

**A MAN OF RARE VISION:
WILLIAM T. SNYDER (1918-1981)**

The editor of *The Frederick Post* of Frederick, Maryland, commemorated the life and death of our Bill Snyder with an editorial, entitled "A Man of Rare Vision." It was the most fitting tribute among the many that appeared in newspapers across the state during the week after his sudden and untimely death on February 23, 1981. The Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland gratefully endorses this characterization of a man without whose dedication much of our work would have been left undone. Although his involvement in our society represented only a minute part of the enormous amount of community work Bill Snyder did, it was often crucial for its continued existence. The real significance of his contributions began to dawn on us only when he had left us forever. Even now, almost four years later, officers of the society still have to call from time to time on his widow, Eleanor L. McKnight Snyder, to find out about this or that aspect of our program that Bill was working on at the time of his death. His devotion to our society was complete. Quietly he had begun to analyze the content of all our publications since 1886. Two results of this labor are presented in this issue of *The Report*.

William Trammell Snyder, Jr. was first and foremost a Baltimorean. His roots in the region and in the city were deep. On his father's side they were planted in colonial times. The Snyders of the Middle Colonies left their mark in many spheres of the region's development. On his mother's side, he descended from the Hemmeters, the Schneidereiths and the Wittkugels who brought with them to America in the 1840's what was most needed in the new industrial society: skills, education and dedication. He was born in Baltimore on August 7, 1918, the only child of William Trammell Snyder and Elsa Katherine Schneidereith. Fate willed it that his childhood and early youth were not as rosy as all outward circumstances seemed to indicate. His mother died and his aunt, Helene Schneidereith, reared the child who soon contracted an illness that was to lead to progressive loss of sight. He was enrolled in the Maryland School for the Blind. After graduation, Snyder went to City College and on to the University of Pennsylvania where he obtained his B.A. in 1940. In later years, Bill Snyder resumed his academic pursuits. He did graduate work at The Johns Hopkins University and earned a master's degree from the University of Maryland with a thesis on Dr. Charles F. Wiesenthal, medical pioneer and leader of the colonial German community of Baltimore.

His professional work in journalism and public relations began in his early college days. He was on the editorial staff of the Hagerstown *Morn-*

ing Herald and served as a press contact man for the 1940 Republican National Campaign Committee. During his studies at the University of Pennsylvania, he had a part-time job at radio station WIP. After his return to Baltimore he gained experience in public relations firms. In 1947 he started his own business, William T. Snyder & Associates, which he conducted until his death. While his firm produced the usual newsletters, annual reports and brochures for clients, it soon developed into a special agency to which organizations representing the handicapped and chronically ill turned with confidence. Among others, Bill Snyder's agency represented the Kidney Foundation. He provided it with its first staff and was instrumental in preparing a report that gained state and eventually federal financial help for victims of chronic kidney disease. From 1957 to 1971 he was executive director of the Kidney Foundation of Maryland. He will long be remembered for his decisive part in drafting Maryland's anatomical gift act, which allows people to will organs for use in transplants.

In 1977 Snyder headed the Maryland delegation to the White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals. This conference gave the final push for the introduction of legislation all over the country to enable handicapped people to lead normal lives within a society that had never before paused long enough to introduce such measures. His efforts to remove barriers to the handicapped as president of the Baltimore Committee to Eliminate Architectural Barriers and Travel Obstacles to the Handicapped led to considerable changes on public roadways and buildings. He was also active in the Commerce and Industry Combined Health Appeal, the Maryland Workshop for the Blind, the American Foundation for the Blind, the Arthritis Foundation of Maryland and a myriad of other organizations. In addition, Bill Snyder was frequently called upon to serve as a consultant to government agencies, particularly the Department of Labor and the former Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Awards for his activities, both professional and civic, include the Freedom Foundation Gold Medal and the Helen Keller Medal. At the time of his death, he was president of the Radio Reading Service, a broadcast service of detailed news and features for the visually handicapped. It was all part of his desire to enable others to achieve what he had truly accomplished: to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Bill Snyder was an ardent member of Baltimore Bibliophiles. He collected rare works on Maryland and early maps of the region. He and his wife, Eleanor, were well known at book auctions. The map collection was a matter of special pride. Several important pieces were acquired during their travel here and in Europe. At a memorial address before the Baltimore Bibliophiles, delivered at Evergreen House, Harold A. Williams recalled that the last map Bill Snyder had bought was Lord Baltimore's of 1671. The day he died he and Eleanor had taken it to be framed.

Another abiding lifetime interest was the history of Baltimore and Maryland. It was this interest that led Bill Snyder to enter graduate studies.

But even without the academic stamp of approval he would have been an accomplished historian. A case in point are the carefully researched fifty articles which appeared from 1942 until 1946 in the magazine *Baltimore*. These vignettes of historical landmarks deserve to be plucked from oblivion. Many booklets and frequent articles from his pen appeared over the years. His last published writings were twenty biographies of American inventors which appeared in the *Creative Profiles* series, published by Schneidereith & Sons.

Given his family background and his interest in Maryland history, it was not surprising that Bill Snyder joined our society in 1948, soon after establishing his own firm. From the beginning he had no intention to limit his participation to an annual lecture and festive dinner. After three years he was elected to the Executive Committee on which he served during the most active years of the society. His constructive contributions during the meetings of the committee are a matter of record. His professional abilities in public relations served the society in good stead. When the chairman of the Executive Committee, Professor Harold Jantz, stepped down to assume soon afterward the presidency of our society, Bill Snyder was unanimously elected to succeed the distinguished scholar. From 1965 until his death, a full sixteen years, he presided over the periodic meetings with humor and determination. At all times he came to the meetings with well prepared reports. He kept in personal touch with all committee members over the years. He also served as our valuable liaison to other organizations in which he was active. Above all, a meeting at which Bill Snyder presided was free of tensions and the pettiness that characterizes so many smaller associations. Whenever nobody else came forward to do what had to be done, Bill would say: "I'll see to it."