

GENERAL WASHINGTON

AND THE

GERMAN-AMERICANS.



## General Washington and the German-Americans.

*By L. P. Hennighausen.*

GENERAL WASHINGTON was born and raised on the banks of the Rappahannock not far from Fredericksburg, A short distance above Fredericksburg was one of the oldest German settlements in Virginia; it is still known by the name of Germania Ford. A German colony had settled there in 1714 under the auspices of Governor Spotswood. Washington in early life became acquainted with the German-Americans and always remained their true friend. When he undertook his first exploration in Western Virginia as a surveyor he found that part, then the Western frontier, settled by Germans, and made large investments in purchase of land near their settlements. When the revolutionary war broke out, the German-Americans were almost to a man on the side of Independence, Whilst a large part of the English were Tories. Many of the German neighbors of Washington enlisted in the army. We have the biography of one, an officer of the Prussian army, who had come to America with Lord Fairfax after the seven years war, and whom I suppose to be Major von Heer, who gives us a most interesting picture of the private and family life of Washington at home.

This officer had married one of the daughters of these early German settlers and was cultivating a farm as well as attending to Lord Fairfax's affairs, when the unmistakable signs of the impending revolution appeared. He cast his lot with his adopted country and rendered good services during the war.

Washington in the first year of the war was often endangered and still more amazed by the treacherous schemes of the Tories, which went so far as to plan the capture of his person in the midst of the camp and deliver it to the English. The plot was discovered and one of his soldiers court-martialed and shot. Washington then petitioned congress for leave to organize

an independent troop of horse, which were placed under the command of Major von Heer and served as Washington's body guard during the close of the war. The last surviving member of this body guard was Ludwig Bayer who died on the 19th of September, 1843, aged 87 years, at Pique, Miami county, Ohio. Col. John Johnston of the U. S. Army published in 1849 in the "Cincinnati Advertiser" a biography of this revolutionary veteran, which is preserved in the archives of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio. Col. Johnston was the President of the Historical Society and at one time an Assistant Secretary of War in Washington. He says that every member of Washington's body guard was a German-American. Ludwig Bayer had the following well authenticated letter in the hand-writing of Col. Cobb, Adjutant, and with the genuine signature of General Washington, in his possession.

"By his Excellency, GEO. WASHINGTON, Esq., General and Commander-in-Chief of the Forces of the United States of America.

The bearer, Lewis Bayer, private dragoon in the Independent troop of horse, commanded by Major von Heer, being enlisted for the war and having served the term of his engagement, consented to continue in service until the 31st day of December, from which date on he is hereby discharged from the American army. And in consequence of his attention and fidelity, the Commander-in-Chief, being authorized by Congress, presents him with the horse and arms and accoutrements now in his possession as a gratuity.

Given at Philadelphia, this 10th day of December 1783.

*By his Excellency's command:*

Signed, GEO. WASHINGTON.

Signed, DAVID COBB, Aid-de-Camp."

Col. Reed, who was born in Trenton, New Jersey, of German parents and who could speak and write German fluently, was the Private Secretary and Adjutant of Gen. Washington. Washington seems to have had a liking for his German-American countrymen, for we find not only many of his personal friends among them, but also a number of very favorable letters written by him of German-Americans. His coachman in Philadelphia was a German. The last religious service he attended with his whole staff was in the German Reformed Church of Philadelphia, and his letter to the Pastor of the church in praise of the German-American element as citizens of this country is a well-known historical document.