

## BALTIMORE'S ENDURING GERMAN CONNECTION ZION CHURCH AND THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

The story to be told here begins with the Rev. Dr. Eric Gritsch and ends ultimately with Pastor Julius Hofmann (1865–1928) of Zion Church in the City of Baltimore and his younger friend, colleague, and literary executor, William Kurrelmeyer (1874–1957). Eric W. Gritsch was a Lutheran theologian and a Luther scholar with a world-wide reputation. He spent the bulk of his career teaching church history at the Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg, where he became the first director of the Institute for Luther Studies.

After his retirement in 1994, Eric moved to Baltimore, where he was a member of Zion Church of the City of Baltimore. There he founded and directed the Zion Forum for German Culture in the hope of making Zion not only a place of worship in the Lutheran tradition but also a locus of secular activities celebrating both Luther the man and German culture in general. The spirit of the Forum typified Eric's attitude toward life and faith. In things cultural as well as things religious, Eric was ecumenical. With wit and wisdom he sought to locate even the smallest events in an individual life within the larger context of human experience. He often touched those around him in very personal ways.

So it was that his death in the final days of 2012 took many by surprise and left friends, colleagues, and former students with a profound sense of loss. Very quickly there arose the idea of establishing an enduring memorial to a man who had remained just as much a scholar, pastor, and teacher in his eighteen years of retirement as in his thirty-three years at Gettysburg.

The Rev. Eric W. Gritsch Memorial Fund was established in 2013 in remembrance of Eric with the goal of raising funds to honor the man, his life and his legacy in ways which both benefit Eric's scholarly and pastoral interests and support Luther research and scholarship. The first public event sponsored by the Fund was a symposium built around a number of historical coincidences in which significant items in Lutheran Church history and uniquely Baltimore circumstances coalesced around Zion Lutheran Church in the City of Baltimore.

On March 8, 2014, the Gritsch Fund held its inaugural symposium, entitled "Celebrating Luther's September Testament (1522)," which

addressed the question of how and why one of the few copies of Martin Luther's translation of the New Testament from the original Greek into German currently resides in Baltimore. The book itself, which is owned by the Johns Hopkins University and is housed in the library of the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, was on view in the *Adlersaal* of Zion Church for the duration of the symposium.

A panel of four scholars from a number of different fields provided insight into the historical and cultural context of the historic Bible and its eventual arrival in Baltimore. Timothy Wengert, Luther and Melancton scholar at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, spoke of the theological import of the text as Luther translated it. Paul Espinosa, curator of the George Peabody Library, part of the Special Collections Department of the Johns Hopkins University, outlined the physical properties and bibliophilic import of the volume. Randall Donaldson, associate professor of German at Loyola University Maryland, identified and explained the Baltimore connection to things German and the Johns Hopkins University, and Holger Roggelin, then pastor of Zion Church, explained the link to the library at Zion. This article, which serves as an introduction, and the two which follow it—Holger Roggelin's discussion of Julius Hofmann, one of his predecessors as pastor at Zion, and Timothy Wengert's spirited explication of the importance of Luther's translation of the Bible as exemplified by his work on the so-called September Bible—are the tangible products of that first symposium. Together they highlight the particularly Baltimore connection between two German immigrants to Baltimore, Julius Hofmann and William Kurrelmeyer, whose common interest in books and book learning engendered a friendship which in turn brought thousands of books, manuscripts, and Bibles into the collections of the Johns Hopkins University libraries. Pastor's Roggelin's article in this volume will discuss Hofmann and the Zion context. Here the discussion will revolve around Kurrelmeyer and Hopkins.

Wilhelm Kurrelmeyer was born in Osnabrück in 1874, making him Hofmann's junior by nine years. Young Wilhelm migrated to Baltimore with his parents in 1882, just eight years old. He attended the prestigious City College and ultimately received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the Johns Hopkins University. I will return to William Kurrelmeyer's distinguished academic career, but for now it is important

to note that young Wilhelm spent both his adolescent and his adult years as William in Baltimore. Julius Hofmann may have been a German in America, but William/Wilhelm Kurrelmeyer was truly a German-American in the purest sense of the term.

So what was the Baltimore of William's time like? Statistics on the subject of emigration or immigration are often difficult to determine. Records are frequently incomplete, the method of reporting changes over time, which in turn distorts the statistical basis for all previous estimates; and German and American figures often differ substantially. However, the eighteen-fifties and the eighteen-eighties are generally considered the peak decades for German immigration. Almost one and one-half million German-speaking immigrants entered the United States in the 1880s alone. Between 1872 and 1896 German-speaking immigrants represented the largest single immigrant group each year, and in the half-century between 1840 and 1890, German immigrants constituted almost thirty percent of the total number of immigrants entering America from abroad. The Library of Congress cites 1882, the year young Wilhelm and his parents arrived in Baltimore, as the year of greatest influx from German-speaking lands. Approximately a quarter million individuals arrived in that year alone.

According to the 1880 census, almost four percent of the U.S. population had been born in the German Empire.<sup>1</sup> Residents of Maryland constituted slightly less than two percent of that total, yet the percentage of German-born inhabitants in the State was higher than in the country overall; almost half of the State's residents reported having been born in German-speaking areas or being the children of such individuals. Moreover, fully three-quarters of Maryland's German-born population resided in Baltimore. The statistics thus make Baltimore out to be one of the most popular destinations for immigrants from German-speaking lands. Like many immigrants, young Wilhelm may well have had moments where he felt alone in the process of adapting to his new environment, but those around him were most certainly not entirely foreign.

I have often said that one could have lived comfortably in Baltimore speaking only German through the First World War—and I stand by that statement. Of course, there are plenty of urban legends. Some would have us believe that at one point the young American nation came within one

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vote of having German as its official language. Then there's the tale which would have it that the Declaration of Independence was published in German translation in Baltimore within three days of its signing in Philadelphia. In the latter instance it's not so much the idea there might be a quick translation into German that's at issue as the fact that one couldn't exactly take the first Amtrak south from Philly and that there were plenty of good, even famous German printers in Philadelphia at the time.

Nonetheless, as with most legends there is some relationship to reality. Dieter Cunz notes that:

[o]n March 30, 1868, ... [the following] bill became a law: 'Every public general law ...shall immediately after its passage be published, at the expense of the state, daily for one week in two daily newspapers of the city of Baltimore, one of which shall be printed in the German language....' This law remained in existence for more than seventy years; it was abolished only during the second World War.<sup>2</sup>

Maryland was a German state, and Baltimore was a German city. In 1870, for instance, Baltimore had three daily newspapers in German. There were three gymnastic unions (*Turnvereine*), fifty-five German Lutheran and twenty-nine German Reformed congregations as well as 21,500 German-speaking Catholics served by twenty-four priests. The *Deutsches Haus* didn't exist as such yet. The building which it eventually occupied and which was then torn down and replaced by Meyerhof Symphony Hall was still the home of the Bryn Mawr School. However, the Scheib School at Zion Lutheran Church had 1000 students and was considered one of the most prestigious parochial schools in Maryland. Then, too, there were numerous *Gesangvereine* (singing groups) and other social and cultural organization founded by and supported by the German-speaking population of Baltimore. In fact, the broad range of immigrant associations always drew attention to the clannishness of the German-Americans in Baltimore and elsewhere. It has been said, not without a little bit of truth, that if you get two Germans together they will form a club. If you have three Germans they will form two clubs, and if you have four German they will found a third club and argue that the first two should be disbanded.

Baltimore was a thriving town as well. From the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna (in Baltimore, think the War of 1812) until the eve of the First World War it grew and prospered. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Baltimore had grown to more than 40,000 inhabitants with an export trade volume of more than \$15,000,000 in merchandise per year, thus becoming the third largest port of the country. The small village of 1729 had mushroomed. Even in the 1890s, a period of worldwide economic difficulties, there was employment in Baltimore. Vincent Potthast, a cabinet maker from Westphalia and eventual founder and co-owner of Potthast Bros. Furniture, found a job immediately at Knabe Piano upon his arrival in 1891.

Of course, we cannot ignore the Johns Hopkins University, which had the first graduate school in the country, based squarely on the German university model. That fact, of course, gives a little extra *élan* to the German Department at Hopkins, which although it did not grant the first doctorate in German Language and Literature in the United States, an which honor belongs to the University of Pennsylvania, did have the first Professor of German in the country, Henry Wood.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that Hopkins was founded on the German university model tells us much about the way that William Kurrelmeyer's career unfolded. He finished his doctorate at Hopkins in 1899 and immediately joined the faculty. He spent one year early on at Franklin and Marshall but for all practical purposes he was in Baltimore and at Hopkins from the time he entered as an undergraduate in the early 1890s until his retirement in 1944. That kind of secure career is unheard of today and would be the dream of any doctoral student in any era, but it fits perfectly with the image of the teacher/scholar who remains a student for a lifetime.

Kurrelmeyer's writings included more than 100 books and articles. He did extensive research and writing as part of his many travels to Germany. His fields of study included the history of aesthetics, lyric poetry, narrative theory, and the periods of Romanticism and the Enlightenment. Much of his scholarship concentrated on the works of Goethe, Kleist, and Nietzsche. His most notable accomplishments were a ten-volume translation of the pre-Lutheran German Bible, the first known printed translation of the Bible in a modern language often called the Mentelin Bible, and a multi-volume work of German lexicography. Tributes to his

work betray both their quality and their importance. The first order for the completed edition of the Bible came from the Vatican, and in its May 1953 issue *Modern Language Notes*, a prestigious journal in the field of language studies, expressed the opinion that Kurrelmeyer had brought to light more German words than anyone in recent years.<sup>4</sup>

Over many years of travel, research, and the kind of judicious purchases only an informed bibliophile can make, Kurrelmeyer acquired a library of more than 25,000 volumes primarily German literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Of particular interest is Kurrelmeyer's Wieland collection, said by many to be the finest collection of Wieland in the world. This includes holography letters of Christoph Martin Wieland and the first editions of all his works. In seven gifts between 1950 and 1957, Kurrelmeyer presented most of these books to the Johns Hopkins University.

Kurrelmeyer collected several Bibles and was for a time even possessor of a genuine *Mentelbibel*. The Kurrelmeyer Bibles were an impressive addition to the Hopkins collection, which is now one of the finest in the United States. Even before his own Bibles were added, however, he was instrumental in enhancing the collection's importance.

Julius Hofmann was briefly one of Kurrelmeyer's colleagues at Hopkins. As pastor at Zion, Hofmann was heavily involved with the school at Zion founded by his predecessor, Heinrich Scheib. His interest in the teaching of language, German in particular, brought him for a time to Hopkins. Ultimately Kurrelmeyer and Hofmann became friends. In fact, they were married on the same day in a double ceremony. When Hofmann died suddenly at a relatively young age, Kurrelmeyer became his literary executor. Kurrelmeyer was then able to negotiate an arrangement whereby part of Hofmann's library would remain at Zion while the bulk of the collection, including the Bible collection, was donated to Hopkins. So it is that the September Bible which was the focus of the first symposium in honor of Eric Gritsch came to belong to the University and the Baltimore German connection between Zion Church in the City of Baltimore and the Johns Hopkins University is made.

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## NOTES

1. In this period of time we can cautiously allow ourselves to say German immigrants rather than German-speaking immigrants although even then we discount many Swiss immigrants and the entirety of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
2. Dieter Cunz. *The Maryland Germans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1948), 321.
3. See Thomas Thornton's article, "The Rise and Fall of German Studies in the United States: Henry Wood at Johns Hopkins," *Report 46* (2011), 33–47.
4. See William H. McClain, "William Kurrelmeyer: German-American 1874–1957," *Report 37* (1978), 13.



**JULIUS HOFMANN**