

JOHANN THOMAS SCHLEY (1712-1790) SCHOOLMASTER, MUSICIAN AND FRAKTUR ARTIST OF FREDERICK, MARYLAND

In trying to piece together the life story and achievement of German colonial immigrants most researchers are confronted with two problems. One is the dearth of contemporary material in German. Older records in German were often discarded by a posterity that could no longer read German or as was the case in World War I did not want to be identified with an enemy people. The other difficulty is the ready availability of fabricated "source" material. The true importance of the lives of certain German immigrants of the eighteenth century has been obscured by the exaggerated accounts of proud, but overly zealous descendants. One of the most common ambitions of the chronicler of a family history was (and is) to establish the ancestor as the very first settler in a given area. Next comes the desire to trace him to a prominent family in Europe and make him the leader and organizer of a group of persecuted emigrants. Schley family historians felt obliged to add such unnecessary glitter to their common ancestor's life story because several of his descendants had become prominent during the nineteenth century. Two of his grandsons who moved south did quite well in Georgia. William Schley was elected to Congress and for a brief time (1835-37) served as governor of Georgia. One of the smallest counties was given his name. His brother was a justice on the supreme bench of the state. A great-grandson, Winfield Scott Schley (1839-1909), was a successful naval officer. He achieved fame because of his participation in a very dangerous rescue operation in the arctic in 1884 and his victory in the battle of Santiago during the Spanish-American War.¹

The resulting story of Johann Thomas Schley always begins as follows: "Thomas Schley landed in America in 1735 with about one hundred Palatine families."² In several accounts it is asserted that these people all came from the Landau area, preferably from Appenhofen. This led to the claim that Schley

was the business agent of the Appenhofer colonies. Since no interesting fact about Schley's parents could be located, there was at least the often-repeated story that his wife was a daughter of General Wintz who died during the battle of Parma in Italy in 1714.³

Unfortunately there are letters extant which Thomas Schley wrote to his father-in-law, Georg Wintz, Sr., in 1752 and 1761. An entry in the Billigheim Reformed Church register in 1743 clearly shows that Schley was then still **Schuldiener** (the common word in the Palatinate for parochial school teachers) in the small village of Appenhofen. The first documented record of Schley in Maryland concerns the baptism of one of his daughters in October, 1746, in the Lutheran Church record of the Frederick congregation. Furthermore, in his letter of March, 1761, Thomas Schley complains to his brother-in-law that he had not received a letter from him in all the 16 years that he has been in Maryland. From these scattered sources it may be safely assumed that the emigration took place in 1744/45. In the absence of ship arrival records for Annapolis, a lengthy search through contemporary sources was necessary in order to locate the ship on which immigrants came directly to Maryland.

Among the papers of Charles Calvert II, Fifth Lord Baltimore, in the Maryland Archives are two letters translated from the "Dutch Language" which were transmitted to him by Daniel Dulany, a prominent merchant and lawyer in Annapolis. Both were obviously written by Germans upon Dulany's urging. They were designed to entice other Germans to come to Maryland. The first letter was composed by settlers who had come "some Years since" from Pennsylvania. It is full of praise for the fertile land and the "full Liberty of Conscience." The second letter is of particular interest because it informs us of the unexpected arrival of Germans in Annapolis, where those who could not pay for their pas-

sage were redeemed by Daniel Dulany. They were settled by him on his lands along the Monocacy which he had acquired from Benjamin Tasker in 1744. When he inspected the considerable acreage known as "Tasker's Chance" in the same year, he was impressed by the progress German farmers in the neighborhood had made in an area that had been a wilderness fifteen years before. Dulany, by the way, had had earlier dealings with the Germans on the Monocacy when he sold them supplies in 1739. Now that he owned land in the back parts and was convinced of the usefulness of German settlers, the unanticipated arrival of a shipload of emigrants from the Rhinelands found him willing to pay out £245 sterling to obtain the service and good will of more than 40 "full freights" among them.⁴

These new arrivals provided Dulany with the second letter meant to be circulated in the home villages of the emigrants. It began by telling how they had not arrived at their original destination, Philadelphia:

We take this Opportunity to Acquaint you that the Ship in w^{ch} we agreed to go Pennsylvania is not Arrived but in the province of Maryland, where we found many of our Countrymen that have Estates & Live very Comfortably, they received us wth great Kindness....

Citing Dulany's payment "to free us from the Captain's power," they added: "we are perswaded that this Gentleman will be Serviceable to Aid and Assist all Germans that will settle in this Province."⁵

The story told here by some of the passengers can be verified from other sources. A court case in 1766 in Augusta County, Virginia, concerning a dispute over an inheritance, reveals the experience of several emigrants from Hallau in Canto Schaffhausen. According to the testimony of Hans Fotsch, a group left their home village in the spring of 1744. They boarded a Philadelphia-bound vessel in Holland together with other passengers, mainly from the Palatinate. During and after the required customs stopover in Plymouth, the Hallau people suffered some loss of lives. The voyage was lengthy and perilous. Instead of landing in Philadelphia, the ship carried them to Maryland. Fotsch and

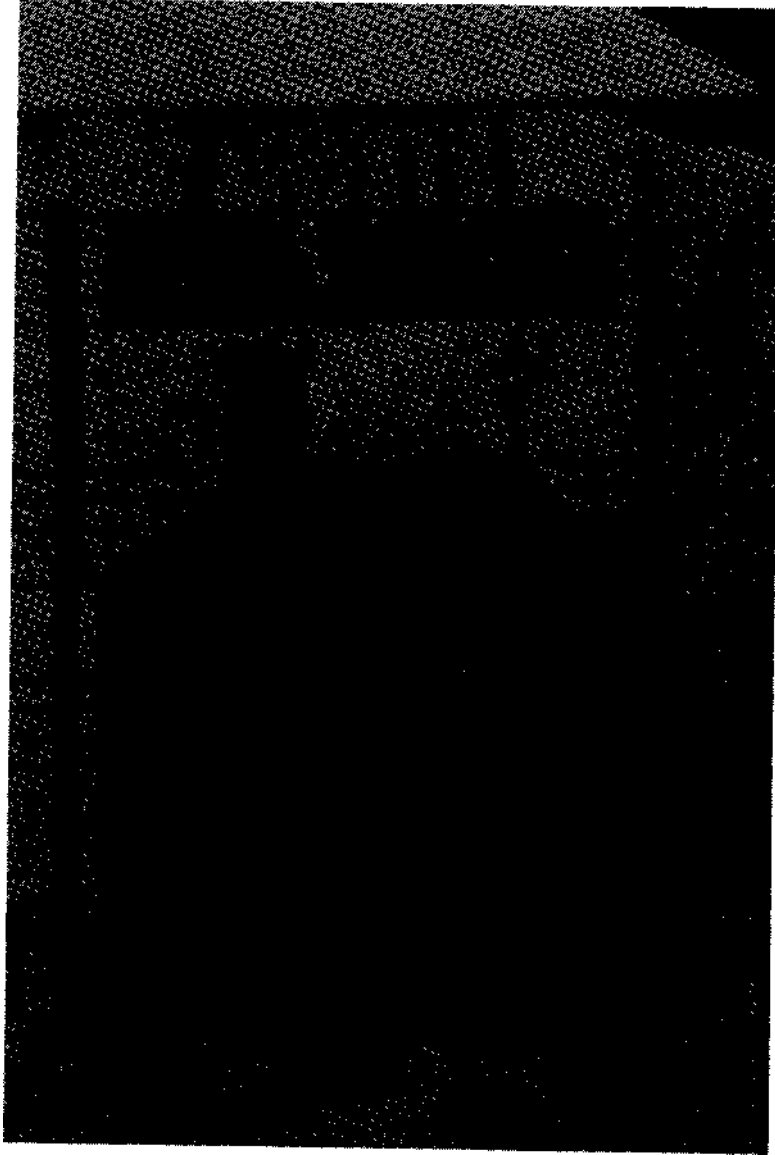
several others who still had sufficient means to pay the captain, continued the trip on their own to their original destination, the Tulpehocken settlement in Pennsylvania.⁶

Christopher Sauer's newspaper in Germantown reported in the February 16, 1744/45 issue that a ship with Germans, chartered by Captain Stedman for Philadelphia, had already entered the Delaware but went back to sea and "entered the Susquehanna and so reached Maryland."⁷ John Stedman, the Rotterdam shipper, had indeed chartered an additional ship for the Philadelphia run in May 1744. It was the *Rupert* under Captain Richard Parker to which Stedman assigned 150 "Palatine" passengers in Rotterdam.⁸ The voyage of the *Rupert* was unduly long because she did not arrive at Annapolis until early January 1744/45. A look at the entire Palatine fleet of 1744 helps to explain her erratic course. Of the nine vessels loaded with German and Swiss emigrants in Rotterdam, only one reached Philadelphia in early October after a relatively uneventful passage. The very successful operations of Spanish and French warships and privateers threw the routine North Atlantic run into complete disarray. Two vessels with Germans were captured. Others were chased by privateers and, in trying to outsail enemy ships, were forced off-course even after reaching the mouth of the Delaware. Only four more emigrant ships made it to Philadelphia after ten, even thirteen weeks at sea.

Joh. Thomas Schley-School Teacher at Appenhofen

Due to the loss of many records in the Landau area during repeated warfare in the early part of the eighteenth century, virtually nothing is known about Schley's family. In recent years a rather substantial house in Mörzheim (now incorporated into Landau) has been identified as the Schley home and a black marble tablet was put up in his memory in 1962. The name Schley appears rather frequently in the council protocols of Landau during the seventeenth century.

Johannes Thomas Schley was born on August 31, 1712, in Mörzheim, the son of Nicolaus and Eva Brigitta Schley. He must have



The stone house which was the first home of the Schley family in 1746. Above a scene from the old country, evoking the skyline of Speyer. (Photo by Allen Smith, Jr. for the Historical Society of Frederick County)



*The schoolhouse of the Reformed congregation — one of the watercolor miniatures in Thomas Schley's hymnal.
(Photo by Allen Smith, Jr. for the Historical Society of Frederick County)*

received a solid education to judge from his later activities. During his young adult life, according to a letter of 1761, he accumulated some savings "which I earned the hard way long ago." The meager salary of a village school teacher in the Palatinate at that time barely provided enough for the upkeep of a family. But all we know of Schley prior to his coming to America is the fact that he served as **Schuldiener** in the small village of Appenhofen. There he married Maria Margaretha in 1735. She was the daughter of Georg Wintz of Appenhofen. They had five children before they emigrated in 1744.⁹

Schoolmaster in the New Town of Frederick

When the redeemed passengers of the *Rupert* arrived on Daniel Dulany's land on the Monocacy, they found numerous settlers there who had come from the Palatinate and Switzerland by way of Pennsylvania. Lutherans and Reformed had already organized a union church and in 1743 built a large log

cabin just south of Jimtown, about four miles from the Monocacy, which served as their common meeting place. The coming of an experienced school teacher was a boon to the frontier community. In September, 1745, Dulany had a town laid out in the southern part of Tasker's Chance. The new place was given the name Fredericktown. He set aside lots for the Anglican, Reformed and Lutheran congregations. Since both the German Reformed and the Lutherans had now sufficient numbers to begin separate organizations, they also held their worship in the new town as soon as buildings were erected. Under Schley's leadership, the Reformed congregation built a schoolhouse which also served as a meeting place for Sunday services.¹⁰ By 1746, the Schleys had their sixth child, a daughter born in Frederick. She was the first child in the new settlement of which there is any record. When the Swedish Lutheran clergyman Gabriel Naesman visited the area on October 31, 1746, he baptized her.¹¹

From the outset Thomas Schley did not limit his work to teaching school. The full scope of his activities was best described by the leader of the German Reformed Church, the Rev. Michael Schlatter, who visited the new town of Frederick twice, in May 1747 and again a year later: "It is a great advantage to this congregation that they have the best schoolmaster that I have met in America. He spares neither labor nor pains in instructing the young and edifying the congregation according to his ability, by means of singing, and reading the word of God and printed sermons on every Lord's day." On May 7th, 1747, Schlatter had held a service in the schoolhouse. He was full of praise for the congregation. "... it appears to me to be one of the purest in the whole country, ... one that is free from the sects, of which, in other places, the country is filled."¹² The last remark was somewhat premature because on March 1, 1748, Thomas Schley wrote a letter to Schlatter in Philadelphia, informing him that the Dunker sect in the vicinity had diverted two of the Reformed members from the church and was very active in trying to convert others. The letter was also signed by the five elders of the congregation. They asked not only for advice but also urged Schlatter to return for another visit to Frederick.¹³ The Reformed leader came back in May. Work on the new church had proceeded well enough that the communion service could be held in the yet unfinished building. It was a highly emotional occasion on which Schlatter wrote in his diary: "After the sermon, I administered the Holy Supper to ninety-seven members, baptized several adult persons and children, married three betrothed couples, and installed new elders and deacons." Thomas Schley was one of the latter, an office that he held until his death.¹⁴

For four years more, Schley conducted the Sunday services and read the scriptures and printed sermons until Schlatter found a young minister to assume the Frederick charge. The Rev. Theodor Frankenfeld was installed by Schlatter in May 1753 after having served in Frederick and at the rural Monocacy congregation for several months on trial. When he attended the Reformed Coetus in

Lancaster in the autumn of 1752, the minutes recorded that Frankenfeld "praises his school teacher" and asked that he may not be forgotten when new funds were received from the churches in Holland. Indeed, Thomas Schley received £6 in 1753.¹⁵

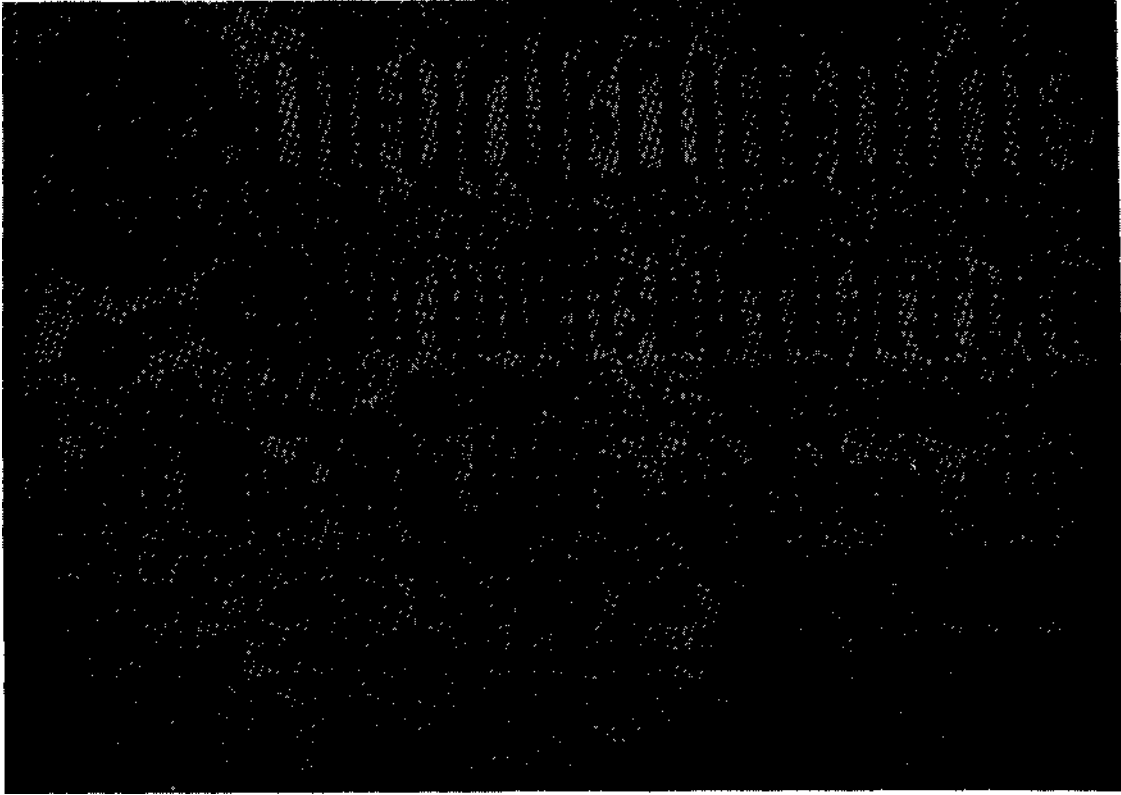
Although the church had regular pastors most of the time, there were still frequent occasions when Schley conducted the services because most of the Frederick pastors also tended to other Reformed churches in Maryland and nearby Virginia. The congregation and with it the number of pupils grew steadily. In 1756, when a church ordinance was introduced, eighty-nine heads of families put their signature under it. There were quite a few members from Schley's home area in the Palatinate apart from his own relatives, e.g. Valentin Schwartz from Mörzheim, Peter Hauck from Klingen, Andreas Eberhardt from Rohrbach and Johannes Lingenfelder from Steinweiler.¹⁶

In November 1763 Thomas Schley was heading the building committee for a new church. By the end of 1764 the new house of worship was used for the first time. The old church building was dismantled and some of the materials were sold to the schoolmaster for a consideration of £10.¹⁷

Master of Calligraphy and Song

For a long time it was only the Rev. Schlatter's remark about Schley leading the congregation in hymn singing that pointed to another gift of the schoolmaster. Only after German folk art of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century became popular in recent decades, did some of the remarkable creations of Thomas Schley come to light. Beautifully decorated sheets and entire books of hand-written church music were preserved by some of his descendants and a few collectors of local lore.

The Historical Society of Frederick County has in its collections the most striking of Schley's works that has come down to us. It is a leather-bound volume of 282 pages, measuring 11 by 20 cm. It contains the tunes and texts of 154 church hymns. While the staff lines and the lettering alone are testimony to masterful work, there are numerous illustrations and



Vorschrift of various *fraktur* styles by Thomas Schley. This example of his work was featured in the New York exhibition "American Fraktur: Graphic Folk Art 1745-1855" at Pratt Graphics Center in 1976/77.
(Photo: Manuscript Division, Maryland Historical Society)

colorful decorations in the tradition of Palatine folk art. Most of the hymns, as Schley indicates, are from the Lutheran *Hallesche Gesangbuch* (Halle Hymnal) and the *Pfälzische Gesangbuch* (the Palatine Hymnal) of the Reformed Church. But a closer look also reveals that Schley himself wrote hymns as his added words indicate: "Musicalische Melodey — meine Eigene" (Musical melody — my own). Besides the flowers, cherubs and other folk motifs, we find buildings on some pages that resemble the first stone church of the Reformed congregation or the family home in Frederick. Above the latter is a skyline that looks like the spires and towers of the Imperial City of Speyer on the Rhine. The title page in beautiful, decorative calligraphy reads: "Singet dem Herrn in euren Herzen" (sing praise to the Lord in your hearts). It may be assumed that Thomas Schley later gave this music book to his grandson, Johannes Schley.

A special page of dedication was glued into the front cover of the volume. Later on, the obituary note that appeared in a Baltimore newspaper after Schley's death was copied by hand onto the back cover.

Thomas Schley also produced other **Fraktur** pieces such as certificates of merit for his pupils. Outstanding is the **Vorschrift**, a sample of various types of Gothic writing and regular German and Latin script, which has been preserved by the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore. He signed it: "Johannes Thomas Schley Reformed Schoolmaster in Frederick Town, the 30th of September anno 1773, 61 years and 26 days old."

At about the same time as the **Vorschrift**, one of Schley's dreams came true. His church ordered a pipe organ from David Tannenberger in Lititz, Pennsylvania after a successful fund-raising collection to purchase an organ and install two bells in the new church

spire. Now Thomas Schley also became the organist of the Frederick Reformed Church.¹⁸

Some Personal Notes of Schley's Life in Frederick

In the absence of any personal diaries or notes it is very difficult to describe in any fashion the life of the Schley family during the 45 years in which Thomas Schley was, as J. Thomas Scharf, the historian of Western Maryland, characterizes him, "the mainstay of the church," as the historian of western Maryland characterized Thomas Schley. In view of the extremely modest remuneration parochial schoolmasters received in most congregations in the Palatinate as well as in America, it is surprising that Schley could buy four lots in the new town on May 10th, 1746. Later we also find a "Thomas Sligh" as owner of a strip of land in the heart of present-day Baltimore. It is known that he carried on "a great variety of business" during his life in Frederick.¹⁹

A chance discovery in the Speyer archives of two letters written by him to the relatives back home proves that he had remained in touch with those he and his wife had left behind. Both letters found their way into the official files only because they dealt with family finances and were most likely submitted by the Wintz family in connection with legacy problems.²⁰ The only relatives living in Frederick County were his wife's sister Sibilla and her husband, Georg Stoeckle. In his letter of October 14, 1752, which was addressed to both his brother-in-law Jacob Baltzel and his father-in-law Georg Wintz, Sr., Schley expressed his sorrow that the latter "in his old age, ... has such a hard time making ends meet, while he has been fairly well *off* in my time." Thomas Schley does not want him to suffer and encourages him "to take what he needs from my wife's inheritance, not lightly, though." There must have been a substantial legacy from his mother-in-law because he also writes that he will settle with Georg Stoeckle "matters with respect to his wife's maternal inheritance, which I bought from her, as you probably know."

In the other letter, written on March 5, 1761, partly to Georg Wintz, Sr. and partly to his son

by the same name, Schley advises them to come over, if possible bringing his own "poor old father" along. In such case, Thomas Schley writes, "sell my property as well as yours and give my father as much as he needs for the trip." Turning to his brother-in-law, Georg Wintz, Jr., he tells him not to come to Maryland if his own father does "not wish to move away with you." But in the next paragraph he assures him that "here you would be much better off than over there."

As to a home visit, he says how much he would like to do it "but my situation will hardly allow me to undertake such a costly trip, and it would be difficult to leave my large family." Only his brother-in-law Jacob Baltzel heeded the appeal to come over as the membership lists of the Frederick church reveal.²¹

Thomas and Margaretha Schley had nine children during the first twelve years of their marriage. Five were born in Germany:

Georg Jacob (1735)	Maria Anna (1741)
Johann Georg (1737)	Maria Margaretha (1743)
Georg Thomas (1738)	

The next four children were born in Frederick:

Maria Barbara (1746)	Johann Jacob (1751)
Eva Catharina (1749)	Sibilla (1754)

It is well known that the German population of Frederick was very much in favor of the separation from British rule. It was also fortunate for Thomas Schley that his church had a pastor from 1770 until 1784 with whom he could work together in full harmony. The preceding five years had placed a heavy burden on Schley's shoulders. There were long intervals without a pastor. The young minister, Friedrich Ludwig Henop, came from Kaiserslautern in the Palatinate. When he assumed his pastorate in 1770 there were 192 families listed as communicants in Frederick and two nearby rural congregations. By 1776 this number had increased to 231. The parochial school had 160 pupils in 1776. Many members of the Reformed church were involved in political activities when the American Revolution began. As early as January, 1775, a Committee of Observation was formed for which Thomas Schley served as collector.²²

After the war, the congregation had



*Dedication to Schley's grandson Johannes which was glued inside the front cover of the hand-written and decorated hymnal.
(Photo by Allen Smith, Jr. for the Historical Society of Frederick County)*

another pastor who was the first one to have been trained in America, John William Runkel. There is a record of a congregational meeting one day after the new minister had assumed his duties. On November 29, 1784, the members voted to elect a new schoolmaster. Thomas Schley, who was seventy-two years old, was evidently determined to hold on to his position. It is not known who the other candidate was but he was defeated and "such a scene of confusion followed" that Reverend Runkel "wept for sorrow over the weaknesses of the people."²³ In 1785 a large German-English dictionary was acquired which bears the inscription: "Johann Thomas Schley, Reform. Schulmeister in Friedrichstadt, 1785," a sure indication that he prevailed during the voting.²⁴

Pastor Runkel made the following entry in the death of his church on November 1790:

THOMAS SCHLEY, first teacher in this congregation, born August 31, 1712 at Mörzheim in Germany, was married to Margaret Wintz

(an. 1735), which latter died in June last. They lived in wedlock nearly 55 years, had nine children, of whom 8 are still living. He had been suffering for some time with asthma, but was confined to bed for one day only. He died yesterday morning, 10 o'clock, aged 78 years, 2 months and 23 days.

The prominence of this parochial schoolmaster is also attested by a notice in the *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* on December 7th, 1790. More than seven years later Schley was remembered in the local newspaper *The Key* in a "Sketch of Frederick County," which appeared in the issue of January 27, 1798:

The first house was built by Mr. Thomas Schley, in 1746. This gentleman died in 1790, aged 78, after having had the satisfaction of seeing a dreary wood, late the habitation of bears, wolves, deer, and c. and the occasional hunting ground of the gloomy savage, converted into a flourishing town, surrounded by fertile country, smiling with yellow harvests, and comfortable farm-houses, interspersed with handsome seats, the happy reward of enterprising, persevering industry.

—Klaus Wust
New York City

NOTES

¹For Thomas Schley's prominent descendants see Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States* (Boston, 1909) II, 175, 570-1.

²Dieter Cunz, *The Maryland Germans* (Princeton, NJ, 1948), 68-9.

³Several papers contributed by Schley family historians were consulted in the collections of the Institut für Pfälzische Geschichte und Volkskunde in Kaiserslautern. An updated file on Thomas Schley is in the Auswanderer-Kartei of the institute. See also *Landauer Monatshefte, July-August 1976*, 160-1.

⁴Calvert Papers, No. 295½ pp. 115-6. Maryland Archives, Annapolis. Printed version in *Maryland Archives*, Vol. 44, 697. For Daniel Dulany, see Aubrey C. Land, *The Dulanys of Maryland* (Baltimore, 1968).

⁵*Maryland Archives*, Vol. 44, 697. The complete text of the letter appears also in the *Report*, 37 (1978), 21.

⁶Case of Carpenter (Zimmermann) et al. vs. Fotch, November 1766, Augusta County Judgements, Book A. Abstracted in Lyman Chalkley, *Records of Augusta County, 1745-1800* (Rosslyn, VA, 1912) I, 342, 495-6.

⁷*Hoch-Deutsch Pennsylvanische Bericht*, Feb. 16, 1744/5.

⁸ONA, B. van Pause 2740, 154-8, Rotterdam City Archives. The *Rupert* had to be prepared for the passengers and ready for loading by June 9, 1744. The contract also called for "breaking down the Bulk heads of the Cabin in order to make it clear and even with between decks to Lodge the said Pallentines." Captain Parker also agreed to "Build as many bedplaces throughout the ship" as needed for 150 people, "and two necessary houses, on each side of the Ship one."

⁹Auswanderer-Kartei, IPGV, Kaiserslautern. Entries about Thomas Schley in Appenhofen appear in the register of the Reformed Church in Billigheim, 1737-43.

¹⁰James B. Ranck, Dorothy S. Ranck et al., *A History of the Evangelical Reformed Church, Frederick, Maryland* (Frederick, MD, 1964) 7-11.

¹¹The baptism of Maria Barbara Schley is the earliest one recorded in the register of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as having taken place in the new town of Frederick.

¹²Michael Schlatter's *Wahrhafte Erzählung von dem wahren Zustand der meist Hirtenlosen Gemeinden...* (Frankfurt, 1752) was translated and appended to Henry Harbaugh, *The Life of the Rev. Michael Schlatter* (Philadelphia, 1857), 87-234. The remarks by Schlatter cited here are on pages 177 and 154.

¹³Schley to Schlatter, March 1st, 1748. A copy of the original in the Archives of the Netherland Reformed Church in The Hague is in Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in Lancaster, PA.

¹⁴Harbaugh, *Schlatter*, 176-7.

¹⁵William J. Hinke (ed), *Minutes and Letters of the Coetus of the German Reformed Congregations in Pennsylvania, 1747-1792* (Philadelphia, 1903), 74.

¹⁶Ranck, *Reformed Church Frederick*, 29, 190.

¹⁷Ranck, 39.

¹⁸Ranck, 51.

¹⁹J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Western Maryland* (Philadelphia, 1882) I, 485, 509.

²⁰The two Thomas Schley letters were found in the Landesarchiv Speyer in 1957 by Dr. Fritz Braun. Photostats and transcripts of both are in the collection of the Frederick County Historical Society. Excerpts were published in the *Report*, 30 (1959), 112-4. In the Landesarchiv Speyer (Bestand F 11: Ausfautei Billigheim) is further material concerning the emigrated members of the Wintz family. File No. 65 contains listings of the debts of Margaretha Wintz Schley and Sibylla Wintz Stoeckle in 1759. Other financial data about the two emigrated sisters for 1752-58 are in File No. 66 (Appenhofen Ausfauteiakten).

²¹Ranck, 192.

²²See Karl Scherer, "Friedrich Ludwig Henop and Johann Thomas Schley — Two Patriots from the Palatinate in Frederick, Maryland," in Roland Paul (ed.), *300 Years Palatines in America* (Landau, 1983), 144-54.

²³Ranck, 54.

²⁴This dictionary is in the Historical Society of Frederick County.