
The First German Settlement

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NORTH AMERICA.

THE FIRST GERMAN SETTLEMENT IN NORTH AMERICA.

THE 6th of October is generally accepted by the German Americans as the anniversary of the founding of their first colony in this country. It was on this day in the year 1683 that the good ship "Concord" arrived at Philadelphia with a number of families, who had left Germany to escape religious persecution, and with the intention to found a permanent settlement in the new colony of Pennsylvania, where they could worship God in their own manner, unmolested. They were, however, not the first Germans who came to America. Already in the year 1608, but one year after the first settlement of the English at Jamestown, some German mechanics came to Jamestown, on special invitation, to carry on their trade. In 1623 at Albany and 1625 at New York, then New Amsterdam, there were many Germans among the first Dutch settlers. Peter Minnewit, the Dutch Governor of New York from 1626 to 1631, who purchased Manhattan Island, 22,000 acres, from the Indians for 60 Dutch florins (\$20), was a native of, and had been a deacon of the Reformed Church at the city of Wesel on the Rhine. From 1626 to 1633 the Swedes, by printed circulars distributed in Germany, invited the Germans to join them in their colonisation efforts in North America, and their first expedition with two ships in 1638 was commanded by said Peter Minnewit of Wesel, who had left the Dutch and entered the Swedish service. Their settlements were on the Delaware, and we find many German names among the first settlers. The earliest Swedish historian of their American colony mentions, that Germans accompanied the Swedes in their emigration to America. John Printz, the Governor of New Sweden from 1642 to 1653, was a German nobleman. All these Germans, however, were in the minority in the respective settlements, and freely intermingling with the mass of the population, soon lost their identity.

The Germans who crossed the ocean in the ship Concord, were all natives or had been residents of the town of Crefeld and its vicinity; many among them were related to each other, and all were united by the bond of sincere and deep religious convictions, for which they had suffered much cruel persecution. They belonged to the Quakers and Mennonites, harmless sects as they were usually called, who seem to have by their passive resistance exasperated the dominant religious authorities far more, than the aggressive Puritan who wielded the bloody sword in so many terrible battles, and offered praises and thanks to the Almighty on a field soaked by the blood of his fellow-men, slain in the strife for political and religious supremacy.

The relation between England and Germany was in the 16th century very close. English actors gave regular Shakespearean performances on the stages of German theatres. Many Englishmen were in the German, and many Germans in the English State service. The English Quakers sent many missionaries to Germany. Penn was there in 1671, also in 1677. Wm. Ames and George Rolf converted in 1657 the inhabitants of Krisheim to the Quaker religion. Wm. Caton, Stephen Crisp, Wm. Moore, Robert Barrlay, George Keith, Benjamin Furley, Gertrude Diricks and Elisabeth Hendricks were ardent missionaries in Germany. They were especially successful among the Mennonites, who are nearest to the Quakers in their religious tenets. The Pietists were also friendly to the Quaker, and those who emigrated, generally joined the Quakers. The Quakers were in Germany as in England and New England especially the object of assault by the rabble; the Government imprisoned and fined them, at the instigation of the churches and ministers of the dominant sects, and a reward of five florins was offered to informers who would tell of the existence of a Quaker in the country.

In 1681 Penn acquired the proprietary right of the colony of Pennsylvania, and in the same year published in Germany the act of religious toleration in his new Province. His friends in Crefeld, Krisheim and Frankfort resolved to seek refuge from their persecutors by emigrating *en masse* to the new colony. Several of them preceded the bulk of emigrants as an advance-

guard to locate the new settlement. On the 10th of March 1682, and the 11th of June 1683, the Crefeld friends, namely: Jacob Telner, Dirk Sipman, Jan Strepers, Govert Remke, Leuert Aret, and Jacob Isaac van Bebber purchased 18,000 acres from Wm. Penn at 40 shillings for each 100 acres, of his agent, Benj. Furly. The Frankfort company about the same time purchased 25,000 acres. But few of the Frankfort people emigrated, their purchase subsequently acquired more the character of a commercial speculation, but they sent as their agent Daniel Pastorius, a Doctor of several German Universities, a man of the most pure and noble character, and superior in learning to any man who then and for a long time thereafter resided in North America. Pastorius left Rotterdam on the 4th of May 1683, and arrived in Philadelphia on the 20th of August, accompanied by six emigrants and the family of Isaac Dilbeck. He there awaited the arrival of the ship Concord with the Crefeld friends and in the meantime made preparation and plans for the new settlement. He erected for himself a temporary house 30 x 15 feet and wrote above the door in Latin: "*Parva domus sed amica Bonis, procul este Prophani*" (in English: "Small is my house, the good are welcome here, the profane stay away,") which gave William Penn, who visited him in his hut, great amusement and he encouraged Pastorius, for whom he felt the highest regard and warm friendship, to continue his building of dwellings. Pastorius often dined with Penn and with the Governor of the Province.

At last on the 6th of October the long expected Crefeld friends arrived. They had sailed from Gravesend on the 24th of July and had a pleasant successful voyage. Two days after their arrival they agreed upon the site of their settlement, which they called Germantown. They wanted to locate their entire 43,000 acres they had purchased at the same place on the Schuylkill river, but Penn only allowed them 5,700 acres, and the next year by a re-survey took the 1000 acres, which bounded on the river, away from them again. On the 24th of October the survey of the lots was completed, on the 25th they distributed the building-lots by drawing chances, and immediately began to dig cellars and erect their dwellings. Each dwelling was located in a small garden, bounding east and

west of the main street, 60 feet wide, leading through the settlement. Although well provided with provisions, clothes, and especially tools, ropes &c. when they left Germany in June, it was a long time till they could, by the harvest of the following year, which was to be raised out of new, unbroken ground, expect to reap sustenance for their frugal life. There was suffering and privation, but still more christian fortitude, reliance upon God, meekness and patience among these hardy pioneers. Pastorius writes of these days: "It can not be written enough, nor impressed enough on the minds of our wealthy descendants, in what poverty and want, but also in what christian cheerfulness and untiring energy and industry Germantown was begun. Before the cold weather had fairly set in, every family was safely housed. The emigrants were mostly mechanics, such as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, locksmiths, especially weavers, but all understood farming also, as is the custom in small country towns in Germany. Their industry was so great that one year after their arrival they offered linen, hosiery and cloth for sale at their store in Philadelphia, which belonged to the Frankfort company and was in charge of Pastorius, and which linen, hosiery and cloth was manufactured by them out of flax and wool raised by them. They soon became renowned for the quality of their goods, and in a book, entitled: "A Short Description of Pennsylvania," published by Wm. Bradford as early as 1692, George Frame sings in rhymes of Germantown: —

"The German town, of which I spoke before,
Which is at least in length one mile or more,
"Where lives High-German people and Low-Dutch,
Whose trade in weaving linen cloth is much;
There grows the flax," &c.

But beside these household industries, Germantown had also the first paper-mill ever built in North America. Wilhelm Ryttinghuysen, who had a paper-mill at Arnheim, Holland, was a devout Mennonite, and being oppressed on account of his religion, emigrated with, his two sons, Claus and Gerhard, in the year 1674 to New York. On the settlement of Germantown by his co-religionists he left New York and with his sons settled at Germantown, where they soon after erected the

first paper-mill in the country. The property is still in the possession of the family. I have some of the earliest paper manufactured by them, and you can by personal inspection verify its good quality. Wilhelm Ryttinghuysen, or Rittenhouse as the family was called, was a man of generous benevolent disposition; he became the first bishop of the Mennonites in America and was especially active in works of charity. In 1705 the Mennonites purchased the ground for the erection of their first meeting house in Germantown, "Wm. Ryttinghuysen becoming their preacher; he died 1708, His son Claus died in 1734. Many illustrious men have come of this family, the most renowned is David Rittenhouse, the great astronomer and director of the first U. S. Mint in Philadelphia.

The history of Germantown records no exciting events.— There was no rebellion, no factious fight of ambitious parties to obtain the political control over the community, no Indian massacre; there was no persecution on account of religious opinions, Quakers, Mennonites, Lutheran, Reformed, Separatist or Mystics, such as Kelpius and his brethren in the Desert, and others lived together in peace; there were no witches burnt, no one was murdered or robbed, not even a theft is recorded in the Court Record or Annals of Germantown. The Court, which set every six weeks, often adjourned for having no business to attend to. The proceedings were usually the recording of deeds, &c., strayed cattle, broken fences. The first criminal case was when Casper Karsten and his wife had threatened the policeman and were fined two pounds; Pettinger was fined for hitting another man's hog, and later for assaulting Johannes Köster. The town prohibited the sale of more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pint of rum or one quart of beer in a half a day to any individual, and Peter Kemlis, who had license to keep a tavern, was fined for violating this law and not providing sufficient accomodation for travellers. A few more such trivial offences are all that the records of Germantown show for the period of 17 years.

The Quakers of Krisheim soon followed our friends from Crefeld; among them were the Hendricks, the Cassells, the Shoemakers, who came in 1685. Mennonites then followed in large numbers and settled in Germantown, and in the country west of it. Among them were many whose names are very

familiar to us, but their names were by an order of the Lord Proprietary anglicized, when they were naturalised as English citizens; it was then that the name of Langeneicher was changed into the well-known Longnecker, Ferne into Forney, Neukomm into Newcomer, König into King, Baumann into Bowman, Steinemann into Stoneman, Zimmermann into Carpenter, Ried into Reed, Weber into Weaver, Burghalter into Burkholder and afterwards Burke, Herr into Hare. This was done so extensively, that the names of many of *our* old families are no criterion as to their origin. This anglicising of German names became for a time very common. The Jäger changed into Hunter, Knecht into Knight, Gottwalter into Cadwallader, Hinkel into Hinkley, Goebel into Gable, Huth into Hood, Schott into Scott, Wehn into Wayne, Schürmann into Shermann, Mohl into Moale, Schürholz into Sherwood, &c.

The Germans at Germantown were a deeply religious people. In 1683 and '84 Win. Penn preached to them in the German language in Tunes Kunders' House; they had their regular meetings and took part in the monthly, quarterly and yearly meeting of the province. The Mennonites worship in their meeting house up to the present time, the Lutheran and Reformed churches were built later. In 1701 the City Council of Germantown erected the first public school, and the site where the school was erected, is to this day used for school purposes. Pastorius was from 1698 to 1700 the teacher of the Friends' school in Philadelphia. He also conducted a night school. In 1688 on the 18th of April, in meeting assembled the Germans of Germantown issued their solemn protest in writing against slavery. They condemned slavery in the strongest terms and set forth its evils in the most eloquent language. It was composed in the English language and signed by Garrett Hendricks, Francis Daniel Pastorius, Dirk Op den Græff, and Abraham Op den Græff. It was the first protest against slavery ever issued in this country, and in force of language leaves nothing to be wished for.

Daniel Pastorius was the first Mayor of Germantown; he also held the office of a Justice of the Peace, City Registrar, and was several times elected as a member of the General

Assembly of Pennsylvania. He died in December 1719 or January 1720. His literary activity during his life was very great. He wrote in the German, English, French, Italian, Dutch and Latin languages, mostly however in English. We have poems from him in all these languages; further, books on Arithmetic, Geometry; Latin, French and English grammars; Treatises on Agriculture, Botany, Laws, Theology, Ethics, History, Natural History and Church History.

Kot many of his books were published. The most important and best known is his "Full Geographical Description of the Province of Pennsylvania." (Frankfort and Leipsig 1700). Some of his books were published in Amsterdam, New York and Philadelphia. He left in manuscripts one large folio volume of 1000 pages, each page of about 100 lines closely and legibly written in English; also, 14 quarto, 22 octavo and six smaller volumes, written in such small and neat letters, that a magnifying glass renders good service.

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