Kansas experienced its most dynamic period of population growth by far during its first three decades of statehood. At the end of the Civil War in 1865, the state census enumerated 136,000 people; federal census takers counted 364,000 in 1870; almost one million in 1880, and nearly a million and a half in 1890. Most of the expectant settlers came from states to the east, with Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, and Missouri leading the field. But the state’s immigrant population, most of whom hailed from the British Isles or Germany, was significant, and although it actually peaked at 13.3 percent in 1870, the overall number continued to increase. Thousands of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe joined this transatlantic migration around the turn of the twentieth century. For the most part, the state welcomed all the migrants who came to settle its vast public and private lands and to build their farms and towns, especially during the immediate postwar decades. The State Bureau of Immigration, the State Board of Agriculture, local newspapers, businesses, and private individuals and groups actively recruited immigrants. The editor of the Junction City Union proclaimed on April 29, 1865, that Kansas “presents to the pioneer settler inducements second to no State in all the West, as a field for emigration. . . . The idea that the Central and Western portion of the State is a Desert is exploded. . . . The field is wide and inviting, and there is nothing in the way. The idea of border and Indian difficulties has kept the State from settling up rapidly. Both of these evils have passed.” In 1868 the commissioner of immigration called on Kansans to be aggressive in their recruitment of immigrants: “It would not be characteristic for Kansas to be hid under a bushel. Let us see that her light shall shine.”

In the early 1890s, as the state’s foreign-born population peaked at 148,000, William H. Carruth created this “Map of Foreign Settlements in Kansas.” It was published in the Ninth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1893–1894, and shows the locations of German, including Russian Mennonite; Scandinavian; French and Italian; Bohemian and Hungarian; and Irish, Scotch, and Welsh settlements. The map above can be viewed on Kansas Memory at kansasmemory.org/item/220778.
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