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THE THREE LIVES OF SOLOMON HENKEL: DOCTOR, PRINTER and POSTMASTER

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While perhaps not as considerable as those of the Pennsylvania Germans, the contributions of the Shenandoah Valley Germans of Virginia in the fields of art, science and politics were by no means, inconsequential. For among the many German-American settlers in those parts were artists, like the fraktur artist Peter Bernhart or the potter Dirk Pennybaker, doctors and scientists like John Peter Ahl or Conrad Neff and politicians like Jacob Swope or Daniel Sheffey. Seldom, however, were so many diverse occupations combined in a single individual in the way in which they were in Solomon Henkel of New Market, Virginia.

Although perhaps best remembered today as an apothecary and doctor in Shenandoah County, Solomon Henkel also pursued somewhat lesser-known interests in the arts and politics, having established almost single-handedly the Henkel New Market Press and, likewise, having served lengthy terms as that town's federal postmaster. Granted, such accomplishments as these would scarcely allow us to rank Solomon Henkel alongside such prominent German-Americans as Adolph Ochs or Carl Schurz. Still, to find such diversity in one human being should certainly suffice to justify further consideration of this man.

That Solomon Henkel chose to undertake a variety of professions is neither surprising, nor unusual in the annals of American history. It was not uncommon, especially along the western frontier, for pioneers to practice several trades off-and-on as the need would arise. What makes the case of

Solomon Henkel more unusual than most, however, was the fact that he pursued all three of his occupations simultaneously, thereby integrating them surprisingly well. His keen interest in printing and publishing served him in the medical trade by assuring him a steady supply of printed labels and prescriptions. His pharmaceutical skills paid off in his printing by giving him the know-how to manufacture his own chemicals and ink. Then too, his post as New Market's postmaster was handy in both of his other careers by allowing him free access to the mail, both for sending and receiving merchandise of all kinds.

In short, it was the harmonious synthesis of all three of his professions that enables Solomon Henkel to warrent further attention and provide us with the subject for further observation. What follows is what I have chosen to call "the three lives of Solomon Henkel: doctor, printer and postmaster." Not knowing for sure which of his three careers Solomon Henkel would have ranked first, I have taken the liberty of arranging them myself and, thus, shall start by examining the life of Solomon Henkel as physician and pharmacist.

To start with, I should perhaps explain that Solomon Henkel was the eldest son of the famous Reverend Paul Henkel, a pioneer and founder in the American Lutheran Church.[1] He was born on November 10, 1777 in what is now a part of Pendleton County, West Virginia, but by the year 1790, his family had moved to the tiny Shenandoah Valley community of New Market, Virginia—a town in name alone since, we are told, there were at that time barely a dozen dwellings already standing.[2]

By this time Solomon Henkel had already received some rudimentary education from a bilingual schoolmaster named Philip Weber. But, as New Market still lacked an organized school, his parents thought it prudent and wise to seek their son's education elsewhere. Thus, Solomon accompanied his father to Philadelphia in May of 1793, "with the intention of finding a profession or trade . . . ."[3] While Paul Henkel was busy attending synodal sessions, Solomon

mingled freely among his father's acquaintances and soon was to receive "the suggestion from one of them to try the work of an apothecary."[4] To this advice his father "agreed and left him with Dr. Jackson," authorizing, "Dr. Helmuth to apprentice him to his master if he proved satisfactory...."[5]

The aforementioned Dr. Jackson under whom the 16-year old boy was to study was David Jackson, Sr. of Chester County, Pennsylvania, an accomplished surgeon and physician who had the distinction of being among the first medical graduates of the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania). Dr. Jackson agreed to train young Solomon Henkel, however, an outbreak of yellow fever in that city a few months thereafter forced Solomon to return home prematurely after barely six months of medical study. Late in 1794, Solomon returned to Philadelphia, this time not to study, but rather to purchase pharmaceutical supplies. When he returned to Virginia, "he brought a quantity of medicines which he had engaged to sell on commission, but after he had given medicines to a number of people . . . with good results, he had to practice as a doctor . . . ."[6]

While this ended, for the most part, the formal medical training of "Dr." Solomon Henkel, he subsequently spent an additional four months with another Valley-German practioner, Dr. John Peter Ahl, under an apprenticeship contract which was also prematurely dissolved.[7] Henceforth, he learned his trade by gaining valuable experience in the field. In 1797, for example, Solomon Henkel tended the sick in an extremely severe small pox epidemic until he contracted the disease himself and required several months of rest to recover.

Indubitably in the life of "Dr." Solomon Henkel the year 1798 must have been a red letter year. For in the spring of that year Solomon decided to renovate a tiny dwelling his father had owned at the south end of Main Street in New Market to use as his office and shop. This building, scarcely 7 feet by 7 feet and entirely made of wood, fondly came to be

called "Solomon's Temple," for in it *all* of his various professions were eventually carried on.

During the course of the next several years, Solomon Henkel devoted much of his time to the pursuit of private medical study. He eagerly sought medical books, many of which he acquired through Dr. Jackson in Philadelphia. He also traveled extensively to gain new knowledge and experience, covering virtually every mile of ground between Philadelphia and Salisbury, North Carolina. Solomon Henkel eventually amassed a considerable library of basic medical texts, including important works in both German and English. A survey of those titles bearing his personal bookplate indicates the unusual cataloguing system he devised: numbering his texts not by subject, author or title, but rather by the *use* to which they were put. He also put the old proverb "necessity is the mother of invention" to frequent use by concocting a wide variety of local medicinal cures, including tinctures, elixers, ointments and pills. Moreover he constructed a small plant shed on a corner of his lot in which to grow medical herbs and shrubs all year round.

A great deal is still known about the remedies Solomon Henkel prescribed from the surviving labels and directions printed at the New Market Press after 1806. While the majority of these handouts were in either English or German, some were actually printed as bilingual texts, which may, in perhaps a limited way, have facilitated the transition from German to English among the older residents in the Valley. Probably the most interesting and unusual of these medical texts was one in German giving the names and usages of nine different cures (*Folgende Arzneyen . . . werden verkauft von Solomon Henkel . . . Neumarket Schanandoah Virginien: Gedruckt bey Ambrosius Henkel.* [1807]. [*Wust: 8*]). Among them we find Solomon's stomache and intestinal bitters which he boasted as being far better than a competitor's brand.

From late 1814 until around 1823, Solomon Henkel was primarily occupied with managing and operating the New Market Press. While more on this subject shall be said

further on, it is interesting to note that during the 8-year period involved, Solomon remained active in his medical trade. Only by relinquishing the Press to three of his sons, could he again devote himself fully to his medical career.

He became extremely interested in the application of an electric machine in the diagnosis and treatment of various physiological diseases and even purchased an elaborate model for himself in 1838. He was also one of the first rural doctors to adopt modern techniques of urinary analysis in treating his patients, the success of which is clearly indicated in copious and still-unpublished notes which he made on the subject.[8]

But, lest we find "Solomon Henkel the doctor" of disproportionate interest, let us now consider the second of his three lives, that of the more-artistically inclined "Solomon Henkel, printer and publisher." Solomon Henkel should be considered the founder of the Henkel New Market Press. It was, moreover, owing to his early interest and foresight that New Market became a center for official Lutheran printing, which it remained well into the 20th century.

Just exactly what the catalyst was that motivated Solomon Henkel in this particular direction, we can only speculate. We know that the Reverend Paul Henkel was aware of the prestige that was to be gained by operating the official press of the Virginia Lutheran Synod. We also know that at an early date Solomon Henkel had thought up the idea of printing his own labels and notes. Still, whether it was one of the above or a combination of both, that finally prompted Solomon to write to his father in the autumn of 1804 and propose the purchase of a printing press, we can not now say for sure. It is, however, certain that Solomon saw in this venture the possibility of great benefit for the entire family.

Needless to say, a first attempt at getting a press and type failed and it wasn't until August of 1806 that arrangements had been successfully made for the acquisition of equipment from the Hagerstown, Maryland printer Johann Gruber. Originally it was agreed that while Solomon was the

de facto owner of the Press, his younger brother Ambrose would carry out the duties of printer. From 1806 through the summer of 1814 this arrangement worked rather well. Indeed, all imprints we can trace in both English and German prior to 1814 indicate that the printing was either done by Ambrose Henkel himself, or at least in his name.[9] Late in the summer of 1814, however, Ambrose decided to quit the printery and study for the ministry. To Solomon was left the unpleasant task of running the Press as best he could. By eliciting the help of another younger brother Andrew, along with the assistance of the printer Laurentz Wartman, he was able to continue the business just as before, but now under the new name of "S. Henkel's Print Shop." Eighteen publications in German and four in English appeared between 1815 and 1823, a date commonly given as marking the end of Solomon's personal involvement as a printer. After that date he mainly supervised operations and allowed three of his sons to continue the work.

There were, of course, numerous German-American printers operating concurrently with Solomon Henkel in other parts of the eastern U.S. Of these, perhaps the majority printed books and pamphlets that were as good, if not better, than what the Henkels could produce. Despite this fact, it is significant to note that Solomon Henkel was among the first German-American printers to acknowledge the growing influence of the English language on the Germans living in this country. He quickly realized that the Henkel New Market Press could assist in the difficult process of cultural and linguistic transition, by providing German-speaking people in Virginia the same works in both English and German. This was a concept which surely predates the invention of the parallel text. Hence, not only did Solomon Henkel oversee the translation and publication of several books written by members of the family (eg. *The Pious Twins,* Paul Henkel's *Christian Catechism* and *Church Hymn Book* [all 1816]), but he also supervised the publication of several English sets of synodal reports which made them available for the very first time to those in the church who could not read German.

Furthermore, let it not be forgotten that Solomon, along with Ambrose and several of his sons, was one of the relatively few German-American printers who made their own woodcuts for their printed texts. By the latter half of the 18th century professional woodblock artists proliferated in most of the printing centers along the east coast, especially in Philadelphia and Boston. Most of the Pennsylvania- and Maryland-German printers visited their shops on occasion to purchase suitable woodcuts for illustrating their various handbills, newspapers and books. So too, the Henkels originally purchased a number of professionally-carved woodblocks for their earliest works. But the difficulty in obtaining new illustrations, not to mention the obvious cost, forced first Ambrose, then later Solomon Henkel, to take up the knife and carve out homemade illustrations. While some of their earliest endeavors were crude and poorly-done by professional standards, many of their later attempts must be judged as showing considerable artistic talent. Among the other illustrations Solomon Henkel may have made, he is believed to have helped Ambrose carve and prepare over 50 woodcuts for several ABC books.[10] It is, however, impossible to say how many woodcuts Solomon Henkel actually made since few, if any, references were ever made regarding this activity in his correspondence and notes.

Finally, in comparison to both of his other two careers, Solomon Henkel's political career has remained by far the most obscure. By the year 1800, to no one's great surprise, the majority of the Valley-German electorate had come to support Thomas Jefferson's Republican Party. Jefferson was, afterall, like George Washington before him, a native-born Virginian, from a place near the Valley. There were, however, more concrete reasons for this widespread support, not the least of which was due to the Republican's stance in foreign affairs.

It was only natural that the German-Americans should want to see close and favorable ties between this country and the lands from which they had come. Yet, the ruling Federalists had, almost from the start, espoused a

cautious foreign policy which, as President Washington had put it, warned Americans against entering entangling alliances. With the outbreak of war between France and Prussia, many German-Americans protested this kind of isolationism. As the Napoleonic tide swept the Continent of Europe, some even preached direct U.S. intervention. Others merely utilized the German-language newspapers to denounce the French as best they could.

Initially the Republicans refrained from taking sides, all the while maintaining the need for good relations with all of the parties involved. Among the Shenandoah Valley Germans this rationalistic approach was greeted with great approval and, thus, an impressive majority of the area's voters cast ballots for Thomas Jefferson in the Election of 1800. So too, numerous local candidates, among them several prominent Germans, were similarly swept into office in this Republican tide.

Among those who benefit most from this Republican sweep was none other than Solomon Henkel himself. He had already been active in numerous political affairs almost from the start of his medical career. He had been a member of several citizens' committees charged with the establishment of local public schools, the first of which unfortunately did not open until February of 1805. He also had served as unofficial liaison between several of the community's German churches and the local government of New Market. In both of those capacities it seems he gained considerable praise and support, so that it was only fitting and proper that, following the Election of 1800, when names were being gathered to fill various political posts, Solomon Henkel's should be suggested for the position of New Market's postmaster. Consequently, records indicate to us, that on March 20, 1801, Solomon Henkel officially received the appointment to the office of "Postmaster at New Market, Virginia."[11]

At that time the officer of postmaster was still a position accorded sizeable influence and respect. Not only was the postmaster charged with handling the mails, he also could play an advisory role in matters affecting the local,

state and federal governments. The postmaster could be consulted on any sort of regional business, from the financing and construction of public roads to the licensing of taverns and shops. It is, therefore, likely that Solomon Henkel remained rather active in local affairs, for his name appears with some regularity in the old record books from that period.

Of course the main benefit derived from this office was free and unlimited use of the mails. Whereas most mail service was still regional and private, a nationwide system of postal dispatch was then being established. It was customery for the receiver of mail to pay the postrider or postmaster the delivery fee. In his capacity as New Market's postmaster, however, Solomon Henkel was exempt from such fees and so could receive his mail free of charge, a factor which benefited both his medical and printing trades. Furthermore, by marking all out-going correspondence with: "postage paid in full at New Market," his relatives and customers could also hear from him without having to pay. Thus, newspapers, books, pamphlets and handbills could be easily mailed as far away as the Carolinas and Ohio.

Interestingly enough, the political career of Solomon Henkel was also swept along by the prevailing tides. Following the Election of 1814, for example, when the Republicans suffered temporary setbacks within the state, Solomon Henkel was removed from office. His removal may have been in-part voluntary, since he had just taken over the New Market Press. Still, the disadvantages of no longer being postmaster must have outweighed the burden it had imposed, for on May 19, 1819, Solomon Henkel was reinstated. He continued in this position until his death in 1847.

While Solomon Henkel never aspired to any higher political office, he was, nevertheless, constantly involved in party affairs and he used his influence on occasion to secure German votes for fellow-Republicans. Contrary to what one might expect, however, the New Market Press seems to have played an almost negligible role in helping to shape the political secene. Only a few known examples of political

fliers provide us with any proof at all of such political printing. In 1813 and again in 1824, handbills were printed in German to support Republican candidates for office, the latter one urging the German electorate to back "Wilhelm H. Crawford" in his unsuccessful bid to become president.

By having limited this discussion of Solomon Henkel's career to his principal work as a doctor, printer and postmaster, I have failed to do justice to his many other pursuits, such as his role in the Lutheran Church. Moreover, very little has been said thus far on that side of Solomon Henkel he probably cherished the most, that being his family life. He was married on September 9, 1800 to Rebecca Miller of Winchester, Virginia and he was the father of eleven children, of whom four sons and three daughters survived infancy. Three of his sons entered the medical profession, while a fourth son became an eminent theological scholar. Today there are hundreds of Solomon Henkel's descendents residing throughout the United States.

In short, while it probably could not be truthfully said that Solomon Henkel led an exceptional life, the variety of professions which he chose to pursue distinguished him from many of his contemporaries. Indeed, such diversity of interest was not only rare among the Germans of Virginia, it was highly unusual in this country as a whole. While his achievements, when considered individually, were hardly outstanding or noteworthy, when seen together in art, science and politics, the "three lives" of Solomon Henkel as doctor, printer, and postmaster, are truly worthy of our attention.

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NOTES

1 For detailed information on the life of the Reverend Paul Henkel see Klaus G. Wust, *The Virginia Germans* (Charlottesville, Va. 1969), esp. pp. 132-7.

2 As cited by Dr. C. O. Miller, "Solomon Henkel A Medical Pioneer Doctor," *The Henckel Family Records* No. 14 (August 1939). Henceforth this work shall be cited as "Miller."

3 *The Journal of the Reverend Paul Henkel for the Year 1793,* as quoted in "Miller," p. 630.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 *The Journal of the Reverend Paul Henkel for the Year 1794,* "Miller," p. 632.

7 Klaus G. Wust, "Dr. John Peter Ahl (1748-1827); Medical Pioneer of Keezletown, Virginia," *Rockingham Recorder II,* 3 (October 1959), pp. 141-2.

8 The manuscripts of these notes are to be found in the collections of the Virginia State Library (Richmond, Va.) and the Alderman Library (Charlottesville, Va.).

9 See Lester J. Cappon & Ira V. Brown, *New Market Virginia Imprints, 1806-1876* (Charlottesville, Va., 1942) and Klaus G. Wust, "German Printing in Virginia; A Check List, 1789-1834," *The Report* (SHGM), XXVIII (1953), pp. 54-66.

10 Wust, "Check List," #53, 54, 55, 61, 62, 63.

11 "Miller," p. 641.