



Chapter 3

Establishment of German Communities on the Minnesota River Valley Frontier

The progress of settlement was reflected by the division of Minnesota Territory's original nine counties into a greater number of smaller ones following the ratification of the treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota. In 1852, Hennepin County had been created out of land that had been ceded by the treaties. In 1853, the counties of Scott, Le Sueur, Sibley, Nicollet and Blue Earth were organized, comprising a significant portion of the Minnesota River Valley Frontier. Two years later Faribault, Carver and Brown counties were created.

Despite being considerably reduced in size from the parent counties of Wabasha and Dakota, several of the new counties were still too large, and had to be further subdivided. For example, Blue Earth County originally extended to the Missouri River. When Brown County was created, the western lands were incorporated into it. In 1857, Martin, Cottonwood, Jackson, Nobles, Pipestone and Rock counties were carved out of Brown. When Minnesota became a state in 1858, the land west of a line running from Big Stone Lake to the Iowa border was cut off. Brown County was reduced to about one-eighth of its original 27 million acre size. The final reduction was made in 1860, when Watonwan County was created by the state legislature. In this instance, final approval was conditional; Brown County voters consented to the territorial reduction in the general election. The vote was 415 to 33.¹



Jacob Guenther

Guenther was one of five German men that left St. Paul in the spring of 1852, bound for the fledgling townsite of Mankato. Guenther was one of Mankato's earliest settlers.

(Photo/Mankato, Its First Fifty Years. 1852-1902.)

¹"German Immigrants Played Role in Settling County," *New Ulm Journal*, 4.

New Ulm was not the first and only community in the Minnesota River Valley to be settled by German immigrants between 1852 and 1865; it did not even boast the largest German population. In the spring of 1852, five German men from St. Paul set off by sailboat for the fledgling townsite of Mankato. The first day out, the sail of the boat caught in some overhanging branches along the shore of the river, and the sailboat capsized. One man, Joseph Weinheimer, drowned.² He was buried along the shore and the remainder of the party, Jacob Guenther, Paul Frenzel, Philip Krummel and a man referred to as “Mr. Stultz” continued on their journey, arriving safely at Mankato in May 1852.³ At the time these Germans arrived, the settlement of Mankato was only about three months old, having been established on February 5, 1852. Henderson, in Sibley County, was founded in 1853 by Joseph R. Brown. Its proximity to the Minnesota River made the town grow quickly. A large



The Pioneer Town of Mankato in the Year 1851 [sic]

By Anders A. Anderson (1871-1956), Mankato Artist and Historian

The view of Mankato is looking down the river in a southeasterly direction from the big bend of the river. On the right is Blue Earth County and to the left is Nicollet County. In the latter county, Chief Sleepy Eyes Indian tribe had its permanent camping grounds at Swan Lake. The Indians were curious and skeptical of the white immigrants. At first, they tried to stop the white man from invading their hunting grounds, as they considered the area around Mankato their most valuable land. The story was handed down that a barrel of pork and other presents helped to open the way for the settlers. Steamboat navigation was the means for bringing settlers and supplies up from St. Paul to Mankato, and until the event of the Sioux City Railroad, the traffic grew in importance. There were times when two steamboats and barges docked at Mankato at one time. Immigrants also came in covered wagons from the south and east.

(Photo/Blue Earth County Historical Society.)

²Mankato, *Its First Fifty Years, 1852-1902. Containing Addresses, Historic Papers and Brief Biographies of Early Settler and Active Upbuilders of the City.* Prepared for the 50th Anniversary of the Settlement of Mankato.

³Mabel Ulrich, John G. Rockwell and Parker T. Van de Mark, *Minnesota County Histories Series: Blue Earth County.* (Federal Writers' Project, 1938), 15.