

GERMAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES: THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS AND LIMITATIONS¹

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The earliest getting together and organization of German settlers in the Atlantic seaboard colonies occurred on that memorable second Christmas day December 26, 1764 in Philadelphia, twelve years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the founding of the first "German Society," charitable and humanitarian in its object and achievement.

The Society's greatest usefulness was attained during its very first period, when in May 1765 they succeeded in getting a law passed under the governorship of John Penn—"the First Fruits of the German Society" (in the words of Christopher Saur), prohibiting extortionary practices of shipmasters, providing more space and better food on the immigrant ships, and the services of an official interpreter, who with a select committee could board the arriving ships and examine grievances, explain the laws of redemptionist services and keep a protecting eye on the arrivals. The first president was Johann Heinrich Keppeler, who had come to Philadelphia on a ship that lost 250 persons, or three-fourths of its passengers during the crossing. The redemptionist system was not abolished until the nineteenth century, but the example of the Pennsylvania German Society was followed by similar protective organizations, first by Charleston, South Carolina in 1766. (In the European archives these ports were referred to as the landing places for the "Insul Pennsylvania," and the "Insul Carolina" respectively, both believed to be West Indian islands.) Then followed New York in 1784. Baltimore may have preceded as early

as 1783, but unfortunately the records are lost. Louis P. Hennighausen in his fine work on the *History of the German Society of Maryland*² gives good reasons for the earlier date, not the much later recorded date 1817. Then followed Saint Louis and New Orleans in 1847, Cincinnati 1854, Chicago 1855, showing at a glance the trend of German immigration for a century.

Since we mentioned Hennighausen's *History of the German Society of Maryland* we may pause a moment to recall that the ideal of protection of the German immigrant was carried on during the late nineteenth century and beyond, by the determined stand taken against the barbarous oyster dredgers in the Chesapeake Bay, who inveigled foreign and particularly German recruits into inhuman service without pay or mercy, and continued to do so until exposed and brought to their just punishment by the untiring efforts of "our" Louis P. Hennighausen and his watchful agents of the German Society. It is a record to be proud of, continuing the spirit of the German Societies of the eighteenth century in defense of the redemptioners, against equally atrocious enemies who could be thwarted in their dire practices only by the process of law and punishment, whereby Hennighausen and his skillful agents often endangered their own lives. It is a noteworthy record of historical and social distinction and an example to be upheld by future generations, concerning not alone the German but all foreign elements subjected to the same inhuman oppression.

Germans wherever they came to-

¹ Address delivered in Baltimore at the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, February 25, 1946.
² Head at the meetings of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland and published by that Society in 1909.

gather in larger numbers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries founded societies in the interests of their social life. Their singing societies spread throughout the land and elicited favorable comment; they were fond of gymnastics, and their Turner organizations frequently had an important political influence. That is an important chapter by itself, which has sometimes been recognized by American historians (as in Saint Louis during the Civil War), but on the whole grudgingly. The Turners unquestionably have also had a leading influence on the introduction of indoor gymnastics in the public schools of the country.

There have always been an untold number of masonic organizations and mutually protective clubs in the past and continuing the present time, as an examination of the *Wegweiser durck die Vereinswelt von New York und New Jersey sowie angrenzenden Gebieten*, published annually by the *New Yorker Staatszeitung und Herald* proves. The Middle West could undoubtedly publish something similar. As an illustration permit me to call attention to a single instance, which may not be as familiar to all of us as it deserves to be historically, viz.; *Der Deutsche Orden der Harugari*. It was founded in 1847 by a dozen men who came together in New York and proclaimed as their purpose: "To preserve the German language in the United States, to give the German speaking people the opportunity to advance their spiritual and material interests and to improve and ennoble their social condition." It was a sort of mutually protective organization, based on the contributions received from its members and in proportion to their contributions. It insured its members against the calamities that might befall widows and children, and men unable to work through illness or accident. Very liberal provision was made for cases of real need. The organization grew at once by leaps and bounds. The name, deduced from the old word

"haruc" meaning forest or grove, and a tradition supposed to have been found in the chronicles of the *Cimbri* (those ancient foes of the Romans: Cimbrians and Teutons) that the name was given to their leaders of worship. A high point of influence of the Harugari-Order was reached in 1871, when the order had 235 lodges, of which there were 56 in New York, 61 in Pennsylvania, 22 in New Jersey, 19 in Maryland, and extending over the whole Middle West, reaching south, to Tennessee, West Virginia and Louisiana (one each). Total membership reached 20,000; property in round numbers valued at \$450,000. They published a very good journal in Reading, Pennsylvania under the editorship of H. W. Rosenthal, (first issue in 1869 called *Die deutsche Eiche*.) The Harugari-Order was well known at home and abroad; it has survived, though no longer as influential as in earlier days.

This central idea of mutual protection based on contributions by the membership was shared by many long-lived German-American Societies, among them the famous Charleston "German Friendly Society" founded in 1766. History as such was incidental; it was oftener made than studied. But when were the beginnings made for the study of the history of the Germans in the United States? Did our worthy founders of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland invent the idea? All honor to them for their keen insight into the importance of learning oneself through the study of one's environment and native stock.

It has been my privilege to read the minutes of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, from the beginnings in the year 1886 to the present time (1946), and it has been fascinating reading for the most part. But there is no definite answer to the question: where and when was the start made for the study of the history of the Germans in the United States? Nevertheless, the clue can be found there. A devo-

tion to research in historical records requires a type of mind above the common run of bread-winners, and our founders were of this rarer type. Let us name them, to hold them in venerated memory: the illustrious, beloved John Gottlieb Morris (originally "Moritz"), first and longest president; the able, courageous and versatile Louis P. Hennighausen; his namesake the Reverend F. Ph. Hennighausen, the faithful secretary; the eminent Dr. Louis H. Steiner, physician, scientist and organizer of the Enoch Pratt Free Library; the genial, witty and gifted Edward F. Leyh; the kind-hearted, intelligently active and helpful Charles Raddatz; the men-of-affairs Christian Ax, Charles Weber, Georg W. Gail; the eloquent preacher and outstanding educator of his time, the Rev. Henry Scheib; what an array of unusual and distinguished personalities! They were conscious of what they were planning and convinced of its value. But the stimulus of the West was necessary to counteract the old established traditions of the East. Let us turn to the West for a more favorable setting.

The valley of the Ohio, with Cincinnati as a center had since early in the nineteenth century (David Ziegler was the first mayor of Cincinnati in 1802) and conspicuously since the thirties, assumed a degree of importance that outdistanced the native element in commerce, manufacture and general prosperity, pushing the Anglo-American element ever farther westward as frontiersmen, so that the strong German element became aware of its power and declared its social independence. That was done by the founding of the *Deutsche Pionier Verein* of Cincinnati in 1868, and the concurrent publication of a monthly journal which was destined to record the history of Western pioneer life and settlement, with the German participation in the upbuilding of the West as no other historical source. The eighteen volumes that appeared between 1868 and 1886, called *Der Deutsche Pionier* are the most pre-

cious source extant for us of German descent in the United States. No library on Americana-Germanica can do without them. During the first years the *Deutsche Pionier* was edited by a number of men such as Brühl, Mack, Rümelin, Knortz, but after four years the historian Heinrich Armin Rattermann took hold and laid the emphasis on historical investigation, for which he maintained a high standard recognized throughout the country, soliciting contributions from the best investigators throughout the land, including Seidensticker (Pennsylvania), Kapp (New York), Munch (Missouri), Eickhoff (Washington, D. C.), Koerner (Illinois), Hanno Deiler (Louisiana), and others.

The first volume contains a characteristic sketch, which I beg your indulgence for presenting to you. It is a dedication to the then oldest German pioneer (this was in 1868) living in Cincinnati, whose name was Jakob Gülich, born in Hamburg, 1784. After a time he settled down in Baltimore, where he had learned the trade of sugar refining. In 1816 Martin Baum, the great German shipping magnate on the Mississippi controlling the commerce between Cincinnati and New Orleans, visited Baltimore in search of a good superintendent for his sugar making at home. He was directed to a young German who had learned and mastered the trade there. Baum hastened thither and addressed Gülich: "Hascht Du nicht Luscht nach Cincinnati zu gehe?" Gülich replied he was engaged for the next year and could not leave without the permission of his principal. Baum turned to the employer, and when the latter heard that it was a question of leaving far to the west, out of reach of competition for him, he gave his consent. Baum to Gülich: "Well, wieviel willscht du denn habe?" Gülich asked for \$1500 and all his traveling expenses and his pay to start immediately. Baum reduced that to \$1,350, but it took Gülich until the end of October to reach his destina-

tion, postchaise from Baltimore to Pittsburgh, then by boat down the Ohio to Cincinnati which took twenty days more. Baum got a good superintendent who easily earned his wages and more. Gülich was a well-educated man; he later served as a preacher in the German Reformed Church of Cincinnati, and was noted for his charities. An instance was the following: when a boatload of twenty-three German redemptioners arrived in Cincinnati, an unprincipled Irishman tried to make a handsome profit out of them. In Philadelphia the captain had sold them to the Irishman for \$50 a head, and now the latter demanded \$450 each, otherwise he would sell them to Louisiana for slave labor in an unhealthy climate. Gülich stepped in with some friends, went to court, set the immigrants free by purchase, though the cost was more than he could ever expect to get back. He never did get back his outlay of over \$1000, but was well satisfied with what he had done. It is not surprising that Gülich was celebrated in the first volume of the *Deutsche Pionier* as the oldest and most beloved of the Cincinnati pioneers.

At first there was not entire unanimity in the *Deutsche Pionier Verein* in regard to the objects of the organization, witness the speech of the first "Festredner" Rümelin at the first anniversary, who said in good humor: "So sehr ich mich zum Danke verpflichtet fühle, indem das Komitee mich zum Festredner des heutigen Tages ernannte, so muss ich doch die Bemerkung beifügen, dass ich mich in einer eigentümlichen Klemme befinde; denn es besteht in unserm Verein die Regel, dass nicht über Religion und Politik gesprochen werden darf. Wie sehr man auch die allgemeine Trefflichkeit dieses Verbots, als ein Mittel zur Erhaltung des Friedens, anerkennen mag, es bedeutet dennoch, für mich wenigstens, eine Beeinträchtigung der Redefreiheit. Ein Vortrag, in welchem man nicht von Kirche und Staat reden soll, muss mager ausfallen; ich bitte Sie also dem Verbote die

Hauptschuld beizulegen, wenn meine Rede Sie nicht befriedigen sollte."

In the year 1886 Ratterman announced that the *Deutsche Pionier* as a monthly would cease publication, but that with sufficient support he would continue the work in a new periodical called *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Magazin*. This was duly copyrighted by H. A. Rattermann, and dedicated to Oswald Ottendorfer, owner of the *New Yorker Staatszeitung*. Yet, Rattermann's fond hopes were not realized, and only one volume appeared. His example, however, was imitated by others, and prominent among them by the founders of our society. They determined to continue the idea in a different area of the United States. Why did it not last in Cincinnati? Various reasons may be assigned. The old German stock had disappeared, many had become wealthy, they may have thought that their frontier history had now been written, in all events, be that as it may, the valuable *Deutsche Pionier* passed out of existence.

In reading the minutes of the early years of our society, I was very strongly impressed by the similarity between the beginnings, objects and organization of the western and eastern groups. In the constitution of the Cincinnati organization we read:

Paragraph 1: Name und Zweck des Vereins.

Der Verein, dessen Zweck es ist, die Bande alter Freundschaft zu erneuern und zu befestigen, wie auch die Geschichte und Erlebnisse der deutschen Pioniere von Cincinnati und Umgegend für spätere Generationen durch Sammlung desfallsiger Dokumente, Notizen etc. aufzubewahren, führt den Namen: Deutscher Pionier-Verein von Cincinnati.

Paragraph 2: Mitglieder.

Jeder eingewanderte Deutsche, welcher 25 Jahre in Cincinnati oder Umgegend gewohnt, und das Alter von 40 Jahren erreicht hat, kann durch Stimmenmehrheit aufgenommen, und soll als Mitglied des deutschen Pionier-Vereins betrachtet werden, wenn er die Verfassung eigenhändig unterzeichnet und einen Dollar für seine Mitgliedskarte bezahlt hat.

This meant: membership was not

arbitrarily awarded to anyone. It was exclusive. A member must be German, resident for 25 years (stiff requirement) and 40 years of age ("Schwabenalter"), if elected by majority vote of the members.

The remarkable fact is that the response was wonderful. Over three hundred persons were able to meet the requirements, sign their names and pay the dues.

Membership in the Eastern group was also exclusive, dependent upon a majority of votes by the members present. The Maryland organization named in its charter as its object: "To gather, publish and preserve material for the history of the Germans in Maryland." Its staff of officers was the same: president, secretary, treasurer and an executive committee that was given large powers.³

It is interesting to note that in its original charter the Maryland organization asked for a duration of forty years (1886 plus 40 = 1926). The *Pionier Verein* of Cincinnati lived only half that long (less than twenty); while its daughter has lived already three times as long.

Now since our Society has arrived at its sixtieth anniversary, we are justified in taking a look backward and ask: what has been accomplished? We have published diligent investigations of Maryland colonial history, including that of Western Maryland, the Eastern shore, and the various epochs in the history of the city of Baltimore. Also separate publications such as Herrmann Schuricht's *History of the German Element in Virginia* (1900), Louis P. Hennighausen's *History of the German Society of Maryland* (1909). We are arriving at the crowning effort of this phase of the work in the forthcoming "History of the Germans in Maryland" by Professor Dieter Cunz.⁴ Some parts have already appeared and assure us of the merit and intrinsic value of the whole when complete. The publication of this work will satisfy the de-

mand of many years, an expectation looked forward to, and we may congratulate ourselves on becoming witnesses and contemporaries of this lasting achievement.

What else has been done? The stimulating influence of the Society has gone beyond its borders. The minutes of April 15, 1891, record Professor M. D. Learned's visit to the convention called for the founding of the Pennsylvania German Society. Learned, then Professor at the Johns Hopkins University, became an active member of the "Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland" on January 14, 1890, and was our delegate to the Philadelphia meeting in 1891. Our minutes record his report on the hotly debated subject of three classes of membership:

- 1) Regular: No one shall be eligible as a regular member, unless he be of full age, of good moral character, and a direct descendant of early German or Swiss emigrants to Pennsylvania.
- 2) Associate: German descent, but not native in state of Pennsylvania not less than 21 years. Cannot hold office, no vote on property or location.
- 3) Honorary members: Those that have made history and genealogy their special study.

On invitation of Seidensticker, the Convention used the rooms of the "German Society" of Philadelphia, but Oswald Seidensticker himself could not be a regular member, having been born in Göttingen. Learned (the author of the grammar of Pennsylvania German, etc.) resented not being able to become a regular member, similar to Professor Richard H. Shryock, recently your guest speaker, who could not (so he told me some time ago) prove to the satisfaction of some members that he descended from Germans of Pennsylvania. Still in spite of such idiosyncrasies, the Pennsylvania German Society has gone its way, and the Publications of the Pennsylvania German Society, now over forty volumes, belong to

³ Charter and By-laws of the Society are published in the present *Report*, pp. 7-8.

⁴ Published under the title *The Maryland Germans*, Princeton University press, 1948, 476 pp.

another series of historical contributions which the libraries of books on Americana-Germanica cannot do without. Our Society has always maintained a friendly connection with the one in Pennsylvania. Our minutes record that our president J. G. Morris and vice-president L. P. Hennighausen attended the third annual meeting of the Pennsylvania German Society at York, Pennsylvania as "self-appointed representatives of this Society" on October 11, 1893.

Memorable in our minutes is the report on the visit and address of Professor Oswald Seidensticker in the early days: June 5, 1888, "With great pleasure I have heard of the organization of your Society. I consider it the duty of the Germans to take an active interest in the history of their fellow countrymen in America. If they are indifferent to the part which their kinsmen have acted in the development of our adopted country, what right have they to complain that others do not display more zeal. As German-Americans we, in a certain sense, enter upon the inheritance left by those who came to this country before us and it is our duty to inquire who they were, what they aimed at, what they suffered, what they achieved."

As Professor Seidensticker had held out the hand of fellowship to our Maryland Society and ever emphasized his warm interest in our welfare, so when after his death (January 10, 1894) his successor was a man chosen from our midst, the relationship proved still more fruitful. Marion D. Learned's excellent historical work on "The Turner Lyric in the United States," written here, was aided in its separate edition by the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland and it became the medium through which Learned was able to propagate his larger plans for the foundation of his important serial publication, the *Americana-Germanica*, followed by the *German American Annals*, another of the leading historical annuals, lasting through six-

teen volumes to the end of Learned's life and carrying on for a few years more, though less vigorously.

Then there came a third series, which was located in Chicago, originally edited by Emil Mannhardt and called *Deutsch - Amerikanische Geschichtsblätter* (1900), supported by the "Deutsch-Amerikanische Historische Gesellschaft von Illinois," which subsequently under the editorship of Julius Goebel became an annual publication, a *Jahrbuch* of considerable value, which ran a series of eleven volumes until Goebel's death in 1931; thereafter it was continued for a short time by Max Baum, a last volume appearing as *Jahrgang 1932-1937*.

So while there were, as late as ten years ago, four series of publications on the History of the Germans in the United States, the situation at the present moment is not so bright. The *Pennsylvania German Folklore Society* publications and our own *Reports* are all that have survived. We might add that sprightly bi-monthly journal, well illustrated, *The American German Review*, published by the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation in its beautiful home the Old Custom House Building, 420 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia. A journal that seeks to entertain as well as instruct, it is worthy of our consideration for its noble purpose and success. (Its subscribers numbered 2972 in October 1943, 3245 during the following year).

The student of German-American history has therefore a great deal to fall back on which has already been written. First and foremost are the eighteen volumes of the *Pionier Verein* of Cincinnati 1869-1886 (plus *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Magazin* 1886-1887) generally called *Der Deutsche Pionier*. (This title should never be given to the publication of similar name which Karl Heinzen, the revolutionary of 1847-1849, published for many years with practically no subscribers. That was really Karl Heinzen's *Pionier* only. Carl Wittke has recently published a very appreciative biography of Karl Heinzen called

Against the Current in which this work is described in detail.) The Cincinnati *Deutscher Pionier* and Ratterman's *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Magazin* had a very decisive influence upon the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland in 1886 when the Society was founded. This was like an inheritance that was carried on by the Maryland Society and influenced all subsequent serial publications such as: Learned's *German American Annals*, and the *Jahrbücher* of the Illinois German Historical Society, and to some extent also the publications of the Pennsylvania German Society. The feeling that American historiography has not done justice to the part that the German-American element has contributed to the upbuilding of the American nation and people, prevailed in these historical series and was subjected to close scrutiny and historical treatment. The successful handling of the subject has perhaps in part at least stirred up other foreign elements to a realization of what they contributed to the American make-up and given rise to such books as: *One America* (1945) by Francis J. Brown and Joseph S. Roucek; *We Who Built America* (1939) by Carl Wittke; *A Nation of Nations* (1945) by Louis Adamic; all of which voice the same demand for historical recognition against the traditional assumption that the history of the country was made exclusively by the so called Anglo-Saxon element, powerful though it may have been. Not always have the claims of the national minorities revealed the same love of accurate historical investigation as has the German contingent.

On the eve of an anniversary celebration one is not in the habit of looking backward only, as interesting or satisfying as that might be. We want to look forward also. Therefore we naturally ask ourselves: What about our future? After our ambition has been realized, after the history of the Maryland Germans has been written, what are we going to do next? Shall

we consider our work done and shut up shop? There are precedents for that, but is that the desirable solution? Or, should we do as the Cincinnati *Pionier Verein*, seek new pastures, turn to the West and Southwest for new areas of investigation? So our glances should turn to the neighborly southern areas. If my personal experiences be of any value, permit me to refer to them.

Most persons of the present remember Professor William E. Dodd only as ambassador to Germany, 1933-1937. Dodd was a poor diplomatist who failed completely in exercising an ambassador's greatest privilege: leading the two countries he represents to a better understanding of each other. Dodd's admiration of Woodrow Wilson, expressed in his eulogistic book *Woodrow Wilson and his Work* endeared him to American politicians and drew him into politics where he did not belong. I knew Dodd when he became professor of history at the University of Chicago back in 1908. He was born in Clayton, North Carolina, took his Ph. D. at the University of Leipzig where he was a pupil of Karl Lamprecht. He wrote in German: *Jeffersons Rückkehr zur Politik*. He felt a real appreciation of the part played by the German element in American colonial history. When my book on *The German Element in the United States* came out in 1909 he was one of the first to welcome it, and when I asked him one day: "Do you think I exaggerated the influence of the Germans in the south?" he said: "Why no. You have underestimated it." That often made me think, but I never found time or opportunity to work at that problem. I offer it now as a subject for investigation by future investigators of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland. William Dodd was an authority on the colonial history of the South, and his word should not be taken lightly. After his retirement from politics he started working again on *The Old South, Struggles for Democracy, The*

First American Social Order; but he died in 1940 before he could complete what he had in mind.

The German descendants of Charleston, South Carolina have themselves recently been active historically by the publication of the *History of the Friendly Society of Charleston, 1766-1916*, compiled from the original sources by George J. Gongaware, since 1913 pastor of the St. John's Lutheran Church. We notice also a renewed interest in South Carolina's favorite poet Henry Timrod, : *Laureate of the Confederacy*, by Henry T. Thompson (1928). The Timrod family (originally the German name Dimrot) for a hundred years shared the weal and woe of their home city Charleston.

Now in conclusion, let me say that I think the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland is fortunate in not being required by its constitution to publish serial publications at stated intervals. Our Society has frequently allowed long periods to elapse before publishing its *Reports*. It may

publish when it listeth. That is a good principle guaranteeing survival. The editor of an historical series is obliged to close when general interest and subscribers fail,—we can live on forever without anyone being disturbed about periods of silence.

Finally, I wish to thank the Society for the honor of having me address them on this festive occasion, especially since I did it once before, at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Society in 1911.⁵ My best wishes attend the Society for the next, the seventy-fifth anniversary, but I cannot guarantee being present then since the years that rest upon my back, if I survive that long, will hardly count in my favor again. The Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland is now the oldest society engaged with the history of the German element in the United States. May it ever look back with pride upon its past, and look forward with confidence in its future! May this venerable Maryland Society ever retain its youth and its vigor!

⁵ Published in the *Twenty-third Report of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland* (1929), pp. 5-13: "Undercurrents of German Influence in Maryland."