

GERMAN CULTURE IN BALTIMORE

On April 17, 1986, members of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland as well as several distinguished guests gathered in what was then the East Dining Room (now the Eisenhower Room) of the Johns Hopkins Club to celebrate the organization's one-hundredth anniversary. The speaker for the centennial celebration was Harold Jantz, emeritus professor and former chair of the German Department at the Johns Hopkins University, past president of the Society, and pre-eminent scholar, both of the works of Goethe and of German-American cultural history. Professor Jantz's announced title that evening was "Tradition and Continuity," but his purpose, as it emerged in the course of his remarks, was to highlight the reasons why the Society had been able to survive for a century, longer than any other ethnic historical society in the United States.

For Jantz's former students and colleagues, of which there were several in the audience, and many others who knew him, the lecture that evening, which appeared in *Report* 40¹, the first of two centennial volumes,² likely elicited both a nod and a slight smile. It was quintessential Jantz, incredibly thorough and unquestionably authoritative. It seems clear that he had reviewed the entire history of the Society and the full run of the *Report* to that point in preparing his remarks. Moreover, in his lecture Jantz reveals something about himself which wasn't always apparent in his personal interactions. He speaks not only with enthusiasm and expertise about his subject but with genuine affection as well, and he frequently enlivens his narrative with a wry sense of humor. With the hindsight of a little more than thirty additional years, it can also be said that Jantz was remarkably insightful.

Jantz cites a number of reasons why the Society in Maryland survived while many of its sister organizations did not, but two stand out. Unlike the Pennsylvania German Society and others like it, the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland did not restrict its membership to immigrants into the state with verifiable roots in the German-speaking areas of Europe.³ From the beginning the Society welcomed Anglo-Americans and others into its membership, a policy which paid many dividends. An Anglo-American of early colonial descent, Marion

Dexter Learned, was a member and the first Germanist of distinction to receive his Ph.D. degree from an American rather than a German university. For some years he taught at Hopkins before he accepted a call to the University of Pennsylvania. His first articles appeared in the *Report* in volumes five and six. His biography of Francis Daniel Pastorius, the founder of Germantown in 1688, and his monograph series, *Americana-Germanica* and *German-American Annals* place him in the first rank of scholars in his time. Then there is Henry A. Wood, an American trained in Europe, who was the first chair of the Hopkins' German Department.⁴ There were others, less well known perhaps, who were members simply because they were interested in things German and enjoyed the good fellowship of the Society. And that points up the importance of Jantz's second salient argument. The Society was from the beginning, and still is, made up of "amateurs in the original and best sense of the word, here for the love of it, for the fellowship of the congenial and like-minded. ... To the businessmen and professionals the academicians were soon added and contributed to the whole in important ways, but they never took over, indeed never wanted to take over." (15)

Thirty years later, the amalgam of business people, professionals, academics, and generally interested parties which listened to Professor Jantz's remarks in a dining room on the occasion of the Society's centennial, is still an appropriate metaphor for the appeal of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland as well as a pertinent factor in its continued survival. Whether lay person or professional, trained historian or avid amateur, members and supporters of the Society share a passion for German culture and a love of things German (or Swiss or Austrian). Culture comes in many forms, from a respect for learning and education to a lifetime of frugal habits and an awareness of the need to conserve, particularly given the fragile state of the planet's ecosystems. The discussion which follows here will take a closer look at German culture in the specific context of Baltimore. The focal points will be two local institutions, The Johns Hopkins University and Zion Church in the City of Baltimore, and a German immigrant, William Kurrelmeyer.

As Madame de Staël so famously wrote, the "Germans rule the heavens." The reference was to German thinkers. Immanuel Kant comes to mind, but undeniably German thought in general was a staple of the intel-

lectual world of the nineteenth century. Embodied in the concept of culture, German culture at least, is a reverence for education, *Bildung*, and philosophy, *Philosophie*. Beyond Kant there are Hegel, Marx, and Schelling. It could be said, in fact, that the key to understanding the German psyche is “culture.” In Mike Nichol’s remarkable film, *The Graduate* (1967), Dustin Hoffman’s character, Benjamin Braddock, receives a piece of advice from one of his parents’ friends who suggests that the key to success and to understanding life is, in a word, “plastics.” From the vantage point of fifty-plus years, one might acknowledge the foresight of such a statement. For many, this author included, Benjamin’s German counterpart should take the word “*Schulpforte*” to heart. The word refers to a boarding school located in a former Cistercian monastery near Naumburg on the Saale River in the German state of Saxony-Anhalt. Although not on everyone’s lips, *Schulpforte* represents the epitome of German education. For years the school taught the country’s elite. Today, it is a well-known public boarding school for academically gifted children, called *Landesschule Pforta*. Nietzsche is perhaps the school’s most famous alumnus, but other literary, cultural, and political notables such as Friedrich Klopstock, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and Chancellor of the German Empire under Wilhelm II, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, also attended.

For many, however, the emblem of German culture would more likely be Goethe, or perhaps even more strongly, Goethe and Schiller as they worked briefly in partnership in Weimar in the waning years of the eighteenth century. So significant is that partnership that it is enshrined in a monument depicting the two men which stands in front of the theater in Weimar. Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832) and Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), are probably the two most revered figures in German literature. Although different in many ways, temperamentally, socially and even physically, the two men developed a very productive literary collaboration, which included the joint authorship of a collection of verse entitled *Die Xenien* (1796), in which the two poets took aim at the mediocrity of much of the literature of the day and took their critics to task for tolerating such a state of affairs. Together and separately the men worked for and contributed in their works to a higher order of literature. Because they lived in Weimar during the years in which they collaborated, the

town of Weimar itself is often considered a symbol of the best of German culture. The monument to them stands in front of the State Theater in Weimar, where both men brought their dramas to the stage.

The importance of Goethe, Schiller, and Weimar is underscored by the Goethe-Schiller Monument itself. It incorporates Ernst Rietschel's 1857 bronze double statue of the two men. It is perhaps an indication of the symbolic significance of the monument and the poets that the bronze figures of the Goethe-Schiller statue are substantially larger than life-size; notably, both are given the same height, even though Goethe was nearly eight inches shorter than Schiller, who was, to be sure, tall for his time. Goethe is on the left in the photograph (see page ix), his left hand resting lightly on Schiller's shoulder. Goethe grasps a laurel wreath in his right hand, and Schiller's right hand is stretched out toward the wreath. Goethe, who was a close friend and advisor to the local duke, Karl August of Saxe-Weimer, wears the formal court dress of the era. On the other hand, Schiller, who was a professor at the university in nearby Jena and had no connection to the ducal court outside his relationship with Goethe, is in ordinary dress.

Although the partnership of Goethe and Schiller in Weimar has become emblematic of the classical period of German literature, Goethe by himself is often thought to be the embodiment of German culture. The motifs and themes of his masterful drama, *Faust*, have even passed into popular culture in such phrases as "a Faustian bargain." His youthful novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, was an almost instant international sensation. His poetry is considered by many the finest in the German language. He was a Renaissance man in every sense of the word. Today, his name signifies German culture more than any other. There are Goethe Institutes world-wide and Goethe's name is invoked often in the undertakings of the Cultural Office of the German government. The process of honoring the man as a symbol of a culture, in fact, began early. In 1885, barely fifty years after Goethe's death, Karl Alexander, then Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach and the grandson of Goethe's patron, Karl August, founded the Goethe Society of Weimar (*Goethe-Gesellschaft von Weimar*). The organization continues to exist today with the purpose of promoting a deeper understanding of the man and his work and examining its significance for contemporary life. The first offshoot of the origi-

nal Goethe Society in North America was founded in 1927 in New York, followed relatively quickly by the Goethe Society of Maryland. With that, the link with Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, Zion Church, and the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland was forged.

On November 13, 1931, two Hopkins professors founded the second Goethe Society in America⁵ in anticipation of the centennial of Goethe's death to be commemorated in March of the following year. The initial meeting and proclamation of the founding was held in the home of William Kurrelmeyer, then chair of the German Department of the Johns Hopkins University. Ernst Feise, Kurrelmeyer's colleague at Hopkins, Adolf E. Zucker, professor of German at the University of Maryland, and Fritz Evers, the recently appointed pastor at Zion, were also in attendance and instrumental in organizing the new group. Even a cursory glance over the list of officers, board members, and editors of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland will confirm the interrelationships between the Society, the newly founded chapter of the Goethe Society, and the major cultural institutions of Maryland with ties to German culture. The new society was going to make the celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of Goethe's death a major event.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe died on March 22, 1832 in Weimar. He was eighty-two-years-old and a titan of world literature. On March 10, 1932, slightly less than one-hundred years later, his death was celebrated in a lavish ceremony in Maryland at the Peabody Institute. More than one thousand people were in attendance, including such dignitaries as the mayor of Baltimore, Howard W. Jackson, and Maryland Governor Albert Ritchie. The guest of honor was renowned German dramatist and Nobel laureate, Gerhart Hauptmann, who spoke on "Goethe as Educator." Gerhart Johann Robert Hauptmann (15 November 1862 – 6 June 1946) was a German dramatist and novelist. He is best known for his naturalistic works, particularly his play *Die Weber* [The Weavers] which dramatized the plight of impoverished Silesian weavers who rose up in revolt in 1844 as their way of life and income were threatened by mechanization. However, Hauptmann wrote in a variety of styles and by the early twentieth century he was a popular and successful figure on the literary, and even the political scene. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1912 "primarily in recognition of his fruitful, varied and outstanding pro-

duction in the realm of dramatic art.”⁶ By the time of the Goethe centenary, Hauptmann was a venerable literary icon well suited to representing German culture abroad. His visit to Baltimore was part of an American lecture tour which culminated in his being recognized with an honorary degree from Columbia University. His host in Baltimore was Hopkins Chair William Kurrelmeyer (see image, page 10).

Wilhelm Kurrelmeyer was born in Osnabrück in 1874. Young Wilhelm migrated to Baltimore with his parents in 1882, at just eight years old. He attended the prestigious City College and ultimately received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the Johns Hopkins University.

At this point, it is worth asking what the Baltimore of young Wilhelm Kurrelmeyer was like. The eighteen-fifties and the eighteenthies are generally considered the peak decades for German immigration to America. 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 Empire⁷. 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. It is, in fact, not an exaggeration to say that one could have lived com-

fortably in Baltimore speaking only German through the First World War. Maryland was a German state, and Baltimore was a German city. The small village of 1729 with sixty undeveloped one-acre lots mushroomed in the course of the eighteenth century to twenty-five wooden buildings and several hundred residents in 1752 and more than six thousand residents in bricks-and-mortar dwellings by the time of the revolution⁸.

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. In 1870, Baltimore had three daily newspapers published in German. There were three gymnastic clubs (*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 Haus⁹ didn't yet exist as such. 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 Church on City Hall Plaza had 1000 students receiving instruction in German as well as English 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 organizations founded by and supported by the German-speaking population of Baltimore.

If Baltimore was an American town with strong ties to German culture, William Kurrelmeyer was an exemplar of that culture and its values. 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. He was throughout a teacher and a mentor, a scholar steeped in the philological methods of nineteenth-century German researchers, and a bibliophile devoted to the physicality of books and the textual evidence within them for his work. Kurrelmeyer's writings included more than one hundred books and articles in his field. He did extensive research and

writing as part of his many travels to Germany and over the course of a career assembled a personal library of over 25,000 volumes.

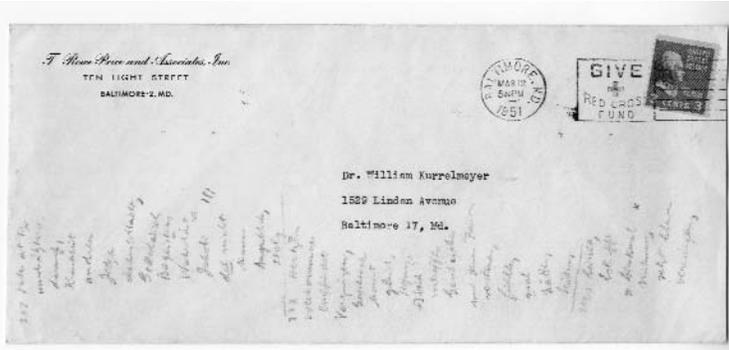
An article in *Report 47* highlighted the link between Hopkins Professor Kurrelmeyer, Zion Pastor Hofmann, and their respective institutions¹⁰. The focus here on German culture reinforces broader ideas developed there. Pastor Fritz Evers was Hofmann's immediate successor at Zion, a member and officer of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, and a collaborator with Kurrelmeyer and his Hopkins colleague Ernst Feise in the founding of the Goethe Society of Maryland and the planning of the events surrounding the centennial of Goethe's death. Moreover, a close examination of the files in the Kurrelmeyer Collection¹¹ at Hopkins underscores the depth and breadth of the influence of German cultural values on Kurrelmeyer, his career, the individuals with whom he interacted, and the institutions within which he worked.

Many items in the folders which constitute the Kurrelmeyer papers are both fascinating and enlightening. They are also illustrative of the degree to which William Kurrelmeyer himself lived out the full range of German cultural values, from the most mundane like thriftiness to the loftiest aspirations of scholarship. Among the random items one might mention is an old examination booklet (blue book) from a student who didn't perform particularly well and a ballot for the election of officers in the Modern Language Association dated 31 December 1943. In and of themselves the items are, of course, relatively inconsequential, but they tell a story. Clearly, the man was a bit of a pack rat, but he was also meticulous and thorough, a demanding researcher. The files are replete with typewritten notes, many copied from books in Kurrelmeyer's own library. The old blue book and the MLA ballot both have notes on unrelated subjects scribbled on the margins, evidence that nothing went to waste in the Kurrelmeyer household. A postcard from a friend is used as a bookmark in a well-read copy of Wieland's *Abderiten*, as usual with notations from the volume written on the edge of the card. Yet, most telling of all is a regular business-sized envelope with scribbles on the edges (see image, page 10). It is a near-perfect example of the amalgam of German frugality (*Sparsamkeit*) and love of education (*Bildung*) which Kurrelmeyer embodied. Research notes are written on the edges of an envelope which

likely contained the latest statement from Alex Brown, Kurrelmeyer's broker!

The current discussion began with references to Harold Jantz's address at the centennial celebration of the Society, an address entitled "Tradition and Continuity." In many respects, the tradition referred to is the love of things German as embodied in German culture, from a lively beer garden to a lengthy lecture on the finer points of a philosophical treatise or an uplifting performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The continuity is evident in the intricate network of people, places, and institutions in Baltimore and in Maryland which have worked together and continue to come together to honor tradition. Both came together in William/Wilhelm Kurrelmeyer and in Baltimore in 1932. They continue to bind a university which adopted and adapted German principles with a congregation which preserved both the faith and the language of Luther for its parishioners. Moreover, the link extends to this Society and to this journal. Carrie May Kurrelmeyer Zintl, William's daughter, was not only an officer and fervent supporter of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, but it was she who left behind a bequest which initiated the Publication Fund and remains a vital source of support for this journal.

— Randall P. Donaldson
Loyola University Maryland



**THE ENVELOPE FROM ALEX BROWN
WITH
MARGINAL NOTES**

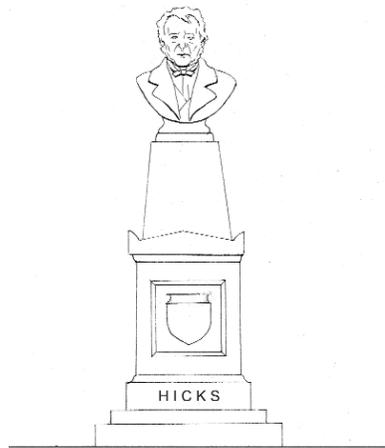
**GERHART HAUPTMANN
HIS SON BENVENUTO
AND
WILLIAM KURRELMAYER
(LEFT TO RIGHT)**



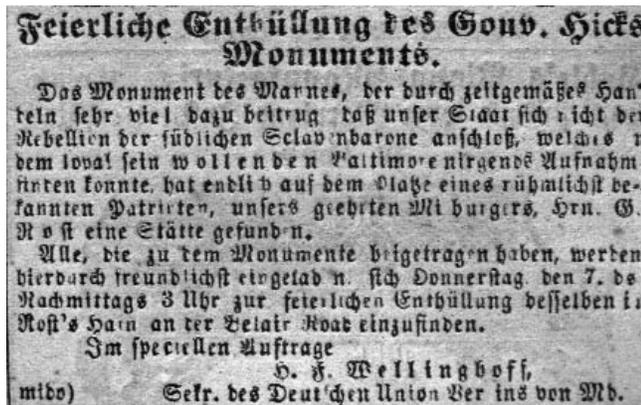
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NOTES

1. Harold Jantz, "Tradition and Continuity: One Society that Survived," *The Report* 40 (1986), 9–20.
2. In the "To Our Readers" section of *Report 40* (p. 7), Klaus Wust, then editor, notes plans for two centennial volumes, but only one was ever published.
3. "direct descendant of early German or Swiss emigrants to Pennsylvania," as quoted by Jantz, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
4. c.f. Thomas Thornton, "The Rise and Fall of German Studies in the United States: Henry Wood at Johns Hopkins," *The Report* 46 (2011), 33–47.
5. There was at that time a chapter in Canada, making three in North America total. Only the Maryland chapter survived the anti-German sentiment of the Second World War.
6. as quoted by The Nobel Prize in Literature 1912. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Sun. 8 Mar 2020. <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1912/summary/>>
7. 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.
8. Olson, Sherry H. Olson. *Baltimore, the building of an American city*. Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980:
(p. 1) Unlike Boston, New York, Philadelphia, or Charleston, Baltimore was never a significant center of colonial trade, enterprise, government, or culture. Laid out in 1730, it was still a mere village of twenty-five houses in 1752, and at the onset of the Revolution it was a small town of six thousand persons and ten churches, and it had just acquired its first newspaper.
(p. 10) The second half of the eighteenth century saw a sudden take-off for Baltimore. From an insignificant way place of twenty-five wooden houses at midcentury, it grew to a brick-and-mortar town of thirty thousand inhabitants by 1800 and crystallized as the central place of Maryland.
9. cf. the cover image of the current issue as well as that of *Report 41*
10. Randall P. Donaldson. "Baltimore's Enduring German Connection: Zion Church and the Johns Hopkins University," *The Report* 47, 35–41.
11. William Kurrelmeyer Papers, Special Collections, The Sheridan Libraries of the Johns Hopkins University. <https://aspace.library.jhu.edu/repositories/3/resources/10>.



**AUTHOR'S INTERPRETATION OF
HOW THE HICK'S MONUMENT
MAY HAVE APPEARED**



**UNVEILING ANNOUNCEMENT:
DER WECKER, 6 JUNE 1886**

Image Credits:

Image 1 (above): Courtesy the Author

Image 2 (above): Courtesy, Special Collections, Maryland State Archive

Image 3 (page 22): Courtesy, the Maryland State Archive