

# ADOLF GUSTAV STEINMANN

By A. E. ZUCKER

Adolf Gustav Steinmann, German immigrant and long time Baltimore citizen, began writing a family chronicle in 1879, the largest part of which consists of an account of his own life in Europe. Unfortunately, he ends this autobiography with the year 1871, when he emigrated at the age of twenty. The brittle, yellowing pages, aside from telling the interesting story of their author's life, present a typical case history of German immigration during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, revealing the narrowness of overcrowded life in Germany, the oppressive poverty, the apprentice system among the trades, the irksomeness of forced military duty under Prussian drill sergeants, but also the love of nature and especially of music among the people. The following is a translation of this document.

My name is Adolf Gustav Steinmann. I was born on the 24th of May, 1851, in Bodman, on Lake Constance in the grand duchy of Baden. My father was a border guard who had five children, of whom two died quite young. He, Silvester Steinmann, born November 28, 1809, married June 9, 1840, Rosa Wenk of Wallbach, district of Saeckingen, Baden. She was born August 15, 1815, and died July 14, 1878. Their children were: Karl Steinmann, born May 13, 1841; Johann Maximilian Steinmann, born December 19, 1843; Maria Louisa Steinmann, born May 13, 1846, and died May 24, 1847; Gustav Adolf Friedrich Steinmann, born December 19, 1849, and died February 4, 1850, and Adolf Gustav Steinmann, born May 24, 1851. All were duly entitled to citizenship in the village of Dillendorf, district Bondorf, grand duchy of Baden, Germany.

Silvester Steinmann was born in Dillendorf of far from prosperous parents. His father died early and the youth became the support of his mother. He worked as a roofer and later learned the trade of the miller at which he worked until 1835 when he received a post as border guard. He applied himself to this job with extreme conscientiousness and skill until 1859 when he was pensioned. At that time he was living in Arlen, the 24th post at which he had served. He removed to his home town, after his health, undermined by long and arduous hours of labor, had been somewhat restored. He occupied himself with farming and hunting, which latter was not very profitable, even though he was a good shot and an experienced hunter. He remained in Dillendorf till 1860, about 14 months. He then served as tax collector in Waiblingen for four years. He traded posts with a man named Wolf who had a similar appointment in Horheim. His pay there amounted to 300 Gulden. In 1872 he became tax collector in Lechlingen, at which place his wife died. The sorrow over her death caused him to lose his mind and he had to be relieved of his post. He was a tall, extremely powerful man of firm and honest character, stern in the fulfillment of his duties. Equally stern he was in rearing his children, punishing the slightest faults with great severity. In his service he was beset by endless worries and harassments, and in his family there occurred numerous sicknesses and other misfortunes.

Rosa Wenk, the mother, had been born in Wallbach. Her father was fairly wealthy but had many children. She was a good, hardworking woman and a devoted mother. She was devout and her religion meant a great deal to her. In 1862 and 1863 she suffered a long illness and was bedridden for two full years, even having to undergo an operation. After years of suffering she died July 14, 1878.

Karl Steinmann, the oldest son, received a good education including instruction in music, as he was planning to become a teacher. But he changed his mind and, at the age of 16, he volunteered for the army as a member of the band. He continued in this career for eleven years when poor health forced him to give it up. He then took a position with a Catholic institute in Carlsruhe. He married Anna Smith of Mühl-

berg, daughter of a pensioned foreman. During his army days he was considered the handsomest man in his regiment. Now he is a clerk and has a large family to support.

Johann Maximilian Steinmann (Max) after his 14th year was apprenticed to a tailor, Herr Ruppel in Lechlingen, the village where eighteen years later mother died. After finishing his apprenticeship he set out as a journeyman and worked for a long time in Hamburg, from which city father had him forcibly brought home in order to serve his required tour in the army. After his discharge from military duty he remained with his parents and opened a tailoring shop in Horheim. After father's retirement in 1874 Max was given the post of tax collector and he is still, in 1879, unmarried.

Adolf Gustav Steinmann, the youngest of this family and the writer of this chronicle, learned the trade of watchmaker. He was born 1851 in Bodman on Lake Constance. My youth, so far as I can recall it, dates back to 1854, at which time we were living in Ebingen. From there we moved to Moos on Lake Constance, where I first attended school. In Moos we carried on some agriculture and father planted the first tobacco in this region in association with the burgomaster. At the agricultural fair my father won the second prize as cultivator of tobacco. In 1857 or 1858 my mother and I went to Constance on Lake Constance in order to visit my brother Karl. There are few details of this trip that I can recall, except that from Constance we went per steamboat to Meersburg where my father had been stationed in 1852-1853. In Moos I attended the school of a certain Schlosser whose father was our landlord. Here it was that while we boys were playing Max hit me on the head with a bowling ball which caused a pretty deep wound on my forehead. In 1859 we moved to Arlen and from there to father's home town, Dillendorf. This is a little village surrounded by mountains and woods in the midst of the Black Forest. This region has very rocky soil, but yields nevertheless considerable grain. Fruit trees were scarce, but of wood there was abundant supply. The houses have roofs of either straw or shingles. In Moos the lake had been our playground and here it was the forest. If today I smell the resinous odor of pine trees then I am reminded of the tall, beautiful evergreens of my childhood home. To gather branches of felled trees and in general collect firewood for our family was my chief occupation. At times I accompanied my father when he went hunting. From here we were transferred to Waiblingen where I enjoyed the best schooling and broad education under a certain teacher by the name of Auer, whose children were my playmates. From here I was apprenticed to a Herr Moraller in Mühlberg near Karlsruhe. In 1866 I fell out with Karl, with whom I was living, and father fetched me home to Horheim to finish my apprenticeship under a Herr Walthe in Thiengen, an hour's walk from Horheim. While my first master had been a generous man, the second was of a low sort who forced me to do much of the housework and to take care of the children, all of which he rewarded with very little food and many beatings. Hence I learned very little of my trade and finished my apprenticeship in 1868 without very much knowledge. In fall I set out on travels in order to try my luck in foreign parts. After wandering about for six weeks I got my first job with my former teacher, Herr Moraller, and later I worked for a watchmaker in Stockach. Two weeks later I went to Waiblingen and from there home once more, where I remained for some months. In September, 1869, I set out once more and, after extensive travels and constant search for work and further training in my trade, I secured a job in the clock factory in Neustadt in the Black Forest. I had wandered on foot as a journeyman through Baden, Switzerland, Wuerttemberg, and part of Bavaria. I remained in Neustadt a year and a half and then found work in Lenzkirch, about half an hour's walk from Neustadt, in a factory which produced only delicate regulators and "Parisian" mantlepiece clocks. Here I worked for about six months until I had the opportunity to go to Turin, Italy. A German, M. Willmann, who had a business in Turin invited me to go there with him. I quickly picked up the Italian language and soon felt quite at home. What attracted me particularly were the theaters; Turin, a city of 150 to 175,000 inhabitants, had fifteen theaters, which during the winter season were crowded every single evening. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, 1870 to 1871, I was in Turin, almost twenty years old.

When the war came it was my firm intention to rush to the aid of my Fatherland, but on the advice of my employer I did not do so. My pass was valid until 1871,

i. e., until after the conclusion of this great war, which ended favorably for Germany. At the end of the war in March, 1871, the annual military draft was to take place, which otherwise was always held in autumn; thus I could not manage to be present. My father wrote in a letter I received March 20 that I was to be present at the draft scheduled for March 21, which was of course impossible in view of the fact that this would require a journey of three days. On April 5, 1871, on Palm Sunday morning at six o'clock I left Turin, arriving in Novarra at noon where I visited my friend who was working at my former job. I continued my journey on Monday by rail to Arona and from there by steamer to Magadino on the long lake (Lago Maggiore). I proceeded on foot the better to see this region which is so very beautiful. Italy, which even today I cannot forget, is unquestionably the most charming land I have ever seen. They have there all sort of fruits and excellent wines which are enjoyed even by the very poorest families. I should like to recommend to anyone who has a bit of money to settle down in Italy if he wants to enjoy life.

It was my intention to cross the St. Gotthard Pass on foot, but just as I reached the halfway mark of the climb I became faint and I was taken on a sleigh to the hospice where by means of a good hot soup my powers were restored. From here on I travelled by stage, having given up the idea of hiking. I crossed the Devil's Bridge, saw Altdorf, with the castle of Gessler, the tyrant who came to subdue the Swiss, and passed through Buerklen, the birthplace of William Tell, the liberator of Switzerland.

Here Steinmann's account comes to an end just before his emigration to Baltimore in 1871. He married Marie Neidhardt, a native of Baltimore, born there November 14, 1854. He moved to York, Pennsylvania, in 1876, but returned to Baltimore seven years later. He established himself as jeweler and watchmaker with a shop at 125 West Camden Street, and resided at 1238 Belmont Avenue until his death February 6, 1923, at the age of seventy-two. He had three sons, Lewis, born 1877, George, born 1883, and Karl, who became one of Baltimore's leading lawyers, born August 8, 1899. Adolf Steinmann became a leading member of the *Liederkrantz Singing Society* and later of the *Germania Maennerchor* when the two groups joined in 1899. As could readily be surmised from the account of his enjoyment of opera in Turin, Italy, music was the dominant interest in his life and in this field he scored some delightful successes.

The flood of songs provided by the poets of the Romantic movement in Germany during the early part of the nineteenth century led to the founding of numerous male singing societies which cherished these works. Immigrants to the United States brought with them this cultural heritage and the German arriving in the seventies in Baltimore came into an environment in which his native music was cultivated with great enthusiasm. As early as 1836 there had been founded the *Baltimore Liederkrantz*, a title that does not refer to cheese but means a "circle devoted to songs." It consisted of a group of men who met weekly to sing songs of the home land with occasionally new composition from the pens of their members. Of course, after their throats had become parched from vocal exertions the club settled down to sociability with foaming refreshments. It may be that in addition to the enjoyment of art the pleasure of a weekly "marital vacation" added to the popularity of the male singing societies.

Toward the end of the century there flourished an astonishingly large number of such singing societies comprising more than 500 members in Baltimore and environs, with the following names: 1. *Arion*; 2. *Harmonie*; 3. *Germania Maennerchor*; 4. *Frohsinn*; 5. *Arbeiter Maennerchor*; 6. *Locust Point Maennerchor*; 7. *Arbeiter Liedertafel*; 8. *Thalia*; 9. *Mozart Maennerchor*; 10. *Eichenkrantz*; 11. *Melodie*; 12. *Germania Quartette Club*; 13. *Metzger Gesangverein*; 14. *Edelweiss*. Some of these groups, interestingly enough,

were guild associations, as for example the *Metzger* (or Butchers) *Singing Society*, while the *Germania* was composed of business men, not all of them of German descent, for German music and *Gemütlichkeit* had a wide appeal.

The harmony engendered in these fourteen groups was not only musical but expressed itself in collective action. *The United Singers of Baltimore* joined in massive concerts, generally held in the concert hall of the *Germania Maennerchor* located at 410 and 412 West Lombard Street; the adjoining club house, spacious and comfortably appointed, served as the center for German hospitality, which was extended naturally enough to prominent Germans or German Americans who visited Baltimore. Thus Carl Schurz, ambassador, Civil War general, senator from Missouri, and cabinet member, was honored in 1879 on the occasion of a visit to Baltimore. At times the *United Singers* took part in memorial services organized by various groups in the city; for example, in 1898 in ceremonies arranged to honor the memory of Prince Bismarck, Chancellor of the German Empire, or in 1901 to memorialize the martyred President, William McKinley. In 1902 the United States extended wide hospitality from coast to coast to Prince Henry, brother of the German Kaiser, on the occasion of his official visit to the United States; the *United Singers* did their bit by serenading the royal visitor during his stop at Union Station while he was passing through Baltimore. Though these singing societies were founded chiefly for the purpose of fostering song and good fellowship they participated also actively in various works of charity, such as concerts for the benefit of the German Orphan Asylum or the Old People's Home.

Just as the sociable individual societies reached out for friendly union within their city, so the united singers of the cities of the Eastern Seaboard felt a desire to join with lovers of song in New York, Brooklyn, Camden, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Lancaster, Newark, Washington, Wilmington, Wilkes Barre, and other points north and south. They united with a membership of over 6,000 in the *Northeastern Saengerbund of America* and held triennial conventions. In 1903, for example, this vast group met in Baltimore for competitive contest and genial fellowship. Usually there were two types of competitions, one between groups with a chorus of over 200 members and another with a membership under 200 singers. The prizes were bronze busts of twice life size—for the larger group Mendelsohn and for the smaller Haendel.

Two other types of competitions were organized before the grand reunion. One was for the best poem to be set to music for which there arrived 57 entries; the judges, leading professors of literature from Johns Hopkins University and other colleges, awarded the prize to the Reverend A. W. Hildebrandt of Noblesville, New York. The other prize was for the best musical composition for which there were 398 entries from all over the United States and Germany; it was awarded by a panel of leading musical authorities to Mr. Louis Victor Saar of New York City. A special prize attracted very wide notice—a gift from his majesty, the German Emperor, William II. It was an exquisite work of the silversmiths art, a statuette two and a half feet high, wrought in gold and silver, representing a medieval German minstrel, said to have a value of \$20,000.

A four-day program was initiated by a concert on Sunday afternoon, June 14, in the Fifth Regiment Armory. There were orchestral and vocal numbers selected from the works of Wagner, Beethoven, Mendelsohn, Haendel, Victor Herbert, and Stephen Foster. As the finale, the Star Spangled Banner was sung by the entire audience in German in the excellent translation by the Baltimore poet, Eduard F. Leyh (1840-1901):

O sprich, kannst du seh'n bei der schwindenden Nacht,  
 Was wir freudig noch grüssten im Abendrotglanze:  
 Uns're Streifen und Sterne, die während der Schlacht  
 Im Winde geflattert, dort hoch auf der Schanze?  
 Der Racketen Gesaus und der Bomben Gebraus,  
 Verkünden durch's Dunkel: die Flagge hält aus!  
 O sprich! weht das Banner im Morgenlichtschein  
 Noch über den Helden, im Lande der Frei'n?

The forenoons of the following days were given over to rehearsals and in the afternoons the various local and visiting organizations competed, each with their special musical numbers. On Monday evening the high point of the program was reached in a concert of orchestral and vocal music in the course of which, after two Wagner numbers, the festival address was delivered by the President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. "Teddy" complimented the appreciative audience on the accomplishments of Germans in our various wars as well as in academic and civil life with the rousing energy for which he was noted.

The other day I went out to the battle-field of Antietam, here in Maryland. There the Memorial Church is the German Lutheran Church, which was founded in 1768, the settlement in the neighborhood of Antietam being originally exclusively a German settlement. There is a list of its pastors, and curiously enough, a series of memorial windows of men with German names—men who belonged to the Maryland regiment recruited largely from that region for the Civil War, which Maryland regiment was mainly composed of men of German extraction. In the Civil War it would be difficult to paint in too strong colors what I may well-nigh call the all-importance of the attitude of the American citizens of German birth and extraction toward the cause of the Union and liberty, especially in what were then known as the border states. It would have been out of question to have kept Missouri loyal had it not been for the German element therein. So it was in Kentucky—and but little less important was the part played by the Germans in Maryland.

Tuesday evening saw the competition for the Kaiser Prize between choruses from four different cities. Wednesday forenoon was given over to a parade to River View Park where a grand picnic was held which closed with the awarding of the prizes. For the following day optional tours were arranged to Gettysburg or to Annapolis for those who had sufficient stamina left after three days of glorious festivity.

Parades were quite the fashion in those dear, dead days beyond recall. A monster parade was organized by all Baltimore in 1880 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the city. It consisted of ten divisions, the third one comprised of marching groups of German singing societies, 45 in number, preceded by a tableau representing Apollo and the Muses. Leading as number one in the procession was the *Baltimore Liederkrantz*. In the ninth division the brewers appeared, 32 in number and all of them German, preceded by King Gambrinus with two pages and seventeen aids.

All the singing societies celebrated the carnival season, *mardi gras* or *Fasching* with a masked ball. The ladies, particularly, prepared their costumes with loving care, not only to win the prize, usually a gold watch, but also to appear so deftly disguised that not even their husbands could recognize them. At eleven o'clock the dancing would be interrupted by the coy unmasking of the harem beauties or the mythological goddesses, and all would sit down to a gay supper. Usually the best female comic mask would also be awarded a prize after it had caused considerable merry laughter. The guests finally went home in time to meet the milkman and usually were so pleased with the festivity that a sequel party or *Nachfeier*

*des Maskenballes* became a regular feature, sometimes referred to as *Katerbummel*. The price of admission to these latter parties was 25 cents for the gentlemen and 10 cents for the ladies, "including the cost of drinks." Tickets for the masked balls cost three dollars for gentlemen and one dollar for the ladies.

Just as in the life of man the birthday is marked by a celebration and the half-century date with especial force, so the societies had an annual *Stiftungsfest* and a really memorable fiftieth jubilee. In 1886 the *Liederkranz* had a *Jubelfeier* of its founding in 1836 which lasted three days with reception at the Concordia Opera House, a concert and ball at the Academy of Music, and a grand banquet. It appears from the program that one of the most famous Baltimoreans of all time, Othmar Mergenthaler, served on four committees: Music, House, Banquet, and Management. In 1906 the *Germania Maennerchor* had its golden jubilee with like festivities. To show how our ancestors could celebrate in the good old days before calories had been invented it may be of interest to present here the menu of the festival dinner:

Hearts of celery	Spanish olives
	Salted almonds
—————	
Blue points on half shell	
—————	
Croute au pot en tasse	Mazzini salt sticks
Filet of salmon, aux fine herbs	
—————	
Larded filet of beef	
French green peas	Potatoes à la chateau
—————	
Sweet Bread à la vinaigrette	
—————	
Roast Carolina Turkey	
Cranberry sauce	Stuffed lettuce salad
—————	
Westphalia ham	Brunswick asparagus
—————	
Transparent ice cream	
Germania Jubilee table piece	
Fruit	
—————	
Roquefort cheese	Crackers
—————	
Café Noir	

So much for the gastronomic part of the celebration. Regarding the concert the music critic of the *Baltimore News* had the following to say:

Concert at the Lyric in Celebration of The  
Germania Maennerchor's Fifty Years'  
Existence.

The Germans are certainly endowed with healthy enthusiasm, and they understand better than any other race how to make such a festival as was inaugurated by last evening's concert of the Germania Maennerchor at the Lyric in every way successful. The programme of the concert included male choruses, with and without accompaniment, mixed choruses with orchestra, female choruses with orchestra, soprani soli, and an overture. There were also four speeches, each and all short and to the point—full of good will, and controlled by good judgment.

The critic lists the program, consisting of numbers by Mozart, Wagner, Hugo Wolf, and other composers. He concludes with the following paragraph:

Altogether, the evening was delightful; not alone because of the artistic merit of the performances, but also because of the genuine *Gemuethlichkeit*, which pervaded stage and auditorium. May the Germania Maennerchor prosper and live to celebrate a centennial which shall eclipse this golden jubilee in brilliancy.

Adolf Steinmann not only enjoyed these musical and social events wholeheartedly, but he also contributed considerably to their success. The fragmentary records of the heyday of these singing societies tell of many of his activities and suggest that there were numerous others of which we have no knowledge. He was president of the *Liederkrantz* in 1894 and frequently his name appears as member of the music or the amusement committee. He was particularly active in negotiating in 1899 the union of the *Liederkrantz* (founded in 1836) with the *Maennerchor* (founded in 1856). With his magnificent bass voice he appeared on numerous programs with solo, duett, or quartette numbers. On March 7, 1907, the *Germania Maennerchor* held a competition for quartettes on which occasion Mr. Steinmann's group won first prize. He had genuine histrionic talent also and appeared in numerous comic numbers (e. g., *Photograph und Bauer*). Mr. Louis Kurtz, to whom I am indebted for some memories, recalls that Steinmann's humor was not of the slapstick variety, but it had like Charlie Chaplin's, always a distinct quality of pathos. To illustrate how outstanding Steinmann's bass voice was in the male chorus Mr. Kurtz tells the following: in rehearsals the director, Theodore Hemberger, frequently called somewhat caustically on different groups or individuals to render their parts alone, but when he turned to Steinman he would say, "*Majestät, wollen Sie auch diesen Passus singen!*" Steinman appeared frequently also in light operas; his son, Karl, recalls that at the age of 67 he sang the comic rôle of the burgomaster in Lortzing's *Zar und Zimmerman*. Adolf Steinmann is recalled by contemporaries as a man of genuine lovable qualities and great popularity in his circles. He deserves to be remembered as an outstanding contributor to musical culture in Baltimore.