

REMINISCENCES

OF THE

Political Life of the German-Americans in Baltimore

DURING THE YEARS

1850—1860.

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Continued from Page 59—Seventh Annual Report.

PART II.

By LOUIS P. HENNIGHAUSEN.

BEFORE I continue my narrative of the persecution and sufferings of the German-Americans under the regime of the American Party in the City of Baltimore during the years of 1850 to 1860, I deem it necessary, for a better understanding of the political situation of those years, to refer more at length to the conduct of a part of the German-Americans in the Country at large, which to some extent influenced the formation of the American, so-called Know-Nothing Party.

The immigration had from the year 1849 increased to about 400,000 and more persons annually, being each year in numbers about equal to the total number of inhabitants of such States as Maryland, North Carolina, Alabama, Georgia,

and twice the number of such States as Louisiana and South Carolina. If these immigrants were inimical to slavery, it was an easy arithmetical problem to figure the time, when slavery would be abolished, and the author of the celebrated Madison Letters in defense of the American Party, laid great stress on this coming result. The literary and leading men of the German immigration of these years, with some exceptions, shared the political views of those we have seen active in our City of Baltimore. The temerity of the so-styled free Germans in Louisville, Ky., and Richmond, Va., however exceeded our Baltimore champions. In Louisville they adopted and published in the year 1854 a political platform from which we cull the following. It reads:

1. *Slavery Question.* — Notwithstanding that we consider Slavery to be a political and moral cancer, that will by and by undermine all Republicanism, we deem its sudden abolition neither possible nor advisable. But we, as Republicans and men, demand that the further extension of Slavery be not constantly urged, whilst not a single step is taken for its extermination. We demand in particular, Slavery be excluded from all the new territories indiscriminately and for ever, etc., etc.

2. *Religious Question.* — We consider the right of free expression of religious conscience untouchable, etc. Religion is a private matter, it has nothing to do with politics, hence it is despotism to compel citizens by political means to religious manifestations or omissions contrary to their private persuasions. We therefore hold the Sabbath laws, thanksgiving days, prayers in Congress and Legislatures, the oaths upon the Bible, the introduction of the Bible into the free schools, the exclusion of "atheists" from legal acts, etc., as an open violation of human rights as well as of the Constitution, and therefore demand their removal.

3. *Measures for the Welfare of the People.* — The public lands ought to be given free to the actual settler, and poor settlers to be aided by the National Government; a Department of Immigration for the colonization of immigrants to be created; a ten hour labor day; security for wage-earners

and preference for Union Workmen; free schools, and German teachers where there are German settlements; the Constitution of the United States to be amended so that:

1. All elections shall be directly by the people,
2. That a citizen from another State or District is eligible,
3. That a representative in Congress or Senate may be recalled by a majority of his constituents,
4. Secure free trade,
7. That woman shall have equal rights with men,
8. Equal rights of all men before the law,
9. Abolition of penal laws.

The Free German Society in Richmond, Va., demanded:

1. Universal suffrage,
2. The election of all officers by the people,
3. The abolition of the Presidency,
4. The abolition of the Senates, so that all Legislatures shall consist of one branch only,
5. The right of the people to recall their representatives at their pleasure,
6. The right of the people to change the Constitution when they like,
7. All law-suits to be conducted without expense,
8. A department of the Government to be set up for the purpose of protecting immigration,
9. A reduced term for immigrants to acquire citizenship.

Reform in the Foreign Relations of the Government: —

1. Abolition of all neutrality,
2. Intervention in favor of every people struggling for liberty.

Reform in what relates to Religions: —

1. A more perfect development of the principle of personal freedom and liberty of conscience; consequently, a) abolition of laws for the observance of the Sabbath; b) abolition

of prayers in Congress; c) abolition of oath upon the Bible; d) repeal of laws enacting a religious test before taking an office.

2. Taxation of church property,
3. A prohibition of incorporations of all church property in the name of ecclesiastics.

Reform in Social Condition:—

1. Abolition of all land monopoly,
2. Ad valorem taxation of property,
3. Amelioration of the condition of the working class,
 - a) by lessening the time of work to eight hours for grown persons and to five hours for children; b) by incorporation of Mechanics' Associations and Protective Societies; c) by granting a preference to mechanics before all other creditors; d) by establishing, at public expense, an asylum for superannuated mechanics without means.
4. Education of poor children by the State,
5. Taking possession of railroads by the State,
6. The promotion of education: a) by the introduction of free schools, with the power of enforcing parents to send their children to school, and prohibition of all clerical influence; b) by instruction in the German language; c) by establishing a German University.
7. The supporting of the slave emancipation exertions of Cassius M. Clay by Congressional laws.
8. Abolition of the Christian system of punishment and introduction of the humane amelioration system.
9. Abolition of capital punishment.

There was certainly enough in these platforms, at the time they were published, to set the world on fire; but they also show what a set of impractical harmless visionaries these men were. It is to be remarked that among their versatile demands of reform, we find some of the earliest beginning of economic and political questions which in our days have grown to importance. I refer to the Labor Organizations and Railroads, etc. I do not understand why these men were in those days always alluded to as ignorant foreigners, unless it

was on the ground that the speakers and writers did not understand them.

These men, a minute fraction of the large German immigration, brought with their paradoxical demands a great deal of harm to the great mass of their fellow immigrants, who, instead of making political platforms, were engaged in building churches and school houses, which last into our days.

About those years the old Whig Party had been completely wrecked by the victorious Democratic Party. The northern fragments of the former Whig Party joined the young Republican Party, the southern fragments could not do so on account of the Slavery question, and their politicians being without a job, were fishing for some popular sentiments to build a new party, antagonistic to their old enemy, the Democratic Party.

The hatred of foreigners is not confined to the Chinese, it is found everywhere on this globe and increases in the same ratio, as ignorance prevails among the lower classes. A language not understood is gibberish, and the man who does not understand you, appears dumb, stupid and ignorant to you. Add to this the fact, that the mass of the immigrants located in the populous cities of the North, had voted the Democratic ticket, as the Democratic Party had especially cultivated the immigrants and looked after them on their arrival, for their party welfare; also the anti-slavery tendency of the German immigration and in fostering the religious intolerance against the Roman Church represented largely by the Irish immigration, the politicians thought they had enough timber to build up the victorious "American" so-called Know-Nothing Party.

The aforementioned platforms of the free Germans were widely published by the Know-Nothing newspapers as representing the sentiments of the German immigrants;—as being hostile and inimical to our free institutions and destructive of what is cherished as the best and holiest in human nature. The politicians made adroit use of some of the articles of

these foolish conglomeration platforms to inflame the prejudice and hatred towards all immigrants.

Many well-meaning and intelligent Americans knew that these platforms were issued by a comparatively few and erratic, men, as are found among all civilized nations, and smiled at the idea of abolishing our President and Senate and other demands of equal absurdity. They did not hold the mass of the immigration responsible for this rubbish, yet they believed that the natural slow, but sure process of assimilation and amalgamation of people of different nationalities into a homogeneous nation, could be hastened by measures and laws, driving them into it; or else depriving them of their political privileges and rights, and therefore joined the American Party.

This however cannot be said of the brutal resolution offered by the Committee on Foreign Relation in the House of Representatives in Congress on the 16th of April, 1856. It recommended:

"The adoption of a State policy which will discountenance the *esprit du corps*, now so studiously cultivated among the foreigners in our large cities, which is calculated if not designed to keep them foreigners in feelings, sentiment and habits, though they enjoy the benefits of our institutions and owe allegiance to our laws. Let their separate and distinctive civil and military organizations, wherever they exist, be frowned down, and a policy be pursued which will break up and destroy those foreign organizations, and oblige those belonging to them to identify themselves with the country of their adoption."

This was clearly an appeal to mob-violence, riot and brutal oppression. The corrupt and low politicians of the American Party took up this hue and cry of political persecution, and the rowdy element in our city, which, by a demoralization of our volunteer fire department, had of late years become more dominant and lawless, with devilish delight, took the hint which came from so high authority.

The volunteer fire department had been for many years a most useful and effective organization in our city. Our

best citizens were either active or contributive members of it. With the rapid increase of the city and the frequency of the fires, the busy mechanics and active business men found it less convenient to extinguish the numerous small and large fires, and their place was taken, to a large extent, by idle young men, who preferred the excitement of rushing to and extinguishing a fire to the dull routine of an industrious life. The citizens liberally supported these volunteer companies and the engine houses of ten became the home of idle and dissolute men, who slept there and drank much of the cheap whiskey.

The rivalry of the different companies gradually led to fights among the disorderly element, and many of the fires were the occasion of a general free fight among the firemen. So bitter became the feud among them, that many incendiary fires were started and false alarms given on purpose to entrap or ambuscade a hostile company in a part of the city where the company to be attacked had but few friends living. The engine houses became partly armories and the firemen went to the fires armed with revolvers. On the 28th of November, 1848, there were not less than five fires in one hour at different parts of the city, evidently incendiary to bring about collisions between the hostile companies. There were days when from twenty to thirty fire alarms were sounded. On Saturday night, the 25th of September, 1847, a riot took place between the *New Market* and *United* fire companies on one side, and the *Watchmen Company* on the other, which lasted about two hours ; the hose carriage of the *New Market* was captured and thrown into the water at the *Light Street Wharf*. On Saturday night, August 18th, 1855, a riot took place on *Franklin Street*, between *Howard* and *Eutaw Streets*, among the firemen of the *New Market*, *United* and *Mount Vernon* companies; two men were killed and many wounded.

With the advent of the *Know-Nothing Party* the fire companies drifted more into decided political organizations, belonging either to the *Democratic* or *Know-Nothing Party*. The rowdy element had thus become fostered and it now organized itself into purely political clubs, who ostensibly formed fishing clubs for social purposes, but in reality were formed for the purpose of carrying the election in favor of their party by

ruffianism, intimidation, rioting, violence, murder and bloodshed.

Encouraged, winked at, and protected by those in authority, including therein the police, who were then not yet in uniform, and by the Justices of the Peace, these political ruffians especially made assaults, committed robberies, in the streets in daylight, and many murders on the peaceable law-abiding German inhabitants of our city.

These fishing clubs, proud of their lawless character and conduct, adopted names indicating their ferocious nature. The most infamous among them were the " Plug Uglies," the " Tigers," the "Blood Tubs," the "Rip Raps," the "Wamphoonongs," the "Hard Times," "Hunters" and "Empire."

On the 18th of August, 1853, the "Know-Nothing" Party held its first public mass-meeting in the City of Baltimore in Monument Square, and it was attended by nearly five thousand persons. Ruffianism increased, and instead of being confined to the firemen, it spread among the political so-called fishing clubs.

On the 12th of September, 1856, in the afternoon, the "Rip Rap" and "Wamphoonong" clubs, in their red flannel shirts, paraded past the Seventeenth Ward House, kept by James Clark, on Light, near Henrietta Street, when a bloody riot took place; the firing of guns and revolvers was uninterrupted for more than half an hour, every man of the two fishing clubs was armed with a revolver, and the men of the Seventeenth Ward House had shot-guns.

And old man sawing wood on the pavement, and a youth passing at the time, were killed, and some twenty badly wounded by shots. Yet not one of the rioters was arrested and none punished, although well known to the authorities.

On Wednesday, the 8th of October following, when Thomas Swann was elected Mayor of the city, the entire city was in the hands of the lawless element, men, frenzied with bad whiskey, firing recklessly their revolvers in the streets and taking a devilish delight in shooting and assaulting harmless citizens of German or Irish nativity, were in possession of various parts of

the city; about 12 o'clock a desperate, struggle taking place between the "Rip Raps" and the New Market men, in the Lexington Market. It turned into a regular battle. A great many persons were wounded and carried from the ground, and the drug stores near the scene of action were filled with the wounded and dying.

This was however only a preliminary skirmish to the rioting and fighting done on the coming Presidential election, the 4th of November, 1856.

Millard Fillmore was the candidate of the "Know-Nothing," James Buchanan of the Democratic and General John C. Fremont of the Republican Party. It was well known and openly declared by the rowdy element, to carry the election by violence. Public speakers at the mass-meetings encouraged them to use force. They were advised to stick the foreigners with the awl, and awls were freely furnished to the boys. A political procession paraded Baltimore Street, carrying with them a gigantic awl, ten feet long, upright on a wagon. Awls figured on the political transparencs ; and many a German, especially after dark on the streets of Baltimore, had an awl driven into his body. On the day of the Presidential election, armed and organized associations, belonging to both political parties, resorted to firearms, with which they were liberally provided, and fought with ferocious and daring recklessness. The most serious fights occurred in the Second and Eighth Ward Polls. In these fights eight men were killed and about one hundred and fifty wounded.

During the morning there was considerable ill-feeling displayed at the Second Ward Polls, but up to three o'clock no serious disturbance occurred. At that hour a furious fight broke out, said to have originated from a stone being thrown into the crowd surrounding the window. Pistols were immediately drawn and fired by both parties. The Democrats drove the Know-Nothings from the polls and up into High Street. The alarm was carried to the Fourth Ward Polls, and a strong body of Know-Nothings started from there. In the vicinity of the Second Ward Polls they were met and driven back. Further reinforcements were then received and the battle renewed.

A good proportion of both parties by this time were provided with muskets, whilst others used pistols, and others fought with knives and clubs. Both parties fought with determination, and in many instances behaved with the most reckless disregard of danger. The battle-ground was spread over portions of Fawn, Stiles, Exeter and High Streets, and Eastern Avenue, and the spectacle presented was a terrible and revolting one. As either party gained a temporary advantage, men would be seen running, with others shooting at them; the wounded were limping off and being carried away by their companions, whilst others, begrimed with smoke and powder, and in some cases covered with blood, still kept up the fight, now firing singly and then in volleys. In the surrounding neighborhood the utmost degree of excitement and consternation prevailed. Children were hastily gathered, the houses closed, and the occupants in many instances sought their garrets and cellars to be out of harm's way. The Democrats were finally overpowered, driven away from the polls, and retreated, still fighting, down Eastern Avenue. In the neighborhood, of the Causeway they again made a stand, and there a guerilla warfare, carried on from the alleys and street-corners, continued for more than an hour.

About three o'clock in the afternoon a report was brought to the police stationed at the Eighth Ward, that there was fighting at the Sixth Ward, and assistance was asked to quell it. The police started, and with them several hundred of the crowd assembled around the polls, who in a few moments were armed with muskets, and accompanied by two gangs of boys, each dragging small brass cannon on wheels. They passed along the side of the Belair Market, and towards Orleans Street, where they were met by a concourse of equally as wild infuriated men and youths, armed with muskets and pistols. A fight then commenced, the Eighth Ward Democrats taking shelter in the market-house, and the Sixth and Seventh Ward Know-Nothings firing from the fish-market and the corner of Orleans Street. They finally rallied on the Eighth Ward party and drove them up through the market, accompanied by perfect volleys of musketry and the occasional discharge of a swivel. The fighting through the market was continued with but little

intermission up to dark, when both parties retired. The scene in the vicinity of the Belair Market was of the most sanguinary character throughout the afternoon. At times one party would apparently obtain the better of the other, and they continued to drive each other back and forward through the market-house. The Sixth Ward party were reinforced shortly after the battle commenced by a detachment of the Seventh Ward and other Know-Nothing clubs, who brought with them a small cannon on wheels. The Democrats got possession of this cannon at one time and were about carrying it off, when it upset and the cannon fell off the wheels. Whilst the fight was going on in the Belair Market, word was sent to the Central Station for aid. High Constable Herring, Deputy Brashears, and Sergeant Tayman, with a squad of twenty men, repaired to the scene. On arriving at the market, they found the Eighth Warders with a cannon in position, preparing to fire. They attempted to take possession of the piece, but were immediately surrounded by an infuriated crowd armed with muskets. They attempted to make arrests, but were foiled by the number and fierceness of the assailants, but succeeded, however, in carrying off the cannon. The Know-Nothing Party carried the election by a large majority, and the city was in the hands of the lawless rowdy element.

The "Baltimore Wecker," a German daily paper, was at that time the only paper in Baltimore which supported the Republican candidates. Most able writers contributed daily vigorous articles to it, expounding the doctrines of the Republican Party, principally on the Homestead Law and the Restriction of Slavery. The paper was in its tone bold and highly aggressive. It was the organ of the younger, more recent immigration, and had a great deal of talent in its service. Among its famous editors we name: Karl Heinrich Schnauffer, August Becker, Karl Gottfried Becker and later Wilhelm Rapp and General Franz Siegel,—all men driven from the fatherland by the miscarried revolution of 1848.

The Democratic Party was ably represented by the conservative daily, "Der Deutsche Correspondent," edited by Dr. Morris Wiener, Dr. Landsberg and by its owner, Col. Frederick Raine. The older immigration remained true to the Democratic

Party, due to a large extent in gratitude of the protection it had always afforded them. The rowdy element however made no distinction in its riotous conduct between Republicans and Democrats, and in the elections of those years the vote of the German element, in common defense against the Know-Nothing Party, was solid for the Democratic Party. The ruffians now dominated in the city, there was hardly a German picnic or gathering in or out of the city, which was not disturbed by inroads of armed ruffians, who used slung-shots, bowie knives and revolvers, to intimidate, hurt, wound and kill among the participants of harmless recreation, who were not guilty of any other offense than having been born on a foreign soil. The Turner, as well as other organizations, formed military rifle companies and thus, armed for self-defense, would march, accompanied by the families and friends, to the gardens which were then numerous in the suburbs, to enjoy a few hours in the open air in social intercourse, with music, song and gymnastical exercise, as used to it in the old country. In those days there were no street cars, the men, headed by a music band, would march in procession in the middle of the street, and their wives and children would walk on the pavements, the distance of one or two miles to the garden, where the picnic was to be held. To escape the rowdyism, excursions to a greater distance by railroad were arranged. The Zion Church on Gay Street went to Magnolia Grove by the P. W. & B. R. R., to the east side of the Gunpowder river, but the ruffians even followed there and had a bloody fight with the officers.

The lawless element, feeling that the city authorities who owed their election to them, were either in accord with or intimidated by them, gained strength in number and spirit of violence during the year 1857. It did not confine its attack on naturalized citizens only, but every Democratic voter came under its ban and persecution.

A new City Council was to be elected on the 14th of October. It was known before, to the authorities, that the election was to be carried by brutal violence, but no precautionary measures were taken. The election was a mere mockery, accompanied throughout the city by riot and bloodshed. Sergeant

William Jordan of the police force was killed in the Eighth Ward.

In some of the wards naturalized citizens were not allowed to vote. Owing to the manner in which the election was conducted by the party in power, during the day a number of the Democratic candidates withdrew from the contest, and quite a number of the Judges of Election resigned.

To give an idea of the manner in which the election was carried on, we have the following result: The Know-Nothing ticket polled 11,898 votes; the Democratic ticket polled 2,792 votes; majority for the Know-Nothings 9,106 votes. The Democratic ticket polled in the Twentieth Ward one vote, in the Eleventh Ward two, in the Fourteenth eight, in the Seventeenth ten, and in the Eighth 1,013 votes. *Governor Ligon*, in his message to the Legislature of 1858, gives a narrative of the political events which transpired in the City of Baltimore at this time, from which we extract the following:

"At the municipal election in Baltimore, held October, 1856, an organized force was made apparent at the polls, which in its direct influence was felt by naturalized citizens. This class of voters was to a considerable extent excluded from the exercise of suffrage; many of them beaten, and others overawed and deterred by violence from visiting the polls. Such were the representations made to me, asserted by a portion of the Press of the city, and measurably conceded by all. In the course of the day, bloody and destructive riots took place, and the subsequent record comprehended a list of killed and wounded truly appalling. The city was temporarily outlawed by its fury, and it is beyond all question with me, that could the executive authority have commanded military power at the moment of the emergency, it would have been my duty then to have interposed, and overwhelmed a lawless demonstration clearly defiant of the municipal police. As the time approached for the Presidential election in November, 1856, apprehension generally prevailed that recurrence of similar scenes was inevitable. Political sentiment and party animosity were alike demonstrative and violent, and peaceable and orderly citizens, and especially naturalized citizens, were utterly hopeless of those decencies and proprieties

essential to the freedom of suffrage. In short, the large body of citizens composing the Democratic Party within the City of Baltimore saw the day of election approach, under the assurance that they would not be suffered to record their votes, and on the other hand would be exposed to the consequences of the most reckless frauds.

"On the eve of the Presidential election I proceeded to Baltimore and sought an interview with the Mayor of the city (Thomas Swann), in a vain hope of such a co-operation of influences, and moral and material power, as would ensure the peace of the city, prevent bloodshed, and secure to every citizen, without respect to party, the exercise of his political rights. My overtures were repulsed with cold civility. I was thrown upon my personal and official responsibility, before an important and respectable community, for the initiative in a measure which the exigency of the time demanded, and the executive of the city was indisposed to adopt. The day of election was then too near at hand for me to mature, under my official authority and by my independent act, a force adequate to the probable necessity which menaced the occasion. I accordingly left the full measure of accountability with the Mayor and his subordinates. How fearful that accountability was, the sanguinary deeds of that election day have sufficiently proven. Again party animosity ran riot throughout the city; the most desperate encounters took place, in which hundreds of infuriated partisans were engaged; arms of all kinds were employed, and bloodshed, wounds and death stained the record of the day, and added another page of dishonor to the annals of the distracted city. I retired from the scene, convinced that all this might have been prevented, and not without a painful sense of duty unfulfilled."

The rowdy element was now stronger and more violent than ever before in the City of Baltimore. The hated word "foreigners" being constantly applied by the Know-Nothing press, to naturalized citizens, they being charged with having no sympathy with the free institutions of our country, the leaders of the German-American element in our city determined to make a patriotic political demonstration, by directing the attention of the native Americans to the share of the German element in this country in the War of Independence. The most impressive

Way to achieve this, was decided to be the erection of a public monument to one of the heroes of German extraction, who distinguished himself in the War of Independence, 1776 to 1782.

There was no lack of such heroes; in the battle of Long Island there was in the Maryland line a regiment commanded in the German language by Col. Ludwig Weltner. Some years ago I accidentally discovered the muster-roll of this regiment among the archive in the State House at Annapolis. There was Major General Herkheimer, the hero and victor of the battle of Oriskana, Major-Generals Mühlenberg, DeKalb, General Hiester, etc., and Baron von Steuben, the organizer and drill-master of the Continental army. The choice fell upon "Baron von Steuben" as the most prominent, competent and meritorious of these Generals. A festival in grand style was arranged for the 2d of September, 1858. Most every German organization took part in it. Preparations were made weeks, yea months before, by the several societies, for a gorgeous procession. The English as well as the German papers were full of biographies of the Baron, many anecdotes relating to him in the war, were published. Baron von Steuben, and Washington at Valley Forge, and the whole War for Independence, became the topic of conversation among the public. The "Steuben Festival" became an epoch in our local history. For many years thereafter the brilliant success of the undertaking was the theme among the German-Americans of our city. The day was fair, and in the morning at seven o'clock, the different societies in bright uniforms, regalias, with national flags and banners, marched to the strains of brass bands, through the streets from all parts of the city to Broadway, where a procession over a mile in length was formed. Not until the celebration of the German Day, October 6th, 1890, was there again such a demonstration, wherein all the German-Americans united with such patriotic enthusiasm and wherein such a large number of native born shared, in the common brotherhood of our beloved *American Nation*. At nine o'clock the procession started from Broadway. First marched five military companies, each in different gala dress, with music bands playing, then came coaches with the officers, orators and invited guests, Mr. A. Schumacher as President, then a large bust of General von Steuben on a platform highly decorated, followed

by fifteen singing societies with their flags and gorgeous banners, six beneficial societies, forty lodges in regalia with banners, three rifle companies, gymnastic clubs, etc., etc. The procession marched through Baltimore and several other streets, where the citizens had decorated their houses, to "Rullman's Garden" on the Frederick Road, now Avenue, near the junction of Baltimore Street. An immense concourse of people, among them many natives, assembled there. After an hour's rest, the speaking commenced. Dr. E. Wiss opened the meeting in a short vigorous speech, then followed Rev. Henry Scheib in a German, and Hon. Joshua T. Vansant in an English oration, Dr. Wisz in German, Wm. H. Young in English, Hon. Thos. Swann, the Mayor, in English, and Mr. Eberle, of Washington, in a German speech. The financial part of the festival was also a success. This imposing demonstration, the most brilliant of its kind up to that time ever held in Baltimore, of the patriotism and firm attachment to our political institutions by the German-American element, satisfied all the intelligent native born, if they ever had any doubts, of the sincerity of their political allegiance to their adopted country. The Know-Nothing press became more just and mild in speaking of their naturalized fellow citizens, what effect however it had on the rowdy element which still infested the city, we will relate in our next contribution.

