

JULIUS HOFMANN
PASTOR, SCHOLAR, BOOK COLLECTOR

Julius Hofmann was born April 9, 1865, in Friedberg, which at that time was part of the Grand Duchy of Hessen-Darmstadt. He was a son of Peter Hofmann (+1891) and Maria (Engelter) Hofmann. His father was a soldier in the Grand Ducal Infantry Regiment „Kaiser Wilhelm“ (2. Großherzoglich Hessisches) Nr. 116. He was a sergeant and fencing master, decorated for services in the Austro-German and Franco-Prussian wars. (I think this is where the curious middle name Kayser comes from that Hofmann later used in different spellings) At some point right after 1871, Peter Hofmann retired from military service and was appointed “Erster Universitätsdiener” at the University of Giessen¹—a position somewhere between a University police officer, courier and being a butler for University functions. The position came with an apartment on Kanzleiberg 9 in the old university buildings, and so Julius Hofmann spent his early life in the small university town of Giessen and enjoyed every facility for a liberal education. He attended the Landgraf-Ludwigs-Gymnasium and then the University, studying theology. While there he was one of the founding members of a fraternity, called “Burschenschaft Arminia Giessen.”² From his childhood he had been especially interested in the study of nature and in history. In his college and university training he had enjoyed the instructions of the best teachers, among them Professor Adolf von Harnack, later in Berlin. From his youth he had been interested in religious work, having early become a Sunday School teacher.³

In 1889 Hoffman graduated from the University of Giessen and entered the Seminary in Friedberg, but in December of the same year was called to the assistant pastorate of Zion Church. We can only speculate what brought about the connection, but Hofmann himself gives a hint when in an article he reveals, that the first image he had of America was a big poster in the local grocery store in Giessen advertising the Tobacco products of G. W. Gail, Giessen and Baltimore. The oldest daughter of Giessen’s Senior Pastor had become Gail’s second wife, and there were a lot of links between the two branches of the company here and there.⁴

For the first six years after his arrival Hofmann was the assistant of the venerable Pastor Heinrich Scheib, who had served Zion since 1833.

After coming to this country Hofmann took the full course in philosophy at Johns Hopkins University and later became instructor in German. On July 22, 1890, he married Adele Chatin, of La Chaux de Fonds, canton Neuchatel in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. She would later survive him for many years until her death in 1955.

People described him as bringing to his field of labor in Baltimore spiritual zeal as well as intellectual training.⁵

The upbuilding of Zion Church in the period between 1895 and 1914 testified to the value of Hoffman's work as preacher, pastor and community organizer. The membership doubled and the influence exerted by the church greatly increased both in strength and scope. Hofmann was determined to give what he perceived as an empty, rationalistic form a content which would again justify the use of the name Lutheran⁶ —although in his native German he would always prefer "Evangelisch". He was a firm follower of the great nineteenth-century theologian Friedrich Daniel Schleiermacher, saying:

The nineteenth century opened with the revival of the gospel by Schleiermacher. With him both rationalism and Pietism became antiquated, and wherever they reappear, they are but a residue of a by-gone era. In the course of the nineteenth century through the labors of the historians and the theologians the interpretation of the gospel, which was God's gift to Martin Luther, was more deeply understood.⁷

Here we have his mission: to use all the developments available in his present time to better understand and bring back to life the core of the Reformation. He was a fervent proposer of what is called Kultur-protestantismus, cultural Protestantism, and liturgical renewal.

To this end Julius Hoffman transformed Zion within a decade, giving it a new constitution, a new hymnal, a new seal, a better place in the community and respect with its sister churches.

In 1905, Hoffman could lead a renewed, transformed Zion into the celebration of its 150th anniversary. In recognition of his work and the anniversary of the congregation he received the Prussian *Kronenorden* /Order of the Crown 3rd class.

He combined his energy for Zion with continued academic interest. In 1897 he was given the degree of Licentiate in Theology by the

University of Giessen. In 1909 Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA, conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.⁸

Hoffman published several books about the history of Zion Church, and was also known as the author of a volume of poems published in 1907. He was gifted as an orator, and was one of the principal speakers on almost all occasions when the German-American community as such, took an active part. His contemporaries said: “His delivery is fine, his sentences are well-rounded and faultless in construction and the sincerity, which is the inspiration of his eloquence, is felt in every word that he utters.” A number of his speeches got published. In local politics, we are told, he was an Independent, but on National questions voted with the Republicans.¹⁰

At the beginning of the twentieth century most of the congregations that had started as German organizations began to lose their German character—be it Lutheran, Reformed and Catholic—with the exception of Zion Church in the City of Baltimore.¹¹ Pastor Hofmann’s biggest project was yet to start: the building of this very hall [the *Adlersaal*], a project started after the fire of 1904, approved by the church council in 1909 and executed in 1912/1913. He wanted a *Gemeindehaus* for a congregational social program beyond Sunday and a *Deutsches Haus*¹² for the entire German-American community. It was finished just in time, before Zion’s and Hofmann’s years of trial started: The First World War. In the first years, before 1917, Hoffman was able to collect almost a million dollars for widows and orphans and the Red Cross of Germany and Austria, with unconventional means like the Eagle nails. In 1916 he started English vespers, steering Zion on the road to becoming bilingual. He said: “We are and remain an American church of the German tradition. The German Gospel as interpreted by Martin Luther is and remains ours. We live on the impulses which it conveys.”¹³

His public figure, like that of most German-Americans, was greatly diminished after 1917. But he used the last decade to rebuild and strengthen the congregation: by moving into the parsonage (his old one had been on 1023 W. Lanvale Street) in 1922, by founding the Church Club and the Club Neuland for younger immigrants. In his family he saw weddings and the baptism of his first grandchild—but also the disastrous alliance of his only son Henri with Anita Berber, the femme fatale of

Weimar Germany (but that's a story for another day).¹⁴ He welcomed guests from Germany and helped where he could. In 1927 he was awarded an honorary doctorate of his alma mater Giessen and could travel to receive it in person. But the trip did not help him in recovering good health. He collapsed in church while teaching a confirmation class and died the next morning, May 19, 1928. His funeral brought together dignitaries from the State, the City, the German-American community, and the church. He was buried on the church grounds under a Linden tree and a bronze grave marker sculpted by Baltimore sculptor Hans Schuler.

As the inscription on his grave marker says there are many reminders or memorials of who he was and what he did. In 1931, the "Julius Hofmann Memorial Fund" was formed in order to support the learning and teaching of German in schools in Baltimore and Maryland. It is still active today under the roof of the German Society of MD, giving cash prizes for Maryland students of German in connection with the AATG (American Association of Teachers of German).

It was his literary executor and friend, Hopkins professor William Kurrelmeyer who knew the value of the library that Hofmann had brought together over the decades. He persuaded the two eminent figures of Baltimore's German establishment: Consul Henry Hilken, the agent of the North German Lloyd, and John Tjarks, the owner of the Hotel Armistead at Fayette & Holliday Streets,¹⁵ to purchase it from the estate and Hilken give one portion to Johns Hopkins University and Tjarks the other to Zion. The portion Hopkins got was smaller but immensely valuable. Unfortunately no records have survived in either the Zion or Hopkins archives about how this donation was executed. All we have is an incomplete, later list of fifty-five titles—but also the books themselves and the clues they give us, like Hofmann's own bookplates of which he had two kinds, or the presentation bookplate of the "Hofmann Biblical Collection"—which is actually more adequate than calling it a Bible collection, because it comprises not just bibles, but also commentaries like Luther's commentary on Galatians from 1523.¹⁶

The Zion portion was given the name "Julius Hofmann Gedächtnis Bücherei"/Julius Hofmann Memorial Library and a special room at Zion which in its present form was installed for it after receiving the gift in 1929. It has a beautiful stained glass window triptych that tells of his

three great passions in collecting books: Dichtung—Gottesgelahrtheit—Geschichte (Poetry or Literature—Divinity—History).

Those were the three wells from which he got his inspiration. The big academic project that he never completed was a confluence of all three. He became intrigued by the idea that Luther's translation into German may have influenced William Tyndale's English translation which was first printed in Cologne in 1525 and 1526 in Worms. After he died, his friend William Kurrelmeyer, assigned one of his graduate students to the project, and it became the basis for Albert Gerberich's PhD thesis of 1933.¹⁷

How did Pastor Hofmann get his books? In Zion's archives, we keep a postcard showing a bookseller on the banks of the river Seine in Paris with an interested client who does look a little bit like Pastor Hofmann—as the handwritten inscription would want us to believe that this indeed was "Pastor Hofmann in Paris." This is a romantic thought, but we have no evidence so far that he did do purchases on the banks of the river Seine. What we do know through labels is that quite a number of books were purchased through the main academic book store in Giessen, the "J. Rickersche Verlagsbuchhandlung." Some of the books also contain manuscript inscriptions that provide provenance clues—but alas, no such inscriptions are to be found in the copy of the September Testament. Recent autopsies revealed the previous ownership of the three volume Latin bible of 1480¹⁸ as coming from the Dominican Convent in Frankfurt am Main, and a succession of owners could be established for Hofmann's copy of Erasmus of Rotterdam's groundbreaking 1516 edition of the Greek New Testament.¹⁹ Among its previous owners were Johann Sigismund Pirscher, a seventeenth-century Lutheran minister in Jauer in Silesia, Ferdinand Olivier, an eighteenth-century educator in Dessau, and Hermann Tausch, a nineteenth-century antiquarian book seller in Halle an der Saale, before it came to the Rickersche Verlagsbuchhandlung and through them to Hofmann, and finally ended in the John Work Garret Library in Evergreen House.

A study of Hofmann's collection, which is still a desideratum, therefore does not just give us an insight into the mind and interests of this great Baltimore personality, but also a glimpse into much deeper layers of cultural history.

— Holger Roggelin
Harrisburg, PA

Renewing the church

ZION 1896



ZION 1910



Hofmann's book plates



NOTES

1. "Personalbestand der Grosherzoglich Hessischen Ludwigs-Universität zu Giessen," Giesen 1885, 29.
2. Karl Ludwig Barthels, *Geschichte der Burschenschaft Arminia im A.D.B. zu Giessen von ihrer Gründung im November 1885 bis zum 10-jährigen Stiftungsfest im Juli 1895* (Giessen: Ottmanns 1899), 57.
3. Clayton Colman Hall, *Baltimore: Biography* (Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1912), 445.
4. Julius Hofmann, "Baltimore vor dreißig Jahren", copy of an undated newspaper article, Zion Archives
5. Clayton Colman Hall, op. cit., 445.
6. Klaus Wust, *Zion in Baltimore, 1755–1955: The Bicentennial History of the Earliest German-American Church in Baltimore, Maryland* (Baltimore: Zion Church, 1955), 90.
7. Klaus Wust, op. cit., 91
8. Clayton Colman Hall, op. cit., 445
9. *ibid.*
10. *ibid.*
11. Dieter Cunz, *The Maryland Germans* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press 1972 [1949]), 334.
12. The place that later carried that name (where the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall is now) had not yet been conceived.
13. Klaus Wust, op. cit., 101.
14. cf. Klaus Mann: "Erinnerungen an Anita Berber. Mit einem Foto von Madame d'Ora," *Die Bühne*, Jahrgang 1930, Heft 275, 43–44.
15. See his obituary in *The Report* 26 (1945), 52–53.
16. "In epistolam Pauli, ad Galatas." Basel: Petri 1523, BS2685.3 .L8 1523 c. 1
17. Albert Gerberich, "Luther and the English Bible," Diss. The Johns Hopkins University, 1933.
18. *Biblia latina: cum glossa ordinaria Walafridi Strabonis aliorumque et interlineari Anselmi Laudunensis Strassburg: Adolf Rusch, for Anton Koberger, not after 1480, bound in 3 volumes, Incun. 1480 .B575a c. 1*
19. BS1965 1516 QUARTO c. 1

A lasting legacy

