

**The 75th Anniversary of the
Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland**



1886 — 1961

The Anniversary Address by Dr. Dieter Cunz

The Program of the Anniversary Observance

Baltimore, October 8, 1961

THE GERMANS IN MARYLAND:

A Story of Useful Citizens *

By DIETER CUNZ

"On the evening of January 5th, 1886, in answer to an invitation issued by Messrs. Louis P. Hennighausen, Edward F. Leyh, Charles F. Raddatz and Dr. W. S. Landsberg, a number of gentlemen met at the rooms of the Maryland Historical Society, to consider the desirability and feasibility of organizing a society for the purpose of collecting and preserving the material for the history of the influence and part of the Germans in the growth and development of the American Nation, especially in the State of Maryland."

These are the opening words of the *First Annual Report of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland*.

It is most appropriate that for its 75th anniversary the Society assembles again in the rooms of the Maryland Historical Society. Our meeting here should mean more than an appreciative and grateful remembrance of the hospitality granted to the Society three quarters of a century ago. It should underline the fact that the endeavors of this Society are an integral part of the efforts of the Maryland Historical Society, even more than that: an integral part of American historiography as a whole. Very little would be accomplished, if this Society were concerned with the German immigrants as an isolated element. Its *raison d'être* is and should be to show how the German immigrants and their children integrated themselves into the organism of the American society—to show what they gave and what they gave up. They gave their efforts, their skill, their Old-World experiences; they gave what are often called "typical German virtues": their dedication to work, their reliability and, last not least, their joy of living, which enlivened the somewhat grey and drab picture of a puritanical America with some spots of color. They also gave up important things; consciously and unconsciously, they cut themselves loose from the cultural bloodstream of their homeland; they gave up some of their German attitudes, their feeling of belonging to the old country even before they had taken roots in the new one,—gave up, finally, their language, because the word "mother tongue" did not mean any longer to the second generation what it had meant to the immigrants. It is this polarity between giving and giving up, between giving and taking that characterizes the relationship between the German immigrants and the New World. Of course, it was an accident that the first organized group of German immigrants to arrive in America was a group of weavers from Krefeld, but even in the acci-

* Address delivered at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland in the Library of the Maryland Historical Society on October 8, 1961.

dental we may find some symbolic significance. They wove themselves into the tapestry of American life. Theirs was the German thread, just as there was an Irish, a Scandinavian, an English, a Polish, an Italian, thin threads as long as they were alone, but woven together they formed the colorful pattern of a strong fabric.

From the very beginning the founding fathers of the Society proved that they were willing to "give up." English formed the common ground on which all nationalities in this immigrant country could meet. If the Society wanted to interpret the contributions of the German-American element to their fellow Americans, they would have to do so in English. Only if their proceedings and at least the greater part of their publications were in English could they break through a confining national parochialism and reach the minds of their fellow citizens of different extraction.

So I think it is not without significance that at the first meeting of the newly-born society it was resolved that the proceedings should be recorded in English, a decision which evidently was not reached easily, for the minutes tell us that it was preceded by "a prolonged and exhaustive debate." And incidentally it gives me a personal pleasure that in this first meeting a German from Ohio was elected a "corresponding member" (even without a prolonged debate): Heinrich Armin Rattermann of Cincinnati.

It was significant that the Society made its first public appearance when in August 1886 the DeKalb monument was dedicated in Annapolis. In Germany DeKalb had been an anonymous nobody. It was in America that he did the things that earned him a place in history. As a general in the War of Independence he led the Maryland troops in the battle of Camden and here gave his life for his new country. Of course, DeKalb is an exceptional case, by no means typical of the German immigrants as a whole. But this he had in common with most of them: the training, the skill, the experience gained in the Old World were placed at the service of the new homeland, and thereby assumed a new and personal meaning to the one who gave them.

The founders of the Society were not historians by profession. Louis Hennighausen was a lawyer; Heinrich Scheib and John Gottlieb Morris were pastors; Edward Leyh was a journalist, William Landsberg an insurance man, Lewis H. Steiner a librarian; John C. Hemmeter and Julius Goebel were university professors. There were a good number of well-known Baltimore business men: Christian Ax, William and Ernst Knabe, Henry Hilken, Georg Gail, Ernst Hoen, Georg Bauernschmidt, to mention only a few. Their interest in history was a hobby, pursued in the evening, on weekends, during vacation time. Some of the historical sketches and articles they wrote and published are naive and amateurish, yet we should not pass over them too lightly; almost all of them contain some information which is valuable to the professional historian.

These "Sunday historians" were at their best when they tackled a topic of clearly defined, limited scope. The most valuable of their products is perhaps Louis Hennighausen's *History of the German Society of Maryland*. For many years Hennighausen was the back-

bone of the Society, untiring in his *zeal* to unearth historical material that was pertinent to German immigration, indefatigable in his efforts to compile his findings into articles and to present them to the public. *The History of the German Society of Maryland* was the story of a great humanitarian endeavor which began in the eighteenth century—and it was this particular activity of an immigrant society that aroused Hennighausen's interest. The society had in the early nineteenth century attacked the barbaric redemption practices and had been the prime instrument in the fight for their abolition. Towards the end of the century the German Society again went into a battle, this time against brutal practices on the oyster dredgers of the Chesapeake Bay. Hennighausen himself was one of the lawyers who led the fight. He fought particularly for a young and helpless German immigrant, who had been cruelly mistreated on an oyster boat; but when the legislature in Annapolis finally passed a law to protect the men on the oyster boats, the fight had been won not only for the German immigrants, but for the Irish, Scotch, Swedish, Lithuanians, and all others as well.

This is the story which Louis Hennighausen told in his book, one of the first major publications of the "Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland." And it is worth noticing that his book was read, read aloud to the members of the Society, whenever Hennighausen had finished a chapter. In our hectic, noisy and restless time, which more and more capitulates to piped music and the cheap and shallow entertainment inflicted upon us by the television stations, these readings make a touching picture, taking us back to the years when the streets of Baltimore were illuminated by the faint and timid light of the gas lanterns and when the members of the German Historical Society would gather once a month and listen for two hours to what one of them had written during the preceding summer or in the first year of his retirement. People worked more than "forty hours a week"; although they had no time-saving gadgets and had to go to their meeting places on foot or ride in a slow and bumpy streetcar, they obviously had much more time and leisure than we have in our "Age of Anxiety."

In the beginning of the twentieth century interest in the Society (as in most other German-American organizations) declined. In the difficult years of the first World War and its aftermath less than twenty members assembled for the regular gatherings, but even then the Society did not die. In 1929 another *Report* was issued, the first publication after twenty-two years of silence. When in the thirties the Society received a substantial legacy from the estate of Mr. Ferdinand Meyer, it was quickly revitalized. However, I should hasten to point out that money alone cannot revive an anaemic organization. Whatever has been accomplished in the last twenty-five years could come about only because there was a genuine, renewed interest among the members. Publications came forth at regular intervals, and a concerted effort was made to have a comprehensive History of the Germans in Maryland written, a project which had been envisaged by the Society ever since the turn of the century. After almost fifty years of hoping and

planning, after three or four unsuccessful and fragmentary attempts, it finally became a reality when in 1948 the Princeton University Press, with the support of the Society, published the book *The Maryland Germans*. The old seal of the Society recommends a moderate speed: "Ohne Hast, ohne Rast." With regard to this project stretching over fifty years I certainly can attest that it was carried out "ohne Hast." I consider it a privilege that I was entrusted with this task. You will not expect me to evaluate my own work. I can only say what I attempted to do, and even in this I shall only quote a few lines from the Introduction to my book. I tried "to show why so many Germans came to Maryland, how they settled and how they took root, why they needed the country and why the country needed them, how their individual and collective existence was blended into the history of America." "It was," as I said, "the story of a special group under special circumstances, yet we may not be unjustified in hoping that from this special case some broader conclusions may be drawn for immigration history in general."

Fifty years ago, when the Society celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, an eminent historian, Professor Albert B. Faust of Cornell University, was invited to address the members. The title of his lecture was "Undercurrents of German Influence in Maryland." He described what the Germans had contributed in the terms of "blood, brawn, brain and buoyancy." These somewhat forced alliterations do not make things all too clear, so it may be helpful to add that he meant: what the Germans had contributed in biological substance, capability to do hard work, intellectual and educational efforts and through their joy of living, their love for music and art. Faust had to speak in very general terms. Very little was known at that time about the history of the Germans in Maryland. Today, we have a more specific knowledge, we see many things in wider perspectives and our attention has focussed on different problems.

What, we may ask again, are some of the characteristic features of the German immigrant who settled in Maryland?

I think the most positive statement we can make about him is that he adapted himself to the needs of the country. We recall Goethe's famous maxim: our noblest duty is to fulfill the demands of the day—"die Forderung des Tages." The Maryland Germans, over two and a half centuries, stand up well if we judge them by this standard. There was the first prominent German, Augustin Herrman, who drew a map of Maryland, very much needed in a colony still unsurveyed. There was John Lederer, who explored the Alleghany mountain region, into which no white man had penetrated—a great achievement in a continent still unexplored. There were, above all, the early settlers in Western Maryland, who tilled a soil still uncultivated. They, perhaps, show most strikingly how the country and the immigrants supplemented each other. Into a land without people came people without land. The old Calvert Colony between Potomac and Susquehanna was at that time in an economic crisis: its economy hinged too much and too exclusively on tobacco production and tobacco trade. Maryland was the Tobacco Coast of the Bay. When in the middle of

the eighteenth century German settlers began to cultivate the fertile land around Frederick and Hagerstown, the grain crop became a factor of ever increasing importance in the economic structure of Maryland. The German immigrant contributed exactly what the country needed in this particular historical moment.

And it was the production of grain, wheat and corn which accounts for the rapid rise of one city on the Chesapeake Bay, the City of Baltimore. The tobacco fields of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries clung close to the Tidewater region of the Bay. The grain crops of the Western Maryland Germans had to be traded through an urban, commercial center. It was the economic impact of the hinterland, settled by pioneer farmers whose names were Schley, Stoll, Schmidt, Schweinhardt, Goetz, Roessler, Lehnich, that created the necessity for a trading center in the northwestern corner of the Bay.

This was the main function of the city and the port of Baltimore at the end of the eighteenth century. And who were the traders? Here again we find the Germans: merchants, shipping agents, insurance agents whose names were Zollicker, Stouffer, Schroeder, Brune, Anspach, Mayer, Von Kapff. Around 1800 there began the long and fruitful trade relationship between the two cities of Baltimore and Bremen which grew closer with every decade of the nineteenth century.

The Bremen merchants who arrived in Baltimore at the end of the eighteenth century did not have to start German life and German institutions in the city. That had been done long ago. Zion Church had been founded in 1755. Charles Frederick Wiesenthal, the physician, was one of the most highly respected citizens during the revolutionary era. The German Society had begun its work in 1783. Nicholas Hasselbach had established the first print shop (German and English) before 1770. Henry Dulheuer and Samuel Sower had published German newspapers.

The German farmers in Western Maryland, although living in the most peaceful relations with their neighbors of English and Irish descent, were still a rather distinct and cohesive group. All sermons in the Lutheran and Reformed churches of Frederick and Hagerstown were held in German. John Gruber founded the famous *Hagerstown Almanack*, which in its English edition is still published today. Mathias Bartgis, the German printer in Frederick, operated a print shop and published German papers in Western Maryland and Virginia.

We should not convey the impression that all these enterprises were crowned with success. To be sure, the German edition of Gruber's *Almanack* continued uninterruptedly for 121 years. But for most other German newspapers it was an uphill fight and more often than not they met defeat. Quite frequently, in fact, there was defeat from the outset, as for John Frederick Amelung's attempt to produce beautiful ornamental glass at a time when the country needed simple window panes and medicine bottles. But mostly the defeats did not break these pioneers; it just made them harder. They made a new start and adjusted their ambitions to the demands of the day and of the country.

While the German farmers in the Western counties began to lose

their German identity around 1830, the German element in Baltimore received fresh blood through the immigration which began just around that time. If we speak primarily in terms of statistics, German immigration into the United States is predominantly a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Between 1830 and 1930 more than six million Germans emigrated from Germany to the United States, and Baltimore got a good share of them.

While in the eighteenth century people often came for religious reasons, we now find quite often the political refugee among those who arrived on the immigrant ships. The important part played by the emigrating Forty-eighters is so well known that we do not have to elaborate upon it. But the overwhelming majority of immigrants, German or otherwise, came for economic reasons: skilled and unskilled laborers, artisans and craftsmen, the butcher and baker, all those who hoped that they would find their place in an expanding country and an expanding society. They all were small people. The story of immigration is the saga of the common man.

They did not always admit that they had come primarily because they hoped to improve their economic status. Many of them made a curious experience when they arrived. If the newcomer admitted that he expected to earn more money in America, that here he would get on his own feet earlier than at home, he often got the chilling reply: "Don't think that in this country money grows on trees, you may have to work harder here than at home." If, however, he said: "I came because I love your democratic institutions, your form of government, your religious tolerance," then everybody opened his arms: "Brother, let me embrace you! Can I help you in any way? "

No matter what the real or pretended reason for their emigration may have been, the various groups of German immigrants in Baltimore developed their own institutions and their distinct social habits. They founded their singing and gymnastic societies, carried on their church activities in German, read their German newspapers, the *Correspondent* and the *Wecker* and numerous others; they had their charitable institutions and their banks and insurance companies, their theatrical performances and literary circles; they celebrated together and quarreled with each other in German, aware of their own German-American identity and somewhat different from their neighbors, but always respected and very seldom resented by these neighbors. They preserved old customs and accepted new ones. By a very slow process of acculturation and assimilation, without undue haste and stretching over three or four generations, they became Americans. And only because they were somewhat slow in becoming Americanized, they were able to transmit to their fellow Americans certain values which would have died in an all too rapid transition.

Around 1890 more than 32,000 Maryland residents were German-born. In the City of Baltimore more than one fourth of the 360,000 white inhabitants belonged to the German-American sector of the population, i. e., were either German-born or second generation German-American. Like many other American cities, such as Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Buffalo, St. Louis and numerous others, Baltimore had its "Little Germany."

It was at this time that the "Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland" was founded. The founding fathers must have had some premonition that this flowering of German-American activities was something transitory, that some day it would be history and that then this history should be written. That is why they decided "to gather, utilize, publish and preserve" material pertaining to the history of the German element in the state.

The last third of the nineteenth century was the Golden Age of the German-Americans. They, as Carl Schurz said in 1904, presented "the living demonstration of the fact that a large population may be devoted to the new fatherland for life and death, and yet preserve a reverent love for the old."

Carl Schurz spoke of "life and death." In those happy five decades between the Civil War and the First World War the German-Americans could *live* for their new homeland. After 1914 they had to prove that they were willing to *die* for it, that they were ready to fight for it, even against the country to which they were still emotionally attached, since it was the land of their ancestors. No other sizable group in this country was ever confronted with such a painful decision. They have often been severely criticized for what they did or failed to do in the years of the First World War. But those who have never felt the burden of such a trying test hardly have the right to sit in judgment over the generation of the German-Americans of 1917. Once the die was cast, once the diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany were broken off, the course of the German-Americans was clear. When they had to choose between the land of their fathers and the land of their children, they left the past behind and turned towards the future.

The German-Americans of 1930 were different from those of 1880. The vast majority of them was second, third, fourth generation American. Many of them had never seen Germany. They had a friendly, but distant interest in Germany, and they kept alive the folk traditions of their parents and grandparents in various clubs and organizations. Whether native or immigrant, men with such names as Schneidereith, Scholz, Stein, Dederer, Prior, Schuler, Dohme, Hofmann, Steinmann, Kurtz, Becker, Franke, Evers, Mencken were respected as substantial citizens. They dressed like the others, liked the same food, spoke the same English; in fact, one of them, H. L. Mencken, spoke a considerably better English than most of his countrymen. (He himself would disagree here, since he claimed that he did not speak English but American.) They all found their place in the social structure of the country. They all proved that they were ready to die for and, what is equally important, capable of living a useful life in this society. They were willing to live according to the "demands of the day."

This is the story of the Germans in Maryland, and this is the story which has been told in these seventy-five years by the "Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland." It is the story of useful citizens.

In the summer of 1948, when the manuscript of my study on the Maryland Germans was already in the Princeton print shop, I happened to re-read the novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, which contains so much of the wisdom of the old Goethe. There I came upon the following sentence: "It has often been said: 'Where I am well, there is my homeland.' But, this comforting maxim were better worded: 'Where I am useful, there is my homeland!' At home someone may be useless, and the fact will not be noticed at once. Abroad in the world the useless person will soon be noticed. So, if I say: 'Try to be useful everywhere, to yourself and to others,' then this is neither doctrine nor counsel, but the dictum of life itself."

I copied the passage quickly and rushed it to Princeton. And I hope you will agree with me that it is an appropriate motto for THE MARYLAND GERMANS.

Joint Meeting of the
MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AND THE
SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF THE GERMANS
IN MARYLAND

H. IRVINE KEYSER MEMORIAL
201 W. Monument Street, Baltimore 1, Maryland
October 8th, 1961



PROGRAM

Invocation. Rev. E. F. Engelbert
Welcome. Hon. George L. Radcliffe
Anniversary Remarks. A. E. Zucker
Address. Dieter Cunz

MUSICAL PROGRAM

First Movement: Allegro
String Quartet, Op. 50, no. 6. Haydn
Old Black Joe. Foster
Arranged for String Quartet by Pochon
Menuetto
String Quartet, No. 21, K.575. Mozart
Scherzo
String Quartet, Op. 41, No. 1. Schumann
Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes. Traditional
Arranged for String Quartet by Pochon
Finale
String Quartet, Op. 50, No. 6. Haydn
William Martin, First Violin
Cline Otey, Second Violin
Raymond Kinschner, Viola
Wallace Toroni, Cello
(Members of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra)
The music is provided by courtesy of the Music
Performance Trust Fund and the Musical Union
of Baltimore City Local No. 40.



Refreshments in Main Gallery

75th ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE
William Trammell Snyder, Chairman; Rev. Fritz O. Evers;
Otto H. Franke; F. W. Pramschufer, Sr.; C. W. Schneidereith

