

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Gary Carl Grassl. *The First Germans in America*. Alexandria, VA: Global Printing, 2008. 88 pp.**

Commonly, the year 1683 is celebrated as the first significant year of German immigration to North America. Franz Daniel Pastorius (1651–1720) organized the immigration of thirteen Mennonite families from Krefeld, a locale within the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, a patchwork of many small political entities.

As a result of painstaking research exploring a multitude of various sources, Gary Carl Grassl is able to fix the immigration of a few Germans to the years 1607 and 1608. Among them was Dr. Fleischer, whose birthplace was Breslau, a city in the Duchy of Silesia.

Johannes Fleischer the Younger was also the first physician and the first trained botanist in English America. Dr. Fleischer received his doctorate from the University of Basel in present-day Switzerland. His main interest was to research the healing quality of plants in Virginia. Grassl familiarizes us in great detail with the life and the accomplishments of Dr. Fleischer, whose life ended in 1608

after a very short sojourn in Jamestown and after having attempted—we surmise—to save lives of the early settlers who died of “dysentery along with typhoid and salt poisoning” (Grassl, 20).

Other early settlers stemming from the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, this time from Hesse, brought their skills as glass-makers to Jamestown. They worked together with settlers from the Kingdom of Poland. Again the author succeeds in making the reader familiar with the craft of early glassmaking, the first industry in North America. Still another craft which Europeans brought to North America was wainscoting and the construction of sawmills as well as the building of a European-style home which came to be occupied by an Indian chieftain who showed his appreciation by practically keeping them as slaves. Finally we learn of a physician from the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, Johannes Lederer from Hamburg, who together with a Colonel Catlet and five Indians explored the Blue Ridge Mountain and discovered the Shenandoah Valley in the year 1670,

Gary Carl Grassl puts the Germans' contribution into its proper perspective. The importance of the Germans at Jamestown must not be exaggerated. These few were drops of water in the stream of English immigrants, Yet they were among the first settlers of Virginia and English America. They were valued for their skills and although small in number they were representative of millions of their countrymen who would follow them, in conclusion it may be said that Germans took part in the settlement that may be called, with more justification than any other, the Cradle of the American Nation. "They were present at the creation" (Grassl, 58).

This treatise would be of value to the specialist in seventeenth-century North American history, Numerous colored illustrations facilitate our understanding of life and work of the early settlers of Jamestown. Copious explanatory endnotes will help the interested reader complement his or her knowledge. Fittingly, this opus was presented to the participants of the celebration of the immigrants who spoke the German language in Jamestown, Virginia, on April 19, 2008, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this historical event.

This reviewer has one reservation. How significant was it in the seventeenth century to be classified as German Polish? National identification begins in the early nineteenth century in "Germany" with the Wars of Liberation [*Befreiungskriege*] against Napoleon Bonaparte, In the seventeenth century people considered themselves Hessians, Silesians, or Thuringians. They identified with their immediate environment, they identified with their faith, and most likely with their local duke, grand-duke, prince, or king. Thus we need to be cautious about projecting our own national sentiments onto the seventeenth century.

—Armin Mruck, Professor emeritus, Towson University

**Don Heinrich Tolzmann.**  
*German-Americana: Selected Essays.* Little Miami Publishing Company: Milford, OH, 2000. 299 pp. \$22.50. ISBN: 9781932250688

In a section of the volume entitled "Swiss Travel Notes," Tolzmann relates his reaction upon visiting the Thomas-Mann-Archiv while on a research tour in Zurich: "The crowning gem of the exhibits is a room replicating Mann's personal *Arbeitszimmer*, or work room ....

Impeccably reconstructed, Mann's study takes you into his personal working space, where he greeted and met with visitors ... (92). Although much is made of Don Tolzmann's many valuable contributions to our body of knowledge on the German element in North America—and rightfully so—for this reviewer and perhaps for many of his personal friends and professional colleagues, this collection of essays is an opportunity to enter the work room of Don Heinrich Tolzmann. One senses not only the painstaking research which underpins many of the essays, but the enthusiasm, love, and devotion with which Tolzmann sets about the task of chronicling the history of German settlement in America.

The volume itself consists of thirty-seven chapters divided among five sections named respectively: Anniversaries and Celebrations; People and Places; Authors and Publications; Museums and Centers; Libraries and Research; and Notes and Reviews. The essays are generally evenly distributed over the various sections, although there tends to be a few more contributions per section in the earlier sections. The chapters themselves are largely reprinted from elsewhere, always with a short intro-

ductory paragraph by Tolzmann which outlines the time and situation in which the item first appeared. Most, but not all, of the chapters reproduce full essays as might appear in an academic publication. Some were never essays *per se* but rather public speeches or addresses, most notably Tolzmann's remarks in the Rose Garden of the White House on October 2, 1987, after President Reagan proclaimed October 6<sup>th</sup> German-American Day. There are also a number of essays—ten by my count—which have not appeared in print previously.

The individual chapters themselves cover an extremely wide range of topics. In his foreword, Jerry Glenn notes the depth and breadth of Tolzmann's work, a fact which is mirrored in the subject matter of the collected essays. Glenn also notes the personal flavor of many of the contributions, an observation borne out particularly in the "travel notes" section as cited above. Given the diversity of material in the volume it is likely that each reader will have his or her particular favorite. There are essays of general interest, essays with a very specific focus, and essays which reflect Tolzmann's interests. For this reviewer, the

winner is “German Contributions to America” (Chapter Seven). As Tolzmann himself says, it is his attempt to summarize the topic in a “brief and concise” (43) manner, and he succeeds masterfully. Indeed it takes an expert to concisely and accurately pull together reams of information into a coherent narrative.

The volume itself is attractively laid out. Each chapter stands on its own and can be read individually, which means that this is a volume which can be kept near at hand and enjoyed in spare moments. It is regrettable that there are so many typographical errors, especially surprising in a collection consisting largely of reprints. Nonetheless, as Jerry Glenn points out, “readers of this book will learn a great deal and will enjoy every minute of the learning process” (xi).

—Randall P. Donaldson,  
Loyola University Maryland

**Richard G. Anderson. *The Charles Town, West Virginia, Confectioner: John Frederick Blessing, His Family, and His Descendants*. Brownsburg, VA: McClain Printing, 2008. 52 pp. \$16.95. ISBN 0870127764**

As the title indicates, the focus of this slender volume is John Frederick Blessing, who immigrated from Württemberg with his family as a child, ministered to John Brown during his incarceration in Charles Town, served in the Confederate Army, and established himself and his family in Charles Town, West Virginia. Richard Anderson, longtime member of this society and former Maryland resident, has coupled the work of Charles Town residents, Raymond and Natalie Parks, as well as the recollections of Blessing’s granddaughter, Ollie Blessing, a Charles Town legend, with interviews with other family members to assemble the documentation for the genealogy of John Frederick Blessing and his descendants.

The story is incomplete. Two-thirds of the volume consists of appendices. John Frederick Blessing’s more recent descendants are relatively well documented, but the story of John Frederick Blessing, fascinating as it promises to be, takes up barely ten pages. Anderson is aware of the gaps in the narrative and invites his readers to help him augment the story.

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