

Immigrant Life at This Location

In the Town of Middleton, immigrants from Mecklenburg settled among their friends and families. Some were able to purchase land immediately, while others worked as laborers on already established farms. In the 1850s and 1860s, wheat was the chief cash crop in the area. In addition, every family had fruit trees, gardens, chickens, cows, and other livestock. Land, climate, and farming conditions were different in Wisconsin, and German-American farmers consulted advice books and journals that were printed specifically for them.



Haus und Farm (House and Farm), masthead; magazine for German-American farm families; Appleton, Wisconsin.



First German Evangelical-Lutheran Church of the Town of Middleton, founded by Mecklenburg immigrants in 1852; second building, 1866.

Life was simple and dominated by work. Boys helped their fathers in the field, picking rocks, mending fences, cutting wood, butchering, or carrying water from sometimes distant wells or springs. Girls helped their mothers in the house and in the garden, cooking, spinning, knitting, sewing, and tending livestock. In the summer and fall, they canned vegetables and turned cabbage into Sauerkraut in a special “outdoor kitchen,” a little shed a short distance from the living quarters. Fruit was dried, and roots were stored in underground cellars—enough to feed the family for the long winter months.

Most immigrants established large families. Surrounded by other Mecklenburgers, they continued to speak their Mecklenburg-German dialect and kept many of their old world traditions. They established business, churches, and clubs where German was spoken. In the Town of Middleton, Mecklenburg families founded the First German Evangelical Lutheran Church on Old Sauk Road in 1852, which held services in German for more than half a century. The Goth families were among the church’s earliest members. There was also a German choir and a “Schützenverein,” a traditional German rifle club. For many years, the local newspaper printed a German version.

Alphabet book for German-American children: the letter F and the word “Fahne” (flag), [Das ABC in Bildern; undated, ca. 1905].

In the early decades, many children in rural Wisconsin attended school only during the winter months and sometimes only for a few hours each week. Many went to schools where German was the language of instruction. Before the railroad came to Middleton Station in 1856, it took a wagon traveling on unpaved roads an entire day to reach Madison. Farmsteads were far enough apart that children saw their friends only at school or in church. They were still surrounded by wilderness, and at night wolves could be heard howling nearby.

