

When Patriotic Fevers Ran High

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Pasadena City Hall at the corner of Fair Oaks Avenue and Union Street, circa 1917. Image courtesy of the Archives, Pasadena Museum of History (C14-A5).

“German Aliens Must Go On Records,” stated the headline in the [Pasadena Star-News](#) on January 26, 1918. “Registration in Pasadena Will Begin at Police Station Feb. 4.”

“All natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects of the German empires or imperial German government being males of the age of 14 years and upward, who are within the United States and not actually naturalized as American citizens are required to register as alien enemies,” continued the article.

It was the final year of World War I, and Pasadena, like other American cities was taking desperate measures to protect national security. Since America’s declaration of war against Germany on April 6, 1917, a drastic set of restrictions had been placed on Germans living in the country.

Under these limitations, Germans in the United States could not own firearms, ammunition, or explosives, aircraft, or wireless devices. They could not foreclose on a mortgage, eject a delinquent tenant from an apartment, or act as a plaintiff in court, and were prevented from leaving the country. Most significantly, they could not “write, print or publish any attack or threat against the government or Congress of the United States.”



Image from the L.A. Times, November 1917.

More restrictions were added in November, 1917—banishing Germans from ports, warehouses and railroad terminals, and from Washington D.C., and finally, it was resolved by President Woodrow Wilson that all alien enemies must be registered with the government.

To the president and his attorney general, Thomas Watt Gregory, it was an essential measure of national security, but to some national newspapers, the law did not go far enough. “There are now but two classes of people in the land,” wrote the [L.A. Times](#) on April 7, 1917, “those who are for the country and those who are against it. Let us divide the sheep from the goats and bid the goats depart.”

In 1917, there were roughly 2,500,000 Germans living in the U.S.—31 percent of the country’s foreign population. Most of them were concentrated in the Midwest or on the East Coast, but many resided in Southern California as well.

Pasadena’s small German community numbered several hundred people. They worked as butchers, carpenters, vintners, shoemakers, and blacksmiths; and were served by four separate German churches in Pasadena—the First German Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Evangelical German Lutheran Church, the German Methodist Episcopal Church, and St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Though there was no exclusively German neighborhood to speak of, according to a 1995 ethnic survey from the archives of the [Pasadena](#)

[Museum of History](#), there were concentrations of Germans near the corner of Walnut and North Fair Oaks, the Lincoln Triangle, the corner of Raymond and Villa, and on South Marengo Avenue. Several German-owned businesses dotted Old Town, including a German deli at 16 N. Fair Oaks, run by Herman A. Proetsch.

After Wilson's registration order was announced, Germans in Pasadena had to report to the Pasadena Police Department—then located in Pasadena City Hall at the corner of Fair Oaks and Union. They were required to bring four photographs of themselves, and had to fill out three separate affidavits and have their fingerprints taken by a police officer. When process was complete, a registration card was issued to each German, which he was required to carry with him at all times.

Pasadena Police Chief W.S. McIntyre supervised the process, and by February 21, 1918, he was able to report to the *Los Angeles Times* that Pasadena had “ninety-six well-behaved Germans.” McIntyre personally reviewed each registrant's information, and sent officers to registrants' addresses to verify them.

ARTICLE VII.

FORM OF REGISTRATION AFFIDAVIT AND INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING SAME.

1. The form of registration affidavit will be substantially as follows:

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE.

REGISTRATION AFFIDAVIT OF ALIEN ENEMY.

The registration affidavit must be filled in and sworn to in triplicate and accompanied by four unmounted photographs of the registrant, not larger than 3 by 3 in size, on thin paper with light background. All four photographs should be signed by registrant across the face of the photograph so as not to obscure the face, if registrant is able to write. If registrant is unable to write he must make his mark in the signature space and affix his left thumb print in the space indicated for the same opposite the signature space.

The affidavit need not be filled out before, but must be signed and sworn to before, a registration officer, who will fill in the description and take the finger prints of the registrant. All registration officers are authorized to administer the oath hereto to persons registering as alien enemies.

I, hereby register as an alien enemy
(Here insert name of registrant.)

at and make the following
(Place where affidavit signed and oath administered.)
statements and answers under oath:

1. Name All other names at any time used
.....
(Here insert any other names used by registrant.)

2. Present residence
(Street and number, city, town, county, State, and, if apartment house or
apartment, the number of apartment or tenement.)

3. Length of residence at the foregoing place
(Here state date on which registrant began living at his present residence.)

4. All other places of residence since January 1, 1914,
(Here give particulars as to
each of such places of residence.)

5. Born in
(Give city or town, province, and country of birth.)
..... on
(Give date of birth.)

6. Since January 1, 1914, employed by:
Name of place: Date: Occupation: Name of employer:

7. I arrived in the United States
(Date.)
at the port of on ship and applied
(State port.) (State name.)
for entry under the name of
(State name under which entry was made.)

Signature
(To be filled in by registrant after.)
Given name
Card issued to
Yes
No
D

Sample affidavit for alien enemies. (Library of Congress)

Mixed feelings from Pasadena's citizens must have accompanied this process. Until 1917, Pasadena had been relatively neutral on the question of the war, and sometimes actively sympathetic to the German cause. In an editorial published in August 1914, *Pasadena Star-News* editor George Hees praised Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II as a "peace-loving monarch" and "the protector of peace in Europe."

Even after the sinking of the ocean liner *Lusitania* by a German U-boat in 1915—a tragedy in which 128 Americans died—support for Germany continued. In 1916, separate fundraisers were held in Pasadena to benefit both the German Red Cross and the widows and orphans of German soldiers.

By 1917, however, the tide had turned. Feelings in the city changed after the notorious Zimmermann Telegram—the intercepted dispatch between Germany and Mexico outlining possible plans to attack the United States—was published by the American press.

Fear of German spies began to spread. In mid-March, Pasadena's postmaster reported seeing "mysterious men" loitering around the post office for several nights in a row. Convinced they were German agents "attempting to blow up the building with dynamite," the postmaster notified the authorities, and for several evenings after that, police detectives armed with sawed-off shotguns kept watch outside the premises.

Several weeks later, the *L.A. Times* reported that the Pasadena Police Department was receiving an average of one hundred calls a day from "persons who thought they had located German spies."

No institution, it seemed, was safe from infiltration—including the public library. On January 23, 1918 the *Pasadena Star-News* reported that city librarian N.M. Russ had received warnings about possible "book spies" who were removing "books favorable to Germany's enemies" and replacing them with pernicious German literature.

Then, the boycotts began. On January 27, 1918, a group of vacationers—among them former Treasury Secretary Leslie M. Shaw—walked out of a concert given at a Pasadena hotel after discovering German music was to be on the program. Shaw in particular, was infuriated by the program. "This is not the time for internationalism in art, literature, drama and music," he fumed to the *L.A. Times*. "It is the time for Americanism with every letter capitalized."

By the end of the month, Shaw had helped head a movement that resulted in a citywide ban on German music. "Doubtful composers like Liszt and Chopin have been laid on the shelf until after the war," wrote an *L.A. Times* correspondent. Soon after, German was also removed from the curriculum at Pasadena High School.



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Image courtesy of the Archives, Pasadena Museum of History (C8h-1).

Pasadena's German churches also found themselves under attack. After the *Pasadena Star-News* published a dispatch from Washington D.C. singling out German Lutheran churches as "among the principal agencies in the United States of the German propagandists," Pastor August Hansen of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church was forced to send a letter to the paper emphasizing his congregation's loyalty to the country.

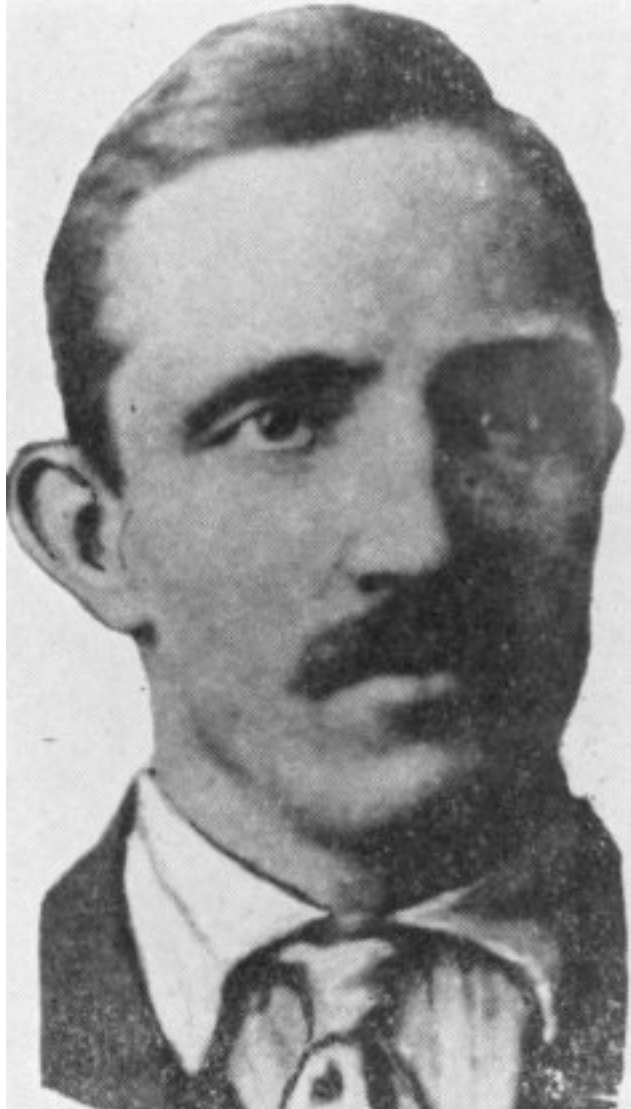
"We have taught diligently and successfully that inhabitants of the United States owe allegiance only to its government," he wrote. "In the present war our stand is with no other land but our United States of America."

At the same time, the German Methodist Episcopal Church of Pasadena dropped "German" from its name and sent a message to Washington D.C. reiterating allegiance to the country.

In May, 1918, Pasadena once again received warnings about spies, reported the *L.A. Times*. This time federal agents warned that Pasadena was "infested with women spies" and that the government had "a long list of women suspects now making Pasadena their headquarters." In response, a 25-member branch of the Army Intelligence Office was organized in a vacant office of the Citizens' Savings Bank building to "stamp out sedition and treason." By June, 1918, German women in Pasadena were also forced to register as alien enemies.

Nationally, 1918 marked a rise in violence against Germans in the United States. In April 1918, in Collinsville, Oklahoma, Henry Riemer, a German-American accused of disloyalty, was dragged from a jail cell by a lynch mob, who forced him to kiss each star on an American flag, and then tied an electrical cord around his neck and hung him from a basketball hoop.

Riemer dangled for fifteen seconds, narrowly escaping death when the assistant chief of police stepped in and forced the men to cut the cord.



Lynching victim Robert Prager.

The worst of these incidents took place the same month in coincidentally-named Collinsville, Illinois. A German-American miner named Robert Prager was accused of making seditious remarks after an argument with a union leader, leading to circulated rumors that he was a German spy. Placed in a jail cell for protection by local police, he was soon confronted by a lynch mob numbering in the hundreds. The mob overpowered the city's small police force and held them under armed guard, while Prager was dragged from his cell and paraded through the streets by a gleeful crowd waving American flags. He was then driven one mile outside of the city, where a noose was placed around his neck and he was hung from a tree

branch until he was dead. Though eleven of the murderers were later brought to trial, all of them were eventually acquitted.

Anti-German violence was aggravated by the hostile language of propaganda that appeared in the press. One overseas dispatch from *The Spiker*, an American military newspaper, accused Germany of pioneering “robbery, murder, arson, kultur and worse,” while an *L.A. Times* article on a marauding German Shepherd who had slaughtered a coop of chickens, accused the dog of “German ruthlessness” and of “[making] war on Americans.”

When Miguel F. Latz, a 75-year-old German-born Union Civil War veteran and former mayor of Magdalena, Mexico was detained in Los Angeles in July 1918 for possessing a revolver, the *L.A. Times* proudly declared, “Hun-Mexican is Arrested.”

Though anti-German violence seems to have been relatively rare in Pasadena, a local chapter of the American Protective League, a private citizens’ group formed in Chicago in 1917 to root out suspected spies, draft dodgers, anarchists, and left-wing activists, probably contributed to a general climate of fear.

One notable incident took place in December, 1918, after fighting had ceased. Three young German women who worked as housekeepers in Pasadena reported being harassed by their respective employers.



Newspaper illustration - New York Herald, March 28, 1918. (Library of Congress)

When they tried to quit, they were told that if they left, they would be sent to a prison camp for alien enemies. One was informed that she was suspected of being a German spy and that if she resigned, she would be shot. The women eventually took their complaints to the Pasadena Police Department, who resolved the matter, though it is unclear whether charges were ever pressed against the employers.

Several days later, on Christmas Eve, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson lifted the restrictions on alien enemies. Anti-German feelings quickly subsided, but residual fear lingered for many years afterward. As an indication of the war's effect on Pasadena's German community, by the late 1920s, no church in the city bore the word "German."