

GERMAN-AMERICAN ENTERPRISES AND INSTITUTIONS OF BALTIMORE: PART III

In this issue of the *Report* the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland salutes the Schmidt Baking Company, the Potthast furniture Company, the engineering firm of Edward Renneburg and Sons, the J. Furst printing company, the *Baltimore Correspondent*, the Stein family, and the *Greisenheim*, the German home for the aged which eventually became the retirement community we now know as Edenwald.

The Schmidt Baking Company

The history of this venerable institution began in 1886 when Elizabeth and Peter Schmidt, recent German immigrants, began to operate a small bread bakery in their Baltimore home. Elizabeth Schmidt, whose maiden name was Mimms, had arrived in this country in 1867, at age seventeen, and had settled in Baltimore, where she met and later married Peter Schmidt in Emmanuel Reformed Church on Schroeder Street on April 5, 1874. Even before her marriage she had come to enjoy local renown, thanks to the savory loaves of home-baked bread with which she expressed her appreciation for her neighbors' kindnesses. It was her neighbors' compliments that eventually inspired her and her husband to experiment with a small bread baking operation in their home with Elizabeth baking the bread and Peter delivering it. The venture was a success, but during the early years the Schmidts could not have imagined, of course, that out of such modest beginnings in 1886 one of the top fifteen bakeries in the nation would ultimately develop. By the time the Schmidt Baking Company celebrated its centennial, in 1986, it had become the largest independent premium line wholesale bakery in the mid-Atlantic region, employing approximately fourteen hundred people and with seventeen distribution centers.

In spite of its great size, however, the company was still a family enterprise, for it was managed at that time by the sons of Peter and Elizabeth, Ernest and Charles Schmidt, who had both entered the business as young men. Charles Schmidt, who was president until 1929,

was succeeded in that year by his son, Carl. After Carl's death in 1964 his twin sisters, Katherine and Ernestine, and his widow took over the duties of managing the company. In the centennial year, 1986, Katharine's sons, Bernard "Roddy" Smith, Jr. and Peter Smith, were respectively president and vice-president of operations, while two of Ernestine's sons, Tom Bowyer and Charles Bowyer, held the offices of vice-president for administration and vice-president for sales.

In March 1984, two years before the centennial, the Schmidt Baking Company completed construction of a forty-eight thousand square foot plant in Baltimore County. The production capacity of this new plant in 1986 was one hundred and forty-five thousand loaves of bread and seventy thousand packages of rolls daily.

In a speech during the centennial year Roddy Smith, while expressing pride in his company's impressive growth during its first hundred years, also pointed out that its success as a business enterprise was due not only to expert management, but also to its having preserved and refined the baking skills which had made people eager to buy his great-grandmother's bread in the early days: "Great-grandmother Schmidt," he recalled, "was known for the skill she put into her home-made bread. Although we've grown beyond her wildest dreams, one thing hasn't changed. We still care about the quality of our products, and each day we try to measure up to the standards of that dear German-American baker, Elizabeth. We'd like her to know that our customers still value a good loaf of Schmidt's bread."

The Potthast Furniture Company

Technical skills and craftsmanship of a high order also assured the success of Baltimore's nationally known furniture firm, Potthast Brothers, Inc., founded in 1892 by William A. and Vincent Potthast who had received their training as master cabinetmakers in their native Germany. William and Vincent were later joined by their brothers, John and Theodore,

who had also mastered the art of cabinetmaking in the famed cabinetmaking shops of Borgholzhausen.

The Potthast brothers opened their first cabinetmaking shop at the intersection of Howard and Lexington Streets, then moved, in 1913, to a larger location at 507 North Howard Street. The beauty of the brothers' hand-made reproductions and their expert restorations of antique furniture soon brought them renown as fine craftsmen, and orders began to pour in. In 1921 Potthast Brothers, Inc. acquired a large factory at 1438 Wicomoco Street and also opened showrooms at 702 North Howard Street. Two years later salesrooms and offices were added at 924 North Charles Street. Eventually, the firm opened showrooms in New York City, Washington, D. C., and San Francisco.

One of the firm's early important commissions was furnishing the Maryland House at the Jamestown Exposition in 1907. In an interview with Fred Judd of the "Evening Sun" in 1987 Theodore J. Potthast recalled that the firm had also made a dining room set for President Wilson when he left the White House, chairs for Hollywood film producer Cecil B. DeMille, a dining set for the State House in Annapolis in addition to pieces for Elsie DeWolfe Hopper and for Tiffany in New York.

When the Potthast Company closed its doors in 1975 it had 35 employees. At that point, however, Theodore J. Potthast had no one to carry on the business, as he explained to Mr. Judd, and he also faced ever rising costs and a growing scarcity of qualified craftsmen. Happily we have a well documented record of much of the firm's work, for the copying books, as Theodore Potthast told Mr. Judd, "include sketches of all kinds of furniture" and "the State of Maryland has a record, on microfilm, of correspondence and sketches throughout the years."

When the Potthast firm closed, Richard H. Randall, Jr., the director of the Walters Art Gallery at the time, recalled that "literally hundreds of Baltimore homes" had Potthast furniture in dining rooms and hallways." Sam W. Rea, auctioneer at Sam W. Pattison and Company, commented that "the Potthast name

here is just like magic; bidding is always brisk for Potthast pieces." This is still true today.

Edward Renneburg and Sons, Co.

Edward Renneburg, the founder of this engineering and steel fabricating firm, came to Baltimore from Hamburg, Germany while still in his teens and soon found an opportunity to ply his trade in a hardware store in southeast Baltimore. In time, his sons came to work with him, Philip helping with designing and Henry assisting with other aspects of the business. In the early years of the twentieth century the Renneburgs moved to larger quarters on Aliceanna Street and began to produce machinery for canning, oyster-processing, and fruit-packing. When additional space again became necessary the Renneburg purchased in 1912 a building previously owned by the Chipman Chair Factory at the intersection of Boston and Lakewood avenues in Canton. In these more spacious quarters the firm was not only able to build a more efficient steel fabricating shop, but also to outfit a wharf for the maintenance and repair of harbor craft and fishing steamers.

At this time the Chesapeake menhaden fishing industry was fast developing, and to capitalize on the possibilities offered by this expanding industry the Renneburgs began to design and manufacture cookers, presses, and dryers for converting menhaden and other small fish into fertilizers, also extracting from them in the process oils for use in manufacturing paints and varnishes and for tempering steel.

Under the able management of Philip, who succeeded his father as president, the firm's reputation continued to grow, and soon orders were coming in from Iceland, Japan, Russia and other foreign countries for renneburg machines. During World War I the company helped the war effort by extracting potash from kelp for munitions manufacturing. The war years brought yet another opportunity to expand operations. Growing scarcity of grain-feed, with resultant higher prices, was causing numerous cattlemen to turn to fishmeal as an alternative, and the Renneburg Company was easily able to help meet the ever-increasing demand by producing fishmeal.

When John N. Renneburg succeeded his father, Philip, as president in 1946 orders were coming in for Renneburg machinery from plants in the United States, Canada, India, Korea, Iran, and Jordan. By then, too, the firm's recently developed machinery for processing animal bones for photographic gelatines where also in use in Sweden, Belgium, and Germany.

In 1985 the Canton area was rezoned from heavy industrial to light commercial and residential use. The Renneburg Company was thus compelled to move to a different location, if it wished to continue production. Its historic headquarters, built shortly after the Civil War, were acquired by Historic Developers, Inc. of Philadelphia. Since the U. S. Government was then considering eliminating the tax credit allowed for preserving and restoring buildings of historic value, the Renneburg Company was forced to vacate its headquarters within three months. To meet this deadline the company sold its machinery to the Industrial Plants Corporation of New York City, which sold the machinery at auction. By 1986 the Renneburg Company had become a division of Heyl and Patterson, Inc., Engineers and Constructors of Pittsburgh, which had acquired what had remained of the company after the sale of its machinery. For a few years after that the Renneburg Company maintained an engineering and sale office in Baltimore which was its last connection with the city in which it had been founded.

The J. H. Furst Printing Company

After their arrival in this country from Germany in the 1840's John, Adam, and Joseph Furst settled in three different cities, John in New York, Adam in Cincinnati, and Joseph in Baltimore, where he found a good situation as a house-builder. In 1850 Joseph married Sophia Grace Helmling of York, Pennsylvania. Four of their seven sons, J. Harry, Jacob H., Frederick V., and Joseph A., Jr., became printers and were employed by the John Murphy Printing Company until that establishment was destroyed in the great Baltimore fire of 1904. When the John Murphy Company decided not

to reopen after the fire the Furst brothers started their own printing business in a small warehouse on Light Street and began by printing publications formerly brought out by the John Murphy Company. The business prospered, and soon the Fursts were obliged to move to larger quarters on Hanover Street. From that address they moved to the Engel Building on Hopkins Place, where they remained for several years, and from there to the Candler Building on Market Place, which was their headquarters until the Candler Building was converted into offices.

A notable commission of the Furst Company's early years was the private printing in 1907 of *The Education of Henry Adams* in a limited edition of 100 copies. Another important early commission was the printing of *American Maritime Cases* from 1924 on. As years passed the firm acquired a special reputation for its ability to print copy in a number of ancient and modern languages. Thanks to this skill, the firm has able to attract as clients several institutions of higher learning, among which were The Catholic University of America, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, the University of North Carolina, and the Johns Hopkins University. By the time the four co-founders had reached retirement age Frederick's sons, Victor J., Frederick V., and William W., and his daughter, Gertrude, were already members of the firm and eventually assumed full responsibility for carrying on the firm's work. The present president, in the firm's new headquarters at 238 South Eden Street, is Francis Furst. His son, John entered the business two years ago; his wife does proofreading; and John's wife assists with sales and other aspects of the business. In recent years changes of various kinds have been made because of advances in electronic printing, but the firm continues to do letterpress, off-set, and type-setting, and also some binding, as in the past.

As the Furst Company approaches its centennial year it can look back with justifiable pride over a long history of satisfied clients. Over the years authors and editors have repeatedly praised its uncompromising standards of workmanship, diligence, and painstaking care

in executing orders. The high level of craftsmanship consistently maintained by the firm, the close working relations between employers and employees, and the firm's many contributions to the education and training of members of younger printing firms have even prompted some of its admirers to liken it, quite aptly, to a medieval guild.

The account of the J. H. Furst family submitted in 1986 by Mary Furst, Honorary Treasurer, also mentions another distinguished member of the Furst family, William Wallace Furst, whose accomplishments as a composer helped to bring renown to Baltimore as a musical center in the nineteenth century. Born in Baltimore in 1852, William Furst studied music and composition and was for a time organist and choirmaster of Immaculate Conception Church. He also wrote music and first gained recognition for his work as a composer when he was invited to join the staff of the Tivoli Opera House in San Francisco. On that stage his first and only grand opera, *Theodora*, was produced. From San Francisco Furst went to New York, where he soon acquired a reputation as a composer of incidental music. He also composed light operas. One of these, *The Electric Light*, commemorates a Baltimore first: the installation of arc lights at Marsh Market in 1881. *Princess Nicotine* premiered in 1892 with Lillian Russell as the lead. Two years later, Delia Fox starred in *The Little Trouper*, also a comic opera. The most popular of Furst's light operas was doubtless *The Isle Champagne* which had a run of six years. Furst also composed incidental music for several successful theatrical productions, including *The Girl of the Golden West* in 1905, starring Blanche Bates and Frank Kenan, and James M. Barry's *The Little Minister* in 1907 with Maude Adams and Robert Edison.

The Baltimore Correspondent During the first four decades of the nineteenth century only Germanlanguage newspapers published in other cities were available to Baltimore Germans. The first successful effort to provide a local German-language paper was Friedrich Raine's "Der deutsche Correspondent," which began appearing as a weekly in February, 1841. Two main reasons for its success were doubtless

that while focusing on local matters of practical concern it also carried articles about Germans living in other parts of the country. Other papers attempted to compete with it from time to time, but none had enough appeal to displace it. Until America entered World War I it was the leading German publication in Baltimore. Like German-language newspapers in other American cities, it lost readers during the war. After the war circulation figures continued to decline, for by then English had become the household language in many German families.

The final chapter in the history of "Der deutsche Correspondent" began in 1929 when the paper, whose readership had by then declined considerably, was acquired by Valentine J. Peter of the Tribune Publishing Company in Omaha, Nebraska. Under Peter's able management the paper, with a new title, "Baltimore Correspondent," flourished. To assure its financial solvency Peter, together with several Baltimore businessmen, formed a corporation in 1935 which eventually purchased from the Tribune Publishing Company both the newspaper and the printing facility which had been producing it as a sixteen-page paper. The corporation generated additional income by printing advertising brochures and newspaper supplements for local department stores and also several weekly and monthly newspapers and trade journals owned by other companies. When Valentine Peter died in 1960 his sons, Theodore Valentine and Bernard George, became managers of the corporation and editors of the paper. When Theodore resigned from the corporation and paper in 1967 Bernard took over the reins until declining readership and resultant decline in advertising revenue necessitated liquidating both the corporation and the paper in 1960. In the summer of that year the corporation was dissolved. For the following three years the "Baltimore Correspondent" was again printed in Omaha with Bernard Peter continuing as manager. In December, 1971, Peter sold the paper to the *New York Staatszeitung*, which incorporated the title into its masthead until December, 1975, at which time it ceased to exist.

During its 134 years the "Baltimore Correspondent" was always primarily a commercial enterprise, but it also contributed in important ways to the cultural life of its readers, as those who remember it can attest.

The Stein Family

Among the Steins of Baltimore the study of the law; has become, it would seem, a kind of family tradition. Franz Leopold von Stein had a law degree from, the University of Heidelberg when he came to America in 1833, but did not practice in this country. His son, Attila Edward, became a physician, but each generation after him produced a lawyer. The first of these, Charles Francis Stein, born in 1866, studied law at the University of Maryland and was admitted to the Bar in 1889. He became a member of the firm of Louis Hennighausen. Like Hennighausen, who devoted considerable time and energy to helping; newly-arrived Germans, Charles Francis also became involved from early on in assisting newcomers and was active in German-American organizations. In his last case as trial advocate he became a participant in an important moment in Maryland history, for the case concerned the dissolution, in 1921, of the American Colonization Society in Maryland which had been founded in 1816 to promote the emancipation of slaves and to enable blacks wishing to do so to return to Africa. In that same year Governor Ritchie appointed him to the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City, on which he sat until his retirement in 1936. After his retirement from the Bench he continued to practice law with the firm of Louis Hennighausen and Stein, specializing in real estate and litigation. He also continued to be active in German-American organizations. Until his death in 1939 he was also a member of the board of director of the General German Aged People's Home, still popularly known in those days as the *Greisenheim*.

Charles Francis Stein, Jr. was born in Baltimore in 1900, received his B. P. in history from the Johns Hopkins University and was graduated from the University of Maryland School of Law in 1923. Like his father before him, he joined the law firm of Hennighausen

and Stein and also specialized in wills and estates and real estate law. His continuing in history interest in history is evident in his monograph on the ground rent system in Maryland, his brief history of the German battalion in the American Revolution, his account of the Battle of Baltimore, his two books on the history of Calvert and Howard counties, and, as some readers of the *Report* will remember, his papers at meetings of the Society for the history of the Germans in Maryland, of which he was president from 1971-1975. He was also active in other American-American societies until his death in 1978.

Charles Francis Stein, III was graduated from Princeton University in 1955 and received his J. D. from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1960, where he was on the law review. Before going into practice with his father in the firm of Stein and Jett he was the law

clerk of Judge William L. Henderson of the Court of Appeals of Maryland. His specialty, like his father's, is real property and estate planning. Since January, 1993, he has been of counsel for the Towson law firm of Royston, Mueller, McLean and Reid. To some people, he says, "of counsel" may mean that a lawyer has retired, but not in his case, for he still practices every day with the new firm and enjoys it. He is married to Anne Farinholt, whose father, L. Whiting Farinholt, Jr., taught for many years at the University of Maryland School of Law. She is a physical therapist whose specialty is treating mentally and physically handicapped children in the public school system. The Steins have two children, a daughter, Laura, who is presently working with autistic young adults, and a son, Charles F. Stein, IV, who is majoring in biology and minoring in geology at Dickinson College. Charles Francis Stein's sister, Jean Alexandra, is married to William Kouvenhoven and also resides in Baltimore. Like his grandfather and father, Charles Francis Stein, III is an active member of the German Society of Maryland, the Society for the history of the Germans in Maryland and the General German Aged People's Home of Baltimore. As a board member and attorney for General German, he was instrumental in the

planning for the creation of the life-care center, Edenwald and, considers this work one of the most significant accomplishments of his legal career.

The General German Aged People's Home of Baltimore and Edenwald

In April, 1881, at the suggestion of the *Allgemeine Arbeiter-Kranken-Unterstützungsve-rein* [Workmen's Sick Benefits Alliance], a group of Baltimoreans of German extraction met in the old Mechanics Hall on Fayette Street to discuss the possibility of founding a home where aged Germans could spend their declining years in comfort and security. The sense of the meeting was that such an institution was indeed needed. An organizational plan was adopted, a charter was drafted, committees were appointed, and a Board of Directors was chosen.

On June 8, 1881, the Directors, Carl Yeber, Hermann Graue, Frederick Wehr, Joel Gutman, Ernst Hoen, Ernst Knabe, Nicholas Burkhardt, Jacob Pfister, Adolph Aichter, John Fellmann, Christoph Bartell, and Louis Hennighausen, filed a certificate of incorporation for the projected home, which they designated as *Allgemeines Deutsches Greisenheim von Baltimore* [General German Home for the Aged of Baltimore]. The first officers of the corporation were also elected, Carl Weber as President, Frederick Wehr as Vice-Président, Hermann Graue as Treasurer, John Fellmann as Secretary, and Louis Hennighausen as Financial Secretary.

The Board's first official action was to launch a fund-raising and membership drive, which brought in \$7,106.00 and increased the corporation membership to 428. A rented building on the northwest corner of Lombard and Penn Streets was the first location of the *Greisenheim*. The building was dedicated on April 12, 1882, and the first resident was Friedrich Gude. Eight months later the number of residents had increased to 18. Soon the number of applicants exceeded the capacity of the rented building, and the Board began to draw up plans for a larger facility. The site chosen, which the Board acquired for \$12,813.75, was the land known as Stuart's Hill, the estate

of General J. E. Stuart at the northeast corner of Baltimore and Payson Streets. Initial capital of \$42,000.00 was contributed by the German community of Baltimore, and the new structure rose apace. The dedication ceremonies were held in May, 1885. Since the total capital outlay for grounds, building, furnishings, and equipment had amounted to more than \$100,000.00, a large debt had to be serviced. By 1888, however, energetic fund-raising efforts, especially those sponsored by the Ladies' Aid Society of the Greisenheim,¹ had brought in enough money to pay off the debt.

In its comfortable larger quarters the Greisenheim, renamed in later years the General German Aged People's Home, served a steadily growing number of elderly residents of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, in accordance with the constitution and by-laws of the Corporation, which stipulated that the home should "never be managed in any particular national, religious, political, or social tendency, but shall have as principal object that of making the later years of the residents and or patients of the facilities as pleasant, quiet, and free of worry or care as possible...."

By 1934 a still larger building had become necessary to accommodate the growing number of applicants for admission. A bequest of more than \$150,000.00 in the will of Anton Textor made it possible to plan for larger quarters. The site acquired was the estate of Louis Muller in Irvington known as "Sorrento," and on September 25, 1935 ground was broken. By early November, 1936, the new building was ready for occupancy. Generous gifts from the Ladies' Aid Society and other donors helped to finance the infirmary wing added in 1957.

Two major changes, in 1979 and 1980, were the abolition of the requirement that applicants surrender their total assets in order to qualify for admission to the home and the merger with the Silver Cross Home at 1464 Greenwich Street. By then, too, it had become evident that more space was needed and that the facilities should be modernized. The centennial year, 1981, thus found the directors busily discussing plans for a completely modern building.

Edenwald, the new facility that resulted from the directors' thoughtful planning, has two sections, an attractive eighteen-story high-rise with 241 comfortable apartments of varying size for independent living and an up-to-the-minute 115-bed Health Care Center. In the Health Center are forty-four tastefully furnished domiciliary rooms with private baths and access to medical and dental care, and, for those requiring long-term care, the Comprehensive Care Unit of seventy-one beds.

Edenwald's location at 800 Southerly Road is almost ideal from the standpoint of the residents' comfort and convenience. Directly across Fairmount Avenue is Towsontown Center; the Baltimore Beltway is nearby; several bus lines are within walking distance; and a few blocks away are churches, hospitals, senior centers, restaurants, grocery stores and other stores, and a post office. The proximity of Goucher College's large wooded campus also offers Edenwald residents some of the pleasures of country living.

If the members of the first board of directors and some of The earlier residents of the General German Aged People's Home could see Edenwald's elegant lobby, its commodious apartments, its tastefully appointed lounges and meeting rooms, and its three fine dining rooms, they would doubtless gape in amazement. While visiting Edenwald's other fine amenities, its auditorium, store, and well-stocked library, they would also be delighted to find in the new building some of the pieces which once embellished old General German, as for example, the handsomely carved sideboards throughout the building or the magnificent Stieff roller-piano which is a unique example of the craftsmanship of the once renowned Baltimore piano-building firm. In speaking with present residents our visitors from the past would be happy to learn that the liberal admission policy adopted by the first board of directors in 1881 is still in force: that no applicant be refused admission on grounds of ethnic or national background or religious affiliation. They would also hear warm expressions of appreciation of the many activities available to the residents. In talking with pre-

sent directors they would surely also feel proud to hear of the American Association of Homes for the Aged warm commendation of Edenwald following its accreditation by the Continuing Care Commission in 1992. This piece of information would certainly convince them, if they had any doubts, that Edenwald ranks high in comparison with top quality retirement communities in the greater Baltimore area.

— William H. McClain

NOTES

The Ladies' Aid Society was formed on February 3, 1882, several months before the first *Greisenheim* began admitting residents. The organizers were: Louise Hennighausen, Auguste Mathes, Catherine Pfeil, Marie Plantz, Elizabeth Tripr, and Johanna Wehr. The first officers were: President, Mrs. Louise Hennighausen; Vice-President, Mrs. Catherine Just; Secretary, Mrs. Elsie Fellman; Financial Secretary, Mrs. Sophie Szold; Treasurer, Mrs. Rosina Sinsz.

