Amateur entrepreneur and aircraft builder Kurt Bredel.
Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
Quietly, at two in the morning on June 2, 1911, two young men opened the door of a backyard shed, rolled their newly built flying machine to the street, tied it to a wagon, and wheeled it through town. They were headed to the aviation field north of Garfield Park in Topeka. Once there, they spent the remaining hours before daybreak rechecking their work and making minor adjustments. A small group of observers gathered at one end of the field to watch the men at the other end prepare their “aeroplane” for a demonstration flight. The mood likely involved both skepticism and excitement. Immigrant entrepreneurs Hino and Kurt Bredel were about to make local history flight-testing the first Topeka-built aircraft as well as the first Kansas-built monoplane. In the competitive atmosphere of the time, it is possible that they knew of fellow Topekan A. K. Longren’s efforts to build and fly a biplane, and perhaps they were under pressure to get their plane in the air first. Whatever their motivation, the local notoriety they achieved would wane over time, due in part to the difficulty of perfecting the monoplane technology and also to their entanglement with authorities seven years later over their activities as German Americans during World War I.1

Immigrant communities in America had long struggled with how to manage their ethnic heritage and their citizenship in a new country, particularly during times of war. Nativist pressures before and during the U.S. Civil War, for example, amplified the “otherness” of German communities. German American soldiers were typecast as cowards after the losses in the Chancellorsville battle, an image that lingered for decades after the war. Rather than assimilating, argued historian Christian Keller, Germans sought to become American on their own terms by retaining pride in their language and traditions. Thus, up to the eve of World War I, “German-ness” was a part of how people in these communities created their identity as American citizens.2

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This construction of citizenship came under new scrutiny at the onset of war with the German empire. Both President Woodrow Wilson and former president Theodore Roosevelt called for “100 percent Americanism” when talking about immigrants, casting suspicion on how effectively “hyphenated Americans” were assimilating into American life. In this time of war with Germany, would the sympathies of German Americans lie with the country they had left behind or with their newly adopted land? The belief was that one could not sympathize with both and that such dual loyalties posed a threat to a nation at war.4

Along with this concern about loyalty came a shift in Americans’ view of Germans as hardworking immigrants. Germany’s campaigns of sabotage in the years prior to U.S. involvement in the war, beginning with the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915, not only put officials on alert regarding threats to the home front but also created a new image of Germanic culture as savagely militaristic and barbarian.5 While some level of such fear is understandable during wartime, it reached new heights during the Great War as Americans conflated the acts of spies and saboteurs with such markers of German-ness as language and culture.6 How this attitude played out across America varied from one community to another, but the complications, prejudices, and false assumptions that characterized the treatment of German Americans during the Great War are evident in this case study of a German immigrant family in Kansas. What happened to them—the shift in public opinion from viewing them as heroes to their fall from grace—illustrates how fragile the place of German Americans was in this climate of heightened fear coupled with the great losses of war.


5. Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 179.


peller, located in the front of the aircraft, to pull the plane through the air rather than push it. They were early users of this technology and part of the larger story of experimentation that eventually moved aircraft design in this more advantageous direction. Though pusher technology is still around today among modern aviation enthusiasts, tractor airscrews became the standard in the industry.

The Bredels also attempted to make a success of single-wing technology, which proved to be more of a challenge. Those who had tried this approach before them had encountered problems gaining enough lift for the weight of the aircraft. In addition, monoplane wing construction required the lightest-weight material in order to accommodate “wing warping,” or the kind of maneuverability needed to make turns. Guy wires were used to bend the wing in a turn, and both the wires and the wings were vulnerable to breakage in flight. Using engines powerful enough to get a single-wing aircraft off the ground had to be weighed against the forces such power would exert on wings made of silk fabric. Worldwide, a few aviators had succeeded. A Frenchman, Louis Blériot, is credited with building a single-wing aircraft and officially flying it for the first time on November 16, 1907. In close succession, the Brazilian balloonist Alberto Santos-Dumont flew his own version of a monoplane. Drawings of the Santos-Dumont aircraft appeared in the June 1910 edition of the magazine Popular Mechanics, thus allowing amateur builders to replicate his work.9

8. For more discussion of early monoplane flight, see Albert F. Zahm, “Conspectus of Early Powerplane Development,” Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C. 46/47 (1944/1945): 325–58. Clyde Cessna tested a monoplane in Oklahoma prior to the war and successfully built monoplanes in Kansas following the war. For more information, see “Clyde Cessna,” https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/clyde-cessna/12006; “Cessna, Clyde Vernon,” National Aviation Hall of Fame, “http://www.nationalaviation.org/our-enshrinees/cessna-clyde/”; Gerald O. Deneau, “Highlights of the Development of the Aircraft Industry in Kansas,” Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science 71 (Winter 1968): 439–50; and Frank Joseph Rowe and Craig Miner, Borne on the South Wind: A Century of Aviation in Kansas (Wichita, KS: Wichita Eagle and Beacon Pub. Co., 1994), 33–41. Two other attempts were noted in the public record during this period, but no successful flights were documented. An immigrant from Luxembourg, Jacques V. Miller of Russell County, Kansas, reportedly built a monoplane and planned to fly it, but no later account has been found that he completed construction and had a successful flight. See “‘Prairie Eagle,’ First Kansas Monoplane Now Being Constructed,” Topeka Daily State Journal, February 21, 1910. Another effort was made in 1910 by three engineering students at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. They designed an aircraft based on the best features, they said, of the Santos Damont and Bleriot models. Though they planned to test it on the last day of 1910, tragic deaths occurred that day to two well-known aviators in separate incidents in New Orleans and Pasadena, and no further mention is made of demonstrating the Lawrence monoplane. See “Three Local Aviators Here: Students in University Have Built Themselves a Monoplane,” Lawrence Daily World, January 2, 1910, and “Death—Falls for Moisant and Hoxsey,” Topeka Daily Capital, January 1, 1911. See also, Rowe and Miner, Borne on the South Wind, 31.
It is possible that the Bredel brothers were the first Topekans to get any plane off the ground. The historical record favors Albin “A. K.” Longren for putting Topeka’s first plane in the sky on September 2, 1911. On that initial flight, his biplane “rose from [the] ground two feet and ran for a distance of 200 feet.” He made subsequent flights over the next three days, both morning and evening, gradually increasing the distance covered to six miles. This cumulative record and his later success in manufacturing biplanes boosted Longren’s claim to fame. Nevertheless, contemporary reports indicate that the Bredels’ flights preceded Longren’s initial flight by three months.

When the Bredel brothers were ready to demonstrate their aircraft on that June morning, they hired theater promoter Robert Blaylock, “formerly with the North Brothers’ Stock Company,” and sent a notice to the press. Reporters from both the Topeka State Journal and the Topeka Daily Capital witnessed the debut. With Hino at the controls, the aircraft lifted off the ground and flew less than one-quarter mile before a wire snapped and the plane landed.

9. Topeka had hosted exhibition flights before, and one account credits aviator J. C. Mars of Oakland, California, with “the first successful exhibition aeroplane flights in Kansas at the aviation meet in Topeka last week.” “Aeroplanist Mars Makes 6 Flights,” Topeka Daily Capital, June 12, 1910; and “Air Line Topeka to Kansas City,” Topeka Daily Capital, June 15, 1910.

10. Longren’s first flights were reported in “Long Flight by a Topeka Biplane,” Topeka Daily Capital, September 6, 1911.

prematurely. The aborted flight was not unusual given the monoplane’s wing strength vulnerability. After repairing the snapped wire, Hino took the plane up a second time, and that attempt proved successful. “It rose from the ground just north of the park and flew north, circling a large alfalfa stack that stands in the north end of the field at a height of thirty feet, then turned south and made a landing near the trees in the center of the alfalfa field.” The wind kicked up after that, and Kurt tried to convince his brother to postpone further demonstrations to another day. Kurt commented to the Daily Capital reporter, “No other aviator would attempt to make a flight in such a wind,” but Hino took the risk with Kurt running alongside. The wind twice forced him to land, finally damaging the propeller and one of the wings. Despite these aborted flights, the brothers had accomplished their goal. The front-page headlines in the State Journal the next day declared, “Topeka Boy Flies!” Noting that the Bredels had built a monoplane “that pulls instead of pushes,” the news account stated that “it is the first air craft of the kind had built a monoplane “that pulls instead of pushes,” the news account stated that “it is the first air craft of the kind to be built in Kansas.” The Daily Capital added, “This was the first Topeka-built air ship to make a successful flight.”

Just days after these accolades, two events drew many visitors to Topeka and provided opportunities for the Bredels to show off their aircraft. The first was the annual Merchants’ Week, June 5 to 9, which brought storekeepers and businessmen to the city from across Kansas and the surrounding states. The second was an aviation meeting, June 8 to 10. Two well-known aviators from the Glenn Curtiss Exhibition Team, Jimmie Ward and Hugh Robinson, entertained the crowds with daring flights in their biplanes. The two fliers also viewed the Bredel monoplane that was on display at the old Mills building—one of the attractions for Merchants’ Week—and commented that it was “the most practical looking they had seen for the size of the machine.”

Following this attention to their work, the Bredels succeeded in making five more flights at the Topeka field. In one effort, Hino achieved an altitude of five hundred feet. They hoped at this time to build a second plane for demonstration flights and to continue to experiment with building larger and more powerful monoplanes. The existing public record, however, does not indicate that they realized either of those goals. Hino admitted in a 1912 interview that their first monoplane “wasn’t a success,” suggesting that it never achieved a longer, sustained flight. The brothers’ partnership appeared to break up, and Hino went on to pursue a solo career as an aviator. Rather than building planes, he purchased a Blériot monoplane in 1912 and performed in exhibitions around the Midwest and in events in Winnipeg and Molson, Canada. He boasted that he made “sensational flights” and claimed to have “won a number of [racing] cups.” Determined to make it in aviation in Kansas, he recruited his brother Frank, and together they opened a flight school in Kansas City, Missouri. Kurt continued in his day job as a machinist for the Santa Fe Railroad in Topeka. He married Louise Eggert, a head nurse from one of the local hospitals, and settled into a quieter life. His name did not make the papers again until the entire Bredel family was investigated by the Department of Justice for disloyalty in the spring of 1918.

Following Wilson’s address to the nation on April 6, 1917, “declaring that a state of war exists between the United States and Germany,” most Germans in America went out of their way to assure neighbors, friends, and above all agents of the government (at all levels) that they were patriotic Americans first and foremost. Most of these efforts were effective in keeping the law at a distance, but culturally, those of German descent (as well as those confused with Germans, such as Scandinavian and Swiss immigrants) were subjected to intense anti-German propaganda that created an atmosphere of distrust. Historian Jörg Nagler observed that “the willingness of voluntary vigilance groups to spy on their presumably disloyal (German) neighbors was astounding, and the chase for the ‘enemy within’ possessed an almost paranoid dimen-

The extent to which this paranoia was manifested in local communities depended on the attitudes of local officials, the visibility of German Americans in the area, and the degree to which ethnic communities interacted with the local economy.¹⁸

The extensive surveillance apparatus that was initiated by the federal government contributed to the magnitude of anti-German hysteria. Programs aimed at identifying and controlling the movement of German Americans became vehicles for more intrusive investigations by several departments in President Wilson’s administration. The largest program, implemented by U.S. Marshals Service under the direction of the Department of Justice, required Germans who were not “actually naturalized” to register at their local post offices or police stations as enemy aliens.¹⁹ Initially, all male (and later female) enemy aliens aged fourteen and over were required to register with the government and obtain permits to enter restricted zones in the United States (usually military areas but also businesses with military contracts). Permitting began immediately, followed by the mass registration program, both administered by the U.S. Marshals Service. The registration program began in early February 1918 for men, and, following additional presidential action, in mid-June for women.²⁰ The four-page forms required detailed information on their families in Germany as well as in the

¹⁷ Jörg Nagler, “Victims of the Home Front,” 193. See also Nagler’s larger study, published only in German, which includes extensive research into National Archives records from this era: Nationale


¹⁹ It was not a new idea to develop a policy regarding those within a nation’s borders who had not relinquished their connection to their birth country. This practice had been established by the English in previous wars and carried into American law as early as 1798. The Alien Enemies Act (July 14, 1798) authorized the U.S. president to imprison or deport any alien considered dangerous. In the Great War, countries on both sides of the conflict had restrictive policies in place for dealing with noncitizens from enemy nations, including arrest and imprisonment on charges of suspected disloyalty, all outside a court of law. The text of the President’s Proclamation of War on April 6, 1917 (Proclamation 1364, “Declaring That a State of War Exists between the United States and Germany”), can be found at the American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=598.

²⁰ Registration was February 4–9, 1918, for men and June 17–26, 1918, for women.
United States and identified registrants with physical descriptions, photographs, and fingerprints. If Germans registered at the appropriate times, they then carried the stigma of being classified as enemy aliens. If they neglected to register, however, they were liable for imprisonment and deportation.

The first hurdle for non-naturalized Germans began within weeks of the U.S. declaration of war. They were ordered to stay out of half-mile zones around federal government property, and this order was later extended to include state government properties and private businesses that had contracts with the federal government.21 Enemy aliens who lived or worked in these zones, or simply had to pass through them on their way to work or home, had to obtain permits from the U.S. Marshals Service. If denied, they had to evacuate the zone or face arrest and imprisonment. “Poor Mr. Alien German,” a Daily Capital story began, “will have a harrowing time in Topeka if he chances to venture within a half mile of a store having a contract with the government, or a public building where any government war supplies are stored without taking the precaution of securing a special permit.” In Topeka, restricted zones included the Beatrice creamery, which supplied food to soldiers; the state house (capitol); the Battery A armory; the fairgrounds (where army equipment was kept, including horses and artillery); and the M. B. Bechtelheimer sales barn, which also sold supplies to the government.22

As these programs were implemented in counties across the country, what had begun as a question of legal status evolved into questions of what people said, believed, or acted upon that suggested disloyalty, however it was locally defined.23 Wilson’s directives in April 1917 imposed restrictions on the visibility and mobility of enemy aliens—what they could write, print, or publish and where they could live, work and shop—and required that they carry identification cards in public. A month later, Congress would add speech to the potential list of offenses, forbidding “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” regarding the United States and the U.S. flag and military or any language that would cause others to view the U.S. government with contempt.24 One restriction that grounded any German-born aviator declared that “no alien enemy shall ascend into the air in any airplane, balloon, airship, or flying machine.”25

For any new policy, agencies of the government had to write specific rules that complied with the provisions of the order. These rules evolved over time in response to the range of actions taken by federal, state, and local authorities. The large-scale permitting and registration programs added thousands of new workers to the surveillance network, including local postmasters and police chiefs who were tasked with registering enemy aliens in addition to their usual responsibilities. In communities across America, such officials wrestled with determining who met the definition of an enemy alien. The Department of Justice had to clarify that “actually naturalized” meant holding a certificate of naturalization—a document that would show the individual swearing off of allegiance to a foreign power.26 The citizenship status of women, however, was determined not by paperwork or their place of birth but by their choice in marital partners. If a woman married a man who was not yet naturalized, she had to register as an enemy alien during the war even if she had been born in the United States. If she was the widow of a man who had been naturalized, she had lost her citizenship upon his death.27

Those who failed to register were investigated by the Bureau of Investigation within the Department of Justice, and the reasons they gave indicated their confusion about the registration requirements. Pierce Mayer of Dallas, Texas, and Max Wimer of San Antonio, for instance, both assumed that filing their declaration of intention to become a citizen, or “first papers,” in court was all that was required for citizenship. Those who had immigrated as children assumed that they had gained citizenship under their father’s naturalization and would not need to register as enemy aliens. However, the proper documents were

25. Proclamation No. 1408, November 16, 1917, Setting Forth Additional Regulations Prescribing Conduct toward Alien Enemies, published online at https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1918supp02/d178
26. Presidential Proclamation 1364 (April 6, 1917) uses this vague definition of eligibility for registration: “who shall be within the United States and not actually naturalized.” Since naturalization was a multistage process and some benefits of citizenship were accorded to those who had filed a declaration, it was not clear what “actually” meant.
27. There were a number of noteworthy complications for women, as the enemy alien regulations crossed paths with laws and judicial rulings dealing with women’s citizenship status. See Candice L. Breeden, A Nationality of Her Own: Women, Marriage, and the Law of Citizenship (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) for a history of women’s struggle to attain full citizenship rights.
William A. Marsischky of Indianapolis, for example, was just two years old when he came to America with his parents and assumed he had been naturalized, as he was just one month shy of his twenty-first birthday when his father filed for citizenship, but the court documents could not be found. Louis Barone of Bastrop, Texas, asked his county clerk to call up the county where his father had filed his papers to verify that it had been done while Louis was a minor, but the clerk reported that only first papers had been filed. Another source of confusion came from the privileges extended to immigrants to encourage them to work and settle new lands. Not only could they own property but, as John L. Giddish of Atlanta, Georgia, argued, since he was allowed to vote and serve on a jury in his state, “if the United States is not his country, [then] he is a man without a country.” These uncertainties about what constituted citizenship added considerable stress for those who did not consider themselves enemies of the United States.\(^28\)

The Department of Justice determined at the start that the only mode of communication with the populace regarding eligibility and regulations would be the American press. The print media were, at the time, the most far-reaching into America’s communities, but the challenge would be a quick and accurate dissemination of information from Washington. A newly created Committee for Public Information became the primary source for newspapers, though adoption by news organizations was gradual and the use of material was uneven. In Kansas, the work was done by the Committee on Publicity of the state Council of Defense, which supplied about eight hundred newspapers and farm journals with publicity “promoting war-work enthusiasm.”\(^29\)

Newspapers in Kansas, for their part, published regular announcements regarding the registration and permitting policies. Most of these announcements promoted the importance of registration, as with one editor who enlisted the help of citizens in ensuring that their German neighbors abided by this directive. “Most of these alien Germans are doubtless good citizens. . . . A large minority, however, are in active sympathy with the German cause and are secret enemies of America. . . . The evil-minded

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\(^{28}\) Department of Justice, *Investigative Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908–1922*, Old German Files, Case 188040 (Pierce Mayer) and Case 323205 (John L. Giddish), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as NARA-DC), https://www.fold3.com/title/74/fbi-case-files.

among them will try to dodge the registration. All patriotic Americans therefore must help. . . . You may possibly prevent a grave injury to the American cause by nailing some alien spy.” Other articles highlighted the vigilance of the government’s efforts. On April 7, the day after Wilson’s statement, a Topeka State Journal headline read, “Topeka’s Eyes Are on Lookout for Any Spies!” with a warning to the community that the U.S. marshal’s office had “instructions to investigate every rumor of disloyalty and to use constant vigilance in detecting and thwarting hostile and unfriendly acts.”

There were, unfortunately, occasional errors regarding who was required to register and where and when they should do it. The Daily Capital reported that those who had not taken out naturalization papers had to register, implying that those who had filed their first papers might be exempt from registration. This report was repeated in a Salina paper a few days later. Another announcement in Topeka initially misstated the start date for the “Hun drive,” but the error was corrected in later editions prior to registration. Germans in Topeka were further handicapped when warned that they needed to read English, as “it is a sure thing that none of the local papers, at least, intend to put [information] in a font of hun type just for the purpose of spreading the warning.” Accounts in the press, then, not only were inadequate means of correctly disseminating important legal information but could also carry considerable prejudice.

Another injustice was the practice of publishing the names and addresses of enemy aliens in the newspaper despite the attorney general’s order that names be kept confidential. These lists included the names of men who had neglected to obtain permits for restricted zones or had failed to register as aliens. One such case appeared in the June 24, 1917, issue of the Topeka Daily Capital shortly after the deadline to obtain permits when Walter G. Vogel’s name appeared in a headline for failing to get a permit. He worked in a shoe shop within one of the restricted zones in Topeka and had been told by his boss, George Reuter, that he did not need a permit because he had registered for the draft. Vogel was allowed to apply for a permit after the deadline, but Reuter was further questioned by investigators regarding his loyalty. While he was a naturalized citizen who had had his business in Topeka for thirty-four years, he had to make a public declaration of his allegiance to the flag.

Complaints of suspected disloyalty were submitted to the Justice Department’s fledgling Bureau of Investigation, the predecessor to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Germans could never be quite sure what would get them in trouble or whether a neighbor might find some behavior suspicious and file a complaint. A farmer in Ellsworth, Kansas, for example, was reported to authorities for flying a German flag in front of his house. When investigated, it turned out to be red-white-and-blue bunting that had become somewhat weather-stained. The sheriff who investigated the complaint determined that the family was patriotic and gave them a new American flag.

In the Kansas district, U.S. Attorney Fred Robertson was particularly attentive to maintaining order, directing county attorneys to investigate the “general mood” within their German communities and to pursue all reports of disloyalty. The bureau received assistance in monitoring speech and behavior from several citizens’ groups whose diligence in these matters varied depending on the locality and the personalities involved. In Kansas, the Committee on Public Defense sponsored a branch of the

33. “German Aliens Responsible,” Topeka Daily Capital, January 13, 1918, announced dates of February 1–9; on January 15, the dates were corrected to February 4–9, and on January 22, a statement was made that “a general round-up of enemy aliens” would start February 5 and last six days (through the 10th). Final correction was made the next day, January 25, to reflect Department of Justice orders—the roundup would start the morning of February 4 and continue through February 9.
35. After reporting that the U.S. attorney general “apparently forbids making public the names of the registrants,” the Topeka Daily Capital continued to publish the names and addresses of those who registered. “Aliens Must Register or Go to Penitentiary,” Topeka Daily Capital, February 8, 1918; and “Alien Registration Extended,” Topeka Daily Capital, February 9, 1918.
38. Nagler, Nationale Minoritäten im Krieg, 158–61. Nagler’s evidence was found in files of the U.S. attorney, National Archives and Records Administration, Kansas City, MO.
39. Councils of Defense, both state and county, were encouraged by the Wilson administration to assist the government’s war preparedness work in both industry and agriculture. Once war was declared, these responsibilities were expanded to include public safety. Another civilian group, the American Protective League, worked closely with the Bureau of Investigation in reporting threats to internal security. Neither organization had trained operatives or worked with the oversight of any governmental authority.
American Protective League, led by Fred Voiland of Topeka and F. W. Blackmar of Lawrence. Their work was “carried on secretly,” according to Blackmar, with the purpose of “discovery and prosecution of disloyalty and the protection of loyal persons who were under accusation of disloyalty.”40 Any evidence of open disloyalty, Blackmar said, went straight to the Department of Justice. This practice not only created a pervasive network of spies in every community but also increased the bureau’s workload of investigations. Special Agent Arthur T. Bagley from the bureau’s Kansas City office was charged with investigating these reports. He became an important figure in the case that was opened on the Bredel family in May 1918.

While many cases were resolved by giving the individual a second chance to register or file for a permit, these investigations could have serious consequences, possibly leading to arrest, detention (local jail time), and internment. The investigation of the Bredel family is instructive regarding how a case could quickly progress to such outcomes. Between the men’s and women’s registrations in 1918, the Bredel men came to the attention of the Bureau of Investigation for failing to register as enemy aliens. Two agents from the bureau’s office in Kansas City, Missouri—Ed Portley and Oscar Schmitz—were sent to Topeka to interview Kurt Bredel and his father, Carl. The agents’ task in the initial interviews would have been, first, to ascertain the reasons for noncompliance and, second, to determine intentionality.

As noted in earlier examples, many Germans misunderstood their status as citizens. The belief was that filing first papers—showing intent—was proof of one’s commitment to the new country. In his statement, Kurt said that he had not registered because, some years before, he had filed his declaration of intention to become a citizen, and he believed that was all he needed to do.41 Kansas was among the states mentioned above that had allowed immigrant men to hold jobs, own property, and even vote—first papers—showing intent—was proof of one’s commitment to the new country. In this statement, Kurt said that he had not registered because, some years before, he had filed his declaration of intention to become a citizen, and he believed that was all he needed to do.41 Kansas was among the states mentioned above that had allowed immigrant men to hold jobs, own property, and even vote in elections with their first papers, so many believed that they did not fit the profile of an enemy alien. Seventy miles away in Kansas City, Missouri, Kurt’s brothers, Hino and Frank, were also being questioned. They too said they had taken out first papers in a Shawnee County court and understood that they did not qualify as enemy aliens because they had made this commitment to become citizens. However, Agent Portley’s boss, Arthur T. Bagley, noted in his interview with Hino and Frank that “these men have been a matter of constant complaint to this office for the past three years.” Bagley did not elaborate on the unnamed complaints that had apparently emerged shortly after the beginning of the European War. The tone of his report suggests that he may have been using wartime rules to take action against them when he, perhaps, lacked proof of other possibly unlawful behavior.

Bagley did admit to monitoring the Bredels’ behavior for any violation of the restriction on flying for enemy aliens. “They have been experimenting in aeronautics and originally started operations at Topeka, Kansas, latterly transferring their field of activities to Kansas City, Missouri. They have an aeroplane which has not flown for two years past and have been conducting a school in aeronautics in Kansas City. This school is largely a fake.”43 He proceeded with the charge of failing to register, concluding that Hino’s statements regarding his citizenship status were contradictory and, therefore, proof of disloyalty. Information from Hino’s draft registration card (the “questionnaire” in the report) and his statements to the bureau regarding enemy alien registration supported his conclusion:

He stated in his questionnaire that he was a citizen of the United States, and he states that the reason that he did not claim exception on his questionnaire as an alien enemy was because he thought that he was a citizen of the United States. This man is evidently lying. His statement that he started to register as an enemy alien and was instructed not to by a policeman when he had claimed before his draft board that he was a citizen of the United States is proof of this. In addition to this his brother [Frank] states that they knew that they were enemy aliens and had talked over together their not registering.44

41. Declarations of intention for Frederich Heino Bredel, Frank Rudolf Bredel, and Kurt Heino Bredel were filed on October 23, 1908, in Shawnee County, Kansas; “Kansas, Naturalization Abstracts, 1864–1972” (online database), Ancestry.com (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, 2013); and, statement of Kurt Bredel as reported by Ed Portley, May 16, 1918, Department of Justice, Investigative Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908–1922, Old German Files, Case 196117, NARA-DC.
43. Report by Arthur T. Bagley, May 16, 1918, Department of Justice, Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, Case 196117, NARA-DC.
44. In his interview, Hino Bredel stated that the policeman had advised him “that inasmuch as he had registered for the draft it would be unnecessary.” Report by Arthur T. Bagley, May 16, 1918, Department of Justice, Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, Case 196117, NARA-DC.
This “talking together” moved the bureau to the next step. Agent Schmitz, one of the interrogators in Topeka, reasoned that “it appeared there might be a conspiracy in this family to avoid registration as alien enemies.” However, because Germans were confused regarding who was eligible and who was not, discussions would indeed take place within families as well as within German communities. In many cases, investigations of nonregistrants would be cleared up if the individual requested another chance to complete the paperwork. This second chance was not always granted, however, and depended on other evidence of disloyalty in their files based largely on gossip and innuendo from neighbors. In the Bredels’ case, a family discussion about whether this program applied to them was amplified to a conspiracy.45 By shifting the assessment of intentionality from a misstep to willful neglect, the bureau could meet the Department of Justice criteria for arrest and detention.46

Determination of a suspect’s intention was largely left to local authorities, though the Department of Justice would issue guidelines when reports reached it of abuse of protocol. In a January 1918 directive, Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory reminded officials that there are discrete stages in an investigation that must be handled properly. Arrest was similar to criminal investigations in that a subject could be temporarily detained while the investigation continued. When the inquiry was concluded, there were three possible outcomes. First, a detainee could be released on parole, under supervision and with restrictions on mobility. Second, a decision could be made to

45. Report by Oscar Schmitz, May 18, 1918, Department of Justice, Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, Case 196117, NARA-DC.
release the detainee without conditions. Third, a detainee could be delivered to the War Department to be interned for the duration of the war.47

Gregory later stressed the need for evidence to justify investigation and arrest. This evidence could include false statements given on a registration form, changing residences without obtaining permission from a U.S. marshal, or violating one of the rules regarding enemy aliens with intention or willfulness. The Department of Justice allowed late registrations if an individual had simply made a mistake, perhaps misunderstanding the eligibility rules, or had been delayed by accident, but there was no second chance for negligence or willful disobedience. The amount of attention given to these issues attests to the volume of cases that reached the department regarding unlawful or lengthy detentions made by local authorities.48

The number of men and women detained by local and federal authorities has been difficult for scholars to reconstruct. The conservative figure comes from a 1918 report by the attorney general’s office of 6,300 presidential warrants issued during America’s involvement in the war. However, Nagler’s examination of Department of Justice warrants found that over 8,500 arrests of suspected enemy aliens were made during the war, and thousands more were likely arrested without warrant and then released, never involving the Department of Justice and with records kept only at the local level.49 The legality of these local matters was a concern of the Department of Justice, as indicated in circulars that cautioned authorities to abide by principles of the law and to limit detention to no more than two months. Nagler found, however, that the average stay was seventy-seven days, or two weeks over the recommended threshold.50 While the purpose of detention was to investigate a case more thoroughly, Nagler argued that a lengthy stay also served as a warning to others of the government’s power to control speech and behavior.

Even if detainees were later released without conditions, they remained stigmatized in their communities for the time served in jail. The process was comparable to a criminal investigation, in the attorney general’s own words, in putting the names of these community members on the criminal docket and including them in facilities reserved for criminal offenders, even when the evidence for arrest was often insufficient to establish probable cause. As a result, the detainee’s name would appear in the newspaper, and the arrest would create a police record that would stay with him or her.

In the daily press, federal programs of registering, permitting, and investigating were frequently referred to as “enemy roundups” and conflated with criminal actions. Typically, arrests were made for failing to obtain a permit, failing to register due to misunderstanding of eligibility, or making statements not in support of U.S. involvement in the war. These were characterized in one news account as the government’s efforts to seek out “propagandists” and “leave no stone unturned in prosecution of persons unfriendly to the U.S. in its war with Germany.” The extent to which freedom of speech was curtailed in German American communities is further illustrated in the writer’s next comment: “In almost every instance men arrested for seditious utterances, conspiracy and other crimes growing out of America’s participation in the war bear names endangering one’s jaw bone in an attempt at pronunciation.” The writer quotes Deputy Marshal C. C. Jackson as saying, “To a great extent we have rounded up the nuts—those persons whose mouths work better than their brains.”51

The public visibility of arrest and detention had an impact on the Bredel case and led to further charges. Frank admitted that he had intentionally avoided the label of enemy alien by telling people he was a naturalized citizen. Although the lie was aimed at sidestepping social embarrassment, agents read it not only as unlawful deception but as an indication that the family had pro-German leanings. For that reason, a few neighbors were interviewed by the bureau. One woman was a former neighbor who claimed that Hino and his wife had “cursed America,” and, while she had not spoken to them in years, she claimed that “what was in them then was certainly in them now.” Two others quoted the same conversation

49. Nagler, Nationale Minoritäten im Krieg, 427.
50. Department of Justice Circular no. 792, February 11, 1918, Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States, 1918, 647; Nagler, Nationale Minoritäten im Krieg, 433, 433n. Nagler based his calculation of the average length of stay on dates provided in War Department case files for the date of arrest and the date of internment.
with Carl Bredel, who had remarked to them, “What did the U.S. get involved in this war for?” In a pre-1917 context in which Americans viewed the conflict as confined to Europe, this would not have been a damning statement. But in the context of global war, and coupled with the bureau’s other suspicions, this comment became part of the evidence for pursuing this case.

The family’s testimonies provided a different viewpoint. From their perspective, they had demonstrated patriotism through their contributions to both Liberty Bond and Red Cross fund drives. In fact, Kurt’s wife, also German born, had taken charge of the education committee for the local Red Cross and directed home health classes. “Our home is here,” Kurt told the agent. Carl also affirmed his support for America as his new home. He told the agent that “he expects to live and die in the United States” and that “this is his country and [he] wants the United States to win the war.”

Agents Schmitz and Portley could find no signs of disloyalty in the Topeka Bredels. They examined the declaration of intention papers filed by Hino, Sr., and found that he had relinquished his ties to Wilhelm II and to Prussia. Moreover, there was nothing in the family’s personal papers that indicated “pro-German” leanings. The agents determined that these Bredels were not active opponents of registration but had simply made a mistake, and they recommended to the bureau that they be allowed to reg-

Prior to World War I, the Bredels received numerous accolades as evident in this article from the Topeka Daily Capital, dated June 18, 1911. Events of the preceding days, including the annual Merchant Week and an aviation meeting, provided the brothers with opportunities to show off their aircraft, pictured here. Because of investigations against the family during World War I, however, the Bredel brothers did not develop a business building aircraft, and Hino Bredel was forced to abandon his career as a performer and instructor.

52. Signed statement by Frank Rudolph Bredel; unsigned and undated report; report by John R. Burger, dated May 16, 1918, case file no. 198947 in re Hino Bredel, alleged pro-German, interviews with Mrs. O. W. Owens and Mrs. Elva Forbis; and case file no. 191949 in re Kurt and Hino Bredel, alien enemies, report by G. E. Barthell, Topeka, interview with Mrs. Clough of 324 Quincy Street, Department of Justice, Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, Case 196117, NARA-DC.

53. Statement of Kurt Bredel, reported by Ed Portley, May 16, 1918; report by Oscar Schmitz, May 18, 1918, in re Hino Bredel Sr., alien enemy; and interview with Mrs. Kurt Bredel, reported by Oscar Schmitz, May 18, 1918, Department of Justice, Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, Case 196117, NARA-DC. Mrs. Bredel was known to Agent Schmitz from her former position as head nurse of Stormont Hospital. Registration of female enemy aliens did not take place until the next month, and Louise Bredel registered at that time.

54. Report by Agents Schmitz and Portley, May 18, 1918, Department of Justice, Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, Case 196117, NARA-DC.
ister belatedly. Unfortunately for the family, Bagley disagreed, and Kurt and his sixty-seven-year-old father were arrested and jailed on June 6, 1918. The arresting officer, Assistant U.S. Marshal C. C. Jackson, stated that “both are dangerous persons to be running loose,” though the only charges that appeared in their case file were that they had failed to register and obtain permits to enter restricted zones in the city, both correctable offenses. Hino, Jr., and Frank Bredel were detained as well at the Jackson County jail in Kansas City, with one news account saying they would likely be interned in a prisoner-of-war camp.55

The Bredels’ file does not shed light on what the government ultimately decided in their case, but there are indications that they were released within a few weeks, a time frame consistent with what Nagler called “internment substitutes.”56 He estimated that these types of detentions would add 1,500 to 1,800 cases to the internment lists if they had been properly processed. Instead, these detainees were kept in local jails for a period of weeks or months and, when released, were warned that a second arrest for disloyal speech or actions would certainly result in confinement for the duration of the war. It is also likely that local officials were aware of the level of evidence needed by the War Department for internment, and they could not justify that decision in these cases. Attorney General Gregory had cautioned local officials about using internment as a threat. “Internment is not an arbitrary remedy to be recommended as a matter of course. . . . In many cases the indications of danger or culpability are comparatively slight, and the interests of the United States will be sufficiently safeguarded if the subject is paroled or released after temporary detention.”57 Of course, the federal government was also concerned about the increased crowding in camps and the rising costs of managing internees. It also had in mind the potential for retribution against Americans interned overseas.

While the Bredels’ encounter with the Department of Justice may have been relatively brief, there were personal consequences of these detentions for the family. Prior to the war, they had appeared to integrate well into the citizen community—filing first papers, buying property, and starting businesses—but the disgrace of these public accusrations along with the incarceration took a toll on the family. Before the war, newspaper accounts of the Bredel brothers had spoken proudly of their accomplishments as aviators and designers of aircraft, but the tone of the news coverage subsequent to their arrests shifted toward the negative and what historian Christopher Capozzola called the “duty of hatred.”58 In the United States, support for the war carried with it the obligation to oppose anything related to the country’s enemies, and this attitude was evident not only in book burnings and bans of the German language but also in the passive as- sent of Germans themselves who switched to English church services and quietly closed German-language newspapers. For the Bredels, this obligation took shape in the reversal of respect regarding their past accomplishments. The Topeka Daily Capital, one of their hometown papers, reported on their arrest on May 20, 1918, with the headline “Two Former Topekans Arrested as Aliens . . . Made Many Attempts to Fly in Kansas but Something Always Went Wrong with Machine.” The report reviewed the Bredels’ aviation history, casting more doubt on their successes:

There were rumors of more successful flights later, but always there were no witnesses. Hino Bredel is said to have contracted with several Kansas commercial clubs and county fairs to stage exhibition flights, but something always happened. Either the wind was too strong or the engine developed a spavin or sweeney. The airplane was to be seen, but always it was on the ground. The next summer Hino claimed to have made a highly successful tour

55. Letter from Bielaski to A. T. Bagley, June 7, 1918, and report by G. E. Barthel, June 6, 1918, Department of Justice, Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, Case 196117, NARA-DC; “Arrest Father and Son as Alien Enemies,” Topeka Daily Capital, June 7, 1918; and “Bredel Brothers Are Held,” Junction City (KS) Daily Union, May 17, 1918.

56. Nagler, Nationale Minoritäten im Krieg, 428. The presidential warrants for the Bredel men had been requested after the arrest, which was permissible by Department of Justice rules, and the attorney general asked for a “brief statement of facts” to be telegrammed to Washington so that an evaluation of the case could be made. Two weeks later, on June 19, 1918, Bureau agent G. E. Barthell in Topeka reported, without comment, “investigation closed.” In the next few days, Kurt Bredel’s wife, Louise, appeared at the Topeka police station and completed the affidavit for alien females (within the women’s registration period), stating that she and her husband resided at 316 Taylor Street, and Kurt requested permission as an enemy alien to move freely around Topeka; his application listed his home address and his job at the railway yard.


58. Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 178-185. “The Duty of Hatred” was the title of an essay written by ethicist Horace Bridges in the Atlantic Monthly, October 1918, 464-66. Bridges rationalized that hatred was justified as a means to help end the war. “It is not merely tolerable,” he said, “it is our bounden duty.”
of Canada, giving flying exhibitions at many places.  

Gone was the praise for the multiple successful flights back in June 1911 or the recognition the brothers had received in the press for months after that time. Instead, the news article gave an extensive, previously unpublished account of their failures. A booster club in Eskridge had paid for an engine repair in 1911 but later could not collect from the brothers. The same informants also complained that Hino had made false claims about the engine he and his brother had designed. The brothers, they charged, had given “a glittering testimonial” in a “national engineering magazine” that these critics maintained was not supported by the Bredels’ track record. All that had been put forth as successes in 1911 and 1912 were now discounted as stories told by con men. The obligation to hate, in Capozzola’s words, is perhaps too strong a term for the shift of affect in this case. However, the arrest as enemy aliens, despite the absence of evidence, was enough information for those who had once supported them to now dismiss the modest successes of these ambitious German hobbyists.

The troubles with the government ended Hino’s dream of an aviation career. After years of moonlighting as an aviator and operating the flight training school, he was forced to disassociate himself from these activities after the publicity surrounding his arrest, and in the years following the war, he drifted through a variety of odd jobs before disappearing from public records.

For Carl and his wife, the consequences of the investigation and arrest amounted to more than bad publicity and public shaming. Within weeks of arrest, the Bredel home was being auctioned in a sheriff’s sale. Carl, his ailing wife, Henriette, and their daughter, Charlotte, left Topeka and moved in with Hino and Frank in Kansas City. Henriette came under the care of a doctor there, and in October 1918, she died after a long-term illness.  

The federal apparatus created in the Great War to protect the homeland, particularly the Department of Justice’s investigative powers and the War Department’s internment camps, provided a template for later programs focused on internal security. The practice of “profiling” based on nationality and the presumed low commitment to one’s adopted country was expanded in World War II and has been resurrected in more recent wars. It was not, however, cost-effective and successful in catching saboteurs and spies. Instead, many resources were spent on programs that resulted in stigmatizing not only those who were caught up in the system but, ultimately, all German Americans.  

The Bredel brothers did not develop a business building aircraft, as they had originally planned and as some other Kansas dreamers had done. Wartime investigations disrupted their lives, and Hino had to abandon his career as a performer and instructor. Lost to history in that “fog of war” on the home front was the record of the brothers’ first attempt to fly a home-designed and home-built monoplane in Topeka. Though the Bredels’ career was brief, it remains part of the story that put Kansas aviation on the map. More importantly, that story cannot be fully told unless it is embedded in the context of the kinds of cultural shifts that occur when a nation goes to war.  

