

A SALUTE TO THE GERMAN-AMERICAN BUSINESS ENTERPRISES OF BALTIMORE

by William H. McClain

Among the plans for the centennial of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland in 1986 was to accord special recognition to German-American business enterprises of Baltimore City by publishing brief accounts of their role in the economic and cultural life of Baltimore and the State of Maryland in the *Report*. Letters were addressed to several firms of German-American origin, and quite a few responded by sending brief histories. In this issue we offer accounts of two of the oldest and most highly esteemed of Baltimore's German-American business enterprises: Glauber's Fine Candies, Inc., which enjoys the distinc-

tion of being the oldest retail candy manufacturer in the United States, and the Kirk Stieff Company, America's oldest silversmiths.

GLAUBER'S CANDIES

In 1876, the year in which Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone and the Johns Hopkins University opened its doors for the first time, John H. Glauber established a small candy factory and retail candy shop at 1037 South Hanover Street which prospered and grew. By 1912 two of his sons, Howard A. and J. Milton, had become partners, and the firm name had been changed to John H. Glauber & Sons. With the help of his two



Glauber's First Candy Store, (ca. 1912)
Courtesy Kenneth R. Glauber

partners John Glauber was able to open stalls in the Cross Street and Hollins markets and to supply candy to department stores and to several groceries and bakeries.

By 1935 the Hanover Street quarters had become too small, and Howard Glauber, then president, accordingly purchased a property at 1020 Regester Avenue in North Baltimore where he could both live and work. Space for the factory and also for a small retail shop was provided by adding on to the house.

When Howard Glauber died in 1939, the responsibility for running the business fell to his widow, Miriam, and his eldest son, Howard A. Glauber, Jr. Howard's younger brother, Kenneth, also became a partner after he had finished college. Under the competent management of the third generation the company continued to thrive. In the early 1950's a candy stall was opened in the newly rebuilt Lexington Market; and in 1963 a shop featuring both cards and candies was established in the Yorkridge Shopping Center. In 1965 another retail outlet was added in the Perring Plaza Shopping Center. Six years later still another store was started in the Eastpoint Mall. 1983 saw the opening of an additional outlet in the Towsontown Centre. The family ultimately decided to close the Lexington Market stall, but the four outlet stores are still flourishing.

Because of technological advances, as Kenneth Glauber notes in his account of his firm's history, candy-making operations today bear little resemblance to those employed by the firm's founder.¹ On the other hand, as he points out, time has not changed "the family tradition of excellence and personal service." In manufacturing candies basic recipes are still used, and several traditional procedures are still followed. In making caramel, fudge, and nougat products, for example, Kenneth Glauber still employs a traditional open-kettle cooking process, and Howard Glauber, Jr. "still roasts fresh nuts and crushes them with a rolling pin." The old metal molds for Chris Kringle, Easter bunnies, and toy shapes have of course been replaced by modern fiberglass molds, but the products, Kenneth Glauber affirms, "are as tasty and pretty as they were 100 years ago."

THE KIRK STIEFF COMPANY

The first member of the Stieff family to arrive from Germany was Karl Maximilian Stieff, who emigrated in the early 1830's. A professional musician, he first earned his living by giving piano lessons. Later, reports Charles C. Stieff II, he also imported pianos from Germany for his pupils. In 1850, his son, John Louis Stieff, went to the gold fields at age sixteen and discovered gold. With his gold he was able to help his father begin the manufacturing of pianos and thus to launch what soon became known throughout the United States as the Stieff Piano Company.

The founder of the firm now known as the Kirk Stieff Company was John Louis Stieff's youngest son, Charles Clinton, who left his father's piano company at an early age and became a wholesale silver distributor. Later he acquired a small silver manufacturing enterprise which assumed as its firm name the Baltimore Silver Company. In 1892 the firm was incorporated as the Stieff Silver Company.²

Under the able direction of Gideon Numsen Stieff the Stieff Silver Company developed into a national organization which was represented in every major American city. In the late 1930's the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation further enhanced the prestige of the firm by extending to it a license to make all Williamsburg silver reproductions. During World War II the firm contributed to the war effort by manufacturing radar parts, surgical instruments, and other items of strategic importance.

After leaving the service in 1946 Rodney G. Stieff joined the company. Charles C. Stieff, II followed in 1948, and in 1954 Gideon N. Stieff, Jr. came into the firm. From 1956 on, thanks to the development of Williamsburg reproductions, pewter also became an important product. Soon other restorations — Monticello, Old Sturbridge, the Newport Preservation Society, Mystic Seaport, Historic Charleston, The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Smithsonian Institution — were also commissioning silver and pewter reproductions.

In 1974, James W. Stieff, a representative of

the fourth generation of the Stieff family, entered the firm. Four years later, in 1979, a merger was announced between the Stieff Silver Company and the eminent Samuel Kirk Silver Company, America's Oldest Silversmiths. Today the firm produces and markets sterling silver flatware and hollowware, silver plated flatware and hollowware, pewter, 14k.-gold designer jewelry, and stainless steel flatware.

A new chapter in the history of the Kirk Stieff Company began on March 9, 1990, with the finalization of a merger agreement between the firm and Lenox, Inc., which is widely renowned for its fine china. One of the terms of the agreement, as reported in the Baltimore Messenger of March 28, 1990, is a

guarantee of a five-year lease of the Hampden plant "so that the company's 200 employees would not be immediately displaced." It was also agreed that Rodney G. Stieff, the present Chairman of the Kirk Stieff Company, would continue to be a member of the Board of Directors of the new firm, and that Pierce Dunn would also remain in his position as President.

'Some of the early machinery used by John H. Glauber was donated by the Glauber family to the Maryland Academy of Science and Industrial Museum, where it is now on display.

²Among the holdings of the Peabody Library of Baltimore is a short history of the early years of the company: *The Stieff Company*. Planned and Produced by the Barton-Gillet Company. Baltimore, 1930.