The second half of the 18th century, when German-language printing developed in America, was also the period when settlers conquered and tamed the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. German speakers built their own communities throughout the Valley in the midst of that process, but no one there sought to create any publications for the local German market. That industry was left to the larger towns to the north. The Lutheran pastor, Adolph Nuessmann, involved in coordinating efforts to expand the church in the southern United States, despaired in a letter in 1793 that no German presses existed between Maryland and Georgia to print Lutheran documents. By that year, the farmers’ almanacs circulating widely among the German readers had been joined by German newspapers imported from northern towns. These newspapers, though, regularly carried advertising for customers in the Valley, indicating the importance of that market to the German press. Regular mail carriages, sponsored by Matthias Bartgis, a publisher with offices in Frederickstown, Maryland, and Winchester, Virginia, began to make delivery reliable for the sole purpose of carrying newspapers into the Valley.

The technology of the printing press had spread very slowly in Virginia up to that point. The few successful presses there focused on producing documents required by the government of the Commonwealth; none could survive solely on the local newspaper market earlier in the eighteenth century. When several printers in the town of Winchester, at the north end of the Shenandoah Valley, began to include newspapers among their other products after 1787, they managed to build up a local industry. Many of the men taking part in these new investments, such as Bartgis and Richard Bowen, came from German backgrounds and even had produced German-language papers previously in Maryland. However, these printers opted to focus on English
publication for their first efforts in Virginia. Perhaps they thought that a good share of the Germans would be willing to read in English, by this time, because of the references to German concerns in their papers. The market of German readers could bring a flow of printed products down to the Shenandoah Valley, helping to maintain the presses in Pennsylvania and Maryland, but this market did not encourage local production. Rather it was a very clear effort to protect the religious traditions and language of Lutherans in the South that spurred the Henkel family create an influential press in New Market, Virginia. The Henkels would produce a wide range of German-language works over the course of the next century, many of them appealing to different groups of German readers. However, it would only take a few decades for the press to give up entirely on printing in German. The effort to preserve faith and heritage largely succeeded, but the program of encouraging German literacy fell away as the community found ways to assimilate as Americans.

The Henkels set up this press in an environment that continued to be difficult for German-language printing. Shortly after becoming established in Winchester, the German newspapermen in the town sought to test the waters for German newspapers for Virginia. In 1789 the Winchester Gazette announced that it had brought a complete set of equipment and Fraktur type to the Valley in order for Bartgis to print Die Virginische Zeitung, along with the other German announcements and advertisements that he was already selling. However, no copy of this paper has ever been found and, indeed, there is no evidence that it ever hit the streets. By 1792, Bartgis would sell his shop to Bowen, a former rival, and leave the area, possibly taking his German type with him. Eventually, the appeal of that market would bring more entrepreneurs to the Valley to print. Jakob Dietrich issued a German almanac in Winchester in 1805. John Wise, born Johannes Weiss, took over the only newspaper Staunton in 1797, The Virginia Gazette and Staunton Weekly Advertiser. When that and another English paper of his failed, Wise purchased the equipment to issue a German-language paper, though the number of Germans in the town itself was small. We do not know the name of this paper, or its content, since here again no copies survive, but the business ledger that Wise kept shows that he was selling ads and subscriptions of “the German paper” for two years. Though that effort also failed, perhaps because many of his customers were willing to read their news in English, printers such as Dietrick and Lawrence Wartmann would still publish short-lived newspapers and broadsides in German for the next twenty years. Pastor Nuessmann’s shortage of printers came from the lack of successful book publishers in German. And the difficulty that the settlements in North Carolina still had in getting German literature.
All of the German religious groups that became established in the American colonies relied heavily on the authority of the written word to pass their faith on to believers, but the pastors of the Lutheran Church and the German Reformed Church also came from traditions that depended on structure and authority to organize the parishes. American congregations of these confessions got their sanction from leaders back in Germany. Even the ordination of pastors faced difficult questions when the men did not get their university training in the old country. For several decades, training and parochial care among the Lutherans had to be supported by trips to Germany to raise funds for the missionary work taking place in the wilds of America.\textsuperscript{10} Even after the Pennsylvania Ministerium became established in 1748, and then created a formal constitution over thirty years later, training of clergy, organization of parishes, and education of believers remained difficult and largely informal for the American Lutherans.\textsuperscript{11} Churchmen struggled to maintain order and discipline, especially when differences arose. It was in the midst of these troubles that the Henkel Press appeared out of the weak print traditions of the Virginia Germans to become a major voice for the German speakers of America in the early nineteenth century.

The Henkels of New Market, Virginia descended from the first Lutheran pastor to immigrate to America.\textsuperscript{12} Anthony Gerhard Henkel had brought his wife and twelve children from Neckargemuend to Pennsylvania in 1717.\textsuperscript{13} Paul Henkel (1754–1825), the great-grandson of Anthony, grew up in the Germany Valley of what is now West Virginia, near Fort Hinkle, after the family moved up from North Carolina.\textsuperscript{14} While growing up, Paul spoke the Valley Dutch dialect of his family, though Pennsylvania Dutch speakers moved to the area as well. He learned the Hochdeutsch of Martin Luther from a German lady in school, in order to be able to read German, and also got formal instruction in English.\textsuperscript{15} Relatively late in life, after taking on a number of odd jobs, he became an itinerant preacher, following the tradition of many of his family members. Henkel travelled widely among the western German settlements, from Georgia to Maryland and Pennsylvania, becoming formally ordained in 1792 at the age of 37.\textsuperscript{16} By this time, Henkel had settled his large family in New Market, Virginia at the north end of the Shenandoah Valley. Here among the German speakers, he was involved in establishing one of the first Lutheran congregations in Virginia, though Henkel would continue to travel widely on a regular basis. Everywhere he went to preach and organize, Henkel set up congregations and encouraged churches. They often offered him jobs, but he saw these missionary tours through the German regions to be his main task early in his career.\textsuperscript{17}

Henkel had not only learned English, in pursuit of his education, but had also received instruction in the teachings of the English church. He gen-
erally seems to have been sympathetic to a wide range of Christian doctrine. The Anglican Church, and by extension the Methodists, at the time had the most influence over the frontier, even among the Germans because more ordained, English-speaking clergymen were sent out to take care of souls in the scattered settlements in the west of the colonies. However, shortly after he began preaching publicly and ten years before his own ordination, Henkel had a dream in which Martin Luther appeared and spoke to him, saying, “I had no people here who were my fellow believers, but they were all of other convictions and enemies to the faith of our church.” Henkel took the concerns over his church to heart. For the rest of his life, even when required to preach in English to Lutherans who had no German, Henkel would work to protect the identity and orthodoxy of the Lutheran Church. He came to see English as a sign of earthliness and failure among the German Lutherans, always pushing to speak in the local dialect and write in the language of the traditional Lutheran texts.

This was a time when large-scale immigration for the German territories had ceased. The experience of service in the army during local conflicts with the Indians and the Revolution had tightened the Germans’ connections to their new country. New lands were opened up to farming further west and south, so that many families moved on, away from the settlements that had clustered around congregations and ethnic enclaves previously. The churches in Germany had also lost interest in supporting the activities of the Americans, so that it was a constant struggle for the Lutheran Church to organize in the new country. The changes presented challenges to the use of German among the churches in the Valley and indeed their very survival in their original form. Even the level of education expected by the children of the Reformation proved difficult to maintain in the isolated farmsteads of the Valley with few visiting pastors and far fewer paid teachers. Though the older generation did not like to hear their children speaking English, the lack of German schools on the frontier often forced them to use the local schools if the children were to have any education. And, of course, parents knew that skills with English would help with fitting into American society.

Paul Henkel was not the only one to see English as a danger for the Lutheran Church. Debate raged in the last decade of the century over whether congregations could be free to pick their preferred language for services. But the situation of the church at the time encouraged further adaptations for Lutherans. Henkel himself routinely worked with congregations from other groups that he came upon in his travels. It was common for different churches to share the same building for their individual services. Many felt the appeal of the religious movements swirling around in the American context. The year that he was ordained, 1792, was also when the Pennsylvania Ministe-
German Readers and the Formation of the Henkel Press in Virginia

...rium revised its constitution, removing all definition of the Lutheran confession. Relations with Moravians and Reformed groups were cultivated, with some even suggesting that they could worship together under one pastor. For his part, Henkel felt that the Augsburg Confession had to be defended to protect Luther’s church.

An even greater danger to the church, in Henkel’s view, arose in the nineteenth century. While visiting his son, also a pastor, in North Carolina in 1801, Paul Henkel and a Moravian colleague attended a revival meeting. What happened there alarmed him. Not only was the service more emotional and chaotic than the most animated Methodist gathering, something akin to spiritual fanaticism, but it also attracted local Germans. People were leaving behind the calm, systematic preaching of the German confessions for these wild meetings. Henkel saw the weakness of the Lutheran Church in terms of organization on the frontier, as well as doctrinal laxity, to be a great danger. So, he called on pastors to organize a new North Carolina Synod, separate from leaders in Pennsylvania, for defense against the revivalism beginning to sweep the country as part of the Great Awakening. Congregations from Virginia, Tennessee, and South Carolina soon joined the group. Henkel spent the next few years organizing and promoting the synod while continuing to work as a traveling preacher. By 1804, plans were underway to create a printing press that could serve the governing needs of the Lutheran Church in the South while also defending the use of German texts as part of his efforts to protect the church from the twin dangers of English and Revivalism.

Paul Henkel moved back to New Market in 1805 to establish a base for his new efforts. His son Solomon had a successful pharmacy in town where he sold medicines, offered treatments, and distributed German publications. At a meeting of Virginia pastors that year, Solomon offered to pay for the printing of their meeting minutes along with an appendix containing the Augsburg Confession stating the tenets of the Lutheran faith. These were to be sold at the North Carolina Synod with the Henkels collecting any profit. Solomon’s mother, Elizabeth, invested her inheritance of twenty dollars into the project. The appendix was an effort by the family to shore up the traditions of the Lutheran Church among the members of the new synod in the South. Pastor Henkel quickly had six hundred copies printed up by John Gruber of Maryland and took them down to the meeting in North Carolina, where his son David helped in distributing the books. Printing helped to explain the ideas of the church.

In his discussions with Gruber, Paul Henkel sought to purchase a press for his family project. Gruber had no interest in getting involved himself, but a simple press with German type was found and carried to Virginia by wagon cart. No journeyman printers could be found to come to Valley, so while...
Solomon took on the daily management of the press in addition to his store. Younger son Ambrose went off for a quick training with John Gruber in Hagerstown, Maryland to be able to work as the printer. Andrew, the youngest son, became the printer’s devil, while their father oversaw the whole operation, determining what to print and finding supplies.

Albert Sidney Edmonds has said that this first press consisted of an old Ramage machine that is now in the archives at Duke University. Company documents from the early twentieth century, however, suggest that this press was purchased in 1810 after the first press failed. The first machine was even more primitive. In any case, the Henkels carved the frame from cottonwood and mahogany, setting it on a slab of granite. This printing press, simple and small, looked very similar to the machine that Gutenberg had used to print his bible and the one that Benjamin Franklin had worked with before the Revolutionary War. The Henkel press might possibly have had a few more iron parts, but descriptions indicate that it had a small platen and few moving pieces, making it necessary to do two impressions even for the smallest newspaper sheet. They worked with primitive equipment compared to what many others used at the time to create a printing business that flourished in the small town of New Market, selling to the rural farmers of the Shenandoah Valley.

Their first efforts, however, did not suggest the success that was to follow. Ambrose Henkel, after his short apprenticeship, sought subscribers for a new German-language newspaper that would focus on the interests of local readers. The number of supporters did not match what the Henkels were looking for, but they still went ahead with publishing Der Virginische Volksberichter und Neumarketer Wochenschrift in December of 1807, the first Virginia paper in German from which copies survive today. Deliveries of the newspaper ranged far from just the German readers in the Valley, with subscriptions registered in Ohio, North Carolina, Kentucky, and throughout Virginia. Sales were still not enough, however. The Henkels shut down their paper in June of 1809, a bit puzzled by the lack of interest. As Elon Henkel wrote in a letter, “Why the Germans in our state do not appreciate a newspaper I do not know.” Paul Henkel crushed any further notions of printing newspapers or popular almanacs for the German readers in Virginia.

Ambrose had worked on little else while producing the newspaper, other than a conference report and a Fraktur birth certificate broadside, so when the paper failed he again went north to find more training among the German printers of Maryland and Pennsylvania, leaving Andrew to try his hand at working on a few instruction books for children and a hymnal that his father intended to take with him to sell on his missionary travels among the Lutheran churches. When Ambrose returned in 1810, Andrew also set off
north for training, and Ambrose took over much of the task of running the press.\textsuperscript{36} A letter addressed to him in 1811, described him as simply, Ambrose Henkel, Printer.\textsuperscript{37}

Set up in New Market, running the press without the help of Andrew, Ambrose again looked for experienced journeymen printers to come join him at the press. Among the men he had met at his various apprenticeships, he could not find anyone willing to leave his job and come down to Virginia other than Lawrence Wartmann, a known alcoholic who was desperate for work. The choice proved to be an unexpected gift for the Henkel Press. Not only did Wartmann find a new stability with the family in their small town, but he also had much more skill and experience than Ambrose had been able to acquire.\textsuperscript{38} Wartmann had received years of training among the successful bilingual firms of Pennsylvania and Maryland, giving him the ability to run the Henkel Press on his own when needed and to improve the quality of work on their large book projects.\textsuperscript{39} When he separated from the firm much later, Wartmann would go on to become a very successful newspaper printer in nearby Harrisonburg.

For the next five years, the printing press would continue what had begun modestly in the time immediately after the newspaper folded. German hymnals, instruction books, conference minutes, and catechisms found a large audience among the German readers of America, especially in the South. They sold thousands of these types of books.\textsuperscript{40} Many of the religious works, including the hymnals, were written by Paul Henkel.\textsuperscript{41} Ambrose wrote the ABCs for children, which he illustrated with simple woodcuts that he carved himself. He also created his own ink from lamp black, linseed oil, and boiled onions.\textsuperscript{42} At the printshop in New Market, the Henkels soon began to bind their own books in pasteboard and sheepskin, make their own paper, and marble their own attractive endsheets. On the flyleaf of an 1819 ABC, Mrs. Elon Henkel wrote, “This book was written, typeset, illustrated (cuts handmade), printed, bound, and sold by the late Ambrose Henkel, who built the press (with stone head) upon which this book was printed.”\textsuperscript{43} Through simple methods and equipment, taking care of every step of production, the Henkels brought German printing to the Valley, and sold their products to readers across several states.

There were no real bookstores at this time, just shops that happened to sell books. Jacob Dietrick’s shop in Winchester was an extension of his Hagerstown hardware store. Solomon Henkel sold many books, but they sat on the shelves next to the medicines in his pharmacy. Peddlers and the carriage post carried the books to meeting points along the main roads. German ministers also carried the products of the Henkel Press in visits from parish to parish.\textsuperscript{44} Of course, this included Paul Henkel and his sons who became ministers.
They carried advertisements of what books were available from the press for the readers they met along their travels. The years of preaching on the road gave the Henkels valuable experience in knowing what the Germans of the scattered southern settlements wanted to read. They were not satisfied with the hymnals being sent out from Pennsylvania, so Paul wrote a simple songbook just for them. His homilies too, helped serve a population that still did not have nearly enough pastors for their needs. Anyone interested could put together a sermon for the people with the help of Paul Henkel’s books. The Augsburg Confession and the small catechism that came off the press showed people the outlines of the Lutheran faith.

By the time that the press started making books, in addition to the broadside advertising job work they handled, the Henkels also knew that the Germans in their small communities in the Valley had begun to lose their ability to read the religious texts that were so important to their church. These people feared that the next generation would not be able to take part in worship. So, the Henkel Press put great efforts into creating books that could instruct young people in German without the need for a trained teacher. Focused on everyday words that farm kids would need to know, the ABC books showed basic German vocabulary and grammar, helping children who spoke in dialect with their parents to develop a feel for the written language of formal Hochdeutsch. These small books of roughly 32 pages cost six cents each, making them affordable for many families.

The instruction books were followed by little readers often called Christmas Presents. The first of these, a traditional German story called The Two Beggar Boys, was for sale, “to any who enjoy the German language and who possibly trying to preserve it for their children, because they know what a loss it is for a child of German heritage to lose the mother tongue.” A later book promised, “That you will have planted in you our German speech, religion, and worship of God.” For years, Henkel had complained about the loss of German among his parishioners across the South. Now the press gave him a teaching tool, just as powerful as the catechism, for training young children in the language of their people.

When Andrew Henkel returned from his training, he took up much of the illustrating for the books coming off the press, specializing in appealing woodcuts and engravings to decorate the children’s books. His work took on a pleasing sophistication that moved away from the simple pictures of the early books. The children’s books would continue to be a major seller for the company for decades. In 1817, they released a large English-German version of the ABC books for children to master the basics of both languages. When one looks at the collection of Henkel publications at James Madison University, it is clear that the press put a great deal of effort into making the books...
attractive. Many have printed or marbled binding papers. Those with leather binding meet the standard of any American book from the time, though like many contemporary books, the paper is much coarser than European printers used. The amateur typesetting from the earliest Henkel books gives way to fine examples with elaborate Fraktur title pages. It is easy to understand why their books proved so popular with children. The other thing to note is how small and light all of their products were. Before the middle of the century, all of the books that came off of the Henkel Press would have been easy to transport. The size of the printing press itself dictated this to some extent, but the small thin volumes clearly satisfied the printers and their customers for many years. Even the conference proceedings look like nice little pamphlets that could be carried in a pastor’s saddlebags.52

Solomon Henkel took on much more of the management of the press after 1815, and Ambrose sold his share in 1817.53 Correspondents now addressed letters to Ambrose Henkel, Businessman.54 Later he would try his hand at being a pastor. By this time, the press was already issuing a growing number of publications in English. Perhaps Solomon with his interest in business and his feel for what the reading market wanted, recognized that the tide had turned. The Henkels could see that their efforts had failed in many ways to defend German culture as their father had intended. It might have been obvious, since the younger Henkel generation did much of their own writing in English and mention that they preferred to speak in English.55 The majority of German speakers, including more and more of those in the Lutheran Church, were losing their ability to read German texts. Within a decade, the number of books issued in German had diminished to almost nothing. The Henkels had become printers of books in English.56 As one of their new tasks, the children’s books and translations of Luther’s works put out by the Henkels sought to transition Germans speakers into successful English readers.

On the one hand, this change to English from 1816 to 1830 is very surprising. After they began the press, Paul Henkel and his son, David, continued to be unhappy with the direction of the church, especially its ongoing willingness to collaborate with Reformed congregations and English-speaking churches. They also felt that churchgoers showed a general lack of respect for traditional orthodoxy. The Henkels helped create the Tennessee Synod in 1820 to offer southern Lutherans an alternative to the direction that the church seemed to be taking.57 The move shows us generally how conservative the Henkels could be when it came to doctrine and in their expectations of the Lutheran Church; how protective they were of their own vision of what German Lutheranism should look like. However, it also came at the end of several years in which Paul Henkel, who had worked alongside pastors from
other churches repeatedly over many years, began to see any sort of collaboration or cohabitation as threatening.\textsuperscript{58}

On the other hand, by giving up on the defense of German reading, the Henkels were able to concentrate on protecting the church in other ways. Paul might still criticize the fact that people did not teach their children German at home, but he could only ensure the survival of Luther’s church in America by making sure that people had the tools they needed, in the language they could read, to remain on the right path. They put the press to work, releasing translations of the catechism, the Augsburg Confession, Paul Henkel’s explanation of baptism, synod proceedings, and even an English-language hymnal. The Henkels might have realized by this time too that the danger was no longer that Lutherans would become English-speaking Episcopalians or Methodists, nor did they have to worry any longer about revival meetings sweeping away believers. The church and the country had developed the schools and church organization to keep the Lutheran Church going with its identity intact, but in English. So, the Henkel Press continued its successful publication of the books people were buying in the language they were now reading. Over the next century, the family business would publish more Lutheran works in English than any other printing press in the world,\textsuperscript{59} helping to keep the church strong and headed in the right direction.

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Staunton, Virginia

Notes

\textsuperscript{1} Klaus C. Wust, “Books of the German Immigrants in the Shenandoah Valley,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 32 (January 1, 1958): 77.
\textsuperscript{2} Klaus C. Wust, The Virginia Germans (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1969), 152.
\textsuperscript{5} Wayland 1907, 163.
\textsuperscript{6} Christopher L. Dolmetsch, “The German Literature of Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, 1789-1854: A Historical, Linguistic and Literary Study” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1979), 93-95.
\textsuperscript{8} Klaus C. Wust, German-Language Publications in Virginia, 1789–1834 (Bridgewater, VA: n.p., 1953), 57.
Based on their eagerness for the publications that became available after 1800. See Dolmetsch, “German Literature,” 185.

Wust, Virginia Germans, 54.


Hermann Schuhricht, History of the German Element in Virginia (Baltimore: T. Kroh & Sons, 1900), 92.


Geinow, “German Language in Early America,” 146.


Wust, Virginia Germans, 132.

Gienow, “German Language in Early America,” 146-47.

Schuhricht, German Element in Virginia, 119-20.

Gienow, “German Language in Early America,” 148.


Wust, Virginia Germans, 132.


Bost, “Catechism or Revival,” 418.


Wust, German-Language Publications, 56.


Dolmetsch, “German Literature,” 50.

McMurtrie, Beginnings of Printing, 40.


Wust, Virginia Germans, 156.

Dolmetsch, “German Literature,” 45-47.

“1811 Letter,” Henkel Family Collections, SC 2065, Special Collections, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

Wust, Virginia Germans, 157.

Dolmetsch, “German Literature,” 48-49.

Gienow, “German Language in Early America,” 154.

Frantz, “Early German Settlers,” 96.


Wust, Virginia Germans, 168-69.

Wust, Virginia Germans, 171.


Several examples, Henkel Family Collection, SC 2065, JMU.

Wust, Virginia Germans, 156.
51 Wust, Virginia Germans, 179.
52 Henkel Family Collection, SC 2065, JMU.
54 Henkel Family Collection, SC 2065, JMU.
55 Gienow, “German Language in Early America,” 156-57.
56 Wust, German-Language Publications, 57.
57 Bost, “Catechism or Revival,” 419.