Celebrating the Nation:

The German Peace Jubilee of 1871

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Lorenzkowski describes the effects of the 1971 peace jubilee in Waterloo County on German immigrants in terms of the German-Canadian identity. She builds here on anthropological and sociological traditions of looking at the popular expression of cultures to discern a given ethnic group's core values. The author argues that "at the nexus of intersecting ethnic and national identities" the Canadian nation is built. In other words, one must define one's own ethnic membership to be able to define one's nation.

"Today was a public holiday as there was a great peace-jubilee in town," Louis Breithaupt scribbled into his diary on May 2, 1871. In a few broad strokes, the sixteen-year old captured the festive air of the celebration that marked Germany's military victory over France in the Franco-Prussian War. Self-consciously modeled after similar gatherings across North America, the jubilee in Waterloo County was ushered in by a salute of twenty-one cannon shots, followed by divine service "in all the German churches of Berlin & Waterloo."[1] Once the visitors from afar had been welcomed at the train station, a procession wound its way to the court house where orators celebrated Germany's "righteous" triumph over France. As exuberant as the speeches that conjured German unity and might, were the ten thousand celebrants who clapped enthusiastically when an oak was planted "as a truly German symbol." In the evening, a torchlight procession marched down King Street that was "ablaze with illuminations, every house, workshop, factory, hotel and building being gracefully hung with Chinese lanterns, colored illuminations, devices in glass, and transparencies of every kind."[2] With revelers singing German songs and loudly cheering at portraits of Emperor Wilhelm I and his "grim Chancellor," Bismarck, the jubilee culminated in a fireworks display and the unveiling of an oil-painting of *Germania.*

In an age of nationalism and national movements, the Waterloo County peace jubilee brought to the fore conversations on national identity and cultural diversity that resonated far beyond the geographical confines of the county. It is in the "thick description" of such micro-historical events that we may hope to address questions pertaining to the interplay of ethnic and national identities. How did German celebrants come to imagine themselves as part of a national community? What national rituals and symbols did they invent? How were ethnic identities constructed against an internal or external "other"? What, and whose, nation finally was celebrated in the popular festival?

German festive culture in Waterloo County stretched back to the 1850s and 1860s and would spring into bloom in the grand singers' festivals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that blended ceremonial celebrations of German folk music with informal social gatherings and copious amounts of lager.[3] But the German peace jubilee represented a turning point. Its grandeur, gushed the Toronto *Daily Telegraph*, "was never surpassed by any similar event in Canada."[4] The very scale of the event thrust the German settlers of Waterloo County into the public spotlight and forced them, for the first time, to reflect publicly on what it meant to be German in Canada.

To study the history of celebrations as a window into the making of ethnic and national identities is to join a burgeoning field of scholarship.[5] It also means to follow in the footsteps of anthropologists and sociologists who have long seized upon "ceremonies, rituals, myths, and symbols as keys for the understanding of deeply held popular attitudes and values."[6] While providing important insights into social practices and traditions, the peace jubilee was not so much a mirror of social reality as it was an expression of cultural ideals. The jubilee endeavored to gather the local German community (that did not necessarily think of itself as "German" yet) under the banner of ethnic unity, and to establish German ethnic culture as central to the project of Canadian nation-building. In so doing, the celebrants highlighted the striking parallel between national and ethnic consciousness. Although the latter does not aspire to either "state power" or "sovereignty," it, too, as the historian Mathew Frye Jacobson has pointed out, cherishes a collective sense of community, draws boundaries between "us" and "them", and indulges in chauvinism.[7]

It is at the nexus of these intersecting ethnic and national identities that we have to situate the Waterloo County peace jubilee. Located in the gently rolling hills of Southern Ontario, the German settlements of Waterloo County shared in

many of the characteristics of the surrounding British counties; theirs was a rural world whose residents pursued agricultural activities or worked in the modest-size factories of the county seat Berlin. Yet the rhythms of everyday life had a distinctly German twist, as did the imaginary landscapes in which the county's residents located their sense of identity. Since German-origin settlers constituted the majority of the population – numbering fifty-five per cent in the county overall and seventy-three per cent in Berlin – they did not simply assimilate into Canadian society.[8] Instead, they wove together notions of nation, myth, unity and diversity into their very own "imagined community."[9] What made the resultant conversation on ethnicity and nationhood so complex, and so utterly intriguing, was the multitude of audiences involved.

Looking inward, the peace jubilee brought together German celebrants from Toronto, Hamilton, London, Guelph, Breslau, Hespeler, Hamburg, Listowel, and a host of other towns and hamlets, in a celebration of cultural nationalism. Looking outward, the jubilee impressed upon English-speaking Canada the colourful appeal of "the biggest and most successful demonstration which has ever taken place in Canada."[10] But the forces shaping the peace jubilee were not restricted to the local, regional, or even national levels. This was a transnational venture that liberally borrowed its festive cues from German-American peace jubilees. In the United States, no less than seventy-two German-American communities had celebrated peace jubilees that were described, in vivid detail, in Waterloo County's German-language press, thus furnishing a festive vocabulary with which to compose a local celebration.[11] The community of print also spanned the Atlantic Ocean. News from celebrations in Germany reached Waterloo County's residents, who, in turn, mailed printed accounts of their very own peace jubilee to relatives in Germany. Ironically, the German Fatherland that figured so prominently in these exchanges was a nation yet in the making. It would take several decades until Germany's citizens learned how to invest the national community with the feelings of loyalty and belonging previously reserved for local homelands.[12] Yet viewed from a trans-Atlantic distance, the newly created political entity had, almost instantaneously, donned the mantle of national greatness.

Nation

In eavesdropping on the conversations at the festivities, we find that nation was a malleable term. For the celebrants in Waterloo County, it signified both the political nation-state of imperial Germany and the cultural community of German migrants in Canada. Typically, orators began their speeches by recalling the disgrace of the German people in the era before national unity. Its internal divisions, Otto Klotz in Berlin declared, bode poorly for the Franco-Prussian struggle of 1870-71.[13] But as if to defy the boundaries of German principalities and kingdoms, the narrative went, the German people rose like one man to defend the country's integrity.[14] "The Prussian did not look with disdain on the Hessian or the Swabian," Otto Klotz enthused, "every one appeared in his place, from the sandbanks of the North Sea to the foots of the Alps. The whole people were united, and sacrificed willingly even more than they were asked to do."[15] Young and old, artisans and scholars, sons of day labourers and millionaires, Prussians, Mecklenburgers, Swabians, and Bavarians, republicans and monarchists all joined hands to fight against the neighbour to the West.[16] Out of their courage and unity, it was suggested, the nation was born. Hitherto, the editor of the *Canadischen Volksblatt* reflected, Germany had signified a geographical territory only. Now, it stood for a nation. At long last, he wrote, "our dear, old Fatherland" occupied the position which it so duly deserved.[17] From the triumphant cry "They were all Germans," it was a short step to exclaim that "We, too, are all Germans."[18] Basking in the glory of Germany's national ascendance, the unity of German migrants in Canada seemed a tangible goal.

The conciliatory air of the festivities impressed English-language observers who noted that the celebrants in Waterloo County "did not gloat over the sufferings of the French nor do anything by word or deed that could have pained the hearts of the most sensitive Frenchmen."[19] Despite attempts to devise a festive script devoid of martial overtones, orators tended to draw upon the binary opposition of "noble Germany" and "jealous France."[20] Ethnic group feeling, much like nationalism, depends "on one group's defining itself *against* another," as Matthew Frey Jacobson has reminded us.[21] In the case of the peace jubilee, this other was France.

In Waterloo County, the beginning of the Franco-Prussian War had pitted German-origin migrants from Alsace-Lorraine (then part of France) against migrants from the German core areas. In August 1870, these latent hostilities erupted into altercations and fist-fights.[22] One is left to wonder how those "German-French," who constituted four per cent of the county's population, reacted to Otto Klotz's vocal endorsement of a policy of assimilation that would bring the provinces back into the fold of German nationality, or how they viewed the ubiquitous banners that celebrated the return of Alsace and Lorraine to the Fatherland.[23] Their voices would remain inaudible in the subsequent festivities.

In recounting the history of the war, Waterloo County's German elite firmly placed the blame on the shoulders of France. Its "jealousy… at seeing Germany becoming one and united," James Young, the Member of Parliament for South Waterloo County said amidst cheers, had triggered "the triumphant but bloody march from Berlin to Paris."[24] Orator Schunck, in turn, pitted Germany's "noble, prudent and brave conduct of war" against "the revengeful, helpless and cowardly behaviour of the French."[25] Unjust, jealous, frivolous, presumptuous, arrogant, insolent, barbaric and criminal – this was the arsenal of adjectives that orators used to describe the beaten foe. Clearly, it was the laurel of the glorious victor, not the humble olive brunch that fired the imagination of orators in Berlin.

Myth

But if a German identity was forged against an imagined other, it also invoked "myths of ethnic descent" that were broad enough to appeal to different groups, yet narrow enough to be readily identifiable as German.[26] These myths were suffused with ideas of romantic nationalism as they

had been developed, most prominently, by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803). Herder regarded nations as organic structures that were intimately shaped by the natural environment. Nature, in turn, he suggested, embodied many of the characteristics that made the German nation different from any other.[27] At the 1871 peace jubilee, the special closeness of the German people to their natural environment was evoked in a powerful symbolic gesture.

By planting an oak tree in front of the Berlin Court House, the Waterloo county jubilee drew upon a symbol that had formed part of the repertoire of German celebrations ever since the first German national festival of 1814, in which celebrants had adorned houses and streets with oak leaves, branches and wreaths to commemorate the liberation of Germany from Napoleon at the Battle of Nations. In the course of the festivities, the oak – "an incarnation of fertility, steadfastness, and strength" – transformed into a metaphor of the German nation itself.[28] Over half a century later and a continent away, jubilee president Otto Klotz saw in the young oak, which had been imported from Germany for the occasion, a symbol of historical continuity. "The old Germanic tribes," he said, "regarded the oak as the forest's foremost tree; in oak groves they preferred to assemble to make decisions on war and peace, to hold court and divine service; for the old Teutons honoured god not in temples but in nature, in the grand temple of sacred nature."[29] Reminiscent of Tacitus's *Germania* that had contrasted German authenticity with Roman decadence, Otto Klotz projected onto the German tribes an image of noble savages whose inner strength and forthright morals were as admirable then as now.[30]

If the oak reached far into Germany's past – back to its ancient roots, so to speak – it also served as a reminder for future generations. "May this oak…," the orator's voice urged the audience, "always remind us and our descendants of the great German accomplishments, be it a memorial of the virtues of the old Teutons…"[31] Although the oak failed to prosper in later years, its meagre growth a poor testimony to German greatness, Otto Klotz's words did fall on fertile ground. Between 1874 and 1912, the German-origin residents of Waterloo County staged no less than eight singers' festivals to celebrate the German soul in song and sound. Here, indeed, an imagined past had inspired an ethnic revival.

Although the organizers of peace jubilee celebrations made use of a festive vocabulary that had been developed in national celebrations in Germany, they did add their own symbols that corresponded to their experience of migration. Judging from the coverage of the jubilee celebrations, the symbols of dual loyalty that graced the festivities were as ubiquitous as they were persuasive. From buildings fluttered the Union Jack alongside the German tricolour, while the celebrants bowed their heads to their adopted homeland; only upon the rendition of "God Save the Queen" did the crowds disperse and the public celebration end.

Unity/Diversity

In Waterloo County, where German-speaking migrants presented the majority of the population, neither newspapers nor orators dared to question the loyalty of "the Germans of Canada."[32] Instead, speaker after speaker lauded "the German character – naturally quiet and unobtrusive, obedient to the laws, patient under extreme suffering, possessed of dauntless bravery," as Charles Magill, M.P. for Hamilton, put it.[33] The very presence of dignitaries who included members of the House of Commons and the Ontario Legislature, the County Court Judge and the bar of the county, the town council and neighbouring county officials, indicated that the jubilee was an 'institutional' celebration, one that was "leveled with the power structure."[34] The local establishment of both German and British cultural origins vocally endorsed the festivities.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that the *eminence grise* of the jubilee, Otto Klotz, sought to translate the festive exuberance into political claims. "We Germans, here in Ontario…," he announced, "should occupy in this country the position to which we are entitled as sons of the grand, enlightened Germany."[35] His tone of confidence was palpable. Evidently, Waterloo County's collective memory did not harbour stories of nativist attacks or even native resentment, so prominent in German communities south of the border. As local charter group, German-speaking settlers had cut the forest and cultivated the land. As pioneers, they claimed a place in the nation's narrative that was at its centre, not its margins.

In what was one of the most remarkable characteristics of the peace jubilee, this place was readily conceded to them. Members of the House of Commons, who climbed the speaker's platform in Waterloo County, emphasized the close ties between the German and the British peoples, who were united "by the bonds of sympathy between the German and British Empires."[36] By emphasizing the ties of kinship that bound together Great Britain and Germany, orators cast expressions of German patriotism as unthreatening. "While the German people took natural pride in the success of the Fatherland," James Young, M.P. for South Waterloo said, "they loved the Queen of England, and the glorious constitution under which they lived."[37] Nowhere was this image of an essential union between the German and British peoples more powerfully captured than in an address by local English-speaking citizens, presented to the organizers of the jubilee:

> You can hardly fail to remember that the bond of union between your Fatherland and our Motherland is one that has been cemented by relationships the most tender and sacred possible, that in the hatred of oppression and aspirations after true liberty, the genius of our fellow-countrymen in both lands is the same; and that in reverence for truth, morality and religion, the observance of law and order, and respect for constituted authority, as well as in the cultivation of al the graces of every day national life, the people of Germany and Britain have long been in mutual accord.[38]

It was in the Dominion of Canada, the address continued, that "German" and "British" citizens had joined forces to build a "Great Canadian nationality." In the New World, these two great peoples were merging "as Canadians and

Colonists relying upon the same rights, civic and political, animated by the same principles and aims." In fact, so similar were their character and mission that the "English Residents of Berlin" were proud to assert that "we are so much one with you in every-thing as it is possible for any two peoples to be."[39]

Conclusion

A snug self-confidence permeated the speeches at the 1871 peace jubilee. Living in a heartland of migration, where the cultural norm was German, not British, German orators reveled in their entitlements as nation-builders. English-speaking orators, in turn, confirmed the privileged role that German migrants held in Canadian society by pointing to the close ties between the German and British Empires. This rhetorical device was soon appropriated by migrants themselves, for it allowed them to camouflage as "almost British" in the years of imperialism, when cultural differences came to be regarded with suspicion. Although the peace jubilee did not result in a national organization, its impact at the regional level was unmistakable. In Berlin, the jubilee sparked a campaign to cultivate "German nationality in language, customs, and traditions" that was spearheaded by the German-Canadian Choir Federation, founded in November 1873. A loose association of German choral societies of Berlin, Waterloo, Preston, Toronto and Hamilton, the *Sängerbund* organized no less than eight singers' festivals in Waterloo County between the years 1874 and 1912. If the peace jubilee had spoken in the language of cultural nationalism, its musical successors helped formulate just what this German identity meant in a Canadian context.

As such, the most "German" of celebrations, whose proceedings the young Louis Breithaupt had so faithfully recorded in his diary, harboured important lessons for the making of Canada's national identity. If the forging of group identity, be it ethnic or national consciousness, involves drawing boundaries between "us" and "them", the German peace jubilee of 1871 reminds us how categories of social integration and exclusion may derive from transnational conversations. The jubilee celebration further highlights the cultural creativity entailed in the forging of ethnic and national symbols, whose origins were projected into a symbolic space and time. In the final analysis, the festival helped shape a cultural tradition that would, many a decade later, become deeply embedded in the national consciousness; the peace jubilee sought to weave changes into the fabric of mainstream society by demonstrating that ethnic difference was a legitimate category within the Canadian nation-state.

Notes

1 *University of Waterloo.* Doris Lewis Rare Book Room, Breithaupt Hewetson Clark Collection. "Diaries of Louis Jacob Breithaupt," May 2, 1871.

2 Toronto *Daily Telegraph,* May 3, 1871, 4; *Canadisches Volksblatt,* May 10, 1871, 2-3; *Berliner Journal,* May 4, 1871 and May 11, 1871, 2-3.

3 Barbara Lorenzkowski. *Border Crossings: The Making of German Identities in the New World, 1850-1914.* Ph.D. (History), University of Ottawa, 2002.

4 Toronto *Daily Telegraph,* May 3, 1871, 4.

5 Key studies in a North American context include Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Ethnicity as Festive Culture: Nineteenth-Century German America on Parade," in Werner Sollors ed., *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 44-76, April Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American Through Celebration* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), and David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

6 Geneviève Fabre and Jürgen Heideking. "Introduction." *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation: American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century.* Eds. Geneviève Fabre, Jürgen Heideking & Kai Dreisbach. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 1.

7 Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 46 & 77.

8 *Census of Canada, 1871.* For exemplary historical accounts of Waterloo County see Elizabeth Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township Through Two Centuries* (Waterloo: St. Jacobs Printery, 1995), Geoffrey Hayes, *Waterloo County: An Illustrated History* (Kitchener: Waterloo Historical Society, 1997), and John English and Kenneth McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Robin Brass, 1996).

9 Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* (London: Verso, 1991).

10 Galt *Reformer,* quoted in the *Berliner Journal,* May 18, 1871, 2.

11 For a summary description of German Peace Jubilees in the United States see *Die Deutschen in Amerika und die deutsch-amerikanischen Friedensfeste im Jahr 1871: Eine Erinnerungs-Schrift für die Deutschen diesseits und jenseits des Oceans* (New York: Verlags-Expedition des deutsch-amerikanischen Conversations-Lexicons, 1871).

12 Alon Confino. *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

13 *Berliner Journal,* August 25, 1870, 2.

14 *Ibid.,* May 11, 1871, 2-3 and Toronto *Globe,* May 3, 1871, 4.

15 *Berliner Journal,* May 11, 1871, 2-3.

16 *Die Deutschen in Amerika,* 1.

17 *Canadisches Volksblatt,* May 10, 1871, 2-3.

18 *Berliner Journal,* May 11, 1871, 2-3.

19 Toronto *Daily Telegraph,* May 3, 1871, 4. See also Hamilton *Daily Spectator,* May 4, 1871, 3 and Toronto *Globe,* May 3, 1871, 4.

20 This distinction mirrored the anti-French tenor of Sedan celebrations in 1870s Germany. See Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor,* 47.

21 Jacobson, *Special Sorrows,* 18.

22 *Berliner Journal,* August 25, 1870, 2.

23 *Ibid.,* May 11, 1871, 2-3 and Toronto *Globe,* May 3, 1871, 4.

24 Toronto *Daily Telegraph,* May 3, 1871, 4.

25 *Berliner Journal,* May 4, 1871.

26 Anthony D. Smith. "National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent." *Research in social movements, conflict and change,* 7 (1984): 96.

27 Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade,* 93-7 and Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins Publisher, 1995), 102-3.

28 Dieter Düding. "Das deutsche Nationalfest von 1814: Matrix der deutschen Nationalfeste in 19. Jahrhundert." *Öffentliche Festkultur: Politische Feste in Deutschland von der Aufklärung bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg.* Eds. Dieter Düding et al. (Hamburg: Rowohls Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 76 & 68.

29 *Berliner Journal,* May 11, 1871, 2-3.

30 Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 87 & 96-7.

31 *Berliner Journal,* May 11, 1871, 2-3.

32 Toronto *Globe,* May 3, 1871, 4.

33 Hamilton *Daily Spectator,* May 5, 1871, 1.

34 Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade,* 92.

35 *Berliner Journal,* May 11, 1871, 2-3.

36 Hamilton *Daily Spectator,* May 5, 1871, 1.

37 Toronto *Daily Telegraph,* May 3, 1871, 4.

38 *Kitchener Public Library.* Grace Schmidt Room of Local History, Waterloo Historical Society. Manuscript Collection 15.1c. "Address of the English Deputation to the Managing Committee of the German Peace Festival, 1871," Berlin, Tuesday, May 2, 1871."

39 *Ibid.*