

Christian Rhoad

Professor Herrington

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### Adolf Ludwig Cluss's expedition to the American Dream

One of the ideals that the United States is often praised for is being known as the land of equal opportunity, also known as the "American Dream". James Truslow Adams, a famous writer and historian, coined the idea as "a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature". Adolf Ludwig Cluss who is a product of Adam's American Dream, is a German immigrant who emigrated to the United States from Heilbronn. He was also a member of the Communist League with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels for ten years and also a leader of the 1848 Revolution in Mainz. Adolf Cluss finds his American Dream through the legacy he was able to build as an architect and civil engineer, developing numerous museums, schools, and other civil/government buildings in our country's capital.

Adolf Ludwig Cluss was born in 1825 into a family of famous builders and engineers at Heilbronn. Throughout his lineage his family was heavily involved in the construction industry, responsible for much of the city planning in Heilbronn.<sup>1</sup> During his adolescent years, he met Karl Marx and joined the communist movement. He was an "invaluable agent" according to Friedrich Engels, a companion of Marx. He also led the local chapter of the Deutscher

Arbeiterverein and numerous Marxist communities. Due to the failure of the 1848 revolution in Germany, his father advised him to leave the country.

In 1848, Adolf Cluss arrives to Washington D.C. and starts his journey working for the U.S. Navy as an engineer. During his time in the navy, he worked on firearm engineering and charted the Anacostia River. In 1864, Cluss earns his first contract with Washington D.C. to construct a design to develop the city's sewage system. His success in building sewers and altering the sizes of the streets, led to establishment of the Board of Public Works and his new position as a building inspector. In 1872, President Grant selected Cluss as Washington's City engineer and a new member of Board of Public Works.

As Cluss fills into his new role, Washington D.C. begins to evolve from a small ill-equipped town to a rapid developing city. Cluss finds his calling as an architect designing churches, office buildings, libraries, and other public buildings. He had a strong passion for education and went on to develop schools for colored students along with different private schools and universities.<sup>ii</sup> As a German immigrant from the Victorian-era, he constructed his buildings showed his preference for functionality rather than style. During the 1870s, Cluss served as a chief engineer and supervised sewers, roads, and green spaces. As a German immigrant, constructing and designing the framework of our nation's capital, he employed many different Germanic designs in his residential buildings standing today.<sup>iii</sup> One of his most notable works that Cluss built was his construction of Smithsonian's first museum. Adolf Cluss being one of the greatest innovating architects of his time, was publicly recognized at numerous convocations for using his talent to benefit the public good.<sup>iv</sup>

In 1889, Adolf Cluss concludes his career as an architect to work as an inspector of public buildings for the United States government. Cluss's new position required him to travel

around the country inspecting federal buildings for potential repairs and to enforce structural regulations. Within the first six months of working his new position, he inspected 54 new sites and 80 in the following year. In 2005, Washington D.C. and modern Heilbronn collaborated on several events to commemorate Cluss's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary death, also known as the "Adolf Cluss Project 2005".<sup>v</sup>

Adolf Ludwig Cluss lives the American Dream through his legacy as a successful architect. Coming from a humble beginning as a low-entry level carpenter, Adolf achieved his success through the American Dream becoming the chief inspector of the United States government. His achievements serve as an example of how James Truslow Adam's American Dream concept that is notable in today. Adolf left everything behind in Heilbronn to escape the persecution for his beliefs. He fled to America where he was able to have a fresh start and to build his legacy regardless of where he come from.

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<sup>i</sup> Test. *An Architect for the Nation's Capital*, [www.adolf-cluss.org/index.php?lang=en&content=w&topSub=adolf&sub=1.5](http://www.adolf-cluss.org/index.php?lang=en&content=w&topSub=adolf&sub=1.5).

<sup>ii</sup> "Red Architect' Adolf Cluss: A Study in Sturdy." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 17 Sept. 2005, [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/16/AR2005091601904.html?noredirect=on](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/16/AR2005091601904.html?noredirect=on).

<sup>iii</sup> "Review of Lessoff, Alan; Mauch, Christof, Eds., *Adolf Cluss, Architect: From Germany to America*." *H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online*, [www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11920](http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11920).

<sup>iv</sup> "Briefing: Carl Grays Article on Time Management [Http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/316/7137/S2-7137](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/316/7137/S2-7137) Seemed to Go ..." *Bmj* 316, no. 7149 (1998). doi:10.1136/bmj.316.7149.3a.

<sup>v</sup>2018. Ebook. [https://www.ghi-dc.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/GHI\\_Washington/Publications/Bulletin36/36.122.pdf](https://www.ghi-dc.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GHI_Washington/Publications/Bulletin36/36.122.pdf).

