



# The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements in Missouri: A Survey of a Vanishing Culture

By Charles Van Ravenswaay

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Many Germans who immigrated to America in the nineteenth century settled in the lower Missouri River valley between St. Charles and Boonville, Missouri. In this magnificent book, which includes some six hundred photographs and drawings, Charles van Ravenswaay examines that immigration—who came, how, and why—and surveys the distinctive Missouri-German architecture, art, and crafts produced in the towns or on the farms of the rural counties of Cooper, Cole, Osage, Gasconade, Franklin, Montgomery, Warren, and St. Charles from the 1830s until the closing years of the century.

As the immigrants sought to transplant their native culture to the Missouri backwoods, the compromises they were forced to make with conditions in Missouri produced many fascinating and individualistic structures and objects. They built half-timbered, stone, and brick houses and barns with designs reflecting the traditions of the many German regions from which the builders emigrated. The author's far-reaching study of immigrants' arts and crafts included furniture in traditional peasant designs as well as the Biedermeier and eclectic styles, redware and stoneware pottery, textiles, wood and stone carving, metalwares, firearms, baskets, musical instruments, prints, and paintings and identifies craftsmen working in all of these fields. One chapter is devoted to the objects the immigrants brought with them from the Old World.

Added to this new printing of *The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements in Missouri* is a touching and informative introduction by Adolf E. Schroeder. Schroeder's long friendship with Charles van Ravenswaay allows him to reflect on the vast contributions this author made to our knowledge of Missouri's German culture. Everyone interested in architecture, crafts, or Missouriana will find this book indispensable as they savor van Ravenswaay's excellent presentation of the craftsmen and their products against the background of the

aspirations and folkways of a distinctive culture.

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## **The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements in Missouri: A Survey of a Vanishing Culture** By Charles Van Ravenswaay **Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

“Charles van Ravenswaay’s massive volume is the landmark result of a unique pilot study of nineteenth century German culture in eight Lower Missouri Valley counties. . . . Van Ravenswaay combines the nostalgic appreciation of a native son with the critical perspective of the professional historian. . . . More than six hundred carefully identified photographs and drawings, including twenty color plates, and four hundred pages of analytical text represent this contribution. Log, frame, stone, and brick construction with the designers and builders are discussed in minute detail. Forty percent of the book is devoted to craftsmen and their furniture, musical instruments, wood and stone carving, stonemasonry, baskets, firearms, tin and copperware, textiles, pottery, drawings, prints, paintings, and trades. Such comprehensive treatment marks the beginning of a welcome new era in ethnic histories.”—*American Historical Review*

“Charles van Ravenswaay has produced a prodigious survey and chronicle, profusely illustrated and attractively printed, which must be rated as one of the great statements on the Germans in America. . . . For Missouriana buffs and every serious student of American cultural history *The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements in Missouri* commends itself as required reading, and for Germanophiles of every stripe, the book is a genuine joy.”—*Journal of American History*

“By the time the reader comes to the end of this massive study, two conclusions will almost inevitably have been reached. First, it is one of the most important volumes ever published on the history of Missouri and, secondly, the research it entailed could not be duplicated in the present or the future. . . . It would be idle to attempt to survey all of the subjects which are treated by van Ravenswaay. Nothing of any importance seems to have escaped his attention in his extensive travels through the state, his diligent research into every conceivable form of written record, and his conversations with a host of people.”—*Missouri Historical Society Bulletin*

“This copious and richly illustrated survey of the German influence on the arts and crafts of the lower Missouri River Valley is a tribute to ‘a vanishing culture.’ . . . The author’s meticulous attention to every form of cultural artifact, whether glassware or musical instrument or wooden bench, is a tribute to his sensitivity to an immigrant group attempting to defy the consequences of acculturation.”

—*South Atlantic Quarterly*

*The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements in Missouri* “is a sumptuously printed and illustrated volume.”—***St. Louis Post-Dispatch***

“The author meticulously examines the history of the settlement of what became enclaves of German-American culture, paying particular attention to how the culture was manifested in buildings and objects. The result is a beautiful source book of information concerning people who carved out a life for themselves in the New World, becoming the dominant cultural group in many sections within two generations. Its works and pictures preserve in one authentic source numerous fascinating details of a way of life that is quickly passing from the scene.”—***Conservationist***

“A product of over four decades of the author’s life, this voluminous work is indeed the survey of a vanishing culture. Van Ravenswaay has preserved the fast-disappearing remains of the substantial non-English population of the lower Missouri. . . . Although not directly oriented toward the history of technology, the underlying theme of this study is the inevitable disappearance of hand craftsmanship in the face of the economics of mass production.”

—***Technology and Culture***

“[Charles van Ravenswaay] has drawn upon forty years of study and collecting to produce this extraordinary book on German immigrant arts and architecture. Limiting his study to the Missouri River Valley between Saint Charles and Boonville, a region that received a heavy immigration from various German states beginning in the 1830s, van Ravenswaay examines in detail the remains of what was once a flourishing and distinctive culture. . . . [This] book will be a revelation to historians interested in ethnicity, few of whom have acquired the knowledge and skill to interpret the kinds of evidence upon which this book rests.”

—***Western Historical Quarterly***

“The product of the very best traditions of American printing and manufacture, this splendid record of and tribute to a vanishing culture is a delight both to handle and to read. Charles van Ravenswaay’s detailed and meticulous study of the arts and architecture of German immigrants who settled in the Lower Missouri valley in the nineteenth century includes some six hundred excellent photographs and line-drawings which combine with a fascinating and most readable text to give a full-bodied evocation of a unique culture. . . . [This book is] of inestimable value to all who respond to a heartfelt and comprehensive description of a unique way of life which is an important part of the mosaic of the traditional heritage of America.”—***Lore and Language***

“This monumental and handsome survey features voluminous photographs (b&w and color) and descriptions of the Missouri-German contributions. . . . The German-American culture developed here and its expression in design and craftsmanship is abundantly imparted to the reader. While regional in its scope, it is a reference study that should remain a model for other studies of folkways and native arts of a distinctive culture. Its importance to scholars in the fields of art, architecture, crafts, ethnic studies and material culture is without limits. Everything about this book is elegant: its design, its craft, and the vast information it imparts.”—***Come-All-Ye***

## About the Author

Charles van Ravenswaay (1911–1990), a native of Boonville, Missouri, was Director Emeritus of The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum and a former director of the Missouri Historical Society. In preparation for this book, he spent forty years interviewing craftsmen, studying and photographing their work, and examining documentary materials.

### **Photo by Adolf E. Schroeder**

Adolf E. Schroeder is Professor Emeritus of Germanic Studies at the University of Missouri–Columbia. He has written extensively on the immigrant experience in America and on nineteenth-century German literature.

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