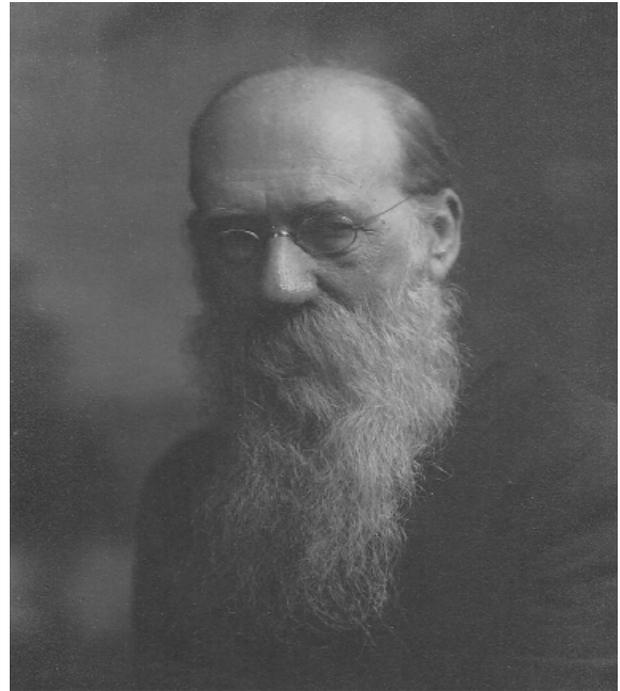


NOTABLE GERMAN-AMERICANS

Heinrich A. Rattermann (1832-1923), German-American Historian and Entrepreneur: A Chronology of his Life and Work By Don Heinrich Tolzmann

Introduction

Researching the history of German immigration, settlement and influences in the 19th century was a pioneer field, and one of the preeminent historians in this field was Heinrich A. Rattermann. Best known as Editor of *Der Deutsche Pionier*, a German-American historical journal published by the German Pioneer Society of Cincinnati, he also was an enterprising businessman. The following chronology aims to illuminate the basic dates, facts, and events pertaining to his life and work as a historian and entrepreneur.



Heinrich A. Rattermann (author's collection)

Chronology

1832: Rattermann was born in Ankum, a town in the Osnabrück district of what is today Niedersachsen in northwest Germany, on 14 October.

1846-49: Emigrated with his family to Cincinnati, Ohio/USA, where the family had relatives. Found employment at various jobs, including driving a team of oxen in a brickyard in Newport, Kentucky; working at a slaughterhouse in Cincinnati; and then as a waiter, and later as a painter in Louisville, Kentucky.

1849: Returned to Cincinnati from Louisville, and found employment as a cabinet maker. Assisted in the organization of a *Sängerfest* in Cincinnati, which led to the formation of the federation of German singing societies, *Der Nord-Amerikanische Sängerbund*. The *Sängerbund* still exists, and continues to sponsor German song festivals.

1850: After the death of his father, he became the sole supporter of his family (mother and two siblings).

1853-54: While continuing to work, he completed a course of study at Grundy's Business School in Cincinnati.

Der Deutsche Pionier.

Erinnerungen aus dem Pionier-Leben der Deutschen
in Amerika.

Unter Mitwirkung deutscher Geschichtsfreunde.

Herausgeber: Deutscher Pionier Verein von Cincinnati. — Redakteur: G. A. Kattermann.

Motto: „Willenskraft, Wege schafft.“

12. Jahrg.

Cincinnati, Juni 1880.

Heft 3.

Der Deutsche Pionier (author's collection)

1854-58: With his savings, he acquired and operated a grocery store, which he subsequently sold to move on to his next business venture.

1858: Founded the highly successful German Mutual Insurance Company of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, with its office located at 13th and Walnut Street in Over-the-Rhine. The German sign painted on the front of the building was painted over during World War I, but eventually peeled off and became visible. It has been re-painted and the building restored.

1868: Co-founded a German-American historical society: the German Pioneer Society of Cincinnati.

1874-87: Served as Editor of a German-American historical journal, *Der Deutsche Pionier*, and began collecting books and archival materials on German immigration, settlement and influences in America, amassing a private library of ca. 8,000 volumes, and numerous manuscripts.

1877: Moved the office of the German Mutual Insurance Company to the newly constructed Germania Building at 12th and Walnut Street. Also co-founded the German Literary Club of Cincinnati, and was involved in founding and directing several German singing societies.

1887: Published and edited a second German-American historical journal, *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Magazin*, after concluding his editorship of *Der Deutsche Pionier*.



The Germania Building (author's collection)

1895: Organized the first German Day in Cincinnati at the Cincinnati Zoo. This led to the formation of the German Day Society, later re-named the German-American Citizens League, which has sponsored the event ever since.

1906-14: Published his collected works, *Gesammelte ausgewählte Werke*, in 12 volumes, which contain his articles, essays, lectures, and poetry.

1908: Published a history of the German Mutual Insurance Company of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, which he described as “a monument of the public-spirited enterprise of our city and of its German element.”

1916: The loss of sight and increasing deafness caused Rattermann to withdraw from public life, and also led to the sale of his library to the University of Illinois-Urbana.

1918: Due to the anti-German hysteria and sentiment of World War I, the German Mutual Insurance Company changed its name to the Hamilton County Mutual Insurance Company. The German sign on the Germania Building was covered up, and the lettering on the statue of Germania was also recut to read *Columbia*. The 1958 history of the company noted: “The remodeled figure remains to this day a symbol of the vision and faith of the many men of German ancestry, who became loyal citizens of the country of their adoption, and intelligently and faithfully governed the affairs of the Company.”

1923: By the time of his demise on 6 January, he had published numerous books and articles, and edited two German-American historical journals.



The Germania Statue (author's collection)

1980: Due to the efforts of the author, Rattermann's home at 510 York Street in Cincinnati's West End was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Unfortunately, the building's owner had it demolished some time later, but the site remains on the National Register.

2014: Due to the efforts of the author, the German sign on the Germania Building was uncovered to coincide with the centennial of the outbreak of World War I.

Sources

For biographical information on Rattermann, see: Mary Edmund Spanheimer, *The German Pioneer Legacy: The Life and Work of Heinrich A. Rattermann by Sister Mary Edmund Spanheimer*. Second edition, edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Oxford, England: Peter Lang, 2004).

For the history of Rattermann's German Mutual Insurance Company, see: Heinrich A. Rattermann, *Die Deutsche Gegenseitige Versicherungs-Gesellschaft von Cincinnati, O. Denkschrift zum fünfzigjährigen Bestehen derselben. 10. Mai 1858-10. Mai 1908*. (Cincinnati: Druck von S. Rosenthal & Co., 1908). The German text is followed by an English translation titled: *The German Mutual Insurance Co. of Cincinnati, O. Memoir of the Fiftieth Anniversary of its Existence, May 10th, 1858-May 10th, 1908*. In 1958, an updated history was published, see: H. Wm. Brockmann, *The Story of our First Century of Service, A Memorial for the Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding May 10, 1958...Hamilton Mutual Insurance of Cincinnati, Ohio*. (Cincinnati: Hamilton Mutual Insurance Co., 1958).

For a guide to the manuscripts in the Rattermann Collection at the University of Illinois-Urbana, see: Donna-Christine Sell and Dennis Walle, *Guide to the Heinrich A. Rattermann Collection of German-American Manuscripts*. (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Library and the Graduate School of Library Science, 1979).

Rattermann's collected works, *Gesammelte ausgewählte Werke*, can be found in the German-Americana Collection in the Archives & Rare Books Library at the University of Cincinnati; the Public Library of Cincinnati; the German Heritage Museum in Cincinnati; as well as libraries elsewhere.

For a selection of Rattermann's writings, some of which are autobiographical, see: Heinrich A. Rattermann, *Ausser dem Vaterlande ist auch eine schöne Welt: Zu Leben und Werk des deutsch-amerikanischen Historikers und Autors (1832-1923)*. Ausgewählt und mit Begleittexten versehen von Heinz von der Wall. (Bersenbrück: Kreisheimatbund, 1989).

Articles by Rattermann in the two journals he edited, *Der Deutsche Pionier* and *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Magazin*, cover a wide array of topics. For references to them, see: Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *Catalog of the German-Americana Collection, University of Cincinnati*. (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 1990).