

German(ic) Toponyms in the American Midwest: A Study of Place, Identity and Heritage.

By *Stephan Fuchs*. Erlangen: *Selbstverlag der Fränkischen Geographischen Gesellschaft*, 2013. 186 pages. €29.00.

In his recently published doctoral dissertation, Stephan Fuchs explores the socio-cultural and spatial-statistical significance of toponyms—place names. He traces the paths of German-speaking immigrants in the American Midwest who inscribed their cultural heritage in the place names of their newly established settlements and thus made visible a pattern of German identity on American soil. While focusing on case studies of two such communities, New Ulm in Minnesota and Eudora in Kansas, Fuchs presents a broad overview of German patterns of settlement as well as spatial and cultural significance in all the states north of Kentucky, from Ohio to the Great Plains. Richly illustrated with 34 maps, numerous photographs, tables and charts—some in full color—this study is a valuable addition to the personal library of any serious scholar in the field of German-American Studies.

Fuchs finds that Germanic place names represent a valuable indicator of historic ethnic settlement as well as modern-day ancestral patterns which together with census data offer a broader view of sociocultural phenomena. His focus is on twelve Midwestern states—an eastern group including Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin and a western group with Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, North and South Dakota. For these states he compiled an extensive database of the historic and current place names for settlements known to have a Germanic origin. Using the mapping imagery of Kernel Density Estimation, Fuchs finds a very profound German cartographic imprint in three adjacent areas of high density in western Illinois and eastern Missouri surrounding the metropolitan St. Louis region. Additional relatively high concentrations of German place names can be found in southern Indiana, east-central Iowa and northeastern Nebraska. Fuchs believes his Kernel Density maps also attest the influential cultural standing of German-related (immigrants not directly from Germany) in Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas—as we might expect given the large numbers of Germans from Russia who settled there in the late-nineteenth century. Fuchs also discusses the challenges to his method to the loss of German place names in this region due to political pressure during the era of the First World War which triggered a wave of place name changes. Such widespread switches in toponyms in themselves provide insights into significant socio-demographic or sociopolitical developments.

Using two case studies—one in New Ulm, Minnesota, and the other in Eudora, Kansas—Fuchs assesses the population's place-based and ethnic

identification as well as local patterns of heritage construction. He claims that the process of naming these two towns provides unique access to the towns' past and present and especially to the local expressions and performances of ethnic identity and heritage. Both towns were founded by Germans from Chicago—New Ulm in 1854 by the Chicago *Landverein* being named for the home in Germany of several of the early settlers; Eudora in 1857 by the *Neuer Ansiedlungsverein* of Chicago and named after the daughter of the Shawnee Indian chief who sold the Germans the land for their new town. The simple example of the choosing the name of the new community demonstrates the broad continuum of possibilities that underlie the naming process. While New Ulm suggests the geographical and ethnic origin of the settlement, it masks at the same time the regional heterogeneity of its pioneer settlers. Eudora proclaims the Native American connection and even real estate dealings behind the town's name but obscures the role of the German settlement society and the ethnicity of its early settlers. Over the years New Ulm has managed to maintain and develop its identity as a German community. Eudora on the other hand, while acknowledgments of its German origin occur, is largely a farming community—and to some degree a bedroom community of Kansas City—with no particular ethnic connection to Germany. As one resident remarked to Fuchs: “When you hear Eudora, you don't think German” (129).