

In Memoriam

ALBERT P. BACKHAUS. Born in Baltimore in 1915 into a family for whom active participation in the social, religious and cultural life of the German-American community was a matter of course, Albert Backhaus attended the city public schools and went on to the University of Maryland where he earned his civil engineering degree. His untimely death from cancer on February 18, 1980 left many a void in the city and the state where he served on numerous commissions, boards and voluntary groups. The Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland lost one of its most active members whose counsel was often resorted to. A member since 1951, Backhaus was particularly interested in bolstering and expanding the REPORT. During his service on the Executive Committee from 1962 until 1975 he made valuable contributions, notably in the preparation of the festive observance of the 75th anniversary of the founding of our Society. Zion Lutheran Church also lost a dedicated member with his death.

The professional career of Albert P. Backhaus began with successful practice as registered professional engineer in local engineering firms before World War II. During the war, he served with the Corps of Engineers and the Inspector General's Department. Attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel, he was chief of the construction section of the operations branch, Middle Atlantic Division, in the Corps of Engineers; executive officer of the 275th Engineer Combat Battalion, and a division engineer with the 75th Infantry Division. As an inspector general, he served with the 22d Corps and the armored forces. After World War II, Backhaus worked for the Veterans Administration here as assistant to the manager and for the VA's construction, supply and real estate division.

In 1955 Backhaus was appointed city deputy director of public works, a position he held until 1959 when Governor J. Millard Tawes made him head of the Maryland Department of Public Improvements, one of the two highest engineering positions in the state. He came to this job with a national reputation in professional circles. Many of his local friends were unaware of the importance of the work he had done quietly in the early 1950's. For several years he served as technical director of the New York State Building Code Commission and virtually created the new state building code in New York which is in effect to this day. Naturally the Governor entrusted him with the same task in his home state. During the eight years as department head, Albert Backhaus was also responsible for overseeing practically all public construction projects in Maryland.

With the advent of the Spiro T. Agnew administration, Backhaus turned to consultant work. In 1968, he became president of Engco Enterprises, Inc., a consulting engineering practice. Away from public service only three years, he became program coordinator for the State Highway Administration in 1970, primarily responsible for coordinating design and construction of toll facilities in the state, including the Outer Harbor crossing project, the Key Bridge. At the time of his death, he was working as principal staff engineer for the state Division of Labor and Industry, helping to administer the Maryland Occupational Safety and Health Law.

STANLEY E. BLUMBERG. After a long illness Stanley E. Blumberg, retired director of alumni relations at the Johns Hopkins University, died on October 8, 1984 at his home in Towson, Maryland. He was born in Baltimore on December 1, 1915 and attended public schools in the city. In 1932 Blumberg graduated from City College, winning an award for scholastic achievement and a scholarship to Hopkins. Before his graduation from the university to which he remained loyal all his life, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. From the beginning he was interested in writing and in public relations. He began his career with the Joseph Katz Company as an apprentice copywriter in 1935. From 1939 until 1941 he worked for the Newhoff Advertising Agency. Returning to the Katz firm, he rose to president of the company. In 1970 Stanley Blumberg accepted the position as director of alumni relations of his alma mater. He retired in June 1983, after holding the post for 13 years, a period in which dues payments and other support for the Alumni Association rose from \$50,000 to \$400,000 yearly. Known for his poetical fund-raising pleas, he also started the university's travel program, which organized tours. At the time of his death he was still serving as a consultant to Johns Hopkins' Development Office. He was fond of sports, classical music and the history of his home town. The latter interest prompted him to join the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland in 1976. During World War II, he had served as an officer in the Navy in the Southwest Pacific. While in Australia he met and married Norma Bennett. His widow and other family members established the Stanley E. Blumberg Scholarship Fund in his memory at Johns Hopkins University.

VICTOR J. FURST, SR. It was late in 1941 that Professor A. E. Zucker, editor of the *Report* of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, contacted the printing firm, J. H. Furst Company, about printing the 25th *Report*. There he met Victor J. Furst who showed him similar publications which his firm had printed for decades. This was the beginning of a cooperation that is still continuing. Like many of the prominent Baltimore printers, the Furst brothers who founded the firm in 1904 were of German descent. Victor J. Furst was born in Baltimore. He attended Calvert Hall College before entering the printing business of his father and uncles. There was never any question that he was dedicated to the Gutenberg craft but within the family there was also a strong pull toward music. Young Victor

played the clarinet before hurting one of his hands at the printing plant. He then became active as a singer, more exactly as a baritone, and later on directed church choirs. Under his management the Furst company developed into a specialty print shop for scholarly, technical and foreign-language works. He remained actively involved until a few months before his death which occurred on September 29, 1982, one day before his 90th birthday. One of the last manuscripts he received for printing was that of our *Report* 38. A little over a year before his death he experienced the unspeakable pain of the death of his son, Victor Jr., who was murdered by shots from a passing car in Woodlawn. His other son, Charles F. Furst, has assumed the management of the printshop in the Candler Building.

OTTO ORTMANN. When the long-time director of the Peabody Conservatory of Music, Otto Ortmann, died at the age of 90 on October 22, 1979, it was difficult to assess in what field he had been most prominent—as a teacher, as administrator, as a composer or as a scholar. Ortmann was all of that and more. A native of Baltimore, Otto Ortmann inherited his musical and intellectual interests from his parents. His father, Richard, was a singer and organist, an instructor of history and mathematics at Zion School, then known as "Scheib's School". In addition, he was an editor and music critic of the *Baltimore Correspondent*, the leading German-language newspaper. Richard Ortmann was a native of Gusterhain near Herborn in Nassau. He had left Germany after the Prussians took over Nassau in 1866 because he did not agree with their educational policies. In 1883 he married Elizabeth Krüger, who was, at the time and for many years later, one of the leading church and concert sopranos of Baltimore. Their son, Otto Rudolph, was born on January 25, 1889.

After graduation from City College, Otto Ortmann studied at the Johns Hopkins University and the Peabody Conservatory, where he received a teacher's certificate and an artist's degree in composition. He was to become a prolific composer. Among his works are two string quartets, a tone poem, an orchestral suite, a sonata for cello and piano, a number of smaller compositions for various instruments and a series of pedagogical studies for the keyboard. Appointed to the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory in 1917. Ortmann taught piano and harmony for the next 10 years. In 1928, he was named director of the institution. Under Ortmann's administration, the Peabody Conservatory became the city's most forceful forum for the presentation of music; its Friday Afternoon Series was nationally known and the envy of large cities. Under his leadership the conservatory also became the first institution of its kind in the world to develop a department of studies devoted specifically to the experimental and scientific investigation of musical talent, perception and teaching.

After his retirement from the Peabody in 1941, Dr. Ortmann went on to serve as chairman of the music department at Goucher College from 1942 to 1957. He continued to teach private voice and piano lessons at his St. Paul street home in Baltimore, which housed four pianos. One was more than a

hundred years old and was a gift to his father from the manufacturer, Wilhelm Knabe.

Like his father before him, Otto Ortmann, was active in a number of cultural organizations of the German-American community. For more than forty-five years he belonged to the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland. In his long, rich life, he taught two generations of young men and women who have since made their mark on American musical life. With his death, a good part of what was German Baltimore at its best became history.

FRIEDEMANN H. PENNER. On November 19, 1984 the beloved *Zions-pastor*, Friedemann H. B. Penner, collapsed in his church after a heart attack. The preceding day he had held the German and English services as usual with his well-prepared sermons in both languages, had attended the traditional Zion church assembly and looked after other congregational matters. The only thing Pastor Penner never observed was rest for himself. The large membership of the 229 year-old Lutheran church on City Hall Plaza and his associates and friends everywhere were stunned by the news that this pastor was called by the Lord whom he served at the age of only 55. In 1928, one of his predecessors, Pastor Julius Hofmann, also collapsed at the altar of Zion Church while instructing his confirmation class. Pastor Penner was the worthy successor to a long line of ministers at Zion. On November 23 the church and the city gathered in his memory. It was one of those moments in the venerable building where past and present, heaven and earth seemed to merge into one stream. Lutheran Bishop Morris Zumbrun and Penner's colleague, Pastor Wolf Knappe, conducted the memorial service. Among the many mourners was one particularly close friend of the pastor, Mayor William D. Schaefer, from whose office window Zion Church is the most visible city landmark.

Pastor Penner came to Baltimore in 1963 to continue the tradition of a bilingual church in the heart of the city. The call to Zion Church in itself has always been a special distinction. Not only did he preserve the church and congregation in a radically changed environment, he also intensified its involvement in the community at large. He continued the distinct German-American character of Zion which has never abandoned the German services every Sunday and on special holidays. His cooperation with other churches was stressed in a tribute by the Jesuit priest, Father Leo A. Murray, who praised Penner's true interest in ecumenical concerns. Pastor Penner served as president of the German Interest Conference of the Lutheran Church in America and as chairman of the vocations committee and the examination panel of the Maryland Synod. For many years he was on the editorial board of the *Kirchliches Monatsblatt*, the organ of Lutheran congregations in North America with regular German services. He served as chairman of Central Churches of Baltimore, was a member of the Executive Board of the Seafarers Center and chaplain to a number of organizations, among them the General German Aging People's Home.

He was born in 1929 in Tilsit, East Prussia, where his father was a public official. During the evacuation of East Prussia in 1945, the family was scattered

but soon all came together in Hamburg where young Penner finished his secondary schooling. In Hamburg he also met Hannelies Schuldt who was to become his "highschool sweetheart" for life. But first he embarked on theological studies, at the University of Hamburg and later in Munich and Goettingen.

In 1952 he was sent to Canada at the request of the Lutheran World Council. The increased German emigration to Canada required German-speaking ministers. There at the University of Saskatchewan he finished his graduate studies. He also found Hannelies Schuldt in Canada and the two were married in October 1953. In July 1956 he was ordained at the Lutheran College and Seminary at Saskatoon. In the following years Pastor Penner served at the German Trinity Lutheran Church in Edmonton while studying clinical and pastoral counseling at the University Hospital of Alberta. From the beginning he was willing to prepare himself in every respect for a ministry in the inner city. He extended his studies and participated in special courses at the Psychological Training Institute in New York and at the Urban Institute in Chicago. He was 33 years old when he was called to Baltimore. Two of the children of Hannelies and Friedemann Penner, Bernard and Joanne, were born in Canada, the third one, Thomas, in Baltimore in November 1964.

Pastor Penner loved Baltimore and Maryland. He knew how to make good use of his precious leisure time. The family maintained a shore home on Cornfield Creek in Anne Arundel county where he sailed and swam. He was also fascinated by scale models of boats and trains. He was a familiar figure at all major German-American events in the city. Soon after his arrival he joined the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland. Asked at one point if he would accept election to our executive committee, he puffed on his pipe and then looked up: "Yes, if you can wait until my retirement." He had just been appointed to the Community Relations Commission. For Pastor Penner there were clear priorities and he served them better than many a contemporary. It was his privilege to add a chapter to the long history of Zion Church. It is a worthy chapter.

FRANCIS W. PRAMSCHUFER, SR. was born in Locust Point, Baltimore, Md. on January 17, 1892. His father was Albert Martin Pramschufer, an immigrant from Germany; his mother was Wilhelmina Henrietta Knoch, whose father was also an immigrant from Germany. Francis Pramschufer attended public schools and took a very active part in Christ Church on Beason St. in Locust Point where he met and later married Anna J. Ford. They had three children: Doris, Francis and Audrey. He joined the masonic order in 1919 and was a member of Concordia Lodge. He was also a member of the Tall Cedars. All through his life he made an effort to promote his German cultural heritage. His areas of concentrated work were: The German Society of Maryland, of which he was president for several years and served on the Board of Directors; The Greisenheim, of which he was also past president and on the Board; Club Fidelitas, Inc., of which he was charter member and founding member and also past president and on the Board of Directors; he also held membership in various other

German clubs and societies where his organizational skills were well utilized and appreciated. For thirty-two years Francis Pramschufer was a member of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland. His active involvement often assured the liaison and cooperation with other German-American organizations in the city.

A prominent businessman, he owned and operated an insurance agency and brokerage through the Home Insurance Company of New York. He retired at the age of 83. He died on January 14, 1979, three days before his 87th birthday, while visiting his daughter, Mrs. Audrey E. Myers, in Birmingham, Alabama.

FRIEDA C. THIES. All members of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland who encountered problems or had questions while researching at the Johns Hopkins libraries in the 50's or early 60's, knew to whom to turn for advice and reference. There was always Frieda C. Thies. She served as a librarian at the Johns Hopkins University for sixty-six years. She was born in 1880, the youngest of eight children of German immigrants. Her father, Henry, painted murals for many Baltimore buildings and her mother, Elisabeth, was a regular contributor of German poetry to the *Sonntags-Journal*. After her graduation from Eastern High School in 1900 she began working as a librarian for the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland before she came to Johns Hopkins. When she retired in 1968 she was curator of manuscripts at the Milton S. Eisenhower Library on Hopkins' Homewood campus. She had also worked as chief reference librarian. She always delighted in recalling her starting salary at \$35 a month at age 22 in 1902. One of the more spectacular events in her life was the suddenly interrupted German service at Zion Lutheran Church and her running home through a shower of cinders the morning of the Great Baltimore Fire of February 7, 1904. Her interest in history, particularly of the German element, enabled her to assist many a young scholar. She belonged to the Maryland Historical Society and the Society for the Preservation of Antiquities. When she died in Lutherville, Maryland, on November 16, 1983, she was 103 years old.

ERNST OTTOMAR VON SCHWERDTNER. Born at the family home, Severn Hill, on the Severn River, Ernst von Schwerdtner grew up in a multilingual family. He cultivated this aspect after it became evident that he was gifted for languages. He mastered three languages perfectly and became fluent in four others. He was graduated as a valedictorian of his class at St. John's College when he was 18. His career as a language professor included positions at Johns Hopkins University and Gettysburg College where he taught until 1937. It was in Gettysburg that he met Susan Mary Kubitz. They were married in 1923. In 1946 Ernst von Schwerdtner was appointed to organize the foreign language department at Towson State. His career at Towson was not limited to linguistics. Soon after assuming his professorship, he volunteered to help in the athletic department, where he established a wrestling program, revived the baseball curriculum and became adviser for the school's first lacrosse

team. He coached baseball for four years and wrestling for 17 years. In 1980 he was inducted into the Towson State University Athletic Hall of Fame, an honor which pleased him particularly because he had always stressed the need for a balance between mental and physical effort in the course of studies.

After his retirement from Towson State in 1963, he continued to teach languages and served as academic dean at the Trinitarian College of Holy Trinity Monastery. He published a basic text on the study of languages, *Fundamental Language Facts*. For many years he took an active interest in the Baltimore chapter of the American Goethe Society. After joining the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland in 1952, he served on the executive committee and was First Vice President from 1958 until 1962. His lively participation in the discussions after lectures was for many years a feature of the Society's annual meetings. His many other activities included the Johns Hopkins Committee of the Use of Human Subjects, which dealt with ethical standards. Ernst von Schwerdtner died on April 3, 1984 at the age of 85 years after a brief illness. A memorial service was held at Towson State University's Fine Arts Auditorium.

SUSAN VON SCHWERDTNER. On May 20, 1979 Susan Mary Kubitz von Schwerdtner died 74 years old, in Baltimore after a long illness. She was the wife of Ernst von Schwerdtner. After the couple's four children were growing into teenagers, she went back to school, graduated *cum laude* from Gettysburg College and earned a master's degree in social work in a combined program at Catholic University and the University of Pennsylvania. She was a district supervisor for many years in foster child care and social work training programs in Baltimore city, and was a district supervisor for several years in Baltimore county.

Susan von Schwerdtner was very much interested in her family history which included both German stock in Maryland and some of the oldest families in Tidewater Virginia. She was a member of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland and the Society of the Lees of Virginia. She held offices at various times and was active in the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the American Colonists.

JOHN JOSEPH WITTSTADT. Exactly on his 76th birthday, on December 29, 1983, John Joseph Wittstadt died in Franklin Square Hospital. He was a direct descendant of the Kalb family of Franconia from which the commanding general of the Maryland Line, Baron John de Kalb came. Wittstadt was proud of this family relationship to one of Maryland's most prominent revolutionary heroes. Born in Baltimore, he worked for many years as a supervisor for the Bethlehem Steel Company. He is survived by his widow, the former Margaret Zeiler Hohenstein, a daughter, Kathleen W. Mustachio, and three sons, John W., Gerrard William and Charles Terrence. Judge Gerrard William Wittstadt is an active member of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland.