

## LAURELS AND BAYS TO THE LIVING

Departing from its usual custom the annual meeting of February 16, 1937, was made occasion to pay a deserved tribute to the merits of three of its members who by their services in the community had cause to be marked for this distinction. Those so honored were:

Henry G. Hilken, whose services as merchant and former German consul, and as one ever active in public, charitable and communal affairs, were delineated by Mr. Otto H. Franke.

Dr. Gustav Strube, musician and composer, first leader of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, who gave it aim and purpose, and a secure foundation of future usefulness was next honored. Prof. William Kurrelmeyer spoke of his life and accomplishments.

Hans Schuler, sculptor, instructor at and director of the Maryland Institute, was the subject of the third address. Mr. C. William Schneidreith depicted his career and spoke of his works and work.

Eulogies were also passed upon two members—Thomas Foley Hisky, a president of this Society, actively interested in its work, and Henry G. von Heine, for many years a loyal member.

After the formal business had been disposed of, as also a very good dinner, the first speaker called upon was Mr. Otto H. Franke. His subject:

### HENRY GERHART HILKEN

It is not only a pleasure but also a privilege to be asked to speak about Henry G. Hilken as the representative German-American merchant in Baltimore. He was one of those few favored ones who are able today to look back over a period of nearly 90 years with clear understanding of the enormous changes in our cultural and physical life which took place during this time.

When Mr. Hilken was born in Bremen in 1847, only a few railroads were in existence. Passengers and freight were carried over the ocean in sailing vessels.

Only a few steamers were plying between Europe and America. There was no transoceanic telegraph cable. It took at least 14 days to get the quickest message from New York to Bremen. There did not exist a united Germany, only numerous separate German states under Prussian and Austrian leadership.

The spirit of that generation was full of enterprise, courage and daring whereby the great losses of the Napoleonic wars were overcome. Developments in science and the many inventions opened up a new world. The merchants of Bremen instinctively sensed the great possibilities of this new era. When the Postmaster General of the United States asked for bids for new postal connection between the United States and a port on the European continent—the entire United States mail to Europe was then going via England—the merchants of Bremen were proud enough to notify the Postmaster General that the only port which could be considered was Bremen.

This desire for a direct transatlantic connection between Bremen and the United States led to the founding of the Norddeutscher Lloyd in Bremen, when Henry Hilken was 10 years old. He could not realize what an important part this steamship company would in later days play in his life. He was then in school preparing himself to become a merchant.

After finishing school he became "Lehrling" first with B. D. Tiemann & Co., petroleum merchants, and then with Osten & Ankersmidt, tobacco merchants. It was quite natural that he should decide to go to Baltimore after he finished his apprenticeship, because Bremen was the leading port in Central Europe for the import of Maryland, Virginia and Ohio tobacco, and Baltimore was the leading market in the United States for these tobaccos.

There were many personal and family connections between Bremen and Balti-

more, and when Henry Hilken arrived here at the age of 20 he must have felt quite at home. The list of merchants in Baltimore reads like pages from the city directory of Bremen. I am giving here only a few: Brauns & Co., Wilkens, Geyer, von Kapf & Ahrens, Konrad Lohse, Thoel, Alberti, Stellmann & Hinrichs, Schumacher & Co. If some of the German merchants hailed from other parts of Germany they at least had gotten their business training in Bremen, as Kremelberg, Dresel, Delius, Spilker, Nitze, Gail & Ax, and others.

This great number of German merchants in Baltimore gives us an idea of the amount of trade which must have existed between Bremen and Baltimore at that time. It was a profitable business. Eastbound to Europe the sailing vessels would carry tobacco and lumber, and returning westbound, German manufactured goods. But their main cargo was human cargo—immigrants.

It, therefore, is not astonishing that the North German Lloyd, after having had such great success in its business between Bremen and New York, considered starting a service between Bremen and Baltimore. Only a few days after Henry Hilken started his career with A. Schumacher & Co. in 1868, the first North German Lloyd steamer arrived in Baltimore and A. Schumacher & Co. were the agents.

Albert Schumacher, born in Bremen of an old established family, founded his firm in 1829 for tobacco export. He was held in great esteem by Germans and Americans as shown by the fact that he was Consul for the three Hanseatic cities: Bremen, Hamburg and Luebeck. Due to his influence, together with the banker, John W. Garrett and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, the new steamship service of the Norddeutscher Lloyd was established.

This period from around 1840-1870 was highly prosperous, and the German merchants were princes in their business. Those were the good old days, without telephone and without typewriter. But even at that time it was difficult to introduce new ideas. The let-

ters were copied by hand at A. Schumacher & Co., and the young clerk, Henry Hilken, must have brought with him from the other side the new system of writing letters with copy ink and then copying them in a copy book by moistening the pages.

Old Mr. Schumacher did not trust these new-fangled ideas, but a conspiracy among the young clerks brought results. Young Mr. Atkinson had to copy the letters by hand and one day he took his position at his desk so that he could read each word Mr. Schumacher was writing down in a letter to his business friends, Gebrüder Kulenkampf, in Bremen. When Mr. Schumacher had finished the letter, he turned around and said, "George, please copy this letter." Mr. Atkinson hesitated a minute and then said, "Here is the copy, Mr. Schumacher, done by the new method." Mr. Schumacher was so impressed that he gave in to having the new copy ink introduced. But when he had a really important letter, he would say, "Copy that by hand, George. That old way is still more correct than your new system."

The alliance between A. Schumacher & Company and the North German Lloyd, founded in 1868, lasted until 1930. Henry Hilken, who started at the bottom and worked his way up until he became partner, and later sole owner of the firm, has been the one who represented the American side of this alliance for most of these years. He had the confidence of his friends in the North German Lloyd in Bremen to such an extent, that in those exciting first years of the World War, Baltimore was selected as the first goal of the submarine "Deutschland," which arrived in Baltimore on Sunday, July 10th, 1916.

Contrary to the life and work of an artist—be it a composer or sculptor—who works alone in his study to create the product of his art, the merchant's life is closely interwoven with the economic and political life of a nation. And if he is in the steamship business, he is also dependent on the conditions of international trade and international relations. There is no business more

sensitive to any international or national influences than the steamship business.

Mr. Hilken had to the fullest extent, those qualities which are required to be a merchant—a "Grosskaufmann."

To understand these qualities and what they represent it is necessary to know something about his North German ancestry and the traditions of his Vaterstadt Bremen. Bremen traditions have taught her sons that the seven seas are not a barrier, but a connecting link between nations, bringing them closer together. The Latin expression "navigare necesse est, bivere non est necesse" is printed in stone over the entrance of the "Haus Seefahrt" in Bremen, to make this thought permanent in the life of the city. The Bremen coat of arms carried the words, "Buten an binnen, wagen un winnen"—"At home and abroad, dare and win," thus expressing one of the best and most important qualities of a merchant.

But I think the essential characteristics of a good merchant cannot be expressed better and more beautifully than by the emblem of the North German Lloyd: the anchor crossed by a key, surrounded by an oak wreath. The key symbolizes the aggressiveness necessary to open up new trade routes with foreign countries; the anchor, the energy and strength to hold what you have gained; and the oak wreath, German faithfulness and loyalty, as well as perseverance and steadiness.

Mr. Hilken has in his home two large oil paintings; the one is a picture of the Market Place in Bremen with the beautiful city hall; in the other picture we see a North German farmhouse. This farmhouse, the home of his grandfather, still stands today to remind him of his "Plattdeutsche" ancestors. The farmhouse stands on a dyke in Katrepel, a village near Bremen. Mr. Hilken's father was one of those bright young men—as we would call them today—who was already a school teacher in the village school when he was sixteen years old. He was too ambitious to

stay on the farm and therefore went to the nearby city and became a successful business man.

The other picture, the Market Place in Bremen, keeps before him his youth when he crossed this square as a school-boy or later as a young clerk. He always cultivated these ties with his birth-place as he took the deep love for his Fatherland with him when he left nearly seventy years ago. But this love for his Fatherland and for the German language did not hinder him from standing with both feet in this country where he has made his home. His strength of will and character—a quality inherited from his ancestors in Lower Saxony, enables him to keep his right course, even in stormy weather. His fine tact helped him often in difficult questions and his keen sense of humor kept him young.

During the war Mr. Hilken was honored by receiving the Roter Adler Orden from the German Kaiser and the Franz Joseph Order from the Austrian Emperor. He has worn them once, thus showing his modesty and his Bremen tradition, which has always been very democratic and averse to titles and decorations.

A schoolmate of Mr. Hilken, a prominent wine merchant in Bremen, once received a decoration from the Kaiser when visiting Bremen. When the Kaiser came again the next year and met this merchant without his medal, the Kaiser asked him, "Didn't I give you a decoration last year?" "Yes, your Majesty," he answered, "I have it at home, but I wear it only on very special occasions." Mr. Hilken might well have given the same answer.

After the war Mr. Hilken continued to represent the North German Lloyd until 1930, ending an intimately friendly business relation which was based on his full faith in the success of the North German Lloyd. Since then he continued in the tobacco export business, which he started more than seventy years ago.