Critique of Carruth's Articles on Foreign Settlements in Kansas

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FROM the geographic point of view, the only printed work treating as a whole the problem of the foreigner in Kansas has been the two articles published by William Herbert Carruth in 1892 and 1894.1 We owe him a debt of gratitude; with no funds at his disposal to aid him in pursuing his investigation he took time from his literary occupations and from scholarly and pedagogic activities, which in those days he necessarily devoted almost exclusively to German, to concern himself with a general matter that could bring him but little immediate recognition. Fortunately he made his study at a time after almost all the rural foreign settlements in Kansas had already been established and before the forces of assimilation had invaded them sufficiently to hide their identity from the casual observers that Carruth had to call on as informants. His articles, if carefully studied, contain much of great value. They are of less interest to the casual reader because they are filled with local names that have no meaning unless detailed maps of the period are consulted at the same time. Carruth provided a map to accompany his articles. It helps a great deal, but as we shall see, not too much confidence can be placed on it.

As inferred above, the articles do not represent a major interest of Carruth's. He merely reported on answers to a questionnaire. He stated his procedures as follows:

As a source of information regarding the origin of the foreign elements of our population when their native speech shall have been forgotten, but when the influence of it will be left in vocabulary and pronunciation, I have thought that a map of the state with the location of all the foreign settlements of even quite small size would be of interest and in time of great value. In the following pages I transmit the results of my inquiries so far as received. It is my intention to make the report complete and to publish the map, when as complete as it can be made, in colors. Unexpected difficulties have delayed the work and prevented its being complete. I depended for my information upon the County Superintendents of the State, a class of unusually intelligent and well-informed men and women. But in not a few cases there seems to have been a suspicion in the mind of my correspondent that I might be a special officer of the state.

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trying to locate violations of the law requiring district schools to be conducted in English, and hence information regarding schools in foreign tongue was withheld or given but partially. And in some cases my informants were not well posted. A superintendent by the name of Schauermann in a county containing a town called Suabia, tells me that there are no foreigners in his county. In such cases time must be taken to secure a correct result.

Carruth suspected that his informants might deceive him, but apparently did not think of their being involuntarily wrong. He seems to have verified their statements very seldom. The results of such an inquiry could not be expected to be complete; they also exhibit great unevenness of quality. There were scores of omissions that might easily be pardoned, but others are sometimes astounding, not only when the county superintendent reported no foreigners as in Atchison county, but also when he was fully attempting to do so.

Here are some glaring cases of omission:

Barton County.—The Pawnee Rock Mennonites and the Albert Germans
Brown County.—The Norwegian and Welsh settlements
Clay County.—The East Border Germans
Cloud County.—The Danish settlement, the Germans
Crawford County.—The Hepler-Brazilton Germans
Dickinson County.—The Alida Germans (not reported from Geary county either)
Ellis County.—The Ellis Bukovinan Germans
Jackson County.—The Germans
Leavenworth County.—The city and its neighborhood (the text omits; the map shows)
McPherson County.—The New Andover Swedes
Marion County.—The Lincolnvile Germans
Marshall County.—The Axtell Swedes, the Danes
Osage County.—The Vassar Germans
Reno County.—The Pretty Prairie Mennonites
Rice County.—The Bushton Germans
Riley County.—The Fancy Creek Germans, the Bala Welsh, the Leonardville-Riley Germans
Russell County.—All but the most important group
Shawnee County.—Topeka itself
Washington County.—The Brantford Swedes, the Danes
Wyandotte County.—Slavs (they were already in the packing houses) 2

In many of these cases the county superintendent probably omitted a report because other foreign elements in the county so impressed him that he momentarily forgot certain important groups. If, for instance, the Ellis Bukovinan Germans had lived in any county

2. The above omissions are “glaring.” There are many other omissions. Carruth and his informants might be pardoned for overlooking smaller settlements in western Kansas where the population had not become stabilized, but even in the eastern part of the state there are many. Three counties in which he reports “no foreigners” or as containing only “scattered” individuals may serve as examples:
Bourbon.—The Fort Scott Germans
Franklin.—The Homewood Germans
Johnson.—The Lennea Germans (still others in this county)
but the one in which the Catholic Volgan Germans were centered, an informant could hardly have neglected them.

The omission of the cities of Leavenworth and Topeka must have been occasioned by the county superintendent's understanding that he was to report only on that part of the county where he was himself active. Omissions of certain other urban groups have probably the same explanation. It cannot be applied in Kansas City, however, where the Swedes are reported, but all other groups neglected. It is equally hard to understand how the Riley county superintendent could neglect to report the two most important groups of Germans, while he did name one of lesser size, combining it with the adjacent Czech settlement. Possibly he confused Swede creek and Fancy creek, but he certainly does not have the same excuse for passing over the Leonardville-Riley Germans who were located so near his Manhattan headquarters. The amount of vagueness and inaccuracy was quite in proportion to the number of omissions. Some of it must probably be blamed on Carruth himself. He certainly could have been more accurate about Douglas county where he lived; he did not need to invent Big Springs township. The confusions regarding Russian Germans seem to reflect his own haziness; he apparently thought they all came from the same part of Russia. The Russians of Russell and Rush counties (Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists) would have been astonished and indignant if they had known they were being lumped off as Mennonites. Setting up a Greek Catholic Church in Scott county was quite a feat; Carruth's inability to believe that Germans in Russia could be Roman Catholic seems to be at the basis of this error. Similarly, he seemed to feel that everybody in the Austro-Hungarian Empire spoke German by choice. The Moravians of Brown and Shawnee counties would have been hurt to be classified as Ger-lings. The inaccuracies of the informants usually show up in matters of locations, chronology, and statistics. For instance, in Anderson county, the Scipio-Greeley Germans very early had population in townships adjoining as well as in Putnam township; they were there by 1855 instead of 1860. The informants may also confuse the identity of the foreign stocks; in Cloud county, Swedes are identified as Norwegians (the Norwegians were farther north), and in Jewell county, Bohemians, Hollanders, and Norwegians are called Swedes.

In making his map on the basis of the data at hand, Carruth could not help falling into other errors. For instance, in Anderson county, finding that the county superintendent had said that the Scipio-Greeley Germans were in Putnam township, he marked the whole
towsnship as occupied by them, whereas they were in the east half only, though, as said above, they were also in adjoining lands to the east and south. When a single settlement occupied parts of more than one county, error was still more likely. The Russell report said there were Russians (called Mennonites by Carruth) in the southwest part of the county. So Carruth marked the two south townships along the west county line as German, left unmarked the most important township next east on the south border and so only casually joined the Milberger Russian Germans to the part of this group in Barton county. He does not distinguish the Hollanders from the Germans, perhaps deliberately because he had used up the colors at his disposal. In any case the Dispatch Dutch appear with the German color in Smith county and the Scandinavian color in Jewell county, so that no one could suspect their unity.

In Greenwood county, the county superintendent reported, "Norwegians, about 200, in the south part of Salem Township." Carruth assigned to them the whole of the township, which was very large, and thus gave a mistaken idea both of the size and of the location of the settlement. In the same county he located correctly "Germans in Shell Rock Township," but he did not realize that the Coffey county superintendent, when he reported "Germans in Liberty" township, was speaking of a portion of the same settlement, and he consequently left a gap in the middle of that settlement. Again, the Washington county report said, "French about midway in Sherman township." Carruth consequently gave the French a full survey township around Linn in territory that is almost solidly German. On the other hand, in Cloud county where the report stated, "Canadian French are scattered over much of the county, with considerable settlements in and around the towns of Concordia, Clyde, St. Joseph and Aurora," Carruth did not guess how much territory was French, and he assigned to the Canadians insufficient space, sometimes wrongly placed. As a final example, the maps make the Danes in Jackson county appear to occupy more territory than those in Lincoln county, because the Lincoln informant specified only one township for Danes, to which Carruth limited them, while the Jackson county superintendent mentioned two townships, and Carruth spread them over most of both although they occupied only a small part of each.

Carruth's articles record the existence of a great many foreign settlements which are otherwise noted only in parish church histories or documents even less widely circulated. As examples, let me cite the Andale-Colwich Germans just west of Wichita, the
Mound Valley Swedes near the Oklahoma line in Labette county, the Cuba Czechs east of Belleville in Republic county, the Cloud county French Canadians to the east of and south of Concordia, the Osage City French and Italians, the Arvonia Welsh in Osage county east of Emporia. This value may exist even when Carruth incorrectly interpreted the data that he had at hand, as occurred in some of the examples already cited.

Another example of value combined with error is the case of the Hungarian Germans of Rawlins county. His article speaks of Hungarians. Though his map shows them with the same color as Bohemians, and his articles do not show that they were German in speech, he has at least recorded their existence. To be sure, the existence of all these groups could be learned in other ways, including inquiry made today; the record of their presence in the 1890’s is, however, important. Also, the notes concerning language usage, particularly in schools, are important, for in many instances parish histories are again the only record that we have in this matter. Here is a list of counties having schools in foreign languages as reported by Carruth (schools are German unless otherwise noted):

- ANDERSON
- BARTON
- CHASE
- CHEYENNE
- CLOUD.—French
- DICKINSON.—German and Swedish
- ELLIS
- ELLSWORTH
- FORD
- GEARY
- HARNEY
- LEAVENWORTH
- LINCOLN.—German and Danish
- LOGAN.—Swedish
- McPHERSON.—German and Swedish
- MARION
- MEADE
- MITCHELL
- MORRIS.—Swedish
- NEMAH
- OSBORNE
- PHILLIPS
- POTAWATOMIE.—German and Swedish
- RENO
- REPUBLIC.—Swedish, Norwegian, Czech
- RILEY.—Swedish
- SALINE.—Swedish
- SEDGWICk
- WABAUNSEE
- WALLACE
- WASHINGTON
- WICHITA

As this list shows, in the 1890’s there were foreign language schools on all four borders of Kansas and there was a great concentration of counties in central Kansas where such schools existed. Carruth’s is the only record of this phenomenon for the state as a whole.

In spite of the omissions and imperfections, Carruth’s articles had a very real value. The general picture that they presented was so nearly correct and so valuable that it should have been given more consideration than appears to have been the case.