

Looking to the Future—Preserving the Past

For several issues the articles in this space have formed a series devoted to German-American business and organizations in Baltimore and Maryland. That series will continue in *Report 45*. For now it seems fitting to inaugurate a new tradition to mark the beginning of the millenium. In a preface to the *First Annual Report* of the Society, the editors—presumably the Executive Committee of the Society—express their concern about the scarcity and possible disappearance of materials on the German presence in America, specifically Maryland. Their hope in establishing the Society and issuing an annual report was to preserve as many documents of relevance to the history of German immigrants to Maryland as they could. Moreover, they were determined to make those items available in English so as to increase the likelihood that the information would in fact be available to those individuals among the American populace who were interested in such things but could not read German. Unfortunately, the plan to issue an annual report lasted only slightly more than twenty years, and today early issues of the *Report* are almost as rare as the materials it sought to preserve. Even the Society itself has only one complete set of all volumes.

As the new century dawns, then, it seems appropriate to once again make available rare materials on the history of the German element in Maryland by reprinting articles from the first two decades of the

Society's existence. Henceforth each new volume of the *Report* will reproduce at least one article from the early issues. In this case I have chosen an article by Basil Sollers on the Jonathan Hagar of Hagerstown which provides an interesting counterpart to Gary Grassl's new contribution on the same subject. I'm certain that you will enjoy reading and comparing both articles and hope that you look forward, as I do, to a continuing series of reprints to complement the existing series of German-American businesses and organizations in Baltimore and Maryland.

In addition to reprinting the Sollers' article I am presenting here some exciting news on the preservation of German-American materials. In renovating and restoring its library space as well as conserving and cataloguing its most valuable books, the German Society of Pennsylvania, in cooperation with the University of Pennsylvania, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic, and a number of other sponsors, has once again made available an unparalleled collection of German Americana in a splendid historic setting. The pages which follow here immediately detail the fascinating story of the conversation and renewal of the Joseph Horner Library and its remarkable collection. Many thanks to Professor Frank Trommler of the University of Pennsylvania for his assistance in supplying the material which provided the background for the following article.

Von alten Drucken und Schriften, die uns treue Kunde brächten vom Schaffen und Wirken des deutschen Elements in der Jugendzeit seines Adoptivlandes, bleiben uns verhältnismässig nur kärgliche Reste. Der Anglo-Amerikanische Geschichtsforscher, nicht immer der deutschen Sprache mächtig, wusste nicht was sie zu bedeuten hatten, und würdigte sie zumeist keiner Bekanntmachung. Nachlässigkeit und Apathie mancher Nachkommen der deutschen Einwanderer thaten das Uebrige, und so sind uns diese, für das Studium der Geschichte der Vereinigten Staaten so wertvollen Dokumente zum grössten Teil wohl auf immer rettungslos verloren. Was uns noch in Maryland erhalten ist, sammeln wir jetzt für den Gebrauch seines künftigen Historikers, der vielleicht des Deutschen unkundig, unsere Verhandlungen und viele Beiträge von Deutsch-Amerikanern, in englischer Sprache geführt und geschrieben, vorfinden wird. Ohne Zweifel wird er dann etwas mehr Kenntniss nehmen von einem bedeutenden Teile seiner Mitbürge, der fast auf allen Gebieten so grossartiges seinem Adoptivlande dargebracht, und folglich auf historische Würdigung gerechten Anspruch hat.

reproduced *verbatim* from the inside cover of:

Der erste Jahres-Bericht der "Gesellschaft für die Geschichte
der Deutschen in Maryland."

And, in the spirit of the text itself, a loose translation into English

Relative little remains of the old volumes and documents which could relate to us the true story of the contribution of the German element to the early development of its adoptive homeland. Anglo-American historians were not always trained in German. As a consequence, they had little appreciation for the value of the old documents and rarely took notice of them in their research. Apathy and ignorance on the part of the descendents of early German immigrants did the rest until today the majority of those documents which might have proven so valuable in the study of the history of the United States are likely lost to us forever. We are now collecting what is left in Maryland for the use of future historians who, although they might not know German, will find records of our meetings and the individual contributions of German-Americans carried out and written up in English. Doubtless those future historians will then take somewhat more notice of that significant portion of their fellow citizens who have made magnificent contributions to their adoptive homeland in almost every field of endeavor and as a result have a right to expect historical evaluation of their accomplishments.

The Joseph Horner Library of the German Society of Pennsylvania

The German Society of Pennsylvania, founded in 1764, is the oldest German organization in America. Like so many of its sister organizations, the Society initially sought to protect German immigrants from unscrupulous shipping agents and to ease the burden which all immigrants felt in settling into a new country. As the initial trials of accommodation to the new environment passed, many immigrant organizations began to devote at least part of their energies to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the land of their birth. In this respect, too, the German Society of Pennsylvania was no exception. Indeed, the library of the Society, named in honor of Joseph Horner, has long served an appreciative membership as a lending library with an extensive collection of German classics, English literature in German translation, and world literature in both English and German. On its dark oak shelves the homesick immigrant could find refuge among a wide variety of books familiar from his schooldays or popular works of which the relatives at home across the sea wrote.

Less well known—and certainly less in demand—were approximately ten thousand volumes collected and lovingly cared for by Professor Oswald Seidensticker of the University of Pennsylvania. Although these volumes represented Professor Seidensticker's professional interests, because they were acquired initially as additions to the collection of a lending library there are many items which would not have been collected by a research library. As a result, the library today has holdings which are duplicated in only one or two prestigious scholarly libraries worldwide. In the case of cer-

tain pieces of German-Americana, the Horner Library owns items which are truly unique and available nowhere else.

In 1994, on the 230th anniversary of the founding of the Society, the organization undertook the daunting project of modernizing and improving the Joseph Horner Memorial Library. The goals of the project were to catalog the bulk of the important holdings of the library in modern, machine-readable form, to preserve the materials in the German American Collection in its entirety, and to begin the process of establishing a center for research into the history of German-America. The refurbished library was reopened to the public in October 1999.

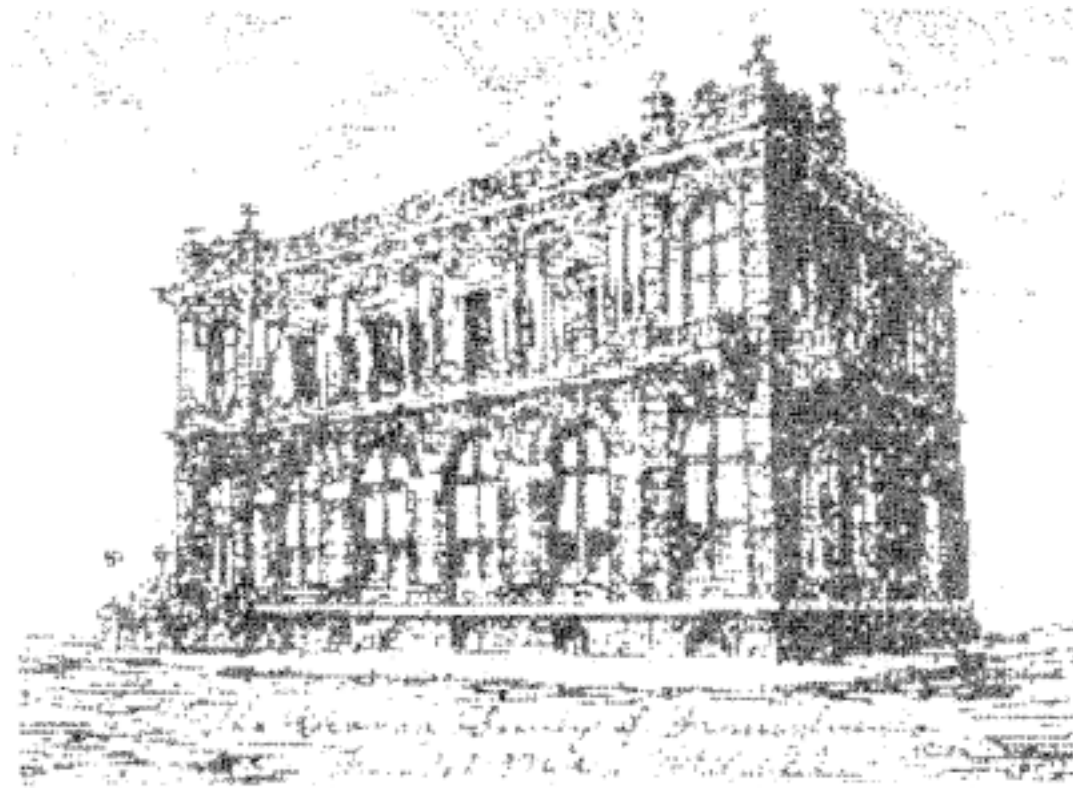
Cataloging of the German Society's library into the RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network) database began in October of 1994. Electronic catalog records were being entered into RLIN, a database into which many of the large university and research libraries enter their libraries' holdings. In the process of cataloging, catalogers found that fully fifty-seven percent of the books cataloged were new to the database, and close to twenty percent were unique titles, available in no other library in the United States.

The advantages of an electronic format are many. The information the catalogers enter in the database is available to anyone who searches in it. Other library catalogers with access to the database can determine whether the book they have is similar to one already represented, or whether their book is a new one. Library users and researchers can determine whether a book is available

The Joseph Horner Library

and which libraries have copies. This is a large improvement over the way libraries used to store information about the books they held. Only those who were actually in the library could use a card catalog. Now, anyone with access to the database can see what is actually in any given library. In addition to entering the records of the

library's into a national database, the members of the library project were able to set up a web-based catalog through which the public can access the electronically catalogued records. Those who are interested in the library and its collection can go to the Society's webpage at <http://www.libertynet.org/gsp/>, and follow the links.



The German Society of Pennsylvania

