

HEIKE BUNGERT, *Festkultur und Gedächtnis: Die Konstruktion einer deutschamerikanischen Ethnizität 1848-1914* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016), 637 pp.

German immigrants in the United States held on to their customs and traditions, replicating many of them in the New World. This included numerous festivities, often conducted by one of the many German-American associations and clubs (*Vereine*). Heike Bungert gives a detailed study of German-American celebrations and makes the convincing argument that this festival culture was a key element for the construction of a German-American identity and ethnicity.

German-American festival culture is widely acknowledged as a crucial factor in shaping and creating German-American communities. Still, apart from an introductory article by Kathleen Conzen<sup>1</sup> and Anke Ortlepp's study on women's associations in Milwaukee<sup>2</sup> that mention the importance of German-American festivities, there are very few reference works on this particular topic. Heike Bungert fills this gap with her outstanding monograph. *Festkultur und Gedächtnis* is a revised version of her habilitation dissertation submitted at the University of Cologne in 2004. In her book, Bungert compiles the currently most complete overview of German-American festivities, from celebrations of the many singing clubs, shooting associations, Turner and worker societies to festivals commemorating Friedrich Schiller or Alexander von Humboldt. This careful analysis and in-depth study is the definite new standard reference on German-American festival culture and its impact on German-American life between 1848 and 1914.

The three key terms in Bungert's study, as outlined in the introductory chapter, are *memory*, *festivity* and *ethnicity*. Heike Bungert argues that festivities were a means for German-Americans to remember the past and build a future in America while constructing a collective German-American cultural memory and

ethnicity (13). Bungert necessarily restricts her study to four major cities that witnessed German immigration: New York, Milwaukee, San Antonio and San Francisco. Her research focuses on the types of festivals that German-Americans organized, as well as gender relations and how German-Americans formed an ethnic group by way of organizing festivals. The account solely sheds light on German-American cultural festivals, leaving out religious celebrations since these often included other ethnic immigrant groups and did not contribute to the formation of a specifically German ethnicity (37). Bungert analyzes a wealth of different sources and most importantly German-American newspapers, which serve as the primary resource on German-American cultural life. She also consults festival programs and festival newspapers, as well as local historical archives and the archives of German-American associations (*Vereine*) in cities like Milwaukee.

The chronologically arranged work starts out with the period between 1848 and the breakout of the American Civil War in 1861 (chapter 2). Soon after their arrival, Germans established German clubs, including singing and Turner societies. These communities served several purposes. They provided stability and continuity, and a home where Germans could connect with their fellow countrymen. Unlike American clubs, German *Vereine* were often political and Germans were known to be very enthusiastic about their typically German celebrations which always included musical entertainment: "Music is a passion with the German" (157). In these early years of German-American *Vereinswesen*, the large festivals were often still a money-losing business. This changed in later years as new waves of immigration brought many new, German-born club members who were eager to participate in a burgeoning German-American festival culture, as Bungert argues.

In chapter 3, Bungert traces German festive culture from the Civil War era through the foundation of the German Empire in 1871. Next to revived Turner activities, two new festival types emerged: marksmen's festivals (*Schützenfeste*) and carnival celebrations (based on the Cologne carnival) with masquerade balls. Bungert astutely analyzes how Germans, the Turner members in particular, actively participated in the war effort and how this identification with their new homeland manifested itself in a newfound American

<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Conzen, "Ethnicity as Festive Culture: German-America on Parade," *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors, (New York: Oxford UP, 1989), 44–76.

<sup>2</sup> Anke Ortlepp, *Auf denn, Ihr Schwestern! Deutsch-amerikanische Frauenvereine in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1844-1914* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004).

patriotism displayed in German-American festivals. The Franco-Prussian war and the creation of the German Reich led to increased re-identification with the Old World they left behind and resulted in festivities commemorating the events in a reunified Germany. Bungert's analyses throughout the book are accompanied by charts illustrating which occupational groups made up the committees organizing the respective festivals.

German America between 1870 and 1890 experienced major immigration waves reaching a new peak in 1890. German clubs gained thousands of new members, especially in New York City and Milwaukee, where more than 300 German associations shaped German-American life by 1900 (244). As the number of *Vereine* grew, they became more specific and included regional clubs and subsections much more so than in years prior. According to Heike Bungert, this was especially true for the singing societies. Women also played a greater role in German-American cultural life as *Ladies Auxiliaries* of clubs emerged that had previously been dominated by men. With the introduction of public festivals, new forms of mass celebrations attracted both German-Americans and Anglo-Americans. Bungert compiles evidence for this, including pictures depicting German customs that were part of these public celebrations. Swabian migrants for example replicated the *Cannstatter Volksfest* in New York, which had much of the same characteristics of the original public festival in Stuttgart (281-84). While public festivals still upheld German *Gemütlichkeit* and included no shortage of beer and German food, new festivals were introduced such as the *Bicentennial* commemorating 200 years of German immigration to the U.S. in 1883 (342). Bungert gives a detailed report on how festivities that were distinctly German assumed a German-American character in their own right, lead-

ing to the emergence of a German-American ethnicity. Her fine-grained analysis of German-American club life gives new valuable insights into this important time for German America's heyday (chapter 4).

Chapter 5 is a detailed study of German-American festival culture between 1890 and 1914. Bungert observes that German-American festivals became more elaborate and included many new commercial elements. In addition, German-Americans built statues for their German icons like Goethe and Schiller, and for German-American *culture heroes* like Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben. Bungert claims that festivities were characterized by a "threefold nationalization" (518). The powerful position of the German Empire resulted in the implementation of military elements and celebrations commemorating the Kaiser. At the same time, German-Americans developed a sentiment of American patriotism identifying with their adopted fatherland (*adoptiertes Vaterland*) more so than ever before. And third, German-Americans grew in confidence and proudly displayed their own German-American ethnicity.

The book ends with a summary of the most important findings outlining how German-Americans both honored the memory of Germany and constructed a German-American ethnicity. Heike Bungert's study provides an excellent account of German-American festival culture. The great strength of this book is its attention to detail as it covers all aspects of German-American festivals, including well-chosen pictures and detailed charts illustrating which groups organized and attended the various festivities. Heike Bungert's *Festkultur und Gedächtnis* should be of great interest to German-American historians and German scholars interested in the field of German-American History alike.

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