

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### *The Last Years of the Reverend J. Samuel Schwerdtfeger*

Most books on the German element and on the Lutheran Church in Maryland mention the name of the Rev. J. Samuel Schwerdtfeger. A native of Burgbernheim, Bavaria, Schwerdtfeger had a difficult childhood. After six years in the Neustadt orphanage, he entered Erlangen University where he attended some lectures on theology and law but soon began to drift aimlessly. He fell victim to immigrant runners who took him to Holland where he bound himself for passage to America. In the spring of the year 1753 he arrived in Baltimore where the ship captain offered him for sale as a *studiosus theol.* for the amount of his passage. The Lutheran congregation of York, Pennsylvania, being at that time at loggerheads within their old pastor, heard of the bargain and bought Schwerdtfeger as their preacher.<sup>1</sup> After five years of service in York, he transferred to New Holland, Pennsylvania. Schwerdtfeger's temperament was not conducive to a long ministry at one place. In 1763 he assumed the pastorate of the Lutheran Church in Frederick, Maryland. His five years of service there proved beneficial for the organization of that group of Lutherans which had been without resident pastors for many years. However, Schwerdtfeger felt the urge to move on. After a trip to Europe, he made again brief appearances in Maryland and Pennsylvania before settling in New York State where he distinguished himself through his pastoral work in Albany and Feilstown. He became one of the founders of the New York Ministerium. American Lutheran sources have claimed that Samuel Schwerdtfeger died at Feilstown, New York in 1788.<sup>2</sup>

Recent Canadian research, however, has proved that Schwerdtfeger's controversial, yet often distinguished career did not end in New York.<sup>3</sup> During the Revolutionary War, the pastor had remained a staunch loyalist. His name appears on a petition sent to the Crown Lands in Quebec in 1780, with those of 150 other citizens, asking that they be allowed to become citizens of Canada. His son, Frederick, who was born in Frederick, Maryland, in 1765, was then already living in Canada. The elder Schwerdtfeger made several preaching tours among the Palatine United Empire Loyalists. Finally in 1790, the Evangelical Lutheran congregation in Williamsburg township, Dundas county, Ontario, extended a call to Pastor Schwerdtfeger who accepted without hesitation. For more than a decade he labored among the German settlers along the Canadian side of the Saint Lawrence river. He died in Williamsburg, Ontario, in 1803. The Lutherans of Ontario consider J. Samuel Schwerdtfeger the patriarch of their denomination.

### *A Silesian Village in Maryland: Silesia, Founded in 1892*

Some twelve miles from the border of the District of Columbia, the small community of Silesia in Prince Georges County could have celebrated its seventieth anniversary if anybody had cared to do so. Silesia, Maryland,

<sup>1</sup> Louis P. Hennighausen, *History of the German Society of Maryland* (Baltimore, 1909), 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> *Nachrichten van den Vereinigten Deutschen, Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinen in Nord-America* (American edition: Allentown, Pa., 1886), I, 177, 276, 427-429, 633; Abdel R. Wentz, *History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Frederick, Maryland* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1938), 124-134.

<sup>3</sup> Hazel M. Schwerdtfeger, *Memoirs of Reverend J. Samuel Schwerdtfeger*, New York, 1961, Carlton Press, 84 pp.

was founded in 1892 by Robert Stein, a German immigrant from Rengersdorf near Glatz, Silesia. Stein who lived in Anacostia, D. C. was employed by the Federal Government as a translator of German-language documents. He acquired considerable tracts of land near Fort Foote (now Fort Washington) on the Potomac River. He was planning to expand his lands sufficiently in order to bring many families from his homeland to Maryland. However, only the original tracts were settled by Silesians. The first families to arrive were those headed by Joseph Tilch of Rengersdorf, Wilhelm Bittner and J. Adler of Falkenhain near Gratz and Hermann Fischer of Rengersdorf. Several others followed during the 1890s but they did not stay permanently except for Franz Walzel whose descendants are still living in Silesia today as are the Tilchs and Adlers. Robert Stein succeeded in having a school and a post office established in the new village. The most prominent home of the settlement was "New Glatz" just outside the village itself. It was built by Stein who spent the remaining years of his bachelor life there as a country gentleman. When he died without issue, the property was acquired by a family named Collins which changed the name of "New Glatz" to "Harmony Hall." Silesia is today almost within the metropolitan area of Washington and the erstwhile farm village of Silesian peasants has lost most of its original character but its name remains on the map of Maryland as a testimony to its Silesian founder.

*Carl Schurz Medal Awarded to Pastor Fritz O. Evers*

One of the most faithful members of our Society, Pastor Fritz O. Evers was awarded the Carl Schurz Medal at the 1961 annual meeting and dinner of the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation. The citation delivered by Professor Harry W. Pfund, President of the Foundation, reads as follows:

The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, Inc. presents its Carl Schurz Medal to Pastor Fritz O. Evers of Baltimore for distinguished achievement in cultural relations between the United States and the German-speaking peoples.

Pastor Evers came to the United States in 1908. He served as minister in Englewood, New Jersey, until 1912. Two years of service in New York among German immigrants followed. From 1914 to 1928 he was pastor of St. Michaels and Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Philadelphia, founded in 1742 and one of the most famous places of worship during the Revolutionary period. He served as pastor of Zion Church in Baltimore from 1929 to 1952, the year of his retirement.

Throughout his life Pastor Evers has devoted himself to the spiritual well-being as well as to the cultural interests of the German American community in Philadelphia, Baltimore and beyond. Through his column in the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herald* he reaches countless thousands of Americans of German birth and descent.

After both World Wars he took an active part in the organizations established for the relief of the German population, especially the children. The United Lutheran Church greatly benefited from his wise counsel as did innumerable individuals who came to him in distress and were given encouragement and help. His ministerial and philanthropic activities were deepened and enhanced by his knowledge and understanding of the classics in German literature and philosophy. This background, combined with an inspiring personality, makes him an outstanding representative of contemporary German American life, a leader thoroughly grounded in the American concept of democracy, yet, drawing his force from the roots of

his German cultural heritage. In grateful recognition of his services to the fellow countrymen on both sides of the Atlantic, the Carl Schurz Medal is herewith presented.

*Baltimore's German Days Honor Memory of Great Maryland Germans.*

Earlier Reports of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland contain extensive accounts of the DEUTSCHTAG celebrations which have been held in Baltimore almost every year since 1900 when the Independent Citizens Union of Maryland, an organization of American citizens of German descent, first called on the German element of Maryland to gather once a year for a public celebration. These GERMAN DAYS have become a tradition sixty years after their initiation. They have in recent years been held in Gwynn Oak Park. Many German American societies from Maryland and from the adjoining states participate regularly in these annual gatherings which have the character of a *Volksfest*. The President of the Independent Citizens Union, Otto H. Kappus, a member of our Society, has attempted to add a new perspective to these joyful and happy gatherings. Since 1960, each GERMAN DAY in Baltimore has been dedicated to the memory of a German American who has made a particularly significant contribution to the development of the city, the state and the nation. This annual tribute to the history of the Germans in Maryland has found a remarkable echo in the press. The first three personalities thus honored were:

- 1960: Julius Hofmann
- 1961: Charles Frederick Wiesenthal
- 1962: Ottmar Mergenthaler

In 1963, the GERMAN DAY will honor and remember the contribution Gustav Strube made to the cultural life of his adopted home town. From 1913 until 1930 Strube was the conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

The Independent Citizens Union and the *Deutschtage*-Committee should be commended for giving such a splendid example of "living history."