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RURAL PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN NEWSPRESS IN THE 18TH CENTURY

The German American newspress, spanning more than two centuries, forms a major chapter of journalistic history in the United States. The first German immigrants arrived in Philadelphia in 1683 and during the following decades, German emigration to southeastern Pennsylvania flourished. By the time the American Revolution broke out, it was estimated that the Germans composed one third of the population of Pennsylvania, i.e. about 120,000 inhabitants. Southeastern Pennsylvania was, therefore, ideally suited to become the cradle for German-American journalism.

The first German-American newspapers

Benjamin Franklin's *Philadelphische Zeitung* first appeared on May 6, 1732. It enjoyed only a limited circulation; the format was 6½ inches by 9 inches with four pages, printed in Roman type. Presumably only two editions were published. The first issue of Christoph Sauer's *Der Hoch Deutsche Pennsylvanische Geschicht-Schreiber, Oder: Sammlung wichtiger Nachrichten aus dem Natur-und Kirchenreich* appeared on August 20, 1739 in Germantown. The title was shortened in 1745 to *Hoch-Deutsche Pennsylvanische Berichte* and a year later to *Germantauer Zeitung*. By 1751 this newspaper had a circulation of 4,000. It ceased publication in October 1777 when, because of its support of the British during the War for Independence, its confiscation was ordered by the revolutionary government.¹

Extensive research has already been done on the early German-American newspress in the Philadelphia area, however, the remainder of southeastern Pennsylvania, with its

large number of German settlers, also supported indigenous newspapers which have received little scholarly attention.² German-language papers were printed during the 18th century in Lancaster, Reading, Harrisburg, York, Hanover and Easton.³

Lancaster

The first German newspaper printed in Lancaster was the bilingual *Lancastersche Zeitung*, (English version: *Lancaster Gazette*) which ran from January 15, 1752 to June 5, 1753. This was the first newspaper also employing the German language to be published outside of Philadelphia and Germantown. It preceded the first solely English-language paper of Lancaster, the *Pennsylvania Packet* (1777-1778), by more than twenty years. The latter paper was a Philadelphia paper printed only temporarily in Lancaster due to the British occupation, consequently it was not until 1794 (when the *Lancaster Journal* commenced publication) that the city had its own English-language newspaper. Even before the appearance of the *Journal* two other German-language papers had come into existence.

Parallel columns (German-English) were printed in the biweekly *Lancastersche Zeitung*. Its publishers were Heinrich Müller (Henry Miller in the English version) and Samuel Holland, who became the sole publisher soon after the paper began circulation. The earliest extant copy of this four-page edition (8½"x13") is that of "29 sten Jenner [sic] 1752" issue. Pages one and two carry international news of a general nature (no editorializing), e.g. political differences between Russia and Sweden; an assassination attempt on the pope; an earthquake in Lisbon; French and Dutch colonial conflicts. Page three contains domestic news: French and Indians in Canada; a ship catastrophe in New York; a hail storm in New Hampshire. Printed on pages three and four are various announcements: pocket watches for sale; horses stolen; land for sale; clothing mislaid; wine ads; books

available—Milton, poetry and devotional literature, psalms, primers, catechisms, etc. The only illustration in this issue is a wood-cut in the title of the paper, a decorative emblem with the motto "Through Benevolentia".

A short-lived weekly, *Das Pennsylvanische Zeitung-Blatt*, begun on February 4, 1778, was issued on Wednesdays for 21 weeks, ceasing publication on June 24, 1778. It contains four pages (8"x13") (published by Frantz Bailey) which support the American revolutionary cause.⁴

The initial edition states that only a few German-language newspapers are being printed. News of the War for Independence is its main concern. Reports from General George Washington (referred to as: "General und Ober-Befehlshaber über die Völker der Vereinigten Staaten von America") are numerous: his military confrontations and his troops' needs, the unpopularity of this war in Britain. Reports of speeches against the war and the King's policies before Parliament, of political repercussions against Britain's military for waging such a senseless war, and of general European antipathy toward England for pursuing the war are given. Overtures of friendship between France and America are praised.

The *Neue Unpartheyische Lancäster Zeitung und Anzeigs-Nachrichten* (which underwent several name changes) was published from 1787 to 1825. The 1786 decision of the Pennsylvania legislature to have all official documents of the Commonwealth printed in German translation, gave great impetus to German printing. This Wednesday weekly consisted of four pages (10"x16") of three columns each. Its original publishers were Anton Stiemer, Johann Albrecht and Jacob Lahn. After Stiemer's death in 1788, Albrecht and Lahn continued publication until 1790. From 1790 on Albrecht was its sole publisher. In the first issue, the editors reveal their support of political independence and concern for moral and pedagogical questions, expressing hope that the newspaper will benefit readers who are not yet proficient in the English language.

This paper, like most early German-American publications, abounds in Americanisms, e.g. "Stohr" for "store," "Lotte" for the English "lot" (property), "verrenten" for "to rent," "crieck" for "creek."

Some of the papers editorial themes are: (1) condemning the elimination of the religious section of the oath for public office, (2) Russian religious leaders giving financial aid for the battles against the Turks, (3) the praising of freedom in the United States followed by the contrasting of American life with the constant wars and military preparation in Europe. Most of the international news refers to areas other than Germany and Austria.

Some of the advertisements refer to the sale of medicines, work horses, land, farming implements, and household goods. On page four we find a legal notification of married couples separating in order to indicate that one is no longer financially responsible for the other. Two advertisements are of particular interest: one offers to buy any rags available — indicating the difficulty encountered in producing paper; the second offers a Negro woman and two attractive children for sale.

The last German-language newspaper established in Lancaster in the 18th century, *Der Lancaster Correspondent* (1799-1803), also contains four pages (9½"x19¾"). Carrying the motto "Frey, Standhaft und Gemässigt", it appeared Saturdays and was published by Jacob Hütter. This weekly did not experience much success and after its demise, Hütter proceeded to Easton and established the *Northampton Correspondent*, which continued publication for almost a century.

A strong note of patriotism permeated this paper from its inception; pro-French and pro-English groups came under severe criticism. International news does not receive extensive treatment, only a minimum of coverage is given to Germany and Austria. An editorial battle was waged against the *Neue Unpartheyische Lancäster Zeitung*, later called *Deutsche Porcupein*, because of its pro-Federalist political policy. Its advertisements follow the pattern of its sister papers. Its

language is generally proper, however, now and then Americanisms such as "Wahl Return . . .", appear.⁵

Reading

Berks County was established in 1752, Reading was planned in 1748, and the population of the area was heavily German. It is curious that more than forty years passed before the establishment of a newspaper in Reading. This was the *Neue Unpartheyische Readinger Zeitung und Anzeiges-Nachrichten* (1789-1802), printed on four pages, a weekly, first published on Wednesdays by Benjamin Johnson, Thomas Barton and Gottlob Jungmann. The latter editor also established the English-language paper, *The Weekly Advertiser, of Reading, in the County of Berks* (1796-1816).

The *Neue Unpartheyische Readinger Zeitung und Anzeiges-Nachrichten* was a staunch defender of the American republic and its pages are laden with praise for the Germans of the Reading area. Its coverage of European events is extensive. Europe is depicted as engrossed in a war resulting from events emanating from France; very little news refers to Germany or Austria. Domestic news coverage is also extensive, spanning a wide gamut from reports of stolen horses, to Pennsylvania's new state constitution, to conflicts with Indians in Georgia and Florida. In three consecutive numbers, November 21, 28, and December 5, 1798, a passionate defense of the Pennsylvania Germans is given. Apparently, the stigma of "the dumb Dutch" was already prevalent; these articles maintain the Germans are by no means stupid, but adds that they should attend school in order to become better citizens. A moralizing Christian tone in stories for entertainment, in the printing of whole sermons, in didactic poems as "An die liebe Jugend," in mourning the death of John Wesley, and in ads for devotional literature are abundant in this paper.

Advertisements treat public auctions, rewards for runaway indentured servants, brushmaker's wares, medicines, dairy cattle, horses for sale, etc. Whereas these announcements are printed in German, those announcing militia meetings are

in English. The May 4, 1791 issue carries an advertisement offering a reward for the return of a Negro slave freeing from Bethlehem. Several examples of incorrect usage are to be found here, e.g. "Donnerwetter" is used for thunderstorm, and numerous English substitutions are found, e.g. "skriens" for "screens" or "Accaunte" for accounts.

One of the most famous of the Pennsylvania German newspapers was the Reading Adler (1797-1913), a weekly appearing on Tuesdays, in four pages, (16"x20½"), originally published under the name of Der Unpartheyische Reading Adler, by Jacob Schneider and George Gerrisch. The title carries an emblem with the American eagle, the national flag, and the word "Freyheit." The July 10, 1798 edition carries a new emblem: the eagle with the inscription "America Alone."

The Adler devotes much space to international news which deals almost exclusively with Europe and the upheavals in France. Reports from the various German states are more extensive than in its sister newspaper in southeastern Pennsylvania. News of political turmoil in Ulster is reported, mentioning also the possible political union of England and Ireland. The XYZ-Affair, which stirred emotions in this country, is given wide coverage in the Adler in September of 1798.

Domestic news is more broadly covered here than in the other journals with reports from various parts of the country: new laws in Pennsylvania (on May 30, 1797 the law regulating the distillation of spirits); the work of the legislature in the Commonwealth; court sessions in Reading. Of particular note is the December 24, 1799 edition which contains a heavy black border on pages two and three to mourn the death of George Washington.

The moralizing tone is conveyed through poems printed in a column entitled "Dichter Stelle" and in anecdotes, e.g. the dialogue of September 11, 1798 between two farmers which emphasizes a citizen's duty to vote.

Advertisements usually appear on page four and resemble those of its sister newspapers; Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws

is offered for sale; teachers are sought who speak both English and German.

The impurities in this paper's German are at times quite overt: "bekleiden" for begleiten, "Freind" for Freund, "Verlehenen" for vermieten, "Taxen" for Steuern, "Adverteisments." the form "wegen den Thee und der Geiz...."

Harrisburg

The town of Harrisburg was planned in 1784, and Dauphin County was organized in 1785. The majority of the inhabitants were Scotch-Irish and the first newspaper in Harrisburg was the Harrisburg Journal (1789 ff.); the town's first German-language newspaper, the Unpartheyische Harrisburg Morgenröte Zeitung, started publication in 1799 and continued until 1840. This 4-page weekly appeared Tuesdays and was published initially by Benjamin Mayer and Conrad Fahnestock. In the banner the emblem of an aurora is substituted for the word itself. International news is exclusively European and centers heavily on developments surrounding France; there is only scant information pertaining to the German states. Broad coverage is given to Napoleon's campaign in Egypt and to the rumor that he has been killed there. This paper is staunchly anti-Federalist. Its first edition underlines its republicanism by praising America's form of government as the best. It is critical of any new federal taxes and sees no need to finance a standing army. It also attacks the Alien and Sedition Laws as detrimental to democracy and in violation of the Constitution. A major campaign is pursued on behalf of Thomas M'Kean (i.e. McKean) for governor and against J. Ross, the Federalist candidate. Jungmann and his newspaper in Reading are attacked since he supports the Federalist cause. A rebellion in Bethlehem against the taxes imposed by President Adams receives extensive coverage.

A moralizing tone is evident in the publicity given to church meetings, as well as in an article of a Philadelphia inn-keeper hoping for war so that his soldier clients would be

able to pay their bills, and in and the poems of the "Dichters Stelle." Advertisements resemble those of the other newspapers. Again we encounter various oddities in the German employed: the genitive plural form "Künsten", "verlehenen" for: to rent, "Scheriff"; "den Sentenz" (for a sentence from a court of law); "Turnpeik."

York

York County was organized in 1749 by English, Scotch-Irish and German settlers. The first newspaper in York was the Pennsylvania Chronicle or The York Weekly Advertiser (1787-1788), however, the Pennsylvania Gazette of Philadelphia was printed in York during the British occupation in 1777-1778. The first German-language newspaper to be established here was Die Unpartheyische York Gazette (1796-1804), a Friday weekly, four pages (18¼"x10½"), published by Solomon Mäyer.

Its content favors news from France and a pro-French attitude. News from German states is sparse. The initial edition of May 20 carries a chronological listing of major events in Europe during the preceding year. Events from various American cities are featured in the national news as well as the business of Congress, e.g. a petition from the State of Delaware asking for a federal law to prevent its slaves from being kidnapped. The local news covers such events in Pennsylvania (particulary in the area of York) as accidents or fires, the printing of Pennsylvania laws, and local elections. A moralizing tone prevails in the anecdotes and poems which deal with a young girl refusing to sing for the King and demonstrating her support for republicanism, prudence in marriage, etc. The German language of this paper also contains errors: "Poland"; "Taxen" (for: taxes); "Lot" (for: a plot of land); the dative plural form of "Wohnhäuser"; the double negative "... niemals kein..."

The Volks-Berichter (1799-1803), a Thursday weekly, four pages, (11"x18½") was published by Andreas Billmeyer. A decorative emblem adorns its banner with an eagle, an anchor,

scales, a cherub, flowers, a sword and a globe. The first issue reports that the paper's major task lies in the preservation of religion and morality. Its poems and the anecdotes facilitate this endeavor. News coverage takes a secondary position although one finds here reporting of events centering around France, especially Napoleon; domestic news concerns itself with ship arrivals or town meetings. Its German is structurally and grammatically correct.

Epilog

From these humble beginnings arose a German-language newspaper during the 19th century in southeastern Pennsylvania, with which the English-language counterparts could hardly compete until about 1860. In their formative years, the second half of the 18th century, the German papers acquainted the German-speaking population with its new surroundings. The course of the Revolution, the wars with the Indians, and local and national political developments were reported as completely as the sources of information allowed. News from Europe was generally three to six months old since it had to be brought by ship. The lack of extensive reporting of news from Germany and Austria clearly indicates that the German-language newspaper was not to be an organ for Germany in the New World. Its independence from Germany was maintained throughout its existence, even during World War I when German-American journalism was dealt a deadly blow.

The level of sophistication of these various papers was not particularly high. It must be recalled, however, that the areas they served, Lancaster, Reading, Harrisburg, York, etc. were small rural towns whose economies were essentially agricultural. It was unfortunate that more than one newspaper was established in each town in a period when these rural areas could hardly support even one. Rather than competing with one another, their energies might well have been given to sustaining a single enterprise.

The difficulty of maintaining a pure High German is marked by the employment of Americanisms and even

English words themselves, as well as English syntax. As the English language had to accommodate itself to a new environment, so too did German. What is surprising, is the fact that the Pennsylvania German-language press maintained German at a time when so many of its readers communicated in the Pennsylvania German dialect.

NOTES

¹See Carl Wittke, *The German-Language Press in America* (Lexington, Ken., 1957), p. 16 ff.

²Karl J. R. Arndt and May E. Olson, *German-American Newspapers and Periodicals 1732-1955* (Heidelberg, 1961).

Clarence S. Brigham, *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers 1690-1820* (Worcester, Mass. 1947).

Both these bibliographies furnish excellent material.

Ralph Wood, "Journalism among the Pennsylvania Germans," *The Pennsylvania Germans*, ed. by Ralph Wood (Princeton, 1942), p. 131-164. This study offers a general view of Pennsylvania German journalism.

Daniel Miller, "Early German American Newspapers," *Pennsylvania German Society* (Lancaster, Penna., 1911). This study is an extended checklist.

Carl Wittke, op; cit. This study deals in a general context with the formative years.

Our attempt here will be to offer a descriptive analysis.

³In Easton the *Neue Unpartheyische Eastoner Bothe und Northamptoner Kundschafter* was published weekly from August 1, 1793-February 6, 1805 by Jacob Weygandt and Sohn (Cornelius Nowland Weygandt). It was Democratic in editorial policy. The only copies from the 18th century are in the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.: September 24 — November 12, 26 — December 24, 1794; January 14, February 18, March 18, 1795. In Hanover, *Die Pennsylvanische Wochenschrift* appeared weekly from April 1797 — February 1805 published by W. D. Lepper and E. Stettinius. No copy known.

⁴Cf. Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans, *History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1883), p. 498. This newspaper is not even mentioned as having existed. As Francis Bailey he also published the English language *Lancaster Mercury*, 1778-1779.

⁵One other German language newspaper was published at this time in Lancaster, *Des Landmanns Wochenblatt* (February 1798-February 19, 1799); its name was changed to *Das Lancaster Wochenblatt* from February 26—May 1799. No extant copies are known.

Der Wahre Amerikaner was not published as early as 1799 as F. Ellis and S. Evans, op. cit., claim; it was not established until 1804.