeing them helped me understand how easy it would have been for anyone living in this country during World War I to suspect their German-speaking neighbors of collaborating with the enemy. The posters portrayed everything German as evil, and everything American as virtuous and righteous. After seeing the posters in the State Historical Society's collection firsthand then examining the extended collection in this book, I was tempted to change my topic for this year's NHD project to focus exclusively on the role of propaganda posters in the U.S. war effort. Initially, U.S. involvement in World War I was not a popular cause that generated wide-spread support. Americans were reluctant to get involved in what they perceived to be Europe's war. To build support for American involvement in World War I, public opinion had to be turned around quickly. Posters simplified the message and communicated information in a way that mobilized Main Street on the home front. American propaganda posters later influenced Adolf Hitler who was a corporal in WWI. He was impressed with the compelling simplicity of posters in communicating the desired message and their ability to generate the desired result.

Sage, Leland L. *A History of Iowa*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1974.

The author, Leland Sage, taught history at the University of Northern Iowa from 1932 to 1967 where, he stated, his chief interest as a teacher "was in the stimulation of student writing in the field of Iowa history." In this book I found support of the census figures that I found in other sources. Plus it had charts, showing the locations of settlement of the immigrants coming to Iowa, which were very helpful.

Schwieder, Dorothy. *Iowa: The Middle Land*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1996.

Dorothy Schwieder was Professor of History at Iowa State University. In this book, she offers insight into the politics, economy, and cultural diversity of Iowa. Her chapters on immigration history, trends, and patterns of assimilation provided essential background for my research. This book also challenged the popular notion that immigrants of previous generations quickly assimilated into their new communities, relinquishing their heritage to the melting pot. This helped me see the misunderstanding perpetuated today when people complain that “the current crop of immigrants refuses to assimilate like our ancestors....”

Schwieder, Dorothy; Thomas Morain, and Lynn Nielsen. *Iowa Past to Present: The People and the Prairie*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1989.

In the eighth chapter, “Settlers from Many Lands,” the stories of immigrant families are told. This book was helpful in that it had the German group alongside the Scandinavians, the Italians, and many other immigrant groups and one could see the similarities and the differences in the way each of the groups were treated when they came to Iowa.

Wall, Joseph Frazier. *Iowa: A History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978.

Wall’s book was a valuable source for understanding the context of both the progressive politics and the xenophobic hysteria prevalent in Iowa during World War I. Dr. Wall taught history at Grinnell College in Iowa. His book provided anecdotes about enforcement of the Babel Proclamation, including the example I used in my paper of the five farm wives who were arrested for speaking German during a rural party line conversation.

### Unpublished Dissertation

Derr, Nancy. “Iowans During World War I: A Study of Change Under Stress.” Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1979: 368-424.

In this chapter of her dissertation, Nancy Derr analyzed Governor Harding’s language ban and its impact on Iowans. Her article that appeared in *The Palimpsest*, listed above, was taken from this chapter. Besides getting more details, going back to her original annotated work led me to many newspaper articles and other documents that were important to my research. In her dissertation, Derr lists the date of the proclamation as 14 May 1918. (I found this to be curious since the copy of the proclamation I acquired from Gov. Harding’s file showed that the executive order was signed on May 23, 1918.) Derr footnoted the date she used to a 1918 State Historical Society Publication, which I was unable to locate in the SHSI collections, but by locating the original proclamation I was confident that the date was 23 May 1918. I later found the SHSI publication Derr cited in the Sioux City archives, discovered the source of her error, and confirmed the date of the language proclamation to be 23 May 1918.

### Internet Sources

Baron, Dennis. “Official American English Only.” On-line: <<http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/officialamerican/englishonly/>> (7 February 2005).

The author is a professor of English and linguistics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Baron’s on-line article illustrated that the “English-only” debate

has raged since the late 1700s in America and related early efforts to outlaw German to more recent measures to discourage bilingualism. His work helped me understand the context for Iowa's language laws and his bibliography led me to other sources that were important to my research.

“Constitutional Topic: Official Language.” On-line: <[http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop\\_lang.html](http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_lang.html)> (7 February 2005).

The Constitutional topics pages at the USConstitution.net site allow researchers to delve deeper into constitutional issues. No official language is mentioned or contemplated in the United States Constitution, but, according to this discussion, an amendment to the constitution is introduced in almost every session of Congress to adopt English as the official language of the United States. This site included the text of language amendments currently before congress. It also provided links to groups opposed to establishing a national language, such as the ACLU, and to proponents of the legislation like U.S. English, Inc. This helped me achieve balance in my research.

Conte, Christopher. “Strangers on the Prairie.” *Governing Magazine*, January 2002. On-line: <<http://www.governing.com/archive/2002/jan/immig.txt>> (25 February 2005).

*Governing* is a monthly magazine whose primary audience is state and local government officials including governors, legislators, mayors and others, but the magazine's online archives allowed me to access a story about the current phase in Iowa's immigration story. According to Conte, “Iowa's immigrant-friendly policies aren't wildly popular among its residents, but the state has little choice. It needs people.” Conte explored American attitudes toward immigration after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the concerns of expressed toward Iowan's today regarding the current wave of immigrants, this time from Mexico rather than Europe. This article helped me see how the same issues surface with each new wave of immigration.

Crawford, James. “A Nation Divided by One Language.” *Guardian Unlimited*, 8 March 2001. On-line: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>> (24 February 2005).

In this article, James Crawford, a former Washington editor of Education and a lecturer on the politics of language, argues that politics still obscure the real debate about the United States' language policy. Crawford quotes linguist Einar Haugen's observation that “America's profusion of tongues has made her a modern Babel, but a Babel in reverse.” For my research, Crawford's discussion of the legal vs. symbolic effects of laws governing language was the most helpful. He also challenges the common belief that immigrants today refuse to learn English. He claims that as the population becomes more diverse, newcomers seem to be acquiring English language skills more rapidly than ever.

Horton, Loren. “Czech Culture in the Midwest.” [www.k12connections.iptv.org/community/SupportDoccs/Czechs.rtf](http://www.k12connections.iptv.org/community/SupportDoccs/Czechs.rtf)

“The Czechs, with their unique and rich tradition, made a distinct mark on American life.” In this internet article the author illustrates the experiences of many Czech immigrants after they uprooted and moved to the mid west. Much of their experiences parallel those of the German society. This source showed me all foreign born people were distrusted during the time of the First World War.

Jacobs, Arthur D. The Freedom of Information Times. On line: <[www.foitimes.com/internment/](http://www.foitimes.com/internment/)> (16 March 2005).

This web site contains research materials related to the treatment of U.S. and Latin Americans of German ancestry during World War II. Links to primary sources such as digitized *New York Times* articles and autobiographical accounts of internment and other discrimination helped me compare experiences of German-Americans during both world wars and helped me decide to narrow my topic to cover language restrictions in Iowa because the overall experiences of German-Americans during the two wars was too big for one NHD project.

Merrill, Dr. Peter C. German Immigrant Culture in America, Syllabus 1994; rev. 1998. On-line: <<http://www-lib.iupui.edu/kade/merrill/home.html>> (16 March 2005).

Merrill described how millions of Americans felt a degree of emotional attachment to the German language and German culture prior to World War I. German cultural ties were reinforced through church membership and German social clubs. By the time the U.S. entered the war in 1917, "American public opinion had begun to seize upon the idea that true Americanism entailed rejection of all foreign values even to the extent of giving up the use of any foreign language." Merrill asserted that this type of nativistic thinking "has a long history in the U.S. and is with us still today, but was blown into grotesque proportions" when America entered the war. His information helped me put the Iowa experience during World War I into perspective; the treatment of Germans in Iowa was much the same as in the rest of the nation. Also helpful in Merrill's course was a comparison between World War I treatment of German-Americans and the situation in World War II. "Although hard times in Germany during the 1920's had brought many new immigrants," Merrill asserted, "the German language had much less importance in the U.S. on the eve of World War II than had been the case on the eve of World War I." Language was not a significant target during World War II, but distrust of German ancestry led to government sanctioned internment of thousands of German-Americans. The World War II experience was beyond the scope of my paper but helped me understand how times of national crisis cause what Merrill called "nativistic" responses.

State Historical Society Prairie Voices Curriculum. [www.iowahistory.org/education/heritage\\_curriculum/timeline](http://www.iowahistory.org/education/heritage_curriculum/timeline) and [www.iowahistory.org/education/heritage\\_curriculum/timeline2](http://www.iowahistory.org/education/heritage_curriculum/timeline2)

This internet based curriculum for teaching Iowa History provided timelines that helped me understand the significance of my topic and where my project fit into Iowa's history. Learning where my topic occurred in history helped me look for contextual information.