

Isms and Schisms: The German Religious Peopling of the Midwest

James M. Beidler / jamesmbeidler@gmail.com

When German-speaking immigrants arrived in America, used to an established religion limited to Roman Catholic or mainstream Protestant, they found America's religious diversity and many splintered denominations.

- I. Historical background of German confessions
 - a. Established churches—Roman Catholic; Reformed and Lutheran (*Evangelisch*)
 - b. Anabaptists

- II. First Wave German arrivals—Primarily in Pennsylvania
 - a. About half Lutheran
 - b. About one-third Reformed
 - c. Less than 10% Anabaptists
 - d. Tiny number of Roman Catholics

- III. Second Wave German arrivals—Primarily directly to Midwest
 - a. About even between Protestant and Catholic
 - b. Some Anabaptists—usually “Second Stoppers”
 - c. Many found residence in places without a majority of Germans

- IV. Potential denominations
 - a. Ethnic German origins ...
 - i. All flavors of Lutherans!
 - ii. German Reformed / E&R / UCC
 - iii. Roman Catholic
 - iv. United Brethren in Christ
 - v. Mennonite and Amish
 - vi. Moravians

 - b. Non-German denominations ...
 - i. United Methodist
 - ii. Episcopal
 - iii. Baptist
 - iv. Presbyterians
 - v. Church of God

- V. Types of records available—varies by denomination\
 - a. Baptisms
 - b. Confirmations

- c. Marriages
 - d. Burials
 - e. Communion lists
 - f. Membership lists
 - g. Treasury reports
 - h. Family registers
- VI. Records substitutes
- a. Private pastoral registers
 - b. Personal certificates
 - c. Newspaper reports—including newspapers published by religious denominations
 - d. Mixed in with records of other congregations
- VII. Prominent church archives
- a. Lutherans
 - i. ELCA <https://www.elca.org/archives> (on Ancestry and Archives.com)
 - ii. Missouri Synod <https://concordiahistoricalinstitute.org/>
 - iii. Wisconsin Synod <https://wels.net/about-wels/history/wels-archives/>
 - iv. Mid-Atlantic – Check Ancestry <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2451/>
 - b. Reformed (later Evangelical & Reformed, still later United Church of Christ)
 - i. Lancaster, PA: <https://erhistoricalsociety.org/>
 - ii. Missouri: <https://www.eden.edu/the-archives-at-eden-theological-seminary/>
 - c. Roman Catholic—many on FindMyPast.com, otherwise access by diocese
 - d. Anabaptists—scattered due to denominational schisms
 - e. Moravians <https://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/>
 - f. Methodists—product of cross-ethnic mergers; older records scattered

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