

*DOES LANGUAGE SAVE THE FAITH?* THE POLITICS OF  
LANGUAGE AND ETHNICITY AND GERMAN CATHOLICS IN  
EARLY MOUNT ANGEL, OREGON

by

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A THESIS

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on the Bavarian festive tradition. This thesis argues that the social, political, and institutional forces that Mt. Angel's German-speaking Catholics encountered in Oregon in the early 1900s led to, and in some cases forced, a decline in German-speaking and the practice of German culture, until cultural trends in the mid-1900s led to a revival of celebrating German heritage, even though the culture that was re-embraced was "bavarianized." This thesis also argues that throughout the history of Mt. Angel's German Catholics, the church remained the strongest influence in the community. In trying times, the Catholic church proved to be more important to the settling generations than their ethnic German background and had the most significant impact on the community of Mt. Angel in its early history.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Dedication**

In memory of my Great-Grandmother Shirley Smith, UO class of 1956 (d. 2021), a former Mt. Angel Towers resident and an enduring example of a devout Catholic and spiritual mother.

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## Personal Anecdote

Most American towns with a rich and interesting history have a historical society and a library that interested historians can visit. Most historical information about these towns are located in the historical society, the library, or perhaps the local university archives. Mt. Angel has all these pathways available for study. And yet, to develop a deeper understanding of the culture and history of Mt. Angel, I decided to travel to Engelberg, Switzerland. There, a Benedictine Abbey lies which has been tucked in between the mountains south of Lucerne for 900 years. Close to the three founding cantons<sup>1</sup> of Switzerland, this area has been a predominantly German-speaking and Catholic cultural region for over a thousand years. I stayed in Sempach, Switzerland, a 20-minute train ride from the City of Lucerne. Sempach was a small city that was home to a series of historically significant events, including a series of battles for the independence of the three founding Cantons of Switzerland from the Hapsburgs in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The building in which the Airbnb was located was over 500 years old; the oldest building in the city. The walls of the multi-story buildings flanking the road through the city were adorned with the city crest and the flag of Switzerland. A series of restaurants were open until midnight in the summer, serving both local and global cuisine. Locals or tourists would spend hours in the chairs outside with a coffee or cool beer close at hand. Many paths led from the city center to the banks of Lake Sempach. The city was also home to a few striking monuments, including a column honoring the mythic soldier Winkelried, a giant wood-carved statue of “The Watcher” of the lake, and a gargantuan Catholic church. “Gottesdienst” (mass) was held at various times throughout the week, but the parish priests migrated between churches

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<sup>1</sup> Cantons are the equivalent of states in Switzerland.

all around the lake. Many of the first monks in Mt. Angel, including Father Adelhelm himself, were from the cantons of Obwalden, Nidwalden, and Schwyz.

I eventually made my way up to Engelberg and explored the town from which Mt. Angel took its name. The train rode through one mountain, into the gradually sloping valley, then into a long, upward-leading tunnel that came out into the a pocket of the alps. The narrow, deep Engelberg valley was flanked by houses and hotels, farmhouses that mounted the hills, and was ascended by gondolas that led over the mountains on either side. Then there were the staggeringly tall peaks, the highest of which is Titlis. Despite the immense size of the mountains, the valley did not feel claustrophobic. The City of Engelberg was obviously a tourist center, but during the August weekdays it seemed to be a ghost town. There was a ski school that had raised Olympic medalists, and a school ran by the Benedictines, which continues to as a central education institution for the local children.

My first sojourn at the Abbey, albeit without contact from the monks, was in the courtyard next to the Käseerei, cheese shop, and a very well-tended and orderly garden, with a statue on the side closest to the entrance remembering the founder of the Abbey, Abbot Adelhelm.





## Introduction

This thesis is about the cultural, ethnic, and religious constitution of Mt. Angel, Oregon, focusing on the period of 1867-1967, which saw the most significant events for German Catholics and their descendants in Mt. Angel. Originally a site of hunting grounds and religious practice for the native Molalla tribe, Anglo-American pioneers settled in the area beginning in 1848. The Molalla tribe was removed to a reservation in the 1850s and therefore no longer frequented the nearby Abiqua River or the area under the butte. German-speaking settlers began moving to the area beginning in 1867, leading to a demographic shift that changed Mt. Angel into a community in which most people could claim to speak German or have German-speaking parents. However, due to a series of challenges in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mt. Angel's German-speaking Catholics became an Americanized Catholic community that placed less importance in its ethnic identity and lost the use of the German language in everyday life. This thesis argues that social, political, and institutional pressures accelerated the tendency of the community of the German Catholics to avoid using German and expressing their German ethnic identity, instead encouraging them to embrace the mainstream culture of the broader anglophone society. This thesis shows that there were both external and internal pressures at play, favoring the direction of "Americanization." In 1965, Mount Angel's community decided to reembrace its earlier heritage with their own Oktoberfest, which was uninformed by the earlier German ethnic culture that was part of the early German Catholics' experience. I argue that in this 100-year period, the institution that most influenced the community, including its Americanization, was the Catholic church. Its influence can be tracked throughout all historical periods from the time the first Catholics set foot on Mt. Angel soil to the present day.

Generally, historical studies of German Catholics in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s focus on the Midwest, where German Catholics were most concentrated in the United States, and, in some places, constituted a majority. Mt. Angel stands out, then, as a small, close-knit community of German Catholics in the Pacific Northwest that, unlike the surrounding towns, steadily grew while maintaining its confessional and ethnic singularity. There were other concentrations of German Catholics where they constituted a minority, including a community in Portland, Oregon, where the German Catholic newspaper *St. Josephs Blatt*, which circulated under the Benedictines from 1888 to 1966, originated from. Because of the concentration of German Catholics at this time, residents of Mt. Angel would have felt quite comfortable speaking German to one another. But the identity of Mt. Angel's German Catholics did not, and could not, reside in a vacuum, which was made most apparent during the era of World War One and the Prohibition era, when anti-German sentiment was at its highest. It is here that German Catholics in Mt. Angel, along with other German Catholics, were prompted to make decisions about how their identities would come to be integrated into the broader culture. Finally, the post-World War Two era shows how German culture became more accepted in the broader United States, and how many descendants of Germans, including Mt. Angel residents, found ways to reembrace German culture, albeit without their ancestors' linguistic and ethnic context.

This paper identifies various parts of the identity of the people of Mt. Angel from 1867-1967, then, using the historical and political realities of each identifiable period, shows how this identity interacted with, reacted to, and was changed by the broader society. In the first section, I will summarize the early history of the first white settlers of Mt. Angel from 1851-1867, identify their cultural, religious, and historical significance, and explain the factors that caused these early settlers to be supplanted by German-speaking Catholics and an Abbey. In the second section, I

will frame the history of German-speaking Catholics in Mt. Angel from 1867-1914, a period in which they settled and grew, and the same period wherein Swiss members of the Order of St. Benedict, a Catholic monastic tradition, were welcomed into the small but very supportive community. This section will identify the cultural and economic significance of the arrival of these two groups and describe the way in which their mutually beneficial relationship solidified the German and Swiss Catholic identity of the community, despite a series of challenges for the Benedictines. This section will also identify forces at play that came to challenge the security of that identity. In the third section of this thesis, 1914-1933, I will show how the experience of German Catholics in Mt. Angel of the German scare of World War One affected and changed the community relative to the broader United States, as pressure against *Deutschtum* increased. This section makes a distinction between reactions of “soul Germans” and “stomach Germans” to the anti-German pressures, identifies the relation of *Kirchendeutsch* to these identities, and showcases the *St. Josephs Blatt*, a German-language newspaper published by the Benedictine Press, and its editor at the time, Br. Cölestin, as the most vocal defender of German Catholic identity. Here, an argument is made that World War One accelerated and strengthened preexisting tensions and trends that ended the use of German language in everyday life, a clear marker of the decline in German ethnic identity. In addition, it argues that the Catholic church in Mt. Angel was the primary force in the community of both stability and change. Finally, this section will show the permanent damage that World War One and the Prohibition Era had on expression of German identity, leaving a few remnants, as indicated by the culture at the time. The fourth section covers the post-World War Two era, a period of revisitation and rediscovery of German cultural heritage in Mt. Angel and beyond. This section ends with founding of Oktoberfest, or O’Fest, as the locals call it, and the selling of the *St. Josephs Blatt*. Finally, the

fourth section highlights the role of the Catholic church in Mt. Angel's early history. The Church was, and is, the community's primary organizing institution, and helped preserve much of Mt. Angel's early history and culture. Analyzing this period of Mt. Angel's history can contribute to discussions surrounding the fate of German identity in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when German immigration was high and the broader anglophone society was challenged by increasing diversity.

# I. Mt. Angel's White Settlers: From Protestant Anglophone to German Catholic 1850-1881

## Early White Settlement around the Lone Butte 1850-67

The Lone Butte<sup>2</sup> area had had white settlers living there for nearly two decades before the first German Catholics arrived. These early settlers were mostly Anglo-American, meaning that they were born in the United States and primarily to English-speaking and Protestant families. However, there were indigenous people that lived in and occasionally occupied the area now called Mt. Angel before the first settlers. The native Molalla tribe used the surrounding territory for hunting animals and cut down trees for more visibility, as the white settlers noticed when they first arrived.<sup>3</sup> The surrounding area was also a gathering place for the Molalla, Cayuse, and Klamath for trade and cultural exchange. What made the surrounding area in particular stand out, however, was the butte, which the Molalla tribe called “Tap-a-lam-a-ho,” meaning, “mount of communion.” Early white settlers discovered that on top of the butte there were stones constructs<sup>4</sup> “said to provide arranged seats for prayer circles”<sup>5</sup> that the natives would visit when passing through the area. In a letter that Davenport wrote to the founder of the Mount Angel Abbey, Father Adelhelm Odermatt, “On being asked why they did not pray where they were camped on Abiqua Creek and not go to the trouble of climbing the butte, the Indians replied,

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2 The butte was also called “Graves Butte” by the early settlers.

3 Ursula Hodes, OSB, *Mt. Angel, Oregon, 1848-1912*. University of Oregon Thesis Series; No. 20. (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon, 1940), 4.

4 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 3-4. In 1851, T. W. Davenport, a land surveyor, wrote that he “observed many semi-circular walls of stone, each enclosing space enough for a comfortable seat, and as high as ones shoulders when in a sitting posture, upon cross sticks as high as the knee.”

5 Joel Ripinger, OSB, *Struggle and Ascent: The History of Mount Angel Abbey*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2020), 12.

‘The Great Spirit dwells near the mountain top’”.<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that between 80 and 100 Molalla resided along the Abiqua River near the Lone Butte around the mid-1800s.



**Molalla Kate dressed in full regalia**

Figure 1 Credit: usgennet.org

There was little interaction between the Molalla and the settlers, and only expressed indifference, suspicion, or outright hostility, which culminated in a violent conflict along the Abiqua that resulted in more casualties for the Molalla; around a dozen natives killed to just one white man injured. Hodes, a member of the Benedictine Sisters in Mt. Angel in the early 1900s, also had nothing good to say about the Molalla, indicating that negative views of the tribes

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<sup>6</sup> Hodes, Mt. Angel, Oregon, 4. Hodes sources this from Homer Davenport in a letter to Father Abbot Adelhelm in “Talapamaho” Yearbook of Mt. Angel College, (Vol. I, 1922).

persisted long after their departure to the reservation.<sup>7</sup> Overall, there was minimal interaction, and their presence was scarcely discussed by the time of the arrival of the German Catholics in the late 1860s, because they were removed to the reservation in the 1850s.

The first white settlers supposedly knew of the chairs on the butte but never gave the butte any religious touch of their own. The early white settlers were religiously and ethnically ambiguous, in part due to the historical effects of westward expansion and the 1848 gold rush, which led to an assortment of farming families from the Midwestern and the Eastern United States heading west to take advantage of the low-cost land grants and the growing need for resources and industry to support gold mining.

Before the arrival of the German Catholic families, there were the beginnings of a town culture, with dances, parties, camp meetings, school activities, spelling bees, and big homestead weddings. It was the early “pioneer culture” that dominated in this time and brought people together in homes, the church, or the school, encouraging warm reception of newcomers and assistance in building log cabins and, later, new framed homesteads for the surrounding farmers. There were at least 19 original settling families that were not German-speaking Catholics.<sup>8</sup> These families all desired that a school be established to educate their children, as they desired their children to become leaders and professionals in the growing society in Oregon, instead of remaining on the farms their whole lives. The first school was built in 1854, with an average of 18 pupils in attendance by the end of the first year of operation.<sup>9</sup> Samuel Allen, one of the first

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7 Hodes, Mt. Angel, Oregon, 5. Hodes expressed that their “mentality” was of a “low order” and that their women were “modest and reserved in bearing but in personal appearance they were careless and dirty”. This essay is an old source and Hodes lived 100 years ago, in a time where the anglophone society held very negative stereotypes of the former residents of the area they lived in.

8 Hodes, Mt. Angel, Oregon, 16.

9 Hodes, Mt. Angel, Oregon, 16.

settlers and a member of the Cumberland Presbyterians, directed the construction of the “Abiqua” or Allen church and helped construct it.<sup>10</sup> According to Hodes, residents of the area attended the church regardless of religious affiliation.

The political makeup of the settlers also seemed to be evenly split, although there were only a few adamant supporters of the Confederate side of the Civil War.<sup>11</sup> According to Hodes, political party affiliations were evenly Democrat or Republican, but “practically all the residents strongly adhered to the Union cause.”<sup>12</sup> The “first and only regular pastor” was T.H. Small, who, due to his “intense dislike of slavery,” came by ox team to Oregon with his wife and nine children, settling on a donation land claim in 1853 in the Silverton hills.<sup>13</sup> The early Lone Butte community was therefore ethnically and religiously tolerant as a general rule, with the exception of the native American tribes, and politically balanced. In other words, it was not all that different from the broader Oregonian society.

Perhaps the most interesting historical effect the early white settlers had on the area was playing a part in the founding of the University of Oregon. The St. Mary’s Parish book alleges that the Cumberland Presbyterians gathered in Nov. 1851 at the home of Samuel Allen (Halls Farm, now owned by Mt. Angel Abbey) to discuss building a school. In spring of 1853 they began to raise funds that totaled \$25,000. These funds resulted in construction of the Presbyterian Academy in Eugene in 1856<sup>14</sup> that, when it later closed, contributed to discussions

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10 According to Hodes, as a community leader Samuel Allen was directly involved in the skirmish with the Molalla and Klamath tribe, also called the “Battle of Indian Bluff.”

11 Hodes, Mt. Angel, Oregon, 18.

12 Hodes, Mt. Angel, Oregon, 18.

13 Hodes, Mt. Angel, Oregon, 14.

14 Steve McQuiddy, “Eugene.” The Oregon Encyclopedia. Oregon Historical Society, January 19, 2023. [https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/eugene/#.Y-ccDy\\_MJ8I](https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/eugene/#.Y-ccDy_MJ8I). St. Mary’s Parish book says 1854, but the Oregon Encyclopedia disputes this.



to build a public university, which became the University of Oregon. “Because when the Presbyterian Academy closed, the city of Eugene petitioned the legislature for a state college”.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the early settlers under the Lone Butte played a role (although certainly a small role), in the establishment of the University of Oregon.

The first white settlers were not ethnically, religiously, or politically homogenous, making it a polyglot, anglophone community. Like many of the early settlers of the Western frontier, industrious men led their wives and many children onto plots of land purchased for a low price from the government and sought to use their skills to provide goods for the growing mining industry and the trade routes that supplied them. Some of them may have also been motivated to escape the context of slavery, although this motive was not by any means out of the desire to be live in harmony with African Americans. Their economic motives, ethnic and religious differences, and the desire to give their children a higher-class life, although not generally different from surrounding communities, would come to be points of division between them and new arrivals under the Lone Butte.

### **The German Catholics Arrive 1867-1881**

The new arrivals of the late 1860s and the 1880s were the result of increased access to fast transportation, desires for a new life in the West, and political circumstances. This new migration changed the Lone Butte community from a typical American frontier settlement that was confessionally ambiguous into a close-knit religious community. The first German Catholic family to reside under the Lone Butte was the family of Swiss Catholic Robert Zollner. In the eleven years following Zollner’s arrival, eight additional German-speaking Catholic families

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<sup>15</sup> Bauman, Ivo, and Jim Flory, *St. Mary’s Parish 1880-1980: Mt. Angel, Oregon*. (Mt. Angel, Oregon: St. Mary’s Parish, 1979), 10.

came to the land under the butte. According to Hodes, “Motives of health, climate, and the desire to provide his growing sons with a farm brought Mr. Mathias Butsch to Oregon”.<sup>16</sup> Butsch, a German who immigrated to the U.S. at age 20, arrived in 1878 and is credited with being responsible for advertising Mt. Angel as a place for Catholics to settle in Oregon.<sup>17</sup> According to Hodes, Mathias Butsch wrote both for “Volks Freund Zeitung” (People’s Friend Newspaper) and “Stimme der Wahrheit” (The Voice of Truth), German Catholic newspapers with wide distribution in the Midwest. He advertised the place as a haven for German Catholic families to work the land and give their children a proper upbringing. Louis Schwab allegedly saw these ads and moved his family to Mt. Angel in October 1881.

Eventually, word got around, and more families came. For example, Peter Scharbach and his family moved, following his brother Joseph Scharbach, who lived in Gervais at the time, and “spoke in such glowing terms of the excellent climate and land”.<sup>18</sup> German Catholics began arriving bit by bit until a community of considerable size grew around the Lone Butte. However, this was not the first Catholic or German Catholic community in the area. St. Mary’s Parish book states “Catholics came late to Mt. Angel. St. Paul, St. Louis and Gervais were expanding Catholic settlements before the arrival of the first Mt. Angel settlers”.<sup>19</sup> Because of the preexistence of other parishes and schools, the children of the first German Catholic settlers attended the anglophone “Grassy Pond, Hazel Dell, and other schools in the vicinity”<sup>20</sup> and went first to St. Louis, then to Gervais for church, which were 9 miles and 6 miles away

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16 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 21.

17 Flory, *St. Mary’s Parish 1880-1980*, 10.

18 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 21.

19 Flory, *St. Mary’s Parish 1880-1980*, 9.

20 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 20.

respectively. Given the common mode of transportation at the time was either by oxcart, by horse, or on foot, this was an inconvenience for a growing community that centered itself around its church.

The most culturally significant event for the German Catholics of Mt. Angel before the arrival of the Benedictine monks was the construction of the first Catholic Church in Mt. Angel. Mathias Butsch and his sons “willingly and cheerfully” donated lumber for the construction and built the 40’x30’ church that accommodated 30 families with the help of John Weiss of Gervais on land donated by Joseph Scharbach.<sup>21</sup> By that time, there were 15 Catholic families.<sup>22</sup> Hodes deduces that the church was built in the Spring of 1881 based on letters Butsch sent to Archbishop Seghers. The dedication ceremony happened on August 21, 1881, with Gervais pastor Reverend Father Hartleib appointed the first pastor of Mt. Angel until he was replaced by the Benedictines. It was during this dedication ceremony that Archbishop Seghers<sup>23</sup> visited the Lone Butte community and ascended for the first time the place that was later to be the seat of the Mt. Angel Abbey. Supposedly, news of the dedication of the church made its way into the Catholic Sentinel, which attracted the attention of Father Adelhelm,<sup>24</sup> and begins the story of the Benedictines.

### *Economic and Social Effects of the New Arrivals*

Because the Anglo-American settlers and their “pioneer culture” meant they were generally tolerant of new families seeking to settle on a homestead, the arrival of the first few

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21 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 24-25.

22 Fr. Maurus Snyder, OSB, *50 Years Ago: Benedictines Arrive in Oregon*. (St. Benedict, Oregon: Mount Angel Abbey, 2002), 22.

23 Archbishop Seghers was the Second Archbishop of Portland after Archbishop Blanchet.

24 Snyder, *50 Years Ago*, 23.

families did not generate any major change in the community, until the economic prospects changed. The symbol of this change is the laying of narrow gauge railroad tracks from Mt. Angel to Silverton by October 4th, 1880.<sup>25</sup> This allowed for speedy transportation of hundreds of people and thousands of pounds of goods to the area around the Lone Butte, leading to further growth of the agriculture industry and giving more incentive to landowners to fully cultivate their land to produce greater quantities of fruits, grains, and hops. These agricultural prospects attracted German Catholic families, who greatly desired to live off their land and produce agriculture as a familial and economic unit. The difference in the willingness to cultivate land seems to have been a cultural difference that benefited both the Catholics and non-Catholics in the area, whom Hodes claims, “did not excel as agriculturalist[s].” Hodes claims that the first settlers cultivated the prairies, but plowed around stones and forests, instead of removing these obstacles to enable more large-scale farming. “Subsequently, when the German-American settlers arrived,” Hodes writes, “the first settlers were enabled to sell their large tracts of their land at a tempting price and the majority then migrated to the larger cities”.<sup>26</sup> The early settlers did not wish their children to have the same difficult lives on the farm and frontier, but rather pursue more lucrative careers. Moving closer to cities, if they could afford it, was therefore the more desirable option. The 1880s were the turning point of this gradual demographic shift, leading to a higher concentration of German Catholics in the Mt. Angel area.

After the Molalla tribe was removed from the area, the people in the Lone Butte area were anglophone, politically mixed, and ethnically and religiously ambiguous. Changing political and economic conditions led to German Catholics, who came with money to the

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25 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 24.

26 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 56.

Western frontier desiring to buy land with good agricultural potential and to be able to raise their children in the Catholic faith and in an ethnic German context, meaning that the German language would be spoken in the home and religious services would be conducted in German. Although there were plenty of families to constitute this ethnic German community, the Lone Butte area needed its own permanent pastor who could offer more consistent religious services and teachers who could instruct their children in the German language and Catholic faith. Their prayers would be answered swiftly, thanks to the efforts of Mathias Butsch and Archbishop Seghers.

## II. The Benedictines Establish Themselves in Mt. Angel 1881-1914

### Why Mt. Angel? History, Identity, and Ambition

The founding of a Benedictine monastery on the Lone Butte has its beginnings in the Swiss Civil War of 1847, also known as the “Sonderbund” War. In this war, seven Catholic cantons of Switzerland<sup>27</sup> formed an alliance, called the Sonderbund, in opposition to the Protestant, centralizing forces of the Swiss Federal Government. The resulting civil war lasted less than a month, ending in the defeat of the Sonderbund, the reassertion of the Swiss federal state, and anti-Catholic retaliation in the form of secularizing many Catholic institutions, including monasteries. The Benedictine Abbey at Einsiedeln, Switzerland, which was closer to protestant strongholds like Zürich and not as protected by mountains, was secularized. To keep the Swiss monastic tradition alive, Einsiedeln sent monks to the U.S. in 1854. Fearing a similar fate, the monks of Engelberg formed a contingency plan to establish a monastery in the United States and sent monks, including Father Frowin Conrad and Father Adelhelm Odermatt, to the states, where they would receive support from the monks of Einsiedeln who had come before them. In 1873, these two found themselves in Missouri, Father Frowin as a newly elected abbot in Conception and Father Adelhelm as a leader of a convent and local parish in nearby Maryville.

Although the Sonderbund War brought the Engelberg Benedictines to the United States, there were different reasons that led to the founding of the Benedictine Abbey in the Lone Butte community. Even though Fathers Adelhelm and Nicholas Frei were touring the Western frontier for a new monastery location less than a decade after they arrived in the U.S., the political

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<sup>27</sup> Since the late 1520s, most of the Swiss cantons had established either Catholicism or Reformed Protestantism as the official, public religion.

circumstances in Switzerland had changed, and the Engelberg Abbey was no longer under threat of secularization. Therefore, with the success of the monastery in Conception, there was no existential need to establish one elsewhere.

There were other reasons for Adelhelm's excursion into the West; reasons of differing leadership style, personal ambition, and ethnic identity. In the previous section, we see that the Anglo-American settlers slowly left the Mt. Angel area because of, according to Hodes, [d]ifferences, which "became more pronounced as time advanced".<sup>28</sup> The same could be said about Father Adelhelm's departure from Missouri. Although they had both arrived in the United States in 1873 with the intent of carrying on the Swiss Benedictine monastic tradition, Abbot Frowin was taking on many of the common practices of the Abbey of Beuron, Germany, which, in the context of Otto von Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* against Catholics, also had interests in growing new roots in the United States.<sup>29</sup> Among the evidence for this change of course was that Abbot Frowin had been gifted a Beuronese Ceremoniale by Beuron Abbot Maurus Wolter.<sup>30</sup>

Father Adelhelm wished to return to a purer, strictly Swiss Benedictine monastic tradition, just like they did it back home. An energetic priest who was accused<sup>31</sup> of being too focused on parish work and too little on proper monastic life, Adelhelm wanted to set off into the West, into states like California, Colorado, and Oregon, where fledgling German Catholic communities were taking root and in need of the sacraments and education for their children. So, with the approval of the Archbishop of Engelberg, he set off on a tour of the frontier with Fr. Nicholas Frei. After Mathias Butsch's petitions to Archbishop Seghers reached the traveling

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28 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 57.

29 Anja Ostrowitzki, "Maurus (Rudolf) Wolter," Portal Rheinische Geschichte, 2017, <https://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/Persoenlichkeiten/maurus-rudolf-wolter/DE-2086/lido/57c935c3eaa642.81273483>.

30 Ripinger, *Struggle and Ascent*, 5.

31 Ripinger, *Struggle and Ascent*, 22. Both Abbot Frowin and Archbishop Seghers were concerned about this.

Benedictines, Father Adelhelm informed Mr. M. Butsch on November 5, 1881, that he intended visiting Fillmore within two weeks and assured him that he would accept the invitation to locate there if he could “obtain a grant of the hill and sufficient farm and wood land surrounding the hill”. On his return to the archepiscopal residence, November 16, 1881, Father Adelhelm was asked what place he preferred for a location. He answered: “The Butte near Fillmore”.<sup>32</sup>

Archbishop Seghers immediately appointed him pastor of Gervais, Fillmore and Sublimity.<sup>33</sup> . In 1882, Father Adelhelm recruited monks from Engelberg and nuns from Maria Rickenbach, a Benedictine convent 15 miles from Engelberg, to follow him into the unknown.

### **Why Mt. Angel? Sacraments and Education**

In 1883, within a year of sending out requests, the community under the Lone Butte would receive a new pastor in the form of a traveling monk, who was seeking a German Catholic community in the Western frontier, that could support a Swiss Benedictine monastic community. The initial visit by Fathers Adelhelm and Nicholas Frei in October of 1882, in which they coasted into town on a hand-pumped railcar<sup>34</sup>, was partially the result of patriarch Mathias Butch, who, upon hearing from Archbishop Seghers that two Swiss Benedictine brothers from Engelberg were visiting the state to find a suitable place for a monastery in the western frontier,

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32 According to the Mount Angel Abbey website, in a letter that Father Adelhelm wrote to Archbishop Anselm in Engelberg, he said of Oregon, “I hunger and thirst for mountains, for during seven years in America I have not yet seen a decent hill. [Oregon] is said to be a kind of Paradise, if one can speak of such a thing on this earth.” Oregon’s mountains must have inspired some nostalgia for the Swiss foothills where he grew up.

33 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 29.

34 Snyder 53-54 The story of how Fr. Adelhelm Odermatt and Fr. Nicholas Frei first visited Mt. Angel is rather comical. While on their way to Mt. Angel, the monks accidentally disembarked the train a few stops early. They found evening refuge in the home of the Catholic family headed by Jim Casey. Upon entering, a daughter in the family kissed Father Adelhelm, mistaking him for her cousin, who was supposed to return soon. The family resolved to get them to Mt. Angel that night, and did so, with son James Casey and one Maurice Gleason, by pumped hand car, on September 31<sup>st</sup>.



“begged” him to send the fathers to their community”.<sup>35</sup> The two monks heard about the growing German Catholic community, and, once they arrived, two brothers held the second mass ever held in the newly-constructed St. Mary’s church on Rosary Sunday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1882.<sup>36</sup> Robert Zollner even brought the two monks to the top of the Butte!

For a small German Catholic community on the remote Western frontier, a Benedictine monastery sitting in the middle of the town was a godsend. This monastery would bring a few monks who were also ordained as priests who could both teach and serve as the regular pastors for St. Mary’s Church, so that the families could celebrate their religious traditions, especially the mass, which was essential to their Catholic faith. A Swiss Benedictine monastery was even better; they would be able to continue celebrating the mass in German and instructing their children in the German language.

It wasn’t until five years after settling in Mt. Angel that the Benedictines were able to satisfy the second desire the German Catholic settlers had conditioned their support on. Mt. Angel college opened in October 22, 1887, with 125 boys and young men enrolled the first year, followed by the seminary, which opened in 1889. The college offered day and boarding school options, allowing them to take in children from all over the state. The seminary was the only one of its kind in the Pacific Northwest when it was founded.<sup>37</sup> The Benedictine Sisters took charge of the younger ages of schooling with the founding of St. Scholastica’s academy on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1883, beginning with 75 pupils. They also had a convent building of their own completed in

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35 Snyder, *50 Years Ago*, 52-53.

36 Snyder, *50 Years Ago*, 24.

37 Ripinger, *Struggle and Ascent*, 23.

1888.<sup>38</sup> The Sisters taught elementary grades<sup>39</sup> and music up until the 1960s. As Bill Predeek, the President of the Mount Angel Historical Society, recalls:

When I was growing up in town here the first three grades of our school were private. Nuns taught first three grades until 1967. The high school I went to was private until my junior year had to close. Nuns taught there. College prep school. Some very, very well-read people.<sup>40</sup>

Like other German Catholic communities in the United States, this education was priceless, because state intrusion and the perceived “Protestant tinge”<sup>41</sup> in public schools would, in their view, create a less nurturing environment for young Catholic children. Furthermore, instruction in the German language, although primarily the responsibility of parents, could be ensured so that they could continue German traditions and maintain their ethnic German brand of Catholicism.

### **The Mt. Angel Name**

Another result of the establishment of the narrow gauge railroad that Fathers Adelhelm and Nicholas Frei originally traversed via handcar was that the area around the Lone Butte was given its first official name, because a train tool shed on one of the train track outposts was named “Fillmore,” after J.F. Fillmore, General Superintendent of the railroad. Hodes deduces that the construction of this shed and the naming occurred sometime between March 24, 1881, which is the date of a letter Archbishop Seghers sent to Mathias Butsch of Gervais, and Sep. 30,

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38 Queen of Angels Monastery, “Our History: Benedictin-SRS,” (The Benedictine Sisters, February 2023), <https://www.benedictine-srs.org/our-history>.

39 According to the Mt. Angel Historical Society’s Facebook page, Mt. Angel’s First Public School, under District #91, was also founded in 1883.

40 Bill Predeek, interview by author, Mt. Angel, Oregon, June 24, 2022, audio recording, transcribed and edited for clarity, 10:00-15:00.

41 Steve Wayne Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” in Dissertations and Theses (Portland: Portland State University, 1988), 12.

1881, in which Seghers' letter addresses Mathias Butsch of "Fillmore near Woodburn."<sup>42</sup> At some point in the year 1881, the area of Mt. Angel could be assigned three different names. My conversation with Bill Predeek describes the dilemma:

"So, then, a man named mister Settelmeier bought a chunk of ground from Benjamin Cleaver and plotted a townsite. He called it Frankfurt... Then, Benjamin Cleaver's son Monroe petitioned the post office to create a post office here in Mt. Angel. And I've got a copy of what he filled out to get this post office. He originally wrote 'Filmore' down as the name of the town. Then he erased it and wrote 'Roy' over the top. Now, eventually, Mr. Settelmeier sold this back to Cleaver and they changed everything to Roy... But, for a period of time, you would buy a train ticket to Filmore, you may have lived in Frankfurt, but you got your mail in Roy".<sup>43</sup>

The name of a town is very significant for a community, particularly a religious one. Although the German Catholics could very well say that they came from Germany or Switzerland, it was just as important for their new home to have a name that reflected their identity. That is, perhaps, why Sister Ursula Hodes accuses Mr. Settelmeier of being "anti-Catholic" when he plotted out a town of 75 lots on both sides of the train tracks, which naming it "Frankfurt" in July 12 of 1881. Indeed, Fr. Maurus Snyder also notes that Father Adelhelm's wish to rename the town "is said have been vigorously resented by an old gentleman who was a considerable landowner hereabouts, and whose prejudices ran strongly in favor of German Lutheranism".<sup>44</sup> Beyond this corroboration. However, Settelmeier's filing of the name of the town precedes the arrival of the Benedictines, who were the most desiring of a name that reflected their identity. The name dispute was settled when Father Adelhelm himself requested that the name of the post office be changed to "Mt. Angel." Mt. Angel was incorporated as a city in Spring of 1893 with the motto of "Justice to all, favors to none."

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42 Hodes, *Mt. Angel, Oregon*, 24.

43 Predeek, interview, 40:00-45:00.

44 Snyder, *50 Years Ago*, 26.

## Time of Trial and Change for the Benedictines

In 1892, a fire, starting in a small wooden shed, destroyed the monastery, the church, the seminary, mill/carpenter shop, and college buildings<sup>45</sup> at the foot of the Butte, leaving the brothers without a monastery for a decade. The Benedictines couldn't have endured this without support from the community. The German Catholic families rallied behind them and gave them shelter and financial support, and the Benedictine Sisters provided food. The brothers didn't just receive support from Mt. Angel either. There was a "generous" response by "local and civic officials," Salem and Portland mayors appealed on their behalf for funding, and Archbishop Gross did his best to pull together funding. Continuously plagued by concerns over debt, Father Adelhelm embarked on a 5-year begging tour while at the parent monastery, Engelberg Abbot Anselm Villiger had much "worry and sleepless nights".<sup>46</sup> Rippinger credits one of the motivating factors behind the surprisingly broad base of support for the Swiss Benedictines to being a reaction to ascendant "nativist sentiment toward Catholics in the Northwest and elsewhere." Homeless, tired, and thousands of miles away from their parent monastery in Engelberg, the Benedictines relied on a young, faithful, German Catholic community they'd only known for a decade to get them through the hard times. The early financial help also came just in time; just before the financial panic took hold in 1894.

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<sup>45</sup> Rippinger, *Struggle and Ascent*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> Rippinger, *Struggle and Ascent*, 28.



Figure 2 Mt. Angel from the Northwest, c. 1913 (credit: Mt. Angel Historical Society)

### **On the Lone Butte**

With the founding leader of the monastery abroad, a new, trustworthy brother, Fr. Benedict Gottwald from Engelberg was sent to watch over the Benedictines. He presided over the constant struggle to maintain monastic discipline while also performing their duties for the community. Despite Abbot Anselm's best efforts with "model monk" Fr. Benedict, two factions began to appear. The first was divided by the decision of whether to belong to the American Cassinese Congregation, an association of Benedictine monasteries, or to remain part of the rival Swiss-American Benedictine Congregation. The brothers were so divided by the circumstances of not having a monastery, some brothers began joining the American Cassinese Congregation

regardless of what the other monks said about it. There was also a considerable debate over whether to build the new monastery on the butte, as Archbishop Seghers and Father Adelhelm had originally dreamed of, or to continue to be located on the valley floor with the rest of the growing town. These two disagreements were correlated to the divisions between new “school monks,” who desired to be more engaged with the community, and older monks, who had more concern for a monastic experience conducive to silent prayer and the conservation of German-language liturgy.

On April 4, 1898, the decision was made to begin construction of the new monastery on Mt. Angel, a decision supported by the monastic leaders.<sup>47</sup> As part of this new arrangement, the Benedictine brothers and sisters were placed under the authority of Adelhelm’s former Abbot, Fr. Frowin Conrad, although there were no hard feelings; Abbot Frowin “fully endorsed” Adelhelm as the “savior of Mt. Angel”<sup>48</sup> for Adelhelm’s begging tour efforts. The effect of the relocation on top of the butte was significant. The lofty location made it easier to return to a private monasticism that was supported by the older monks and comparable to the remoteness of Engelberg. This solidified the prominence of the Abbey and made the monastery something to “espy” and admire just as Archbishop Seghers did when he first visited the Lone Butte. The location of the monastery on the Butte also divided the Benedictines monks from the Sisters, whose convent remained in the southwest of town. The dispute between pro-Swiss American and pro-Cassinese factions was resolved as well, as Mt. Angel entered the Swiss-American Federation when it achieved the status of Abbey. After 22 years of growth, Mt. Angel elected their first Abbot, Thomas Meienhofer, on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1904.

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47 Fr. Adelhelm, Abbot Anselm Villiger of Engelberg, Abbot Frowin Conrad of Conception, MO, and the new Archbishop of Portland William Gross all supported this move.

48 Ripinger, *Struggle and Ascent*, 38-39.

## **The *St. Josephs Blatt***

Beyond providing for the sacramental and educational needs of the community and managing their internal affairs, the Benedictines decided they needed a news publication that could extend the reach of the Benedictines into other German Catholic communities and families. Luckily for them, the first steps toward such a publication had already been taken by St. Joseph's Church in southeast Portland. This newspaper was the brainchild of Fr. Alois Sommer, a German American pastor of a German-speaking congregation. However, the demands of running such a paper became so great that the responsibility was transferred to the Benedictines in 1888. The most influential monk for the newspaper was Brother Cölestin Müller, who took over editorial duties in 1889 until his death on June 12, 1929. As Steven Wayne Harmon writes, the paper grew from being "small" and "church-oriented monthly" newspaper to an "internationally read weekly" newspaper that covered Catholicism, German-American matters, and local and international news. The paper was to become "a voice in defense of the German people, culture, and language".<sup>49</sup>

The *Blatt* kept its finger on the pulse of the country and on religious and political movements. According to Harmon, "*Deutschtum* in America faced strong opposition and the *Blatt* fought not only external political forces pressuring German-America to shed all ethnic baggage, but also the internal pressures of the Church to speed-up artificially the assimilation of her immigrant flock".<sup>50</sup> The stated mission of the *Blatt* was to teach; it was to teach something of:

...die Leiden und Freuden unserer heiligen Kirche und ihres geheiligten  
Oberhauptes, die Ausbreitung der Religion, die Wirksamkeit des Apostolischen  
Stuhles, die Thaetigkeit der Bischoefe und Priester, der Entwicklung der

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49 Harmon, "The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919," 5.

50 Harmon, "The St. Josephs-Blatt," 19.

Missionen und Orden—ueberhaupt was immer die Aufmerksamkeit eines katholischen Christen verdient, dem die Ausbreitung des Reiches Gottes auf Erden am Herzen liegt.<sup>51</sup>

...the pains and joys of our holy church and her sanctified leaders, the dissemination of the religion, the efficacy of the Apostolic See, the activity of bishops and priests, the growth of the missions and orders, overall what has always deserved the attention of Catholic Christians, so that the expansion of the kingdom of God on earth lies in all hearts.

The Blatt's readership grew over time, attaining a circulation of 50,000-75,000 by 1909. That year marked 20 years of circulation and was also the same year an independent press building was completed, so that it did not reside in the monastery. Under Br. Cölestin, it did its part to invite more German Catholic families to the area.<sup>52</sup> However, it didn't limit its advertisements to Germans. An ad in the Blatt put out an advertisement to Catholic families in 1905, and again in 1915: "Written inquiries should be addressed to Rev. L.A. LeMiller or Joseph Sander (in German), Joseph Mischaud (in French), D. Patrick (in English).<sup>53</sup> It advertised "wonderful meadows" and noted that "prices for sensibly run dairy businesses are rising. A catholic church and a parochial school offer old and young the best opportunity to fulfill their Christian duties and achieve a good education." They even advertised specific houses. "Wonderfully suited for older folks, or those who want to send their children to the famous Mt. Angel college." The Blatt was what connected Mt. Angel to other German and non-German Catholic communities in an otherwise ethnically-heterogenous church. The quote below points to the Blatt's perception of itself:

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51 Harmon, "The St. Josephs-Blatt," 20-21.

52 Harmon, "The St. Josephs-Blatt," 32. The January 3, 1908 issue of the Blatt continues to advertise "little known function of the paper" to German immigrants seeking to settle in the area.

53 Augustine DeNoble, OSB, *Early Mt. Angel: Its People and Events*, (St. Benedict, Oregon: Mount Angel Abbey, 2016), 46.



“A good press is like a second church, and in some respect even more so, since the written word has a greater influence than the spoken one”.<sup>54</sup>

The *St. Josephs Blatt* was the last German-language Catholic newspaper in Oregon, ceasing wide circulation in the 1960s. In its early years, it had many readers in Mt. Angel.<sup>55</sup>

The events of 1881-1914 show that, after political turmoil and through the ambitions of Father Adelhelm, the Swiss Benedictines found a German Catholic community that enthusiastically accepted their presence and set up a mutually beneficial relationship. These two different groups had similar goals: supporting a community rooted in the Catholic faith, educating the next generation, and maintaining a uniquely German (and Swiss) ethnic identity. For this, it was worth it for the German Catholics to financially support the Benedictines, and for the Benedictines it was worth settling in a remote community in the Northwest. One of the fruits of this relationship was the *St. Josephs Blatt*, which promoted this German Catholic identity and invited more Catholics in. The German Catholic community in Mt. Angel was in a very secure position relative to other German Catholic communities.

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<sup>54</sup> Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt,” 21.

<sup>55</sup> Augustine DeNoble’s excerpts from the *Saint Josephs Blatt* mention local readers of the SJB. It was at least read, shared, and taught in the households of John Weiss (d. 1927) of Gervais (p. 157) and Joseph Bochsler (d. 1916) of Mount Angel (p. 28), who was, born in Aargau, Switzerland on May 12, 1844 and brought to California as a baby. However, these are among SJB’s “oldest” subscribers, so it is by no means an accurate representation of local readership.

### III. World War One and *Deutschtum* 1914-1933

By the early 1900s, Mt. Angel seemed to be quickly becoming a typical Willamette Valley town, rich with agriculture and containing a close-knit community. Thanks to the efforts of the first German Catholic families, it continued to express its distinctly German Catholic identity through its bountiful education, religious services, and the *St. Josephs Blatt*. Eventually, this small community did not go unnoticed by the anglophone and protestant majority that was predominant in Oregon and in the broader United States. The major conflicts and events, beginning with World War One in 1914, challenged the ethnic identity of Mt. Angel's people, and revealed that *Deutschtum* or "Germanness" was not as secure as previously thought, and came in many different forms of expression.

Historian Frederick C. Luebke, who wrote about German ethnic identity and politics in Nebraska in a similar period, distinguishes between "stomach Germans," who "followed a way of life that was materialistic and emotional...one that emphasized the warm embrace of ethnic life and its unquestioned customs and values," and "soul Germans," who made a more "ideological or rational" defense of their language, customs, and ethnic life. For "stomach Germans," being German meant attending a German beer garden, reading a German language newspaper or magazine, enjoying a game of cards<sup>56</sup>, or attending a quilting group of church ladies, chattering in German. Examples of stomach German activities in Oregon include the German Rifle Club, the German Mutual Aid Society, the German Gymnastic Society, and the Harmony Singing Society which were active in Portland in the late 1800s.<sup>57</sup> "The 'soul

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56 German card decks have 32 cards, suited as Acorns, Leaves, Hearst, or Bells, ranking from 7, 8, 9, 10, to Under Knave (subordinate), Over Knave (overlord), King, and Ace. Southern German decks have 36 cards, which include the "6".

57 Roberta Lee Schmalenberger, "The German-Oregonians, 1850-1918" in *Dissertations and Theses*, (Portland: Portland State University, 1983), 40.

German,” by contrast, went beyond social and personal leisure activities to articulate, idealize, to rationalize, consciously and deliberately, what he perceived to be his superior culture...essential to this was the maintenance of the German language, which he believed to be the most beautiful in the world”.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, soul Germans are the type to go against the grain, justifying their cultural practices at the inconvenience or exclusion of others. This is why, according to Luebke, German ethnic apologist movements were often led and informed by socialist ideals, since socialism was a highly-rational, modern German invention.<sup>59</sup> Soul Germans were also the type to create German-language publications that had a high opinion of German culture and the German fatherland.

In addition to these two identities, there is a group that incorporates different aspects of both “soul Germans” and “stomach Germans,” the *Kirchendeutsch* or “church Germans”. From the reformations of the sixteenth century to the collapse of German society during the world wars, religion was the most important aspect of every German’s identity. Following the wars of reunification under Otto von Bismarck, German identity was divided between Protestant and Catholic. Although German identity was also divided by region, Germans who emigrated to America did not have the luxury of regional identification, and therefore consolidated around religious lines. The German Catholics of Mt. Angel, for example, originated from regions all over Germany and Switzerland. According to Luebke, for German Protestants and German Catholics in the United States, “each group had surprisingly little to do with the other.” The most important and somewhat surprising aspect of the *Kirchendeutsch* was that, as Luebke writes,

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58 Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I*. (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 28.

59 Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 317. Luebke explains that the Central-Verein took a conservative turn in response to political pressure caused by the revolution in Russia, unrest in Germany, and the Red Scare in the U.S.

“when they perceived that being German obstructed or prevented the attainment of their goals as church people, the majority were prepared to cast off their ethnicity to whatever extent was possible or necessary”.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, had they been pedantic, German Catholics might have referred to themselves as Catholic Germans. This predominantly religious identity had a different effect on German Catholics relative to German Protestants, in that it “forced Germans into a larger mold” of a church that, in the United States, was diverse and did not allow for church organizations that officially excluded other ethnicities.<sup>61</sup> For example, the first mass that Father Adelhelm ever said in the Mt. Angel area was in German, French, and English.<sup>62</sup>

Frederick Luebke compares German Catholics with German Lutherans and analyzes how their different approaches to the Christian faith affected the preservation of *Deutschtum*. Luebke writes that German Lutherans were often more ethnically solid, holding exclusively German religious services across the country with the number of worshippers reaching two million, by pre-World War One estimates.<sup>63</sup> These services were held for Germans by Germans, with the purpose of strengthening their faith. As Luebke writes, “The preservation of German language and culture was conceived of as a means, not an end.” This was the exact position of the *St. Josephs Blatt*, which had a motto: “language saves the faith.” Although the German Catholic and German Protestant *Kirchendeutsch* had similar intentions behind the continued use of the German language in conducting religious services, the historical emphasis on religious over ethnic identity doomed many German Americans to division in the World War One era, when

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60 Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 34.

61 Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 37.

62 Snyder, *50 Years Ago*, 32. On the Feast of All Saints on November 1 in the church of St. Gervase and Protase, Prior Adelhelm sang the Mass and preached in English, French, and German, “the usual sermon program for Gervais on Sundays and Holidays those days.”

63 Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 30.

anti-German sentiment was given institutional force, which further weakened their ethnic solidarity.

### **Soul Germans: The St. Josephs Blatt**

The dilemma facing German Catholics in Mt. Angel is best described by Luebke in his book, *Bonds of Loyalty*:

But the times were more difficult for persons whose religious values were touched by the crisis of loyalty. Each German-speaking denomination had erected its own complex of schools, colleges, seminaries, publishing houses, insurance companies, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged, and a multitude of social organizations, designed in part to preserve the religious identity of the group. Unlike the pyramid of artificiality, the National German-American Alliance, the German churches and their institutions refused to fade away. Thus, when the war came, the church Germans were the most likely to persist in behaviour deemed offensive or disloyal to by the superpatriots.<sup>64</sup>

What Luebke is describing here is how the *Kirchendeutsch* were unique from other German identities, in that it persisted in the context of more gradual cultural forces, such as childhood education, because they had their own institutions that raised their children in a distinct ethnic and religious context. Many of these *Kirchendeutsch* were well-equipped to defend their German-ness against dominant cultural and political forces, if they perceived that it was worth the fight. The most vocal soul German in Mt. Angel's German Catholic community during World War One was Brother Cölestin, Editor-In-Chief of the *St. Josephs Blatt*.

Harmon's coverage of the *Blatt* shows how Cölestin's belief in the superiority of the German culture and language and his status as a well-read, Benedictine monk meant Brother Cölestin was unabashedly anti-British and desired the U.S. to ally with Britain over Germany as conflict broke out between the two nations. Br. Cölestin made many criticisms of U.S. dealings with Britain and suggested Britain wanted to drag the U.S. into war. He justified his pro-German

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<sup>64</sup> Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 311.

stance because the Anglophone press, or the mainstream U.S. press, was disadvantaging and misrepresenting the views of German-Americans, who desired peace, not war. Nevertheless, *Kirchendeutsch* and soul Germans like Cölestin and those in the German-language press had an “...unswerving loyalty to Germany, Austria and Deutschtum in general. It became a matter of German pride”.<sup>65</sup> Harmon describes how, in the early months of World War One, the *Blatt* defended Germany and Austria and showed how they were “doing everything possible” to prevent war”.<sup>66</sup> The *Blatt* defended Germany’s actions throughout the war, relying on foreign and domestic channels of information to depict their own version of events, and decried England and the allies’ unjust atrocities , including starving German children by refusing to import milk.<sup>67</sup> The *Blatt* also called on German-Americans to write to their representatives to push for an embargo on the support to England and justified Germany’s sinking of the *Lusitania*.<sup>68</sup> These defenses of *German-ness* and German Catholicism were grounded in rational arguments and reflected how soul Germans thought they should react to pro-English sentiment in the broader society and questions of loyalty.

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65 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt 1896-1919,” 52.

66 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt 1896-1919,” 54-55.

67 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt 1896-1919,” 104. "It was reported by the *Blatt* in a special feature on June 16, 1916 called “Tabak und Zigarren fuer die allies, aber keine Milch fuer die deutschen Kinder,” that President Wilson refused to intervene. “President Wilson was ridiculed for his ‘humane’ decision to allow packets of tobacco, cigars and cigarettes to be sent to soldiers in England, Belgium, and France, free of charge, yet when bombarded from all sides asking him to allow milk to be sent to infants in Germany he turned a deaf ear.”

68 Br. Cölestin claimed that the U.S. and British passengers were warned by Germans that to sail into U-boat-patrolled waters was to sail to their death. Instead, they should have sailed north. Br. Cölestin suggested that the British were intentionally reckless with American lives, so that if Americans were to be killed in the conflict it would drag the U.S. into war with Germany.

## *Language Saves the Faith*

A poem, published in the Blatt on July 2nd, 1915, is one of many expressions of love for the German language and Deutschtum provided by Br. Cölestin and the Catholic *Kirchendeutsch* throughout its time in circulation:

### **Die Deutsche Sprache in Amerika**

Du bist kein Fremdling in der Freiheit Lande  
Mein deutsches Lied, das voll und kühn erklingt  
Und bist du ferne auch vom Heimat Strande.  
Zu tausend Herzen eilst du leicht beschwingt;  
Mit allen einen dich di schönsten Bande.  
Durch welche je in hold Geschick verschlingt:  
Die deutsche Sprache ist's, die uns verbindet.  
Ob Lust ob Leid das Lied des Sängers kündet.

Du bist kein Fremdling; viele Millionen  
Sind, fern von Vaterland, von Herzen dein.  
Und über all, wo deutsche Herzen wohnen,  
Bist du ihr Kleinod, du ihr Edelstein!  
Wir beugen uns nicht mehr vor Fürstenthronen,  
Vor dir, o Muttersprache, nur allein.  
Mit jenem ersten Lied, das hell erklungen,  
Hast du auch hier das Bürgerrecht errungen.

Was kann, wie Du, so warm und hold erklingen,  
Zu pfeifen, was da groß und schön erblüht?  
Was kann, wie Du, so wunderbar besingen,  
Was in der Seele tiefverborgenen glüht?  
Ihr, deutsche Laute, könnt das Herz bezwingen  
Denn ihr allein seid Seele und Gemüt!  
Ihr seid die edelste von allen Gaben,  
Die wir an diesen Strand getragen haben.

Mögt ihr die Kühnen Pioniere presien,  
die fließ'ge Hand, die froh die Scholle baut,  
Den, der da schürft der Berge Gold und Eisen,  
Den, der da forschen zu den Sternen schaut.  
Ich heb' auch sie: singt ihnen Rühmesweisen.  
Doch ich will preisen deutscher Sprache laut!

Mein bestes Kleinod, in dem Land der Freien. <sup>69</sup>  
Fr. Alb. Schmidt

### **The German Language in America**

Thou art not a stranger in the land of the free  
My German song, which rings out fully and boldly  
And you are far away from the beaches of our native land.  
You fill a thousand hearts with liveliness;  
The most beautiful bonds unite you with all of them.  
In every possible all-consuming future:  
It is the German language that unites us.  
Whether lust or sorrow announces the singer's song.

You are not a stranger; many millions  
Who are far from the Fatherland, hold you in their heart.  
And everywhere where German hearts dwell,  
You are their treasure, you are their gem!  
We no longer bow before the thrones of princes,  
Only before you and you alone, o mother tongue.  
With all of the first songs that rang out brightly here,  
You have also gained citizenship.

How can you sound so warm and sweet,  
And hum what blooms large and beautiful there?  
How can you so wonderfully sing  
About what glows deep in the soul?  
You, German lutes, can conquer the heart,  
For you alone are soul and mind!  
You are the noblest of all gifts,  
That we have carried to these shores.

May you praise the bold pioneers,  
the diligent hand that builds the clod gladly,  
The one who digs the mountains for gold and iron,  
The one who looks up inquiringly at the stars.  
I'll lift them up, too: singing to them songs of glory.  
But I want to praise the German language aloud!  
My greatest treasure, in the land of the free.

Fr. Alb. Schmidt

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69 Harmon, "The St. Josephs-Blatt 1896-1919," 95-96.



Before and during World War One, preserving the use of the German language was a primary concern of soul Germans, who believed it was the most beautiful singing language and had a unique ability to reveal the depths of the soul. The *Blatt's* secondary mission, beyond informing German Catholics of church matters, was to defend the German language as central to the life of German Catholics. The *Blatt's* apologetics for the German language were published in an October 1915 editorial:

"Language...forms a key which opens the inner self to the world. It is a known fact that wherever the German language is heard there rules a certain 'Gerechtigkeit, Ordnungssinn, Genuessamkeit, Sparsamkeit, Fleiss und Ausdauer.' There is no 'fleissigeres' intelligent and 'beharrlicheres' people as the Germans. When one enters a traditional German home, one is met with a certain simplicity, together with cleanliness. The mother takes care of her house duties and when the tired husband comes home he will find his supper hot and ready. The daughter stands by mother's side smiling, supporting her in the kitchen, using the sewing machine, and doesn't shy away from the washing machine. This is the home of the German language...We enter another German home and immediately believe we made a mistake. The house is dirty, there is nothing in the refrigerator. The son doesn't work and the daughter—o! how awful. The mother is to blame because she forgot to teach her children the German customs; she banned the mother tongue, she neglected the German virtues when the children were small; she turned her back on the German church because it wasn't 'stylish' enough. She will eventually regret this and will remember her own Father and Mother and their good German ways—but too late!"<sup>70</sup>

We see here that, in the context of a traditional family, use of the German language went hand-in-hand with a great many "German" virtues, including cleanliness, simplicity, and a traditional family structure that supports new generations of German children. Br. Cölestin also suggests in English in the *Blatt*, "[t]he more languages you know, the more man you are".<sup>71</sup> It is implied that, absent the use of the German language for proper moral and religious instruction, the ethnic German family order will deteriorate and church attendance will decline. This is an evolution of the arguments that German nationalists made during the late-1800s rise in nativism in the U.S.,

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70 Harmon, "The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919," 96-98.

71 Harmon, "The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919," 96.

who believed that “A foreigner who loses his nationality is in danger of losing his faith and character”.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the German language was directly tied to faith and the German way of life, in the eyes of Br. Cölestin and the *Blatt's* readers. In 1911, for example, parents complained to the *Blatt* that German was not being taught enough in parish schools.<sup>73</sup>

The *Blatt* also stuck its head into national politics, putting out information and editorials on proposed literacy test bills, anti-immigration bills, anti-trust and tariff acts, and the merits of presidential candidates. In other words, the *Blatt* covered all politics relevant not just to Catholics, but specifically to German Catholics. The *Blatt* gave a passionate response to President Woodrow Wilson’s Oct. 29<sup>th</sup>, 1915 speech, in which he suggested that there should not be such a thing as hyphenated Americans. The *Blatt* suggested Wilson was questioning German-American’s patriotism and that the Democratic Party’s 1916 statement against “dual-loyalty” put a target on the backs of German-Americans. At one point he wrote, “Machen Sie die Augen auf, Herr Wilson!”<sup>74</sup> Open your eyes, President Wilson!

Although the *Blatt's* avid defense of the German language represented an important local and national political battle, what really got the *Blatt* noticed was its coverage of the war, perceived to be extremely pro-German, to the point of waging its own “propaganda campaign” in response to what they saw to be British propaganda.<sup>75</sup> In fact, as Harmon shows, the coverage of the war was so unrelenting that Trappist monks at the Abbey of Gethsemani requested that the *Blatt* no longer be sent.<sup>76</sup> They were concerned that the *Blatt* published too

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72 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 15.

73 Rachel Schlachter, “Various Mt. Angel Abbey Sources,” (St. Benedict: Mount Angel Abbey: 2023).

74 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 100.

75 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 93.

76 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 72.

much “German war news” for a Catholic newspaper. Some readers even sent letters, written in German, that complained about this impartial coverage of German news.<sup>77</sup>

This news coverage was noticed by others, too. In 1917, Dr. Joseph Schafer, head of the department of history of the University of Oregon, who was an American born of German parentage, published a treatise “For the Newspapermen of the State of Oregon” in “Oregon Exchanges,” criticizing the *Blatt's* and other German newspapers’ failure to adequately adjust to the United States entry into the war. Schafer lamented that German editors failed to act on their responsibility to free the German Oregonians “from the awful doom of going into war in the spirit of Persian slaves; to interpret to them the ideals set before the American people by their president who sees in this struggle the opportunity for America to ‘spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured’”.<sup>78</sup> This assessment would seem sensational from the perspective of Br. Cölestin, who dramatically adjusted the opinion of the newspaper on the war after the U.S. entered. For example, to demonstrate that they were loyal to the U.S., they began publishing advertisements to buy war bonds. They also began publishing more information about the war and war bonds in English, sourcing it from mainstream anglophone publications.

### *Censorship*

After the United States declared war on Germany, suspicion of German-Americans increased dramatically, leading to an intense pressure on German-Americans, especially those who continued to speak German, to prove their loyalty. This was felt in Mt. Angel, too. In

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<sup>77</sup> Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 72.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Schafer, “The Northwestern German Press,” Wikisource, the free online library, August 21, 2018. [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Oregon\\_Exchanges/Volume\\_1/Number\\_3](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Oregon_Exchanges/Volume_1/Number_3).

response, the *Blatt* doubled down on its pro-German sentiment, but added more patriotic messaging to prove its allegiance. The *Blatt* praised German as a world language and explained that it was, in fact, contributing to more patriotism, not less, in light of the war effort, by “teaching German-Americans about political life, and strengthening their trust in the American government”.<sup>79</sup> The *Blatt* insisted that the German language had done nothing wrong and that attempts by superpatriots to ban the language nationwide were deplorable.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the *Blatt*, and other newspapers, rationalizing their use of German and despite their patriotic messaging, the 1917 Trading with the Enemy Act and continued opposition by anglophone press had a suppressive effect on the newspaper and its readers. Tensions culminated in a September 19<sup>th</sup> search of two Benedictines’ rooms by a Department of Justice agent “on a suspicion lodged by a local resident who thought lights in these rooms in the pre-dawn hours were possible signal codes”.<sup>81</sup> The less extreme methods of opposition, however, were more effective at hindering the reach and reputation of the *Blatt*, such as the regulations that required English translations of the *Blatt* to be submitted to the post office. Harmon explains the situation faced by the *Blatt* in the final years of the war:

Copies of all ethnic publications were sent to Washington, D.C. and other locations to be read by a force of paid and volunteer translators, readers, and assistants. If found to be \*unmailable\* under the Espionage Act, the paper was denied the use of the second-class mailing privilege. In the most extreme cases, a newspaper ‘might be denied the use of the mails altogether. In that case no mail would be delivered to the address of the offending publication...Foreign-language

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79 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 123.

80 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 123. “Die deutsche Sprache hat nichts verbrochen,” “begins a special feature on July 13th, 1917. The article decried the ‘Hetze’ against American newspapers appearing in the German language. Br. Cölestin denied the allegations of disloyalty leveled against the German-American press. He lamented the idea prevalent in 1917 that it was criminal to use any language other than the ‘Landessprache’ and considered the movement to stop all German language instruction in schools in the United States as deplorable.”

81 Rippinger, *Struggle and Ascent*, 59. On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1918 orders were sent from D.C. requiring the *Blatt* and *Armen Seelen Freund* to suspend production. In September, all monks 31-46 required to register for military service. On Sep. 19, rooms were searched by DOJ Agent on suspicion of signal codes.

newspapers could apply for a permit allowing them to forego the filing of the translation with the Post Office. Of those applying between October 1917 and January 1919, only 650 newspapers were issued such a permit. The *St. Josephs-Blatt* was not one of them.<sup>82</sup>

On April 12, 1918, the 25<sup>th</sup> edition of SJB for 1918 was published, then production ceased for one year and eight months. Following the continuation of publication after the war ended, the *Blatt* claimed it had ceased production due to “voluntary, insurmountable criticism by cliques”<sup>83</sup> and criticized the “hateful” actions brought against them, asserting, “Surely it ought to be possible to be loyal to-day without breaking the principles of Christian morals”.<sup>84</sup> The publication continued on as usual until Brother Cölestin’s death on June 20, 1929, and a new generation took over. The *Blatt*, with its well-defined reader base, was one of the lucky ones.

According to Luebke, by 1919 47% of the 522 German-language publications in the country were gone. Circulation was dramatically reduced, and the small-town weekly publications were the hardest hit, especially where the ethnic German population was small. The *St. Josephs Blatt*, then, was an outlier. The *Blatt*, along with other German-language newspapers, represented the views of soul Germans and *Kirchendeutsch*, who feared that anti-German sentiment and institutional pressures leading to a decline in exposure of both adults and children to the German language. Furthermore, declining readership would lead to declining revenue, for German-language news publications the social and institutional pressures were an existential threat to *Deutschtum*. However, the *St. Josephs Blatt* had reliable funding from the Catholic church, which was one reason it survived. Therefore, the largest concern of the *Blatt* was for the impact on the ethnic German communities it connected and supported.

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82 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 125.

83 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 133.

84 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 128.

## Stomach Germans

### *Parents and Schools*

Not every German Catholic was as outspoken as soul Germans, and Kirchendeutsch like Br. Cölestin. In fact, during World War One, most German Catholics, like most Americans, were concerned with providing for their families and maintaining life as usual while their sons were fighting abroad. Then, if German-speaking institutions came under fire, and they were only loosely related to their life, such as the newspaper they read in their past time, it was sure to fall away. This dilemma describes the reaction of so-called stomach Germans, many of whom were Kirchendeutsch, to the underlying forces of assimilation before, during, and after World War one. In a 1908 issue of the *St. Josephs Blatt*, Fr. Schmidt wrote:

Die Leute sage oft: ‘Die Deutschen sterben aus. Das Deutschtum hier zu Lande leide an Mommonismus, Lungenschwindsucht und Audzehrung.’ Man hat schon alles moegliche versucht, um dem kranken Maennlein, das doch einst ein starker achtungesgebietender Mann gewesen, wider auf die Beine zu helfen, doch alles scheint umsonst.<sup>85</sup>

People often say: ‘The Germans are dying out. That Germanness in this land suffers from mommonism, tuberculosis and consumption.’ Everything possible has already been tried to help the sick man, who was once a strong and respectable man, back on his feet, but everything seems to be in vain.

Fr. Schmidt continues, suggesting that despite the founding of different associations (Vereine) which purported to subscribe to German ideals, *Deutschtum* still continued to die out.<sup>86</sup> Schmidt insists that all Germans are challenged to halt the decline, and that the *St. Josephs Blatt* is the “Volkschule für die Erwachsenen”<sup>87</sup> on matters of social, political, religious education.” He also claimed that the German Oregonians did not use the press to their fullest advantage, and that

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85 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 34.

86 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 35.

87 This translates to “community college for adults.”

“The fault [of the underwhelming growth of [SJB] lies not with the *Blatt*, but with its readers, who do not spread the word”.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, it was not just that German Oregonians did not spread the word, it was that they did not choose to instruct their children in the reading of the German language. Some people, claims Brother Cölestin, blamed the schools and churches, but he points out that the language must be spoken at home as the children’s first language, before it can be taught in schools and used in the churches:

“The guilt, Br. Cölestin preaches, lies with German-American parents. It is their responsibility to be sure the first language their children learn is German. English, he says, can be learned on the streets...so often, claims Br. Cölestin, children find the German language a burden and it is then thrown overboard. When this happens, however, something very important, ‘deutsche Zucht, Sitte, Charakter, Eigenart und Wesen des Deutschen’ is also thrown overboard”.<sup>89</sup>

So, for all the benefits of continuing the German language tradition, why wouldn’t regular German Americans, including those in Mt. Angel, be interested in teaching their children, when the very people tasked with teaching their children, the monks, desired that they do so?

The answer lies in the reaction of stomach Germans and *Kirchendeutsch* to the forces of the dominant anglophone culture. The pressures didn’t just come from outside anti-German sentiment and government forces. For the Catholic *Kirchendeutsch*, the pressures came from within the Church as well. Luebke writes. “By the end of the Twenties most German Catholics agreed that the goals of the church could not be served by the preservation of German language and culture. The number of German Catholic publications continued to decline and the membership of the Central-Verein [a national union of German-Catholic lay societies] dropped by a third...Though these trends were the normal concomitants of assimilation, it seems clear

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88 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 36.

89 Harmon, “The St. Josephs-Blatt, 1896-1919,” 96.

that they were stimulated by the experiences of the war period".<sup>90</sup> Although Mt. Angel was in a better place than other German Catholic communities, social pressure and the multiethnic constitution of the Catholic church could not allow for a strictly ethnic parish forever. So, the German liturgy declined.

According to Luebke, it was sheer numbers, rather than a resistance to assimilation, that insulated German Americans from assimilation until World War One.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the German-born population in Oregon remained proportionally stable and grew at similar rates to the native-born Oregon population before 1910.<sup>92</sup> Even so, one of the reasons the parents and teachers may have failed to instruct the next generation in the German language was that it was, as Schmalenberger puts, "practical".<sup>93</sup> Germans were unique among other ethnic minorities in that they were the largest immigrant population that had the largest proportional amount of English speakers. In other words, Germans could speak English, but other Americans could not speak German. According to census data of the 1900s, only 3 percent of all Oregonians of German parentage ten years old and older could not speak English.<sup>94</sup> German numbers contrast greatly with those of Italian parentage at the time, 24% of which could not speak English. Therefore, it is more likely that Italians would have constructed their own Italian-speaking institutions for the convenience of those who didn't speak English than it would have been for the Germans. Stomach Germans were more likely to go along with the decisions of the institutions and the

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90 Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 317-318.

91 Schmalenberger, "The German-Oregonians, 1850-1918," 42.

92 Schmalenberger, "The German-Oregonians, 1850-1918," 17-19. On these pages Schmalenberger provides tables listing the percentage of ethnic Germans in the foreign-born population of Oregon between 1850 and 1910 based on census reports. The proportion of ethnic Germans in the immigrant populations remained large, ranging from 16.16% and 20.71% from 1870- until 1910.

93 Schmalenberger, "The German-Oregonians, 1850-1918," 55.

94 Schmalenberger, "The German-Oregonians, 1850-1918," 54.



requirements of the social and political context in which they lived, because the most important thing was providing for their families, not continuing to speak their mother tongue. Therefore, the gradual pressures nudged German Catholics, family by family, to cease the rearing of their children in an ethnic German context.

## **Mt. Angel's Post-World War One Declining Deutschum**

### *Schools*

In 1920, Br. Cölestin wrote, “In many ways the years after [World War One] are years of great change. The use of German Language, both in abbey and in town, declines greatly. Few, if any, of those making simple vows this year (monks) are proficient in the German language. Some know nothing of it.” Even as the Mt. Angel Benedictines began to decline in their German proficiency, so did the curriculum. Course catalogs from 1914-1935 from Mt. Angel College and Seminary show how German remained part of the curriculum, but mostly optional. For students that chose the Classical Course of Study, they were required to take Ancient and Modern Language courses, which included German. For students in the other courses of study, German was an optional elective. According to the Abbey Library, there are required texts listed for all four years of German language courses. In course catalog from 1922, students needed to complete two years of either French or German by the end of their sophomore year, unless already completed in high school. For the final year of course catalog archives, there was a wider offering of German courses.<sup>95</sup> This does not differ greatly from any other academic institution in Oregon at the time, aside from its minor emphasis on the German language. Augustine DeNoble, a scholar and monk of Mt. Angel Abbey (d. 2019) argues that the Abbey’s schools contributed to

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<sup>95</sup> Rachel Schlachter, “Various Mount Angel Abbey Sources.” Mount Angel Abbey, 2023.

a faster embrace of the English language before and after World War One, which the historical evidence supports.<sup>96</sup> As the schools taught fewer classes in the German language, the decline in expression of the ethnic German identity was dually reinforced in the next generation.

### *Mt. Angel's Catholic Community in the News*

As the German-speaking people in Mt. Angel dwindled, many of the German cultural practices rooted in the language, such as family customs and social gatherings were changed forever. The cultural vacuum that was created was quickly filled by the Catholic church and Anglo-American culture. Mt. Angel news offers an insight into Mt. Angel's community in the post-World War One years. It often mentions the monthly young men's and women's Sodality meetings<sup>97</sup>, as well as the dances, such as the Baseball dance<sup>98</sup> and Fireman's Dance<sup>99</sup> that took place. These gatherings brought together the youth of Mt. Angel in ways approved by the parish priests and the broader community. Movies were often shown in Mt. Angel's school buildings and were advertised in *Mt. Angel News*. To be shown in the community, however, they had to be approved by the Church. This control of the Church over social gatherings continued into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 1950s, one Mr. Andersen attempted to reopen the town theatre, so he had to get a license from a committee, which the parish priest was a member of. Because of the priest's prestige in the community, "[U]nless he agreed to only show the movies approved by the Catholic church he wouldn't get his license".<sup>100</sup> Beginning in the 1930s, *Mt. Angel News* begins promoting the growing flax industry, which came to flourish during World War II, as flax

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96 Martin Pollard, Hugh Feiss, and Augustine DeNoble, *Mount of Communion: Mount Angel Abbey: 1882-1982*. (St. Benedict, Oregon: Mount Angel Abbey, 2012), 19.

97 Flory, *St. Mary's Parish 1880-1980*, 74.

98 Sourced from the Mount Angel Historical Society Facebook Page

99 Vincent Hauth, *Tales of Mt. Angel*, (Mt. Angel, Oregon: Mt. Angel Printing, 1998), 19.

100 Predeck, interview, 75:00-80:00.

was useful for rope and parachutes. It became so big, in fact, that a Flax Festival was founded. According to Vincent Hauth, carnivals were set up on the grounds of the St. Mary's School or large lot north of Richfield Station with carnival rides, booths, and wrestling matches.<sup>101</sup>

### *Legislation*

As it was stated earlier, Mt. Angel's German Catholics could not go unnoticed forever by the anglophone and protestant majority in Oregon. One of the ways this materialized was in Oregon in 1922, when the Compulsory Education Act was passed. This act required all school-age children to attend public schools, which would effectively have destroyed private school institutions in Oregon, including the parochial schools in Mt. Angel and elsewhere. This was a nightmare scenario for Mt. Angel's Catholics, who desired schools that did not contain the "Protestant tinge"; schools that they could trust to educate their children in the necessary subjects and support their children's Catholic faith. The case of the private and parochial schools of Oregon, Mt. Angel among them, was argued and appealed all the way to the Supreme Court. Surprisingly, one of the lawyers who helped argue the case before the Supreme Court was J.P. Kavanaugh, the very first graduate of Mt. Angel College.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, with the help of a student that they had supported years before, Mt. Angel was saved from a similar fate of secularization that Einsiedeln and Engelberg faced when they sent monks to America to establish new monasteries.

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101 Hauth, *Tales of Mt. Angel*, 75.

102 Snyder, *50 Years Ago, 199-201*. Kavanaugh's position on the defense is also corroborated by Sr. Hodes, who also lived during that time, and by Oyez, which catalogues SCOTUS decisions.

## *Prohibition*

For stomach Germans, soul Germans, and *Kirchendeutsch* alike who enjoyed festivals that included drinking and merriment, prohibition was a difficult era. News coverage of Mt. Angel's community in this era indicates that many of Mt. Angel's German Catholics had not quickly forgotten their heritage and wanted their favorite beverage back. When it came time to repeal the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Mt. Angel's population, if there were a vestige of the *Deushtum* left, would have overwhelmingly supported it. *Mt. Angel News*<sup>103</sup> included an article in the July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1933 issue discussing the likely repeal of the prohibition and instructed readers on how to vote "Yes" on repeal. Supported by Editor-in-Chief J.M. Eisen, it is written that "wets" are "centering all their efforts in instructing the voters how to vote repeal, rather than in trying to win votes" and lauding that the wets "stole a march on the 'dries' by leading the fight for sane liquor control and temperance by education".<sup>104</sup> It seems that at the very least this member of the Mt. Angel community was implicitly in favor of repeal.

Luckily, Mt. Angel News even covered the vote for the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment. According to the July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1933 issue, Mt. Angel voted 30 to 1 for repeal.<sup>105</sup> Overall, Oregon voted 2:1 for repeal and slightly more for repeal of the state constitutional amendment. It's no coincidence that Mt. Angel's Catholics overwhelmingly supported prohibition. In an editorial, J.M. Eisen writes that it is "significant" that national emergencies colored both the passage of the eighteenth amendment and its repeal, arguing that the depression was a major factor in prompting the repeal. J.M. Eisen also defends those who voted against the repeal, calling them "decent minded

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103 Evidently, Mt. Angel got friendlier in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; the slogan for *Mt. Angel News* was "The Cooperative City—In the Heart of the Willamette Valley." That is friendlier than "Justice to All, Favors to None."

104 J.M. Eisen, "Oregon Joins the Parade." *Mt. Angel News*, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1933.

105 Eisen, *Mt. Angel News*, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1933. The combined vote of the two precincts was 581 for repeal to 19 against.

people who are sickened with the evils that grew up under the prohibition era”.<sup>106</sup> In an August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1933 article, a brewer discusses the “ancient art of beer drinking” and discusses proper, prudent drinking and calls beer “the best drink in the world”.<sup>107</sup> An August 17, 1933 article discusses the City of Mt. Angel’s continued monopoly on beer and the growing hops industry. Members of the liquor control committee at the time, Councilmen R. I. Young, Fred Schwab, and Emil Bochsler, handed in their resignations, creating hope for a less-restricted beer industry that benefited individual brewers.

From World War One to Pro-Secularization laws and Prohibition, the institutional pressures on German Catholics reflected broader cultural trends in the anglophone American society that hated *Deutschtum* and the German language. This had an overall suppressive effect on German people and specifically on German-language newspapers such as the *St. Josephs Blatt*, which had editors like Br. Cölestin, a soul German through-and-through. Soul Germans and *Kirchendeutsch* editors and readers who disagreed with the pro-British bias before the war were met with intense pressure when the U.S. entered the war, leading to the end of many German-language newspapers in the country. These newspapers were essential to the conservation of German ethnic identity, and, as the *Blatt* saw it, the Catholic faith. However, during this time were also more gradual changes, such as demographic shifts and the simple fact of being a multi-ethnic church that led to a general disincentive towards using the German language. This, combined with the lack of effort on the part of parents, led to subsequent generations no longer being rooted in the German ethnic identity their parents had. However, we see that new generations continue to support the Catholic church and conserve their remaining

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106 Eisen, Mt. Angel News, July 27, 1933.

107 Eisen, “Brewer Tells All About the Ancient Art of Beer Drinking.” *Mt. Angel News*, August 3, 1933

heritage, including the love of beer. But beyond the love of the ancient German beverage, *Deutschtum* in Mt. Angel as something distinct from the broader anglophone society was gone.

## IV. Mt. Angel after World War II 1945-1967

Luebke frames well the relation of German Catholics to the broader society in the years following World War II:

“Gradually the negative elements of the German stereotype eroded. At the same time, only the faintest traces of German ethnic life remained. The Germans as a group had disappeared, completely assimilated into mainstream America. Here and there a few belated efforts have been made, chiefly by academics, to revive the study of German culture in America. But few persons of German descent have been interested. Instead, German ethnicity has been exploited by entrepreneurs of all kinds—entertainers, restaurateurs, and specialists in trapping tourist dollars. While this phenomenon should not be mistaken for a genuine revival of interest, its importance lies in the way it demonstrates that it is respectable once again to be German in America, as it was before the madness of World War I”.<sup>108</sup>

The Post-World War II era, a time of unity and stability, allowed for renewed interest in various cultures and in religion, too. For Mt. Angel, the religious revival took the form of increased interest in monasticism and the vocation of the priesthood. The Benedictines also did their part to preserve remnants of German and Swiss culture on the Abbey grounds. But for those who still remembered Mt. Angel’s ethnic German heritage and culture fondly, it wasn’t clear what form that would take after World War I. Although World War I had destroyed the German empire, World War Two had destroyed German national culture. There wasn’t any culture for soul Germans to defend, because Germany was divided in two between Western liberal capitalism and Eastern socialism. For stomach Germans, besides the occasional celebration with Wurst and Sauerkraut,<sup>109</sup> the activities they embraced that were region-specific had been lost to time and Americanization. The solution for a revived German cultural tradition in Mt. Angel, then, was to create one.

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108 Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 331.

109 Hauth, *Tales of Mt. Angel*, 11. Beginning in the 1930s, the Mt. Angel Creamery would host a dinner annually at St. Mary’s School. Sausage and sauerkraut were served for dinner, after which films on “the latest methods of dairy farming” were shown. The food must have been delicious.

## **What happened from 1933-1945?**

This section picks back up after World War Two, mostly because there is less to say about World War Two than the World War One and Prohibition Era with respect to *Deuschtum* among Mt. Angel's German Catholics. The trends of the past continue into this era. World War II reignited anti-German sentiment and many ethnic Germans were placed in internment camps, but by this time most Mt. Angel German Catholics, who were in the second, third, even fourth generation of naturalized immigrant, did not fit the bill of German nationals. Furthermore, one of the reasons provided for the lack of internment of ethnic Germans relative to the Japanese immigrant population (about 10:1) was because those qualifying as German-born were so large in number, that it would have been an immense expense to try to incarcerate all of them. Overall, the focus was not on the Germans as much as it was on other ethnicities. The U.S. government and the anglophone society were generally friendlier to German Americans during World War II. The U.S. military even employed the help of Mt. Angel's German Catholics, paying the *St. Josephs Blatt* to distribute German-language news to German P.O.Ws.<sup>110</sup>

## **The Benedictines Preserve Culture and Prepare for a Monastic Revival**

One of the ways the Benedictines kept Mt. Angel's German and Swiss history alive was by preserving the Stations of the Cross, fourteen individual house-shaped markers that lead up the hill to the Abbey. The stations mark the fourteen stations of Jesus' persecution and crucifixion and are inscribed in German. The bases of the Stations date back to 1889, although the wooden structures have been rebuilt before and a paved path was laid recently:

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110 Ripinger, *Struggle and Ascent*, 92.





Figure 3 Station #11: Jesus wird gekreuziget (Jesus is crucified)



Figure 4 (Left) – Station III: Jesus fällt das erste mal (Jesus falls the first time)

Figure 5 (Right) – Station XII: Jesus stirbt am Kreuze (Jesus dies on the cross)

A postwar explosion of interest in the priestly vocation and monastic life led the Benedictines to construct a brand-new Abbey church (1954), residence hall (1954), and guest and retreat house (1959) on the butte. This expansion, although necessary at the time, and notable today, was costly, like all the former projects on the butte. It was so costly, in fact, that the Abbey church only has one bell tower spire when it was planned to have two, because the money simply ran out. In the 1960s, the *St. Josephs Blatt* went out of print in the midst of speculation about many projects that the Benedictines were continuing, despite suspicions of mismanagement and concerns over a diminishing monastic workforce and excessive spending on the Mt. Angel Towers and the high school seminary. All this was combined with concerns for the health of Abbot Damian,<sup>111</sup> who had presided over this period of growth. These issues were resolved over time and did not doom the *Blatt* either. The *Blatt* was sold to Manfred Friedrich Ellenberger, a German-speaking Swiss, in 1967, and continued in print with a few hundred subscribers until 1991.<sup>112</sup> The sale of the *St. Josephs Blatt* is a partial marker of the end of the significance of German Catholic culture in Mt. Angel.

## **O’Fest**

Because the end of World War II understandably led to a decline in flax subsidies, the Flax festival, which was the largest non-holiday festival in Mt. Angel during World War II, dwindled. In the 1960s, community leaders were inspired to build a festival that was like a fair but “where a family could go and not have to have their hands in their pockets all the time”.<sup>113</sup>

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111 Ripinger, *Struggle and Ascent*, 145.

112 Schlachter, “Various Mount Angel Abbey Library Sources,” (St. Benedict, Oregon: Mount Angel Abbey, 2023).

113 Jim & Connie Unger and Agnes & Virgil Diehl, “Interview with early O’Fest board.” Interview by Bill Predeek. (Mt. Angel, Oregon: Mount Angel Historical Society, 2022), 1. Jim Unger was a former Oktoberfest President.

By chance, the President of the Chamber of Commerce at the time, Jim Unger, was approached by others who knew about a festival that was being revived in other parts of the Northwest. This included one Sam Bates, who owned a furniture store in town.<sup>114</sup> According to an interview of the founders, in 1955, Sam Bates spoke to city leaders visiting his store and “noted that a Salem golfer suggested that an Oktoberfest theme would be good for Mt. Angel because of the German Swiss background of the town. Later, a group of eight sat in the Gasthaus, a Mt. Angel Restaruant...and the idea jelled. They formed the board right then and there”.<sup>115</sup> There are other reports of how the idea initially came to Mt. Angel, such as from a man who had formerly served in Germany and thought about having Oktoberfest there “like they have in Munich, Germany?”,<sup>116</sup> which prompted Paul DeShaw to begin planning, although others claims DeShaw thought of it himself. Luckily, the planning was not inhibited by people worrying about who got credit for it, and it developed quickly. Many businesses jumped on the bandwagon and “bavarianized” their store fronts with wood framing and painted artwork.

One historical distinction made between German Catholic and German Protestant culture was its friendliness towards beer. No place in Germany has a greater reputation for both Catholicism and beer-drinking than Bavaria, with its historic and world-renowned Oktoberfest. The Oktoberfest in Mt. Angel, therefore, embraced the stomach German characteristics of Bavarian culture and history, even though it is likely that very few of Mount Angel’s original German Catholic settlers came from Bavaria.<sup>117</sup> The first “kickoff” party for O’Fest was held in

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114 Diehl, “Interview,” 1.

115 Diehl, “Interview,” 4.

116 Diehl, “Interview,” 5.

117 Augustine DeNoble, OSB. *Early Mount Angel: Its People and Events*. (St. Benedict, Oregon: Mount Angel Abbey, 2016). Based on the selections of obituaries published in the *Saint Josephs Blatt* that this book includes, we see that most of the early pioneer families mentioned came from Switzerland, Southwestern Germany, or were born into other German Catholic communities in the United States.

1966, the very same year *St. Josephs Blatt* went out of print at the Benedictine Press. Over time, the festival grew quickly, and the festival was supported by high school and adult bands, “Bavarian Dancers, auto races, bicycle races, a ballgame, and a Fireman’s waterball.”<sup>118</sup> Local Catholic organizations even reembraced German culture and held their own German dinners, which were a quick success. The event was also blessed at the opening ceremonies by the Archbishop of Portland and West German Consul of Seattle. Booths representing local churches and other organizations populated the streets and the *Festhallen*. An article in the *Statesman* journal for the second year of the festival, 1967, reads:

“It had the smell of sausage and strudel. It had the sounds of polka and yodel. It had edelweiss and a harvest moon. It had the blessing of the archbishop and the weatherman. It had the kiss of the hops. Hundreds of people ebbed and flowed through booth bedecked, blocked-off downtown streets—eating, drinking, listening, singing, enjoying. Opera, soccer, autocross, waterball, Bavarian Dinners and more. Mt. Angel’s Cups Overfloweth.”<sup>119</sup>

The festival planners went so far as to bring back the German language in their advertisements of the festival, albeit with limited success:

“Der Engelberg Luftwaffe: ‘Squirten Das Chemicals on das Crops mit der Flugzeug’

‘Kum sitz, eatz, und drinkz, und haf a goot time’”.<sup>120</sup>

“Dis is Vone Hot Furnace!”<sup>121</sup>

Although it is easy to assume that setting up such a festival in the Pacific Northwest, a region in which German culture would be considered “out of place,” or that it was an attempt at simplifying a culture to make it palatable to anglophone American audiences, O’Fest saw itself from day one as cultural phenomenon rooted in the local community. The whole enterprise is led

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118 Diehl, “Interview,” 8.

119 Diehl, “Interview,” 10.

120 Diehl, “Interview,” 12. This was an ad in the special edition of the North Willamette news by Sam Bates

121 Diehl “Interview,” 18. This was a Traeger Heating advertisement.

by a nonprofit that gives excess funds to future festival, infrastructure, and most importantly to other community organizations such as churches, schools, service groups, and non-profit food booths. The same could not be said about the origins of the Munich Oktoberfest, which brought together competing brewers from across Germany to sell their beer and grow their individual brands. The locals even have their own name for it: “O’Fest.” Although few Mt. Angel residents could claim to be directly descended from Bavarians, since the late 1960s they have been determined to bring a “touch of Bavaria” to anyone who visits. Below are photos of early Oktoberfest:



Figure 3 Photo Credit: Mount Angel Historical Society

Here are photos from Oktoberfest 2022:



### **Mt. Angel's Foundation: The Catholic Church**

When the Mount Angel Historical Society began constructing itself a few decades ago, the members of the board were deciding on what they should use for a logo. In our interview, Bill Predeck spoke of the disagreement on the board. The disagreement was divided between a Sister, who thought that the Society should remain separate from the church, and a Brother who insisted on a logo that connected the history of the town with the Catholic Church. “The problem

with that is,” Predeek explained, “the history of this town is so interwoven with the history of the convent and the history of the Abbey that it’s very difficult to separate the two...It’s incredible...the influence...the parish had on this town”.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, one can easily see the lasting effect of a devoted religious community when walking through Mt. Angel today, just as clearly as one can see their celebrated German heritage. The implausible chain of events that led to Mt. Angel being what it is today has been interpreted by some of Mt. Angel’s Catholic residents to be God’s Divine Providence. While this thesis cannot adequately address that theological assertion, it does point to the involvement of the Catholic Church at every point of Mt. Angel’s early cultural history.

The Church came with the German Catholic settlers to the Lone Butte. Benedictines were attracted to this growing Church community and further strengthened it. When observing other surrounding communities, we see that, thanks to the Benedictines, no other Catholic community in the area could compare to the emphasis placed on the faith of the community. Mt. Angel itself remains a small town, but while other small towns dwindled when incentives arose to move to cities, the community’s faith kept it rooted, and is responsible for its stability. The Church helped facilitate the transition of the German Catholic community to an entirely anglophone, Americanized Catholic community. The underlying trends, social pressures, the crisis of World War One, and Prohibition solidified the linguistic and cultural transition. When German ethnic identity decreased, the Catholic identity increased in significance, gradually filling the void in the community left by it. The Benedictines, although they pursued a monastic life and experienced significant growth after World War II, remained connected to the community, and early on, no events took place without the say of the parish priest, who was a Benedictine. The

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<sup>122</sup> Predeek, interview, 5:00-10:00.

Catholic church had a special power to shape Mt. Angel's culture in the first hundred years of Mt. Angel's history and continues to be a foundation of Mt. Angel's community today. A quick drive around the small town is enough to see how important their religion is to them.



## Conclusion

The many changes Mt. Angel underwent in its early history are the result of religious and ethnic differences that, over time, led to the area under the Lone Butte becoming a distinctly German Catholic community. In the first section, I explored the early beginnings of the area that later became known as the city of Mt. Angel. This place had long been known to have religious significance for the Molalla tribes because the Great Spirit dwelt on the butte, where they would go up to pray. Although there were settlers before the German Catholics arrived, religious and ethnic differences and economic circumstances led to the German Catholics supplanting most of the Anglo-American pioneers. Mt. Angel quickly grew into a close-knit religious community in need of religious and educational resources.

The second section covers the effects of the arrival of the Swiss Benedictines, who embraced a German-speaking Catholic tradition that allowed for early generations to continue to speak the German language and celebrate their connection to the mainland. The *St. Josephs Blatt* was taken over by the Benedictines to continue to promote reading and education in the German language, while also using its reach under Brother to defend *Deutschtum* and Catholicism with the motto, *Language Saves the Faith*. The defense of this tradition came to a high point during World War One, when anti-German sentiment was at its peak in the broader anglophone American society.

The third section shows how, despite the best efforts of soul Germans and *Kirchendeutsch* like those who published or engaged with the *St. Josephs Blatt*, the forces of assimilation, Americanization, and prohibition, combined with the preference of Catholic identity over German cultural and ethnic identity on the part of German Catholics, led to a steady decline in the use of the German language, and in readership of the *St. Josephs Blatt* and other

German-language newspapers. By the end of the First World War, German Catholic families thought of their children's education more pragmatically and understood that English was to be the language of choice for instruction, even religious instruction. Stomach Germans were thrilled when they were allowed to reembrace their love of beer after the Mt. Angel community voted to end Prohibition by immense margins. By the end of World War II, Mt. Angel had only a few remaining traces of the German heritage left, and resembled an Americanized, anglophone, Oregonian town, with many agricultural opportunities and a few traces of the culture that the German Catholics brought with them, including the Stations of the Cross.

The fourth section explains the effects of the post-World War II increase in interest for both monasticism and German culture, leading to expansion of the Benedictine's facilities and leading the community of Mt. Angel to return to celebrating their heritage in a localized, philanthropic way in the form of O'Fest. This festival runs on today and is the largest folk festival in the Pacific Northwest, sharing the most enjoyable aspects of Bavarian culture with visitors. This festival never existed in Mt. Angel until 1966, meaning it was uniformed by Mt. Angel's previous German ethnic identities and cultural practices, which are lost to time. It was something new, that transformed Mt. Angel into a spectacle that communicated in inoffensive ways to other Americans that this community celebrates its heritage.

One thing has remained constant, and timeless, throughout Mt. Angel's cultural history, and that is the influence of the Catholic church. This community was and still is a tight knit community of Catholics with a close connection to the Benedictines. Although the role of the Sisters (and of the Brothers, to some extent) in the community has diminished, and they have returned to a more cloistered, monastic tradition, the monastery atop the butte continues to define Mt. Angel as unique, historic Catholic community with a German and Swiss Catholic religious

tradition that stretches back to Engelberg, Switzerland. For over a hundred years, and counting, Mount Angel has been a small town with “Tap-a-lama-ho,” a mount of communion, that points its residents and visitors to what they value most, the Catholic faith. However, as it is intended, they can perceive this regardless of what language they speak.

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