

# GERMAN IMMIGRANTS AND NATIVISM IN VIRGINIA

1840—1860

By KLAUS G. WUST

Speaking of German immigration to Virginia most people will invariably think only of the settling of the Shenandoah Valley and the southwestern region of the State which received a large influx of German-speaking immigrants during the 18th and the early decades of the 19th century. Virginia is seldom thought of when the great Atlantic migration of the last century is discussed. Its share in the spate of this mass movement of people was small and, compared to that of most of the northern and midwestern States, rather insignificant. Yet there was a time when one third of the inhabitants of Richmond were foreign born, and throughout many years during the period immediately preceding the Civil War the German element of Richmond accounted for almost 25 per cent of the total white population in this city. The presence of a large German group together with other immigrants, notably the Irish, contributed to the rise of nativism during the two decades before the Civil War. Virginia historiography has shown little concern for non-Anglo-Saxon minorities in the State. Only in recent years the scholarly findings of the Shenandoah Valley historian, Dr. John W. Wayland,<sup>1</sup> have been incorporated in general histories of the Old Dominion. The attempt of Herrmann Schuricht to write a history of the German element in Virginia<sup>2</sup> lost much of its effect through its inaccuracies and exaggerations. On the other hand it helped to preserve a great deal of information which would otherwise have been lost, particularly on the period following the Civil War. For the years between 1840 and 1860, when the German element of Richmond and other Virginia cities was stronger in number and importance than after the war, very few sources are extant. Almost all files of the few German newspapers published in Richmond before 1860 were lost. Most records of organizations and churches were destroyed during the war—either through the actual fighting or out of caution on the part of the parties concerned. This study represents an attempt to piece together from various primary and secondary sources the factors and events that led to the rise of nativistic feelings against the Germans. At the same time it tries to reconstruct some of the history of the Germans in Virginia in the years prior to the War between the States.

The wave of intense nativistic feelings during the middle of the last century was never concerned with the old stock of German, Swiss and Alsatian immigrants and their descendants. The epithet *damned Dutchmen* which originated in Virginia when Captain John Smith bestowed it upon four treacherous German laborers way back in 1609<sup>3</sup> was occasionally applied to one or more of their number when quarrels arose, yet it never really had a collective connotation until it was added to the political vocabulary around 1850.

<sup>1</sup> John W. Wayland, *The German Element of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia* (Charlottesville, 1907). By the same author: *A History of Rockingham County, Virginia* (Richmond, 1912); *Virginia Valley Records* (Strasburg, Va., 1930); *Historic Harrisonburg* (Staunton, Va., 1949).

<sup>2</sup> Herrmann Schuricht, *History of the German Element in Virginia* (Baltimore, 1898, 1900), 2 vols.

<sup>3</sup> John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (London, 1624), 82.

The mass migration of Germans into the Valley of Virginia began soon after 1725. While a few came directly to Virginia from the Old Country—as it was the case with the Germanna and Germantown colonies and several Swiss groups—the majority had sojourned for some time in Pennsylvania, New Jersey or New York prior to their coming to the Shenandoah Valley. Although originating in various parts of the German-speaking countries of Europe, they represented a homogeneous stock. They were Protestants, either Lutheran, Reformed or Pietist sectarians, essentially a rural element, and they were united in their common desire to find land on which they and their children would live quietly and prosperously. Being unaccustomed to even the mildest form of self-government in their native principalities back in Europe, they brought little political ambition with them and conformed readily with the Eastern Virginia rule which prevailed in their new home. Only slowly did they assume the rights of citizens in a free society. During the Revolutionary War they bore their full share of sacrifices and burdens. After the war their names began to appear on the rosters of public officialdom. Their integration into American life took a course typical of rural groups: they became Americans long before they gave up their own language and customs. They learned the language of the country but retained their own vernacular for home, church and school use during many decades. Writing about Strasburg and Woodstock in the Shenandoah Valley in 1833, Samuel Kercheval observed: "To this day the German language is in general use, though the English language is now generally understood, and also spoken by the inhabitants."<sup>4</sup> In 1837, when a group of 33 German laborers who had been engaged for the construction of the James River Canal left their jobs to make their way to the West, they were surprised to find a solidly German settlement all the way from Staunton to Winchester. Farmers and town-folk received them with kindness and helped them along. "It was like traveling in Germany," Heinrich Foss, one of their group, wrote in his diary.<sup>5</sup> Still in 1866, the Baltimore *Catholic Mirror* in an article on the Shenandoah Valley stated: "In many portions the German language is yet the vernacular."<sup>6</sup> In a few instances (particularly in Rockingham County) descendants of the early settlers actually use their German dialect at the present time in the family circle although their families have been American for more than seven generations.<sup>7</sup>

The presence of such a large segment of non-English-speaking people in Virginia during the 18th and the early part of the 19th centuries remained without serious political repercussions. To be sure, history records a few incidents where some resentment over the linguistic differences became evident, such as the Winchester riots<sup>8</sup> involving the Germans and the Irish, or the Bartgis-Bowen controversy over the establishment of a German newspaper in Winchester in 1789.<sup>9</sup> The *Valley Dutch*—as the Old German stock in Virginia came to be called—were fully accepted by their neighbors of Anglo-Saxon extraction. They merely represented a different shade of the colorful native American population. They had settled on virgin land at the same time the English and Scotch-Irish located there. None of the three elements had a claim to this land antedating that of the

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Kercheval, *A History of the Valley of Virginia*, 4th ed. (Strasburg, Va., 1925), 176-177.

<sup>5</sup> *Der Deutsche Pionier*, XI (1880), 402.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in *The Rockingham Register and Advertiser*, February 9, 1866.

<sup>7</sup> Heber M. Hays, "On the German Dialect Spoken in the Valley of Virginia," *Dialect Notes*, III (1908), 263-278; Henry L. Mencken, *The American Language* (New York, 1945), 619.

<sup>8</sup> Kercheval, *op. cit.*, 176.

<sup>9</sup> Klaus G. Wust, "Matthias Bartgis' Newspapers in Virginia," *American-German Review*, XVIII (1951), 16-18; Winchester *Virginia Centinel*, June 24, July 1, 1789; Winchester *Virginia Gazette*, July 1, July 17, July 22, August 12, 1789.

other. The sentiment expressed by one of the greatest Virginians, Thomas Jefferson, may stand for the general benevolence with which German-Virginians were viewed by their Anglo-Saxon neighbors. Jefferson, while touring the Rhineland, stopped to write home to his secretary, William Short: "The neighborhood of this place is that which has been to us a second mother country. It is from the Palatinate on this part of the Rhine that those swarms of Germans have gone who, next to the descendants of the English, form the greatest body of our people. I have been continually amused by seeing here the origin of whatever is not English among us."<sup>10</sup>

#### THE ARRIVAL OF THE URBAN IMMIGRANT

The presence of a large rural German element in the State not having caused any noteworthy hostile reaction, it will be surprising at first that a much scantier influx of Germans after 1830 should have aroused animosities theretofore unknown in Virginia. A great wave of German immigration to the United States started in the decade after 1820. Considering the total number of Germans who crossed the Atlantic between 1820 and 1860, Virginia was scarcely touched by the tide. Alexandria and Richmond were immigration ports of minor importance. Most of the Germans arriving directly in the Virginia ports hurried on to the newly opened western territories where cheap and good land was abundant. The vast majority of the tens of thousands of Germans and other nationals seeking a new home in America, however, came through the four principal ports of debarkation, New York, New Orleans, Philadelphia and Baltimore.

Perusing European works on North America written during that period and aimed at prospective emigrants, one is not surprised to find that hardly any German peasants turned toward Virginia during the three decades following 1830. The following two examples may serve to illustrate the opinion generally shared by European observers with regard to immigration prospects for farmers in Virginia. A German traveler, Dr. Ernst Brauns, stated in his guide for emigrants published at Göttingen in 1827:<sup>11</sup> "No German who wishes to attain longevity should settle south of the left bank of the Potomac." The German revolutionary Julius Fröbel who sojourned in America from 1850 till 1857 wrote, after mentioning that most of the soil available for settlement in Virginia was completely exhausted: "Whoever has the moral strength or the good habits to take upon himself the task of settling in this State—as Pennsylvania-German farmers have done—may go thither, if he feels compelled to do so. He will help to erect for himself an enduring memorial of fame in the history of this world. Other people, however, who lack such characteristics will only help to increase either the number of Virginian slave-holders or that of the white Virginian proletariat. For their own sake and for that of the rest of the world it is to be wished that they stay away."<sup>12</sup> Several attempts to bring over rural settlers for the exhausted soil of tidewater Virginia failed, notably the efforts of the "Immigration Society" of Richmond of 1849/50 which tried to induce Saxons to settle in Virginia.<sup>13</sup> A small group of Tyrolian Catholics who made their home in Lunenburg County a hundred years ago seem to have braved all adversities as the presence of several of their descendants in and about Meherrin testifies today.<sup>14</sup> The lure of the

<sup>10</sup> Cited by Marie Kimball in *Jefferson: The Scene of Europe 1784-1789* (New York, 1950), 239.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Brauns, *Ideen über die Auswanderung nach Amerika* (Göttingen, 1827), 440.

<sup>12</sup> Julius Fröbel, *Aus Amerika* (Leipzig, 1857), 122-123.

<sup>13</sup> Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 55-56. The Richmond Society corresponded with the "Emigration Society" at Meissen, Saxony.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

West could not be matched by occasional "planted" articles in European newspapers about the low price of land in Virginia.<sup>15</sup> Even many of the old stock German farmers of the Shenandoah Valley left their old homesteads to go West.

Nevertheless, some 10,000 Germans tried their luck in Virginia during the three decades following 1830. Most of them, however, came from cities and towns in Germany and Austria. Their ranks included artisans and mechanics, adventurers and traders who had little in common with the homogeneous group of the 18th century settlers who avoided the urban centers and made their way into the wilderness. Though the old type immigrants often came in groups, they were strongly individualistic. They banded together only for their protection against the Indians in the early days, and later to build churches and organize schools. There is no evidence of any organization other than ecclesiastical or educational founded by the old German immigration.<sup>16</sup>

The new immigrants were individuals who had very little in common apart from their German language and a certain cultural background similar to all German states. Some were Protestants, many Jews and Catholics, others so-called "liberals" ranging from those indifferent to religion to ardent atheists and freethinkers. Almost all corners of Central Europe were represented among their numbers although Hesse, Bavaria and Saxony seem to have furnished the majority. While a few brought with them sufficient resources to establish a business, a greater percentage were people with little or no means in search of jobs and trades that would be better than the opportunities their native land could provide. Purely economic considerations led the Germans to cast their eyes in the direction of Virginia. Several wholesale houses of Bremen sent their representatives to Richmond with a consequent increase in the export of tobacco to Germany. As many as six or eight German vessels were, before the middle of the century, to be seen at one time in the port of Richmond. Then, in the course of the fourth decades, the German element, particularly in Richmond and in several county towns, received large additions.

As soon as they reached a certain number, the Germans tended to found a great variety of organizations of their own. The Richmond Germans followed this pattern which characterizes the 19th century German immigration in the entire country. The first step was generally the forming of separate religious congregations. As many a newcomer did not adhere to a particular faith or was reluctant to join a church entirely supported by the financial sacrifices of its members, he sought social contact with fellow immigrants through a *Verein*. Such societies were generally of four types, *Unterstützungsverein* (mutual aid society), *Schützenkompanie* (rifle company), *Turnverein* (gymnastic society) and *Gesangverein* (singing society). This development of a separate German social life in a city, the creation of a "Little Germany," was then accentuated by the appearance of newspapers in the German language.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 55. In 1848 the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* reported "On the James River good land is sold for four dollars an acre."

<sup>16</sup> The Rev. Johannes Braun (1771-1850), noted Reformed Church leader in Virginia, attempted to found a *German Bible Society* in 1812 but realized soon that a purely German endeavor had no future. Cf. his *Circular-Schreiben an die Deutschen Einwohner von Rockingham und Augusta* (Harrisonburg, Va., 1818), 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Dieter Cunz, "The German Americans: Immigration and Integration," *Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, Reports*, XXVIII (1953), 35-36.

## THE BEGINNING OF RICHMOND'S "LITTLE GERMANY"

The first sizeable number of Germans in Richmond arrived about 1835. The roll of St. Peter's, the only Roman Catholic Church, mentions two Germans, Anthony Krishman and Henry Müller for the first time in 1834.<sup>18</sup> Likewise German names begin to appear on the membership list of the Jewish congregation *Beth Shalome*.<sup>19</sup> A few years later, immigrants from German states represented the majority of the congregation, yet the traditional Sephardic mode of worship was continued to be used. German Lutherans who arrived also from 1835 on found no local church to their liking, the existing Anglo-Saxon congregations being alien to them in doctrine, worship and language. Almost simultaneously, all three faiths began to prepare the founding of their own religious institutions. The German Israelites were accustomed to the German ritual. In 1841, two years after they had joined the *Beth Shalome* congregation, they founded their own separate organization, *Beth Ahaba*, which soon outgrew the older congregation in numbers and importance. The newly elected Rabbi, Maximilian J. Michelbacher, a native of Bavaria, created a German school for the Jewish children in 1846 which was officially called "The Richmond German, Hebrew, and English Institute." It was the first German-language school ever established in Richmond.<sup>20</sup>

On May 8, 1843, fifty German Lutherans met for the purpose of organizing their own Evangelical Church, *Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische St. Johannes Gemeinde*.<sup>21</sup> From their midst they elected the first church council which consisted of Carl Nordmeyer, president; O. A. Strecker, treasurer; Albrecht Appelius, secretary; John Kloeber, Jacon Freyvogel, Martin Kress, Dr. A. Caspari, August Schad and Carl Mau. After several months of futile search, the council was able to find a German pastor, the Rev. Strater, who preached his first sermon in October, 1843. The services were held in a double house, nos. 412 and 414 East Marshall Street. Within a little over a year after the founding, sixty-two new male members joined St. John's. In 1845 another sixty men signed up for membership. For reasons unknown, the Rev. Strater was dismissed and a call was extended to the Rev. John C. Hoyer, a liberal clergyman who served as an assistant to Pastor Henry Scheib at Old Zion Church in Baltimore from 1841 until 1844.<sup>22</sup> Pastor Hoyer preached his inaugural sermon in January, 1845. During the twenty subsequent years he served at St. John's and became one of the leaders of the German element in Richmond. His unorthodox attitude in ecclesiastical matters kept the church from joining any Lutheran synod. Many of the liberal immigrants were welcomed in his congregation which grew steadily during the first years. At Christmas 1847 a newly erected church building at the corner of Jackson and Fifth Streets was dedicated. A German parochial school was organized, chiefly through the efforts of John Kloeber and Eduard Frank.

A few Catholics from Southern and Eastern Germany as well as from Austria came to Richmond in the thirties. By 1840 their ranks were unexpectedly reinforced by a large group of German laborers who had helped in the building of the James River Canal. Three years earlier a shipload of them had been imported directly from Bremen to Rockets by the Canal

<sup>18</sup> Joseph H. Hodges, *St. Mary's Church Centenary 1851-1951* (Richmond, 1951); Ignatius Remke, *Historical Sketch of St. Mary's Church* (Richmond, 1935).

<sup>19</sup> Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Liechtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond* (Richmond, 1917), 94-97.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 138, 225, 258.

<sup>21</sup> William C. Miller, *A History of St. John's Evangelical-Lutheran Church* (Richmond, 1933) 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Klaus G. Wust, *Zion in Baltimore, 1755-1955* (Baltimore, 1955) 85-86.

Company through the good offices of the tobacco importer E. O. Nolting.<sup>23</sup> In 1840 the narrow waterway was extended to Lynchburg and many of these Germans settled in Richmond when their contract expired. Most of them being Catholics, they joined with the other German members of St. Peter's Church in an appeal to the German Redemptorist Fathers in Baltimore to obtain a priest who could hear confession and preach in their own language. The diocese of Richmond had only one German-speaking priest, the Rev. Dr. Alexander Histelberger of Norfolk, whose visits to Richmond were sporadic. The Redemptorists sent one of their outstanding priests, Father John N. Neumann, from Baltimore to investigate the situation and conduct a mission. When he saw the large number of people in attendance, he promised that a German priest would be sent soon. From 1842 to 1848 Redemptorist Fathers came to Richmond to hold services and hear confession in German every three months. The number of German Catholics steadily increased. In 1843 they held a meeting under the chairmanship of Father Mathias Allig for the purpose of forming a separate congregation. They decided to support a German priest who would hold services for them once a month. However, it was not until 1848 that the Germans were permitted to separate themselves from St. Peter's Church. The first "Church Committee" consisted of Joseph Hierholzer, David Kinker, Henry Müller, Henry Ross, Henry Wienhold, Caspar Wendlinger, Joseph Middendorf and H. Doerflinger. They rented an abandoned Jewish synagogue on Sixth Street near the Market, furnished it with an altar and called it *Die Kapelle*. On April 14, 1848, a Redemptorist, the Rev. Michael Braun, took charge of the congregation. Two years later, the present name of St. Mary's Church was adopted and the future spiritual leadership of the congregation was entrusted to the Jesuits. Father John M. Pallhuber assumed his office of a pastor of St. Mary's energetically. The cornerstone for the church was laid in June, 1851. It was completed by December of the same year. A German school for the children of his parish was also conducted.<sup>24</sup>

The establishment of three separate German religious bodies in Richmond within a few years represented something new to the people of the city. These congregations with their three German-language schools meant that a part of the inhabitants were to set themselves apart, even preparing to bring up their children in a foreign language. Many Germans, however, felt also the need for other organizations. Traditionally German churches knew no social life outside worship services and activities directly connected with church life, i. e. choirs, instruction of youngsters. Accustomed to gay celebrations and parties with plenty of singing and beer, and the proverbial German *gemütlichkeit*, they naturally tried to transplant such customs into their new homeland. The forerunner of all the gay and often shockingly wet celebrations of the Richmond Germans was a *Volksfest* held in 1840 to honor the memory of Gutenberg,<sup>25</sup> the inventor of printing. German saloons and beergardens appeared early in the forties all over the city. Best known among them were the "Lafayette Saloon" founded by Louis Rueger in 1845 on the site where the Rueger Hotel was to be built in later years, August Schad's Hall on Broad Street, and opposite from it in the same block Simon Steinlein's "Monticello Hall." Several German brewers established themselves in Richmond and monopolized a trade which has been dominated by their descendants until the present day.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Der Deutsche Pionier*, XI (1880), 402; Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 27; Hodges, *op. cit.*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Hodges, *op. cit.*, 8-10.

<sup>25</sup> Gustav Körner, *Das Deutsche Element in den Vereinigten Staaten, 1818-1848* (Cincinnati, 1880), 404.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, September 27, 1953.

While no records of any German social clubs of the forties are available, although some might have existed, it is known that the then small band of German inhabitants of the city founded its own society for the relief of the sick (*Deutsche Krankengesellschaft zu Richmond*) already in 1841. The shoemaker J. Gottfried Lange called on his fellow immigrants to form such a society for protection in sickness and distress.<sup>27</sup> About 1850 a general German Relief Society was founded in the city<sup>28</sup> and offered counsel and assistance to newcomers. The Jewish immigrants had their own Hebrew Benevolent Society which provided succor to the poor and sick of that faith. Later the St. Mary's and St. John's Churches formed similar relief societies. These self-help organizations kept many a destitute or disabled immigrant from becoming a public charge.

The first attempt at founding a German newspaper was made about 1848 by Wilhelm Raine who had come from Baltimore. His weekly *Der Virginia Demokrat* did not survive a few initial issues. Raine conceded that his enterprise was a complete failure due to the lack of support by the local German population. He left the city very soon and turned to Chillicothe, Ohio, where he founded a German weekly in April, 1849.<sup>29</sup>

On March 1, 1850, the German citizens of Richmond followed the example set by their fellow immigrants in other American cities and organized the *German Rifle Company*, a militia organization which soon became known all over the city for its colorful uniforms, its martial display and the conviviality which surrounded most of its activities. At about the same time the *Sociale Turnverein*, a gymnastic society, was founded, shortly after similar societies had been established by German immigrants in New York, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore. The cradle of the *Turnverein* stood in Steinlein's Monticello Hall where also most of the meetings, lectures and indoor exercises of the Turners were held. Soon Richmond also got its German singing society. On July 1, 1852, the *Gesangverein Virginia* was organized in Schad's Hall. Fourteen men signed up as the charter members electing C. Emminger as the first president. The *Gesangverein Virginia* soon was to become the largest of all German societies and the only one which has survived to the present day.<sup>30</sup> A number of other non-political groups was organized during the fifties of which only the *Theaterverein* and the *Schiller Lodge* (Odd Fellows) attained a sufficient membership to outlast the year of the founding.

Five years after Raine's unsuccessful attempt at establishing a German newspaper in Virginia, an enterprising young immigrant from Kassel, Burghardt Hassel, who had already worked as a newspaper hand in New York and Baltimore, came to Richmond and set up his print shop. On June 1, 1853, the daily *Richmond Anzeiger* appeared for the first time. It met with immediate success and existed for more than sixty years. Hassel himself printed, edited and distributed his *Anzeiger* during the first years.<sup>31</sup>

Official cognizance of the presence of this sizeable German-speaking population had already been expressed by the fact that the Constitutional Convention of 1850 printed many of its documents in German.<sup>32</sup> Rich-

<sup>27</sup> Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 41. Lange (1809-1893) a native of Erfurt. He came to work on the James River and Kanawha Canal in 1837. After 1840, he settled in Richmond as a shoemaker and remained there until his death.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Mueller and Hermann Schmidt were the founders and first presidents of this society (*Deutscher Unterstützungsverein*) which numbered about 300 members. Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 183.

<sup>29</sup> Heinrich A. Rattermann, *Gesammelte ausgewählte Werke* (Cincinnati, 1906-14) III, 347. For detailed information on Raine, see Dieter Cunz, *The Maryland Germans* (Princeton, 1948) 253-255.

<sup>30</sup> We owe thanks to Mr. August Dietz of Richmond who placed at our disposal a scrapbook with clippings relative to the early history of the *Gesangverein Virginia*. Cf. also, Henry Wenzel, *Festprogramm des Gesangvereins Virginia nebst einer Historischen Skizze* (Richmond, 1902).

<sup>31</sup> Lester J. Cappon, *Virginia Newspapers 1821-1935* (New York, 1936) 164.

<sup>32</sup> W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, La., 1950) 32.

mond's "Little Germany" seemed complete by 1853. Provided with his own churches, social, fraternal and relief organizations, militia company, theatrical club and newspaper, the German immigrant began to feel at home. He became even reconciled with the Southern climate to which he was unaccustomed when he arrived. By and large he made an adjustment to life in a Southern city which might seem astonishing only to those who attribute utmost cleanliness and tidiness to all Germans. Many of the Richmond Germans were still rather poor in the fifties and they were forced to live in quarters which did not encourage whatever natural urge to keep clean they might have had. Two visitors to Richmond have left us with descriptions which are not all flattering but nevertheless convey much of the impression shared not only by observers but by many native Richmonders. Samuel Phillips Day wrote about German Richmond: "A large proportion of the inhabitants are Germans, who either keep lager-beer saloons, or clothing stores. They occupy the lower part of the city, support their own private theaters, *Volks-Garten*—a favorite resort on Sundays—two newspapers, and a few churches. The German population is not liked in Virginia; they seldom associate, and never assimilate with the regular citizens, and are generally dirty and untidy in their habits. In some parts of Richmond more German than other names appear over the doors; and to judge from the conversation heard in the streets, one might be at a loss to ascertain whether German or English was the language of the country."<sup>33</sup> Similar, though more outspoken, was the comment recorded by Frederick Law Olmsted on his visit in 1855: "There is a considerable population of foreign origin, generally of the least valuable class; very dirty German Jews, especially, abound, and their characteristic shops (with their characteristic smells, quite as bad as in Cologne) are thickly set in the narrowest and meanest streets, which seem to be otherwise mainly inhabited by negroes."<sup>34</sup>

#### THE RISE OF NATIVISM IN VIRGINIA

The foregoing chapter clearly explains how the Germans had set themselves apart from the rest of the population. In Richmond, and to a lesser degree in Alexandria and Norfolk, the native Americans for the first time witnessed a group which lived with them in the same city and remained aloof of the social life of the established community. However, the existence of such a "Little Germany" in Richmond alone could hardly have led to an organized "nativistic" movement. Albeit the Virginia Germans may have contributed one of the *raisons d'être* to nativism, the intense feelings against foreigners certainly had many other reasons which we must look for on the national scene. Total immigration to the United States from the year 1849 on had increased to 400,000 and more persons annually, being each year equal in number to the total population of such states as Maryland, North Carolina or half of Virginia. At this rate of immigration, it was an easy arithmetical problem to reckon the time when foreign immigrants would outbalance the political life of the nation which was precariously split over the slavery issue.

We have seen that although Virginia and other Southern states shared in the spate of this immigration, only a very small number of immigrants chose to stay in the South. Thus, the fear arose that the immigrants would all be concentrated in the North and would—being unfamiliar and in most

<sup>33</sup> Samuel P. Day, *Down South* (Boston, 1860) I, 139.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick L. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (New York, 1850) 55.



cases openly inimical to slavery—increase correspondingly the abolitionist tendencies of the North. Virginia Senator William C. Rives expressed a feeling which was shared by a number of people who favored immigration to the South in order to balance the populations better when he wrote to William M. Burwell of Maryland that the way to redress this unbalance of population between the North and the South was to encourage immigration to the South from the North or directly from Europe. He believed that such a policy could be safely followed if the immigrants were confined to the "industrial elements" and political privileges restricted.<sup>35</sup>

At first, sentiments in Virginia oscillated between the desire to bring in more, preferably selected immigrants to help in the development of the Commonwealth, especially in its western parts, i.e. what later became West Virginia, and an outright hostility to the influx of foreigners. The latter factor, however, remained dominant. The native Virginians who had enough difficulties coping with the Negro problems showed an instinctive xenophobia. Anti-Catholic feeling and suspicion of the Jews and their religious as well as commercial activities contributed not little to the crystallization of nativism in Virginia after 1850. As the following chapters will show, certain events and, in some cases, tactlessness of the Germans caused frictions and resulted in open clashes between the immigrants and the native population.

The secret order of the Know-Nothing spread rapidly all over the State. When the Know-Nothing organized as a political party in 1854 they found adherents even in sections of Virginia where hardly a foreign immigrant had set foot.<sup>36</sup> In the South, the Know-Nothings drew largely upon the support of pro-slavery people who regarded the Germans as abolitionists.

The German immigrants to Virginia came from countries in Europe where democratic movements had been active under the surface for several decades. The revolution of 1848 had just been crushed. It is true that, while the year 1848 is often considered the turning point in German-American history because a sizeable number of German revolutionaries found a haven in the United States, this date does not have the same significance in the history of the Virginia Germans. Yet, the Germans in Richmond did not remain untouched by the events in Europe. A few of the men who were involved in the Revolution found their way to Virginia, others who were by no means revolutionaries had become influenced by the trends in Europe.<sup>37</sup>

Since its inception the *Sociale Turnverein* adhered to principles which were alien to the Southern Society. "Opposition to any form of deprivation of rights resulting from color, religion or place of birth, since this is incompatible with a cosmopolitan conception of the world," was the credo of the *Sozialistische Turnerbund* with which the Richmond *Turnverein* was affiliated.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the *Gesangverein Virginia* had close relations with Northern singing societies and sent delegations to the *Sängerfeste* in the North.<sup>39</sup> This sufficed to subject it to suspicion. More than the constant fear that the Germans be nothing but foreign abolitionists, the harmless festivities of the German societies and church groups aroused an open hostility in

<sup>35</sup> W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, La., 1950) 18 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Overdyke, *op. cit.*, 32.

<sup>37</sup> The only Forty-Eighter in Richmond was Oswald Julius Heinrich (1828-1886), who as a student participated in the Dresden uprising. He was prosecuted and forced to flee Germany. He arrived in America in 1850, worked in Tennessee and the Carolinas as a mason and carpenter. In 1855, he settled in Richmond as an architect. Cf. Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 32-33.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Heinrich Huhn, "Die Spaltung und die Wiedervereinigung des Turnerbundes," *Amerikanischer Turner-Kalender* (1890), 26 ff.

<sup>39</sup> The *Gesangverein* participated already in the great Philadelphia *Sängerfest* in 1853.

Richmond and elsewhere. Gay parades and Sunday outings with plenty of singing and beer drinking disturbed the traditionally quiet Sabbath of the native population. Occasional rows occurred between German participants and the native element. The first major clash happened on June 20, 1853.

The German societies had called upon the German population of Richmond to participate in the presentation of a flag from the *Turnverein* to the *Gesangverein* on the occasion of the latter's first anniversary. A large procession formed by the various organizations and accompanied by a crowd of women and children marched through the streets of the city to a distant picnic ground on the farm of a Mr. Krauss. After the ceremony of the flag presentation was over, the Richmond Mayor Mayo spoke to the assembled crowd. Then the afternoon was spent "in singing, dancing, speaking, eating, drinking and gymnastic exercises." A group of ruffians appeared on the scene and a fight during which the flag disappeared resulted in the breaking up of the ceremony. When the Germans marched back to the city under the protection of the Rifle Company, rumors spread that "the whole German population had risen *en masse* upon our native citizens, and were about to take entire possession of the city." Stones were thrown into the procession on Second Street. A participant, Henry Doerflinger, was knocked down by one of the stones. Immediately the cry "Mob, mob" was given and the men counterattacked the "American ruffians." After the aggressors fled, the Germans fell again into line and marched to the corner of Leigh Street where another bloody fight developed. The police finally interfered and arrested five Germans, Augustus Schad, Charles Emminger, Andrew Miller, Charles Ritterhouse and A. Rix on assault charges. Several bystanders, among them a woman storekeeper, had been injured. An examination before the Mayor followed about which the *Richmond Enquirer* reported: "With the exception of Mr. Toler we are glad to state that none of the wounded are seriously injured, and that not more than thirty or forty of our German citizens were engaged in the row, the result of which they seem to regret as deeply as any other person can do."<sup>40</sup>

#### THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ASSOCIATION OF RICHMOND

This incident, insignificant as it may have been in its actual scope, resulted in a strained relationship between the Germans and their native-born fellow citizens in the city. Meetings were scarcely held without some guards being placed at the exits of the hall. Picnics and other outings took place under the protection of the Rifle Company which displayed its martial strength by frequent parades through the quiet streets of Richmond Sundays. When in June 1854 the *Gesangverein* dedicated a new flag to replace the one which had disappeared during the brawl, the worst was expected. However, nothing happened. The procession returned to the city at night, the organizations disbanded and everybody went home happily.<sup>41</sup> The sober attitude shown by the leaders of the Germans and the benevolence of the Democratic rulers in the city seemed to guarantee a tolerable development for the future. Only occasionally did unfriendly articles about the Germans appear in newspapers, particularly the *Richmond Penny Post*, the mouthpiece of the American Party in which the Know-Nothing movement found its political expression. So it was in the *Penny Post* that Virginians read for the first time the sensational news of "Red Republicanism" among the

<sup>40</sup> Wenzel, *op. cit.*, 14, *Richmond Enquirer*, June 24, 1853.

<sup>41</sup> Wenzel, *op. cit.*, 14.

Virginia Germans. In September, 1852, a Congress of the "League of German Radicals" had met in Wheeling which was then within the borders of Virginia.<sup>42</sup> Although only 16 delegates out of a possible number of 1,112 appeared on the scene of this congress which proclaimed in prophetic words the creation of a World Republic, its significance was greatly exaggerated by the nativistic press and commented on as late as 1854. Suffice it to say that the only three delegates from Virginia were residents of Wheeling. The president of the "Wheeling Congress" was Dr. Conradin Homburg, a radical refugee from Germany who had practiced medicine in Fredericksburg for some time after his arrival in America. Prior to his participation in the "Wheeling Congress" he had moved from Virginia to Indianapolis. The Germans of Richmond certainly had nothing to do with this movement.

In January, 1855, the *Penny Post* reported another sensational news which was a great surprise to almost all Germans in the city when it wrote: "Few people are aware that among our adopted citizens there has of late been founded by the recent political refugees from Europe, regular Red Republican societies that purpose to pull down our government . . . One of them has lately been established here, by a certain so-called Dr. Sternmetz (sic), a newly imported German radical who wants to tear down our government before he knows what it is."<sup>43</sup> On January 15, 1855, Rep. William Russel Smith (Alabama) while defending most vigorously the tenets of the American Party before the House of Representatives had exclaimed: "Here are the solemn resolutions of the German Social Democratic Association of Richmond, Virginia—an association existing in the center of the Old Dominion, in the heart of the home of Presidents:

*Reform in the laws of the general government, as well as in those of the states.*

We demand:

- 1) Universal suffrage;
- 2) The election of all officers by the people;
- 3) The abolition of the Presidency;
- 4) The abolition of Senates, so that the Legislatures shall consist of only one branch;
- 5) The right of the people to recall their representatives at their pleasure;
- 6) The right of the people to change the Constitution when they like;
- 7) All lawsuits to be conducted without expense;
- 8) A department of the government to be set up for the purpose of protecting immigration;
- 9) A reduced term for acquiring citizenship.

*Reform in the Foreign Relations of the Government.*

- 1) Abolition of all neutrality;
- 2) Intervention in favor of every people struggling for liberty.

*Reform in what relates to religions.*

- 1) A more perfect development of the principle of personal freedom and liberty of conscience; consequently, (a) abolition of laws for the observance of the Sabbath; (b) abolition of prayers in Congress; (c) abolition of oath upon the Bible; (d) repeal of laws enacting a religious test before taking an office.
- 2) Taxation of church property;
- 3) A prohibition of incorporations of all church property in the name of ecclesiastics.

*Reform in the Social Conditions.*

- 1) Abolition of all land monopoly;
- 2) Ad valorem taxation of property;
- 3) Amelioration of the condition of the working class, (a) by lessening the time of work to eight hours for grown persons and to five hours for children; (b) by incorporation of mechanics' associations and protective societies; (c) by granting a preference to mechanics before all other creditors; (d) by establishing, at public expense, an asylum for superannuated mechanics without means.

<sup>42</sup> Eduard Schläger, "Der Wheelinger Congress," *Der Deutsche Pionier*, VIII (1876), 90-97.

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Penny Post*, January 31, 1855.

- 4) Education of poor children by the State;
- 5) Taking possession of railroads by the State;
- 6) The promotion of education, (a) by the introduction of free schools, with the power of enforcing parents to send their children to school, and prohibition of all clerical influence; (b) by instruction in the German language; (c) by establishing a German University.
- 7) The supporting of the slave emancipation exertions of Cassius M. Clay by Congressional laws;
- 8) Abolition of the Christian system of punishment and introduction of the human amelioration system;
- 9) Abolition of capital punishment.

After reading off the entire resolution, Rep. Smith declared: "Let every American read this carefully and candidly. It is but a fair sample of the foreigner's ideas of liberty. Ought these men be allowed to vote? No President, no Senate, no Sabbath, no swearing upon the Bible, no permanent Constitution, no neutrality, no Christian punishment. Is it even probable that the second generation of such insane fanatics should so be improved as to be capable of voting with discretion? These are the 'fundamental principles of reform of the Social Democratic Society of Germans,' and are not confined to Virginia, but ramified throughout the whole Union, wherever Germans go."<sup>44</sup>

This speech and the resolution quoted in it received nation-wide attention. In Richmond and in other parts of Virginia it was circulated widely. Everywhere German individuals were questioned about this "Society."<sup>45</sup>

Few, if any, could give a satisfactory answer. There was no such radical group in Richmond. The name "Sternmetz" was practically unknown in the city, even to most Germans. For weeks the Richmond newspapers carried editorials on whether or not such a society existed. Germans wrote to the *Enquirer*, the Democratic organ, that they knew of no movement of that type in Richmond.<sup>46</sup> The *Whig* published an anonymous communication to the extent that there existed presently such an organization, "a fearful and astonishing fact which the writer begs the people of Virginia to remember." Both the *Whig* and the *Penny Post* denounced a German grocer by the name of Joseph Hierholzer, a devout Catholic, as the leader of the Richmond radicals. Hierholzer was in fact the president of a German Democratic Club, organized for the support of the Democratic Party in the forthcoming elections.<sup>47</sup> The *Penny Post* retorted to Hierholzer's denial sent to the *Whig* that his club was identical with the Social Democratic Association: "All he has done is to throw off the blame from the association over which he presides and fix it on another."<sup>48</sup>

The truth behind the matter was hard to come by. Finally a German wrote a letter to the *Whig* in which he stated that "about four years ago a certain Dr. S. came from Cincinnati to preach in Richmond the doctrines contained in the published basis."<sup>49</sup> Late in 1850, a "Dr." John Steinmetz had in fact arrived in Richmond. He registered at the "American Hotel" and gave his profession as "baker." He held several meetings in "Monticello Hall." Together with Simon Steinlein, the owner of the Saloon and hotel, Edward Kempe, A. Rick, Moritz Richter and the Teupel brothers, he organized the "Social Democratic Association of Richmond." The total membership never exceeded twenty-two men. The activities of this small

<sup>44</sup> John C. Rives (ed.), *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, New Series, Vol. XXXI, 2nd Session, 33rd Congress (Washington, 1855), 95.

<sup>45</sup> Overdyke, *op. cit.*, 17, 87-88.

<sup>46</sup> *Richmond Daily Enquirer*, February 2, 1855.

<sup>47</sup> *Richmond Whig & Advertiser*, February 3, 1855.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted by *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, February 5, 1855.

<sup>49</sup> *Richmond Whig & Advertiser*, February 3, 1855.

band remained little known. Contemporaries recalled that "a great deal of animosity was aroused, particularly among their countrymen by the hoisting of a red flag over the meeting house. Soon afterwards Steinmetz was advised to leave the city if he did not desire to be subjected to complications particularly disagreeable to himself."<sup>50</sup>

With the departure of Steinmetz, the Association ceased to exist. Meanwhile the radical German newspaper *Der Wecker* in Baltimore had received a copy of the resolution and reprinted it in full.<sup>51</sup> A translation of this copy was evidently placed into the hands of the American Party four years later and provided the basis for the statements made by the Rep. Smith in the House of Representatives. Once having been entered in the congressional record, it found wide publicity. Still in 1860 it was contained in its entirety in Cluskey's *Political Encyclopedia*<sup>52</sup> and as late as 1953 a noted Southern historian believed that the "revolutionary Free German Society of Richmond" was an "experimental community" that "soon failed."<sup>53</sup>

There was certainly enough in this manifesto of 1851 to set the world afire. The handful of men who applauded it in a Richmond beer-garden, however, was so small that everyone could easily have ignored their demands and forgotten these impractical visionaries. Some of their demands—in our present light—seem no longer so fantastic, e. g. a reform of the electoral law, abolition of neutrality, the eight-hour day, child labor laws, free public schools, abolition of capital punishment.

The Richmond Germans protested in vain against the political abuse of the resolutions. The Know-Nothing could hardly have wished for better campaign material in Virginia. Only the German *Anzeiger* and a part of the Democratic press of the State, notably the *Enquirer*, published denials and explanations with regard to the phantom radical society which the Know-Nothing press had unearthed four years after the ephemeral organization had actually ceased to exist. The crusade against everything German or otherwise "foreign" and Roman Catholic gathered momentum. Newspapers and campaign speakers throughout the South presented to their horrified public the Steinmetz resolution as the true expression of the purpose of the Germans in Richmond and elsewhere in the State. The motto of the *Penny Post* during the election campaign of 1855 found wide acclaim: "Foreigners and Roman Catholics may ride the chariot of Freedom—but Americans must drive."<sup>54</sup>

#### THE GERMANS AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The violent attacks against the Germans had one immediate effect: the average German immigrant who, in general, had been content to be left alone and work out his own destiny in the new environment, suddenly became aware of politics. It was only natural that he turned to a party which seemed to accept him as an equal and afford him protection against slander and violence. The Democratic Party with its professed belief in the principles laid down by the Declaration of Independence attracted him more than the Whigs who had among the Germans the reputation of being money-bound aristocrats. After the American Party entered the political scene in Virginia and the Whigs joined it in assailing the foreign-born citi-

<sup>50</sup> From the recollections of C. R. Pohl, Louis Rueger, Caspar Wendlinger and Burghardt Hassel. Cf. Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 36.

<sup>51</sup> *Daily Penny Post*, January 31, 1855.

<sup>52</sup> Michael W. Cluskey, *Political Text-Book, or Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia, 1860) 221-222.

<sup>53</sup> Francis B. Simkins, *A History of the South* (New York, 1953), 162.

<sup>54</sup> *Penny Post*, February 16, 1855.

zens, the choice for the Germans was clear. The Democratic Party in Virginia accepted this challenge and provided the political home for the Germans. The party organ in Richmond, the *Enquirer*, frequently defended the Teutonic immigrants in its editorials. Evaluating the European influence in America, the editor wrote in the fall of 1854: "The German brings to us in the best instances great learning, warm social feelings, and domestic refinement, yet in far too many cases he is less favorably represented, and the last quarter or half million that have come over seem infested with the wildest radicalism. Many of their two, three hundred newspapers are gross and incorrect in the extreme. Yet, of our American Germany as a whole, we must say that it is great blessing to us, enlarging our wealth by its decided agricultural taste, confirming our freedom by its decided protestant tendency, balancing the Celtic immigration by its intellectual independence and habitual pursuits, and promising at least to learn the thrift and quicken the artistic taste and social feelings of the Anglo-Saxon."<sup>55</sup>

When in April, 1855, the American Party elected the mayor, assessor and collector of Richmond and similar successes were reported in Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Petersburg, Portsmouth, Lynchburg and Wheeling, the Germans became alarmed about the party strength of the Know-Nothings.<sup>56</sup> Certain irregularities during the elections in Manchester increased the tension. The American Party claimed that the Democrats had brought wagonloads of Germans from Richmond to cast their votes in Manchester. After a thorough investigation, twenty votes were finally discarded as invalid.<sup>57</sup>

Everywhere the majority of the Germans rallied around the Democratic Party in self-interest. "At first the Germans continued silently to bear all abuse and threat—some of them even forgot their self-respect and joined their enemies—and it was therefore the good luck of the oppressed that from among the Anglo-Virginians an eloquent and ardent defender pleaded their cause."<sup>58</sup> This defender was Henry A. Wise, the democratic candidate for governor in the campaign of 1855. Throughout 1855, Wise stumped the entire state and in an open letter and many speeches lured the "abused foreigners" into the ranks of the Democratic Party. Although many Germans were at heart opposed to slavery, their anxiety about their own rights outweighed for the time all other considerations, and seemed to keep them in the ranks of the Democrats.<sup>59</sup> Wise's election as governor did not heal all the woes of the Germans. The nativistic pressure prevailed until the outbreak of the Civil War, thus strengthening their closeness.

The first example of a concerted action on the part of all German organizations in Richmond was provided in the summer of 1856. The German Rifle Company had held one of its regular target shootings near a picnic place called "The Hermitage." Large crowds of Germans always gathered during the rifle practicing of the Company in order to participate in the manifold amusements that followed the shooting. A quarrelsome American onlooker had conferred the old epithet "damned Dutchmen" accompanied by some stronger expressions on a corporal of the Rifles who shot his offender. The man, a local butcher, died in the hospital during the following night. The Rifle corporal fled the city. This so-called "Hermitage Incident" and the great indignation that it had caused among the native population prompted the City Council on July 21, 1856, to exclude

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, October 9, 1854.

<sup>56</sup> Overdyke, *op. cit.*, 66.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>58</sup> Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 37.

<sup>59</sup> Carl Schurz, *Reminiscences* (New York, 1907), II, 66.

the German Rifle Company from the payment of an annual allowance of 50 dollars which was accorded to all other uniformed militia companies of Richmond. This time the Germans did not keep still. A mass meeting was called for July the 28th in St. John's Evangelical Church. The appeal was directed to all Germans who were already citizens of the United States or who had taken out their intention papers and called for a discussion of the following questions:

- 1) Is the City Council justified in ignoring the rights of citizens and spending the public funds with partiality?
- 2) Is the City Council entitled to tax the German citizens like other citizens, without granting them equal privileges?
- 3) Is the City Council authorized to grant German citizens and taxpayers fewer benefits of public funds than citizens of other nationalities?
- 4) And is the action of the City Council of the 21st inst. not to be termed an act of impudence and insult against the Constitution of the country, and an outrage to the whole German population of the Commonwealth of Virginia?<sup>60</sup>

More than 200 German citizens, among them representatives of all social and church organizations, responded to the appeal. The editor of the *Anzeiger*, Burghardt Hassel, C. R. Pohle, a prosector of the Richmond Medical College, the Rev. John C. Hoyer, C. E. Gronwald, Joseph Rick and other speakers gave vent to the hurt feelings of their fellow immigrants. The meeting unanimously adopted a resolution which was endorsed in the following days by several hundred other Germans who did not attend. It condemned in strong words the action of the City Council as being apt "to render the German Rifle Company conspicuously odious," and continued:

That an honest investigation before the proper tribunal of the conduct of the Virginia Rifles was due to them, previous to the unjust action of the City Council.

That the exception made was induced by want of knowledge and entire ignorance of the truth regarding the conduct of certain persons, or by an intentional violation of the principles of justice and the rights of freemen, which under present circumstances is calculated to create discord between foreigners and natives, and particularly to generate the hatred of the latter against the German adopted citizens of Richmond.<sup>61</sup>

Still, the City Council, after reviewing the matter decided to uphold its earlier decision and deny any support from public funds to the Rifle Company. The Germans were disappointed but their leaders expressed that "our patriotism and reverence for American liberty cannot be shaken by the undignified and short-sighted policy of certain members of the City Council, and that our respects for the laws of the land shall ever be preserved faithfully and in obedience to the rulers who may be elected to power by the votes of freemen."<sup>62</sup>

The national campaign of 1856 brought new unrest. Some Germans became dissatisfied with the Democratic Party which began to weaken in its support for the foreign-born. They hoped to find a better champion of their interests in the Republican Party. The *Enquirer* reported with a certain bitterness that ungrateful Germans "in our city lately formed a Fremont Club."<sup>63</sup> The great majority of the Germans, however, remained faithful to the Democratic Party. Constant bickering about the subversive "foreigners" and several rowdy attacks on German individuals induced the leaders of the Richmond Germans to make plans for a patriotic political demonstration, thus directing the attention of the native Americans to the

<sup>60</sup> *Täglicher Anzeiger*, July 26, 1856. Quoted by Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 35-36.

<sup>61</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, August 2, 1856.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, August 2, 1856.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, August 5, 1856.

share of the German element in the War of Independence. No figure of early German American history could have been more appropriate as a symbol for the attachment of the German element to the adopted country than General Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben. Many months of preparation were spent to make the *Steuben Festival* a successful demonstration against the detested nativism. For two days, on the 14th and 15th of September, 1857, the Germans literally dominated the city. The highlight of the festivities was a grand parade on the first day. By noon, the Rifle Company, the *Gesangverein*, the Turners, the Relief Society, the Schiller Lodge, the *Theaterverein* and representative groups from the German religious organizations, joined by many out-of-town guests, assembled in full force, with brass bands, national flags and banners, on the north side of the Capitol. The procession marched through the main streets of the city to Bellville Place where a Steuben bust was unveiled. Prayers, speeches, declamations and recitals rounded out the ceremony which was followed by a great teutonic *Volksfest*. The festival remained undisturbed by nativistic elements. The significance of this event rested on the fact that all factions of the heterogeneous German population of Richmond were represented. The liberal Forty-Eighter, Oswald J. Heinrich, was selected as the orator of the day. In his speech, he called on the Germans to rally around the Democratic Party: "Do not the Germans stand by the flying banner of that party which has espoused the principles of the fathers of our Republic and seeks to protect the liberty and equality of all against vile attacks and monopolies?" Leading Jewish businessmen, devout Catholics, avowed free-thinkers, as well as orthodox and liberal Lutherans were among the men who made this festival successful. The pressure of the nativists had finally resulted in welding the Germans together.<sup>64</sup>

#### FLOURISHING GERMAN LIFE IN RICHMOND

This outward unity is surprising in view of a number of conflicts which existed within Richmond's "Little Germany." Since 1843, the German Evangelical Church of St. John's had gathered most Protestant German immigrants. Under the leadership of Pastor Hoyer the congregation developed theologically in a rather liberal manner. In the early fifties a number of Lutheran newcomers felt that St. John's lack of doctrine did not correspond to the faith in which they had grown up in Europe.<sup>65</sup> Some older members, among them the tobacco merchant Emil O. Nolting, proposed the founding of a new congregation. In 1852 a number of families severed their relation to St. John's Church. Ill-feelings accompanied the separation. In 1853 a second German Lutheran congregation, Bethlehem Church, was founded by the dissatisfied parishioners of St. John's. The new congregation acquired a lot on Sixth Street near Clay, a neighborhood where numerous German newcomers had settled between 1853 and 1855. At first, Bethlehem Church united with the Lutheran Virginia Synod. A Rev. Schmogrow was the first pastor. By 1856 he asked to be relieved from his office and the congregation was unable to secure a German-speaking pastor from the synod. It therefore turned for help to the orthodox Missouri Synod which was able to comply with this request. Whereupon Bethlehem Church withdrew from the Virginia Synod and united with the Missouri Church stating explicitly as reasons: "Having difficulty in securing a German pastor, and (only secondly) entertaining the firm conviction

<sup>64</sup> Schuricht, *op. cit.*, I, 31-33; Wittke, *We Who Built America* (New York, 1939).

<sup>65</sup> William C. Miller, *op. cit.*, 2.



and belief in the purity and the soundness of the doctrine as held by the Synod of Missouri." The Rev. Carl Gross took charge of the congregation which retained for years to come a hostile attitude towards St. John's Church and especially toward Pastor Hoyer's liberal views.<sup>66</sup>

The German Catholics experienced difficulties which came from three different sides. The official attitude of the Catholic Church in America was to discourage the existence of national parishes.<sup>67</sup> In order to continue as a German church, St. Mary's congregation preferred to be served by priests from religious orders rather than be directly subject to the bishop of Richmond.<sup>68</sup> Since 1850 the Jesuit Fathers had cared for the church. Father Pallhuber was succeeded as pastor by Father Joseph Polk in February, 1852. The Jesuits were exposed to much slander and criticism. Being Germans and Catholics at the same time, they and their congregation were the object of both the anti-foreigner and anti-Catholic attacks of the Know-Nothing movement. On the other hand, many Germans were suspicious of the Jesuits; even among the parishioners there was a wide-spread desire to be served by another order. The Jesuits were often reproached for trying to establish "European Papism" in America. The support which St. Mary's Church received from the St. Leopold Society in Vienna was also cited by those critical of the Catholics.

Thomas S. Flourney, unsuccessful Know-Nothing candidate for governor in 1857, warned Virginians not to feel that foreigners and Catholics in the state, though few in number, did not constitute a problem, and described the Roman Catholic Church as despotic, proscriptive and intolerant and suggested that public offices should be withheld from them.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, St. Mary's Church grew steadily. By the end of the decade about 1,500 souls formed its membership. In 1859 three Notre Dame sisters came to Richmond to take charge of the German parochial school. A building was erected on the west side of Fourth Street between Clay and Leigh Streets to serve as a second school, the "German Female High School." In 1860, Father Polk left Richmond and the Jesuits gave notice that they were no longer willing to serve the congregation. In August, 1860, a Benedictine, Father Leonard Mayer assumed the pastorate upon the urgent request of Bishop McGill.<sup>70</sup>

German social life flourished despite all nativistic attempts to discourage immigrants from participating in the activities of the clubs and societies. The *Gesangverein*, particularly, became the center of cultural endeavors. Under the leadership of Frederick Seibert it staged many concerts between 1857 and 1860, most of them in the large hall of the New Market Hotel. It also had a dramatic branch which played locally-produced comedies. The shows of the *Theaterverein* in Schad's Hall never reached professional perfection but were well attended by the German population. Occasionally, troupes from other cities were invited for stage shows.<sup>71</sup> A special event was the visit of Ulmann's *Operngesellschaft* in February, 1859, which offered an opera program with the celebrated singer Carl Formes.<sup>72</sup>

The increase in the German population also brought forth new newspapers. In 1857 the Rev. John C. Hoyer tried himself as a newspaper editor. His weekly *Das Auge* was printed on the press of the Hoyer and

<sup>66</sup> Thanks are due to Pastor O. A. Sauer of Bethlehem Church for information from the Church records.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Vincent J. Fecher, *A Study of the Movement for German National Parishes* (Rome, 1955).

<sup>68</sup> Hodges, *op. cit.*, 29.

<sup>69</sup> Overdyke, *op. cit.*, 235.

<sup>70</sup> Hodges, *op. cit.*, 8-11, 25, 30-31.

<sup>71</sup> Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 53-54.

<sup>72</sup> *Richmonder Anzeiger*, February 12, 1859.

Ludwig firm by Charles Ludwig and Werner Koch. This sheet was discontinued after a year's publication.<sup>73</sup> More successful were Herrmann Schuricht as editor and Henry Schott as printer of the weekly *Virginische Zeitung* which Schuricht launched soon after his arrival in Richmond in the spring of 1859. He also published a comic Sunday paper *Die Wespe*. The *Virginische Zeitung* met with success and yielded wide influence. On December 3, 1860 it changed to daily publication.<sup>74</sup>

On November 10, 1859, the German element of the city was once again united in a jubilant celebration to honor the 100th birthday of Friedrich von Schiller. This time the various societies and church groups came together, not to stage a demonstration against a common enemy, but to commemorate the life of a poet whose works were as much alive and beloved in the fashionable home of the richest tobacco merchant as in the humble shack where newly arrived laborers were crowded together. The Schiller Festival<sup>75</sup> was to be the last German *Volksfest* in Richmond before the great conflict.<sup>75</sup>

#### GERMAN IMMIGRANTS OUTSIDE OF RICHMOND

As we stated earlier, German immigration during the decades preceding the war was not limited to Richmond. At times, considerable numbers of Germans sojourned in Norfolk but very few of them made this port their permanent home. The increasing development of the German community of Richmond attracted many an immigrant who left Norfolk as soon as he had saved enough money to go on. The Catholic St. Patrick's Church which was under the able pastorate of the Rev. Alexander Histelberger from 1833 till 1852 had a number of German members throughout this period. Most immigrants from Germany who remained in Norfolk permanently were of the Jewish faith. It is reported that they formed a militia company of 35 men in 1858 when nativism was particularly strong in Norfolk. J. Umstädter was elected captain of this protective guard.<sup>76</sup>

Petersburg received a number of German immigrants. Many of them were small shopkeepers. Toward the end of the fifties the Petersburg *Gesangverein* was founded. Almost every Virginia town of some size had a few German craftsmen and merchants. The Shenandoah Valley attracted a greater number of new German immigrants than other sections. From Winchester down to Staunton, church and civil records show a small, but continuous influx of Germans. Some acquired farms from owners who were moving west. The bookbinder Frank Prüfer of Leipzig who settled in Staunton in 1853 has been credited with the introduction in the Shenandoah Valley of the German custom of decorating a fir tree for Christmas, a practice unknown to the German immigrants of the 18th century. For Christmas 1855 he displayed a large *Tannenbaum* in front of his house. The young Saxon medical student, Ernst Schmid, who came to Winchester in 1853, happened to be in Richmond when the Yellow Fever broke out in the South. His services in the fight against this scourge proved so important that after the epidemic was stayed with his help, the Episcopal Board of Foreign Missions sent him to Japan, being the first white physician in that country. Another immigrant to Winchester in 1853 was F. August Graichen of Anhalt who was later to become the mayor of his adopted home town,

<sup>73</sup> *Washington Journal*, March 11, 1911.

<sup>74</sup> *Die Tägliche Metropole* (Washington, D. C.), December 5, 1860. Cf. also Cappon, *op. cit.*, 191-192. For details on Schuricht, see Dieter Cunz, "Schuricht's Virginia-German Weekly," *American German Review*, XVIII (1951), 14-16.

<sup>75</sup> Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 33.

<sup>76</sup> *Baltimore Wecker*, October 25, 1858.

the only German-born mayor in the history of Virginia municipalities. Individual immigrants in smaller communities remained relatively unmolested by nativism. People had daily personal contact with them and the immigrants themselves had little opportunity to band together. In Alexandria a sufficient number of Germans settled in the fifties to warrant the founding of a singing society, the *Musikverein*, which attracted a large membership under its conductor Wachtmann. It also served the functions of a social club. Dr. Julius Dienelt, a dentist who came to Alexandria in 1854, was the leading spirit behind German activities there. Visits to the singing societies of Washington were frequent. In 1859 the *Musikverein* sent a large delegation to the National Singing Festival in Baltimore. On June 15, 1859, after the return from Baltimore, the Alexandria singers were hosts to the sister societies of Washington, Richmond and Petersburg. During a *Volksfest* along the Potomac in Arlington, the festive crowd was attacked by rowdies. The celebration threatened to turn into a free-for-all fight. Order, however, could be restored, and the speaker, Virginia's ex-Governor William Smith, could expound the virtues of the German immigrants.<sup>77</sup> Four years earlier, Smith had supported nativistic principles and pictured the dangers to the South that were inherent to immigration.<sup>78</sup>

#### ON THE EVE OF THE WAR

The scene had changed. The Know-Nothings, a heterogeneous organization from its outset, had broken into warring factions. The great issues of the day were no longer the dangers from foreign immigration but the acute danger of a division of the country. The Germans of Virginia, many of whom had by then been residents of the state for a decade or more, directed their attention to the threats against the Union. In their public speeches and the editorials of their newspapers we find no longer the harsh tone of complaint against unfair treatment from the part of the native American fellow-citizens. The great question before them was the same that all Americans, native-born or immigrant, were confronted with: can the Union be preserved?

The statement has been made repeatedly that the Germans of the South were to one man pro-Union and their loyalty was questioned seriously, since they "had not by inheritance of birth the Southern instinct."<sup>79</sup> It is, however, not possible to make such a general statement with regard to all the divergent factions and differing individuals who made up the German population of Virginia. It comprised the most extreme types. A few had found entry into the old society in the tidewater section and joined the ranks of the slaveholders. Most notable among them was the Rev. Charles Minnigerode, who had left Germany in 1839 after having been imprisoned in Prussia for revolutionary activities. In 1842 he followed a call to the chair of classical literature at the College of William and Mary. Two years later he joined the Episcopal Church and prepared himself for the ministry to which he was ordained in 1848. At the outbreak of the war he was the rector of St. Paul's in Richmond, earning himself the sobriquet of father-confessor of the secession. "In German politics, he was more to the left than the most radical progressive, but in American affairs he advocated the use of the whip," one of his Northern critics wrote.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Baltimore *Wecker*, June 18, 1856.

<sup>78</sup> Overdyke, *op. cit.*, 199.

<sup>79</sup> Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1940).

<sup>80</sup> Frederick Knapp, *Aus und über Amerika* (Berlin, 1876) II, 374.

A handful of German Jews were undoubtedly interested in the slave trade which did not make them more acceptable to the Virginia planter who regarded the trader in Negroes with contempt. Yet, it was only natural that such men were found among the foremost advocates of secession.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, Northern abolitionists had their sympathizers among the Virginia Germans, notably in the Richmond *Sociale Turnverein*.

The vast majority of the Germans, especially those in the small trades and crafts, were opposed to the institution of slavery, but were by no means willing to consider the Negro as an equal. The *Anzeiger* sharply criticized the emancipation of the Negroes in the Northern States. "The Negro rule in Ohio is a fact. Soon they will dominate every Northern state, if the people express their approval of Lincoln's and Hamlin's Negro worship."<sup>82</sup> The editor of the *Virginische Zeitung*, Herrmann Schuricht, blamed the Northern fanatics for being carried astray by passion, "inclined to sacrifice a cultured part of the Southern people to the terrorism of an uneducated and inferior race," and for the ignoring the interest and safety of the white people in the South. Schuricht most likely expressed the opinion of the majority of the Germans in Richmond when he later attempted to justify their attitude in these critical days: "They never embraced the southern cause in order to protect the interests of slaveholders, but they were ready to defend the political and commercial independence of the States."<sup>83</sup>

One noteworthy attempt was made by the Germans to meet and consider what steps could be taken to preserve the peace in the last moment. In April 1861, a mass meeting was called in Steinlein's Monticello Hall (which ten years prior had seen the gatherings of revolutionaries). Henry L. Wiegand, an avowed Unionist, presided while the son of ex-Governor Wise, O. Jennings Wise, a former Göttingen law student and attaché at the U. S. Legation in Berlin, addressed the meeting in German. The majority of those present refused to take any resolution in favor of the Union but considered it the duty of every adopted citizen to submit to the will of the majority, particularly of the native-born citizens and "to sacrifice their life and fortune, if necessary, in defence of the States."<sup>84</sup>

Soon afterwards, the German Rifle Company (of 1850) which had continued its existence without the aid of public funds, responded to the first call to arms, joined the First Virginia Infantry Regiment as Company "K" and went into battle. Some Germans fled to the North but the vast majority remained loyal to their adopted State until the bitter end.

<sup>81</sup> Lonn, *op. cit.*, 34.

<sup>82</sup> *Richmonder Anzeiger*, October 31, 1860.

<sup>83</sup> Schuricht, *op. cit.*, II, 70.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-70.