
Oral Presentation

THE TEUTO-BRAZILIANS OF FRIBURGO – MATHEMATICS TEXTBOOKS AND THE USE OF (NON-METRIC) MEASURE SYSTEMS

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During the 19th century, and until the 1930s, the German immigration in Brazil had brought about eight thousand Germans to live in the state of Sao Paulo. (Kahle, 1937, p. 29; Miranda, 2005; von Simson, 1999, 1997, pp. 63-65)

According to a report from 1852, written by the district administrator of the rural village of Bernkastel (140 km south of Bonn, in Prussia), the production of goods had not increased at the same speed as the growth rate of population. Due to the predictable nourishment difficulties, already by 1846, 633 persons had emigrated either to USA or Brazil (MoZ, 2007).

Meanwhile, a series of intense debates and liberal movements sought to democratize and build a new republic in Brazil, purging all remaining connections to the Portuguese monarchy. Many members of these movements, owners of coffee plantations, had rejected slavery and had started to properly hire laborers, paying them salaries. One of the crucial figures of this liberal movement was senator Nicolau de Campos Vergueiro who, in a partnership with the owner of the Fazenda Sete Quedas, brought, in 1856, 112 German families to work in the fields (Di Francesco, 2007, p. 25; dos Santos Bezerra, 2002, pp. 69ff.; Leite, 2006; Fortes, 2003).

Once the immigrants had evened up their debts with the landowners, they were able to save money and move away; some of them decided to buy land lots in the nearby region and cultivated coffee, potato, beans, etc. (von Simson, 1997) Eight families, among these 112, had settled, between the years 1864 and 1877, in a rural region situated in the southwest of Campinas and north of Indaiatuba. They were immigrants from the German regions of Rheinland-Pfalz and Schleswig-Holstein, and from the canton of Bern in the German Switzerland. In 1879 the district of Friedburg, later called Friburgo, was founded and a school was opened this same year in October (Guebel, 1937, p. 2).

In general, the first German colonies were founded in very remote geographic locations, which had caused a need for opening schools inside the same colony. These schools had been established with German curricula, and were, for a long period of time, the mainstay for the transmission of the German traditions and identity, difficulting the integration process (Schubring, 2003, p. 14).

During this presentation, we would like to present the results of an ethnographic research undertaken in Friburgo, in 2007. In particular, we would like to show that,

despite the promulgated laws obligating the teaching in the national language (1920), i.e. Portuguese, and the use of the International System of Units (1872), i.e. the metric system, the school of Friburgo had continued to use mathematics textbooks, edited in German language, which also included conversion tables of non-metric measure systems, until after the 1st World War. As we will see, some non-metric units remain in use, at least orally.