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Establishing German-American Studies in the Nineteenth Century: A Philadelphia Story

“Will the Teutonic Race Lose Its Identity in the New World?”

Shocking as it seems, upholding German ethnic identity in the United States has been in jeopardy since the nineteenth century, generally considered the century of a huge German immigration. Long before the mass immigration from German-speaking countries ceased after 1890, doubts about the future vitality of the German-American contingent tainted reminiscences and assessments. This paper takes its point of departure from the insight into the insecurity about ethnic identity that Kathleen Conzen, the eminent Chicago historian of German-American ethnic culture, placed at the base of her concept of “invention of ethnicity”: the intention of German-American leaders in the second half of the nineteenth century to overcome ethnic insecurity by creating organizational and cultural cohesiveness. While Conzen explored the dynamics of ethnic activities vis-à-vis the assimilationist melting pot assumptions in education, religion, cultural activities and communal celebrations, this paper traces an important ingredient of this “invention,” the anchoring of German-American identity in a filiopitistic and increasingly scholarly understanding of its history.

First delivered at the 2017 annual meeting of the Society for German-American Studies in Philadelphia, the paper presents an opportunity to demonstrate the enormous impact of historians on the narrative about German Americans. Its initial title, “Why Philadelphia?” reflects the question why Philadelphia with Germantown holds a surprisingly central, arguably premier rank in the German-American narrative while midwestern cities like Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Chicago and St. Louis can always claim, thanks to the high percentage of Germans among their population, to have been more

German than the harbour city on the East coast. While the question stimulates geographical considerations of German-American ethnicity, it cannot be fully answered without reflecting the growing importance of historians for the debates about the unified American nation after the Civil War and, subsequently, the growing importance of historians for the self-image of German Americans. Historians became instrumental in elevating history to a crucial ingredient of the ethnic narrative, thus providing a prominent spot to Philadelphia, where Francis Pastorius and thirteen families from Krefeld began organized German immigration in 1683.

It was no coincidence that the Tricentennial Conference of German-American History, Politics and Culture at which Conzen presented her notion of the invention of ethnicity, took place in Philadelphia in 1983. With slight irony she quoted an Anglo-American commentator from a hundred years earlier, in 1883 when the German Americans celebrated the Bicentennial of German immigration with special pomp in Philadelphia:

The destiny of the German element in America has long been a theme for argument and speculation among the more cultivated and thoughtful representation of that element. . . . In the German newspapers and the German clubs which are found in all our principal cities the questions, Will the Teutonic race lose its identity in the new World? And, Will its language become extinct here? are often discussed with feeling and interest.¹

The observer made a point in mentioning that those who articulated this pattern of ethnic insecurity belonged to the cultured portion of the German element, meaning the educated urban middle classes, not the farmers and craftsmen of Pennsylvania and the vast regions of the Midwest. And indeed, the “invention of ethnicity” that Conzen analyzed as a typical phenomenon between 1840 and 1890, has to be fully attributed to the fast growing German middle classes in cities like Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and many smaller towns which, thanks to the rapid industrialization, developed urban elites. Theirs was the increasing reference to German culture and language that linked groups together which were divided by dialect, region of origin, and religion.² In some ways, this reference to culture, in Conzen’s view, became the driving force of the invention of ethnicity. How important it was, we know from the fact that much of the anti-German hysteria of the period of World War I focused on the notion of German culture or *Kultur*, something that German Americans, especially the well integrated middle classes, honed as the concept that made

them special, even superior in American society, which reacted with scorn and unprecedented hostility.

Next to the reference to German culture as a connecting link among German Americans stands the reference to the impressive but neglected history of Germans in America, mostly condensed in a combination of local and national narratives. While local histories were begun in earlier decades, the emergence of a national narrative can be attributed to a large extent to the Forty-Eighters, the political refugees of the failed revolution in 1848/49 that was to bring democracy to the German countries, as well as to the following generation of German Americans who in the period after the Civil War became active in the large cities. This is when Philadelphia received particular attention and moved to a premier spot in the ethnic narrative.

Historiography Becomes a Promotor of Ethnic Identity

The most stimulating exploration of the “historians’ craze” in the nineteenth century is still the article, “The Ethnic Historical Society in Changing Times,” in which the well-known historian John Higham traces the growth and academization of ethnic histories—Swedish, German, Jewish—in the context of the historical societies of Anglo-American urban elites. Higham calls also those Anglo-American societies “ethnic” in their pursuit of a communal history with the argument: “Both types—the societies that produced history for ‘persisters’ and those that produced it for migrants—elaborated a collective identity, nurtured self-esteem, honored ancestors, and celebrated progress in their communities.”³ He takes as an example for their compatibility the episode in the preparation for the civic sesquicentennial of Baltimore in 1880 when the Maryland Historical Society failed to embrace the propitious moment and 59 German associations stepped into the breach with a number of prominent American citizens “to mount a spectacular parade, lasting six days, replete with historical tableaux illustrating the rise of Baltimore and, also on the first day, featuring German singing societies and a dazzling exhibition of the city’s industrial arts.”⁴ It was a moment when an ethnic group secured its civic acceptance as part of the American nation in a spectacular way.

Tracing the general development of ethnic societies until the 1960s and 1970s, Higham is less interested in the specifics of the individual ethnic use of history. This has not been done for the German element although the Forty-Eighters have received attention for their political instrumentalization of history in the fight both for abolition and the recognition of the German element.⁵ This paper, focused on Philadelphia, does not intend to describe the whole spectrum of German-American historiography in the service of creating a collective identity, but it will at least open the eyes for the larger spec-

trum in the pursuit of a “national” narrative which successively became the interest, at times obsession of historians, archivists, collectors and, of course, German historical societies in larger and smaller towns.⁶

Under the label *Deutscher Pionier-Verein* that reflected the mission of American Pioneer Societies, German-American historical societies originated in numerous cities. In the decade after the Civil War the most visible and productive Pionier-Verein was the one in Cincinnati, a city in whose growth Germans played a particularly strong role. It gathered around the publication of the first scholarly journal with the exclusive focus on German-American history, *Der Deutsche Pionier*, which began its run in 1869 and soon became a national forum of research in this field. It received its broadest recognition under the editorship of Heinrich Rattermann in 1874–1885. Rattermann, born in Germany, did not belong to the Forty-Eighters but displayed a similar zeal in creating an *Öffentlichkeit*, a public sphere, for discussing German-American issues—not in politics but rather in history. His research of the German element in North America followed the lead of Forty-Eighters in elevating the largely ignored German contribution to the development of America, yet he wrote from the perspective as an ethnic insider who rendered the indigenous story of German immigrants, not just a narrative juxtaposition of Germans with Anglo-Americans on the North American continent.

This juxtaposition characterized the first comprehensive history of Germans in North America that Franz Löher, a German jurist and historian who traveled extensively in the United States and settled in Cincinnati for seven months in 1847, published in 1847, *Geschichte und Zustände der Deutschen in Amerika*. Löher assembled informative chapters about the various regions where German immigrants had settled and become influential, yet he went overboard in his praise of German virtues while disparaging the American population so that even the Forty-Eighter Friedrich Kapp, who conceptualized his history of the Germans in America in a similar way, called the book a “romance or a romantic story.”⁷ Different from a romance, Löher’s history clearly distinguished itself from the famous earlier endeavor to make German immigrants look superior to the Anglo-American population which the Philadelphia physician Benjamin Rush, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, wrote about the Pennsylvania Germans in 1789: *An Account of the Manners of the German Inhabitants of Pennsylvania*. Rush’s essay could be called with more right a “romance” as it puts the Pennsylvania Germans in the tradition of the noble savage, even recurring to the formulas with which Tacitus praised the German character.⁸

Löher’s studies mark the beginning of a more scholarly approach to German-American history. He pointed to the rich material that he was able to use in the libraries of Philadelphia and recommended the founding of a

German historical society after the model of Anglo-American societies.⁹ The latter inspired the founding of the society in Cincinnati, the former benefitted the scholars of German-American affairs in Philadelphia later in the century.

The first historian who established a sustainable model of ethnic historiography after the Civil War was one of the most versatile and influential Forty-Eighters, the journalist and politician Friedrich Kapp. Having served as the first secretary of the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848, Kapp joined the fight against slavery as journalist and member of the Republican Party and became, besides Carl Schurz, the most influential voice in guiding German Americans to vote for Lincoln. When Schurz introduced the second edition of Kapp's path-breaking work of 1867, *Die Deutschen im Staate New York*, he praised it as a premier model for a historiography that presented "to the current generation of German Americans the share that its tribesmen in earlier and recent times secured in the enormous development of this new world."¹⁰ By editing the *Geschichtsblätter, Bilder und Mittheilungen aus dem Leben der Deutschen in Amerika*, in which Kapp's history of the Germans in New York was to be the first and Oswald Seidensticker's *Bilder aus der deutsch-pennsylvanischen Geschichte* the second volume, Schurz took part in the promotion of the new engagement with German-American history that he found indispensable for the survival of the German element.

In his own *Vorwort* to the 1867 volume, Kapp mentioned, among other supporters, George Bancroft, who wrote the first comprehensive history of the United States under the influence of German historiography, a multi-volume work whose aim was to further the unity of the expansive country. While back in Germany, thanks to an amnesty, and soon a member of the Reichstag, Kapp published his reflections about America and the Germans under the title *Aus und über Amerika: Thatsachen und Erlebnisse* in 1876. In this volume he expressed little hope that the German element would survive in its distinction for more than one generation: "What we call German element in the United States is hardly more than the currently living immigrated generation which will die within itself."¹¹ Kapp did not take into consideration the tenacity and cultural interests of German urban middle classes which disagreed strongly with his assessment. At any rate, while in the U.S., he had inspired a historiography that became instrumental in overcoming this kind of ethnic presentism.

Back to Heinrich Rattermann, the editor of *Der Deutsche Pionier* in Cincinnati. As mentioned, he wrote as an ethnic insider with pride in his German heritage and the drive to show in his journal the wealth and depth of German-American history within the history of the nation—until the journal's deficit became a burden that the Pionier-Verein in Cincinnati was not willing to shoulder anymore.¹² Rattermann held out with the journal un-

til 1885, a time when in other places the willingness, even eagerness to make history a crucial part of German-American self-understanding had grown and turned into an issue that reached beyond local histories, acquiring a “national” profile. This transformation of a local or regional historical narrative into a narrative that German communities in other sections of the country embraced as part of their identity was the step beyond Kapp’s merely historiographic endeavor. Carl Schurz himself defined this step in the above-quoted introduction to his *Geschichtsblätter* in 1884 when he pinpointed the effect of the Bicentennial celebration: “The two-hundredth anniversary of the first German settlement in Pennsylvania has lately awakened among the German population of the United States fresh interest in the history of the German immigration in America.”¹³

The Bicentennial anniversary in Philadelphia in 1883 was made into a celebration that elevated significant local events—the founding of Germantown by Francis Daniel Pastorius in 1683 as the beginning of organized German immigration—into an enormous public parade in the streets of the city, creating a powerful symbol for German Americans by directing them to a story of origin that resembled the founding story of the country. Much of it was conceptualized by Oswald Seidensticker, who had established sound scholarship about the founding of Germantown as well as the Germans in Pennsylvania with articles since 1867, when he became professor of German at the University of Pennsylvania and founded the archive at the German Society of Pennsylvania. Seidensticker, not a Forty-Eighter but the son of a revolutionary of the 1831 upheaval in the Kingdom of Hanover, had entered the academic profession as a free-spirited observer of Pennsylvania politics.

Much of the organization of the Bicentennial lay in the hands of the *Deutsche Pionier-Verein* of Philadelphia, which Seidensticker founded in 1880.¹⁴ His main collaborator was Georg Kellner, the editor of the leading newspaper, *Philadelphia Democrat*, a great orator and organizer. A Forty-Eighter like Kapp and Schulz, Kellner, in 1852, still under the name Gottlieb Theodor Kellner, had been a *cause celebre* in Germany with a similar spectacular liberation from prison as Carl Schurz which eventually brought him to America.¹⁵ Kellner was supported by a special committee of local leaders such as William Mann, Hermann Faber, Ferdinand Moras, and Samuel Pennypacker, a lawyer and an historian in his own right, who in the following decades became the most effective promotor of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and the special role German immigrants played in their development.¹⁶ Pennypacker’s tenure as governor of Pennsylvania, 1903–1907, coincided with the peak of organizational activities of German Americans in Philadelphia. In his *Address at the bi-centennial celebration of the settlement of Germantown, Pa., and the beginning of the German emigration to America* of 1883 he conjured

the whole history of the Teutonic race as a prelude to the powerful contribution of Germans to the growth of America.

Pennypacker, who claimed to be himself a descendent of one of the Germantown families (Pannebecker, probably Dutch), gave credit to Seidensticker's extensive research about the founding of Germantown and especially about the lawyer, pietist, poet, and mayor Francis Daniel Pastorius, who had been almost forgotten in the nineteenth century (and not known to the Amish and Mennonites of Pennsylvania). Indeed, Seidensticker's laudatory yet well researched studies on Pennsylvania's early history—first published in Rattermann's journal *Der Deutsche Pionier*¹⁷—served as the recognized base for the celebration. His initiatives included the suggestion of putting the historical date on October 6, 1683 (when the Krefelders on the *Concord* were supposed to have arrived while Pastorius arrived on August 20, 1683).

Among various factors that built the momentum for the initiative to organize a grand spectacle of the German-American heritage in 1883, one factor needs to be mentioned that might shed some light at the fact that such celebration of the German element was not devised in one of the big midwestern cities which still experienced a strong influx of German immigrants but rather in Philadelphia, where the influx had clearly diminished and German elites sensed the shrinking of their ethnic turf. The German Society's loss of members after a peak in the 1870s was disconcerting, feeding the wish to become active and reconfirm the strength of the German element whose history had started in this very city.¹⁸

It was the moment when the support from the academic side strengthened the civic engagement—at the price that the embrace of history, usually practiced as an enforcement of a communal heritage, shifted into the hands of academic historians. In this case the University of Pennsylvania with its local ties and scholarly setup became a stakeholder in ethnic self-assurance, a fact that John Higham considered a general phenomenon at the end of the century, yet with restraining effects on ethnic associations. Higham spoke of “the semi-academic, elitist cast of the new ethnic societies.”¹⁹ While the majority of German Americans in Philadelphia did not belong to the middle classes, those who did were drawn by the social and cultural recognition that the academic exploration and presentation of the local history of German immigration provided.²⁰

German-American History Made into a Philadelphia Story

In the eighteenth century Philadelphia had been the dominant place for German immigrants. As the city of brotherly love and a certain tolerance towards different religious groups it enjoyed a high reputation among those

willing to risk emigration—as long as the terrible conditions on the ships on the Atlantic route from Rotterdam were not blamed on the city.²¹ The founding of the German Society of Pennsylvania by a group of concerned German citizens in 1764 occurred with the focus on exactly those terrible conditions. It was to become the first German immigration society dedicated to providing help and protection to German arrivals and succeeded in introducing laws that would regulate their treatment aboard ships and in the harbour in a human way.²² The Society became a model for immigrant societies in Baltimore (1783), New York (1784), and other places.

Given the ambition of urban elites towards strengthening German language and culture at the end of the nineteenth century, it might be enlightening to see that these trends, frequently interconnecting with academe, were already well under way hundred years earlier. After promoting their mission for immigrants, the German societies, at the end of the eighteenth century confronted with a strong decrease of immigration due to the revolutionary turmoil in Europe, extended their charitable agenda towards cultural endeavors such as the support for teaching German in schools and providing sponsorship for German students. The Friendly Society of Charleston directed itself from the beginning in 1766 less towards charity and more to entertainment and education. In Philadelphia the Lutheran contingent was dominant, with one of the founders of the German Society, Henry Muhlenberg, the organizer of the Lutheran Church in America, and his sons Frederick, Peter, and Henry Jr. as well as the successful businessman Heinrich Keppele, the Society's first president. It was upon the instigation of the Society that the University of Pennsylvania, founded a few decades earlier by Benjamin Franklin, established a German department, the first in the country. Its first members were two Lutheran pastors: Johann Christoph Kunze, with a doctorate from the University of Halle, who was elected professor of German and Oriental Languages, and later, when Kunze was lured away by the German Society of New York and Columbia University, a Dr. Justus Helmuth, another Lutheran minister in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia lost its premier importance for German Americans as their main port of arrival in the beginning of the nineteenth century after a last peak in the hunger years of 1816/17. As sea transportation and the payment for the passage changed and the redemptioner system lost importance, New York, Baltimore and New Orleans became the preferred harbors for German migrants. The minutes of the German Society of Pennsylvania give shocking insights into the crisis of 1816/17 when the scandalous conditions of the overcrowded, disease-ridden ships *Ceres*, *Hope*, and *April* caused a rethinking of the system of assistance, which led to more stringent legal regulations.²³ Financial considerations played a crucial role in the transformation, includ-

ing the selection of shipping routes. How crucial they were is illustrated by the competition between Philadelphia and New York, as reported by the merchant Georg Friedrich Krimmel in a letter to the King of Württemberg on May 25, 1817. Krimmel answers the question why until 1817 Philadelphia was preferred to New York as the harbour for ships with redemptioners from Amsterdam. New York imposed on the owner of the vessel such high costs for each redemptioner—"a guaranty of 500 Thaler"—in order to prevent the person from becoming a burden to the state in the first five years, that the ship's owner chose to send them to Philadelphia, which did not impose such a tariff.²⁴

It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that Philadelphia gained ground again as an entry port, but other factors, among them the activities of Forty-Eighters, its importance as the foremost place of German publishing as well as the lively world of its social associations,²⁵ advanced again its stature among German Americans. After the Civil War the city became the center of national and international attention as the place where the nation had been founded with the Declaration of Independence and now staged the first World Exhibition on the American continent in 1876. Although the German Empire fared poorly with its machines and other products at the exhibition, its founding by Otto von Bismarck in 1871, cheered by many German Americans, raised substantially the self-image of German-American urban elites. With a strong fatherland in place, the desire spread to unite the German Americans and show the nation the importance of the German contingent in the growth of the country.

Inspired by the national wave after the Civil War to explore the birth and ascendance of the American republic, ethnic associations, in particular those of the Irish, Polish, Jewish, and Swedish minorities, became active in furthering the historiography of their communities. Seidensticker's initiatives, first focused on Pennsylvania, clearly responded to this trend. In these years he developed a mission to provide a historical narrative for German Americans.

Philadelphia was one of the big cities that after the Civil War promoted giant civic celebrations in order to elicit the mass participation of an urban population that rarely shared the same values and tastes. One of those celebrations that took the clue from the Baltimore jubilee in 1880, was staged in 1882 to commemorate the founding of Philadelphia in 1682 by William Penn, one year before Pastorius founded Germantown. In 1882 the Society for the Commemoration of the Landing of William Penn, established in 1824, became active again, and the Bicentennial Association of Philadelphia staged a whole array of parades of military, industrial, and fraternal organizations, displays of manufacturers, and reenactments of historical highpoints.²⁶

Historic Reenactment as a Public Celebration

By planning such a spectacle for the Bicentennial anniversary of the arrival of German settlers and the founding of Germantown, Seidensticker, Kellner, Pennypacker and their semi- and non-academic friends and colleagues gave the historic commemoration a timely form. The Philadelphia Bicentennial mobilized around 10 000 participants for the parade that moved through the streets of the city for hours on the weekend of October 6, 1883. Its floats were to become the core of the German American narrative, their iconography mixed the story of Pastorius as the leader of German immigrants with the established story of the Pilgrims, leading to the celebration of the German contingent in the spectacular growth of the nation. The symbolism of the arrival of a ship with the name *Concord* struck a chord as did the focus on Pastorius as a visionary leader who gave the founding of the village six miles north of Philadelphia a certain distinction—not exactly a truthful image of the rather pitiful first settlement in the wilderness that he called Germantown.

The *Philadelphia Democrat* reported the story that the spectators of the Philadelphia parade saw in subsequent floats. First came the floats of Germania and William Penn. The third float featured the founding of Germantown, showing Pastorius as the leader, surrounded by the settlers like the prophet leading his people to the new land. Germantown's code of arms, which Pastorius designed in form of the clover with the words, *Vinum linum et textrinum*, was represented on the float right behind Pastorius with living figures. The spectators saw a little log-house entwined with vine, in front two women in period costume spinning the flax, and in the house a loom—vinum, linum, and textrinum. This symbolic image has been very much alive on the cover of the *Yearbook of German-American Studies* since 1999. The Pastorius float was followed by a float that featured the policies of peace and trust towards Native Americans, as well as one Indian who held a sign-board which commemorated the first protest of Germantown Quakers against slavery in 1688. Of the next floats one was dedicated to Christopher Saur, the first German printer who resided in Germantown, one float to the allegory of freedom, one to General Frederick Mühlenberg, and one to the allegory of industry.²⁷

Upon suggestion of Seidensticker, who wrote the *Festschrift, Die Erste Deutsche Einwanderung in Amerika und die Gründung von Germantown im Jahre 1683*, the anniversary day was elevated to “German Day,” to be celebrated in future years as well. The label “German Day” stuck. Based on the Philadelphia model that offered the story of the beginning of German immigration as the base of a nation-wide commemoration, German Americans in various

parts of the country were drawn to a common anniversary date whose name corresponded with Independence Day, Patriot's Day, and other "Days," a kind of German "Nationalfeiertag."²⁸ Among the many cities that celebrated German Day were Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, New Orleans, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and, of course, many smaller towns in Pennsylvania, the Midwest, and Texas.²⁹ New York was not among them for many years, as was Chicago.

It took the United German Societies of New York until 1902, when several spectacular banquets in honor of the visit of Prince Heinrich of Prussia, the brother of Emperor Wilhelm II, created enough interest to stage a grand celebration in Madison Square Garden on November 9. A report from New York gave insight into the developments that eventually led to larger festivities in this city under the label of "German Day":

The German Day celebrates the landing of the settlers of Germantown, the first important German colony in North America, on October 6, 1683. This day was first recognized publicly by the German Americans in the form of a celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of the landing of the Germans in Philadelphia. Since that time the day has been regularly observed in Philadelphia and in many other parts of the Union. It was the recognition of this day which, perhaps, did most to awaken the national sentiment of the Germans in America and to kindle in them the spirit of unity. The movement towards unity of organization has finally taken national form in the National German American Alliance.

It was noticeable, however, that the greatest German city of America, the great metropolis New York, has, up to the year 1902, taken but a minor interest in this unifying movement. During the past year, signs of new life have manifested themselves in many directions in the great metropolis. The visit of Prince Henry of Prussia furnished the occasion for a series of splendid banquets among the Germans of New York (formed in 1784 after the pattern of the venerable German Society of Pennsylvania, funded in 1764).³⁰

The report about the 1902 German Day celebration in Madison Square Garden appeared in the *German American Annals*, the journal of the National German-American Alliance, founded and edited by Marion Dexter Learned, the successor of Seidensticker as the chair of the German Department at the University of Pennsylvania. This connection is worth mentioning as it demonstrates the tight bond between ethnic politics and historical re-engagement in which Philadelphia played a dominant role since the 1880s.

In Marion Dexter Learned, of early English and Welsh ancestry without any German heritage, Seidensticker had a congenial successor who completely internalized the newly invigorated mission of Germans in America for the education and culture of the rising nation. Learned, who in 1887 had written the first dissertation in philology in the German Program of John Hopkins University in Baltimore that was established after the German model in 1876, pursued the idea that German literature and culture should be promoted as a means to advance a genuine American literature (“eine wahrhaft nationale Littérature in Amerika”).³¹ This idea, rarely stated with such rhetorical force, found some resonance in American academic circles as many professors had studied at German universities and remembered those years fondly. In the 1890s the discussion of the German university model still reverberated in these circles.³² However, Learned’s pursuits exposed a certain academic overreach when he attempted to recruit German Americans as well as Germanists for the endeavor to influence American national education. He was on more secure terrain when he expanded Seidensticker’s unearthing of the history of Germantown, Pastorius’ impressive intellectual acumen (in a voluminous biography in 1908), and the general value of history for reinforcing the German-American identity. Here lay the solid base for his organizing the German American Historical Society in 1901 in close cooperation with the founding of the National German-American Alliance in the same year.

The broad recognition of historic studies originating in Philadelphia shapes the answer to the question that John J. Appel asked in his article, “Marion Dexter Learned and the German American Historical Society”:

One acquainted with the work of societies founded by Germans in Maryland, Ohio, and other states for the preservation of essentially historical memories may ask why these societies are disregarded in favor of a group whose guiding spirits were mostly Philadelphians and closely connected with the University of Pennsylvania. The answer is that, according to the evidence available, only the German American Historical Society attempted to promote German-American history on a *national* scale and that its history and the role of Marion Dexter Learned as its chief editor are therefore of significance for an appraisal of German-American-sponsored historiography.³³

As stated above, the national orientation was formulated long before by Forty-Eighters and had crystallized in Philadelphia with the Bicentennial in 1883. The founder of the National German-American Alliance, Dr. Charles Hexamer of Philadelphia, the son of a Forty-Eighter and a graduate of the

University of Pennsylvania in engineering, had experienced both the decline of membership in the German Society of Pennsylvania and the national and historical direction of the new ethnic activities. As president of the German Society he became a forceful leader in the movement towards the national organization, which he modeled after a first unifying alliance in Pennsylvania.

Establishing the new and larger alliance followed the desire expressed by German associations all over the country to unite German-American groups in a national organization, not just in spirit, culture, and history. Considerable controversy arose not about the election of Hexamer, a born leader, as its first president, but rather about the composition of the executive committee. Delegates from Midwestern states objected to the dominance of officers from East Coast chapters. The issue remained on the agenda. Despite the regional conflicts, the unity of the gathering was never really contested, not least because of the fact that the delegates were members of middle-class elites who saw the movement as an affirmation of their standing in American society. Although there was diversity, it remained within a middle-class spectrum. Class, educational and organizational background brought similarity; different professional orientation, including education, business, the arts, and language, did not really separate the participants.³⁴

Hexamer's agenda for the National Alliance included the support for German language instruction, including the Milwaukee Teacher's Seminar, efforts among German Americans to become citizens, the spread of information and education in German culture, a distinctly German concern for the protection of the natural resources of the country, especially its forests, as well as the support of the Germanic Museum at Harvard and the creation of a monument to Pastorius in Germantown.³⁵ Of special importance for Hexamer, according to his maxim, "To value something, one must know its history," was the study and reenactment of German-American history. *The Principles of the National German American Alliance* postulated the writing of "a German American history" that was not restricted to reporting the ethnic heritage but was to revise American history with a view to the neglected German part.³⁶ Thus, Learned's work with the German American Historical Society—in clear distinction from the Pionier-Verein of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania German Society, founded in 1891, that pursued research on Pennsylvania Germans (Pennsylvania Dutch)—represented a crucial part of the Alliance. With his journal, *Americana Germanica*, devoted to "bringing the subject of German American history into the sphere of academic research, and of giving it a place by the side of other subjects in the field of Germanic studies,"³⁷ Learned had prepared the ground for having the journal become the official organ of the Alliance under the less academic title *German American Annals*. Hexamer, an effective speaker, engaged in a broad national

speaking and publishing program about the prominent place of Germans in American history.

In the following years, when the National Alliance was increasingly drawn into the fight against prohibition of alcohol and often considered the mouthpiece of the German brewing industry in the country, advancing the historical narrative of German Americans tended to be handled as an antidote to the allegation of service to that industry. Beer and history: a thorny and perplexing combination of a popular and an academic item, rarely mentioned in one breath. Learned kept his journal at a clear distance from the brewing industry, while Hexamer had to walk a tightrope between the two as the National Alliance began to depend on the support of brewers like Adolphus Busch.

As long as the National Alliance existed with its seat at the German Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia—it was disbanded after the accusation of serving as a spy organization for the German enemy in 1918—the city of brotherly love received special attention on the part of German-Americans in the country. However, as Russell Kazal has pointed out, the leaders of Germantown were not happy about playing second fiddle when it came to the ownership of the founding history. In a typical example for the clashes between local and national histories, Germantowners claimed to celebrate “Founders’ Day” while the Alliance members used the label “German Day,” and Germantown (which had been part of Philadelphia since 1854) became the place where the big parade at the 225th anniversary in 1908—often considered the largest celebration ever of the German-American heritage—was staged. Highlight of the day was the unveiling of the conerstone for a Pastorius monument in Germantown’s Vernon Park, where some 50 000 spectators craned to hear orations by National Alliance speakers.³⁸

While Pastorius unquestionably stood out as a person of unusual gifts as a writer, a religious and ethnic leader whose friendship was cherished by William Penn, his lionizing is a product of late nineteenth-century adoration of great men. Still, one should not overlook the fact that his memory helped overcome American aversion in the period after World War I against things German and certainly against the celebration of German Day. Calling this day Pastorius Day or Founder’s Day or Settlers’ Day made it more palatable as a celebration of the German element in American society. Thanks to him, the narrative of German Americans in the twentieth century, though in a national framework, highlighted the humble immigration origins and thus represented a believable equivalent to the Mayflower story, as Albert Bernhard Faust, the author of the most comprehensive work about the cultural impact of the German Americans, *The German Element in the United States*,

stated in Cincinnati on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the founding of Germantown in 1933:

The people of New England cherish the memory of the Mayflower and their William Bradford, pilgrim governor of the Plymouth Colony. We venerate our ship *Concord*, that brought the first body of German colonists to Philadelphia. Germantown is our Plymouth, and we also have a Bradford, our own leader second to none, a man of exceptional ability and devotion to a great cause, outstanding recititude, scholarship and humanity—Francis Daniel Pastorius.³⁹

After World War I, Philadelphia played a prominent role only when the anniversaries of 1933 and 1958 drew official attention to the historical place. While Germantown was represented well by the Germantown Historical Society, Germantown itself had completely lost its one-time German population and character. Continuities with the earlier manifestation of the German element in Philadelphia originated either in the German Society of Pennsylvania, whose impressive building with the largest private German-American library showcased the link to a more glamorous history, or social clubs and associations such as the Cannstätter Volksfest-Verein. Its Two-Hundred Year anniversary in 1964 put the Society back in the upper circle of German-American associations while it delivered only a poor contribution to the American Bicentennial in 1976. This endeavor went almost unnoticed as Philadelphia, the city of the celebrated founding of the Nation, completely failed to stage a representative jubilee.

It was not until the Tricentennial of Pastorius' founding of Germantown in 1983 that broader interest—at least among German Americans—was created with events that resulted from the cooperation between the German Society and the University of Pennsylvania: an academic gathering of leading scholars from the U.S. and Germany, the above-mentioned Tricentennial Conference of German-American History, Politics and Culture, and the Society's festive banquet in the presence of both the German Federal President Carl Carstens and the American Vice President George Bush. Typically, the academic enterprise was able to set a more lasting marker for the 1983 celebration than the ethnic gatherings as it featured a spectacular assessment of German-American history.⁴⁰

If seen in the light of John Higham's observations about the academization of ethnicity, the Tricentennial 1983 resumed a dynamic that had been established in this city hundred years earlier. While "hundreds of folk festivals all over the United States fulfilled popular expectations of the German-American talent for merrymaking," it gave Philadelphia a short exposure as a

crucial place of German-American self-understanding.⁴¹ With the legacy of Pastorius' founding of Germantown ingrained in the tradition, Philadelphia reasserted its prominent place in the German-American narrative. It owes it to the "historians' craze" that inspired ethnic historians and semi-historians all over the country in the nineteenth century. Although Higham's quote of Lana Ruegamer's word about people "who believe that history is too important to be left exclusively to professional historians," carries some truth, these historians knew something about the fragile character of ethnic identity when they engaged in making it accessible and thereby strengthening it.⁴²

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Notes

¹ Quoted by Kathleen Neils Conzen, "German-Americans and the Invention of Ethnicity," in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred Year History*, vol 1, eds. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 133 f.

² A detailed discussion of "culture" in Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Mainstreams and Side Channels: The Localization of Immigrant Cultures," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10 (1991): 5-20.

³ John Higham, "The Ethnic Historical Society In Changing Times," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 13 (1993): 32.

⁴ Higham, 33.

⁵ Frank Trommler, "The Use of History in German-American Politics," in *The German Forty-Eighters in the United States*, ed. Charlotte L. Brancaforte (New York: Land, 1989), 279-95.

⁶ Albert B. Faust, "German-American Historical Societies: Their Achievements and Limitations," in *Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, 28th Report* (Baltimore, 1953), 21-8.

⁷ Gustav Philipp Körner, *Das deutsche Element in den Vereinigten Staaten, 1818-1848* (Cincinnati: A. E. Wilde, 1880), 17.

⁸ Susan M. Johnson, "Benjamin Rush and the Pennsylvania German Farmer as Noble Savage," *Yearbook of German-American History* 29 (1994): 49-57. Benjamin Rush, *An Account of the Manners of the German Inhabitants of Pennsylvania*, ed. Theodore E. Schmauk (Lancaster: Pennsylvania German Society, 1910), 108: "It is very remarkable that the Germans in Pennsylvania retain in a great degree all the virtues, which this author [Tacitus] ascribes to their ancestors in his treatise 'de moribus Germanorum.'"

⁹ Franz Löher, *Geschichte und Zustände der Deutschen in Amerika* (Cincinnati: Eggers & Wulkop / Leipzig: K. F. Köhler, 1847), IV.

¹⁰ Carl Schurz, "Zur Einführung der Geschichtsblätter," in: Friedrich Kapp, *Die Deutschen im Staate New York während des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (New York: Steiger, 1884), II f.

¹¹ Friedrich Kapp, *Aus und über Amerika: Thatsachen und Erlebnisse* (Berlin: Springer, 1876), 334,

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¹² Rainer Sell, "Der Deutsche Pionier-Verein von Cincinnati, Heinrich Armin Rattermann, and *Der Deutsche Pionier*: A Nucleus of Nineteenth-Century German-America," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 20 (1985): 57.

¹³ Schurz, "Zur Einführung der Geschichtsblätter," II.

¹⁴ C. F. Huch, "Der Deutsche Pionier-Verein von Philadelphia," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Pionier-Vereins von Philadelphia* H. 10 (1909): 21-25.

¹⁵ C. F. Huch, "Gottlieb Theodor Kellner," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Pionier-Vereins von Philadelphia*, H. 10 (1909): 26-31.

¹⁶ Samuel W. Pennypacker, *The Pennsylvania Dutchman in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania German Society, 1897).

¹⁷ Rattermann, who considered Seidensticker his teacher, published an informative summary of Seidensticker's work in the context of German-American historiography: "Dr. Oswald Seidensticker und die deutsch-amerikanische Geschichtsforschung," *Deutsch-Amerikanische Geschichtsblätter* 11:3 (1911): 131-63. Rattermann gave Kapp an especially critical review, pointing to many incorrect descriptions and conclusions.

¹⁸ Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 82.

¹⁹ Higham, "The Ethnic Historical Society," 34.

²⁰ About the academization of ethnicity among German Americans see Frank Trommler, "Literary Scholarship and Ethnic Studies: A Reevaluation," in *German? American? Literature? New Directions in German-American Studies*, eds. Winfried Fluck and Werner Sollors (New York: Lang, 2002), 25-40.

²¹ See the highly critical report by Gottlieb Mittelberger, *Reise nach Pennsylvanien im Jahr 1750 und Rückreise nach Teutschland im Jahr 1754* (Stuttgart: Gottlieb Friderich Jenisch, 1756).

²² Hartmut Bickelmann, "Deutsche Gesellschaften in den Vereinigten Staaten und ihre Funktionen im deutsch-amerikanischen Wanderungsprozeß," in Michael Just, Agnes Bretting, Hartmut Bickelmann, *Auswanderung und Schifffahrtsinteressen* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1992), 105-216.

²³ German Society of Pennsylvania, Minutes of August 14, 16, 27, 1817 and January 22, 1818; James Boyd, "The Rhine Exodus of 1816/1817 within the Developing German Atlantic World," *Historical Journal* 59:1 (2016): 99-123; Oswald Seidensticker, *Erster Teil der Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft von Pennsylvanien* (Philadelphia: Graf & Breuninger, 1917), 102-10.

²⁴ *Aufbruch nach Amerika: Die Auswanderungswelle von 1816/17*, ed. Günter Moltmann. Neuausgabe (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989), 317 (Dokument 49).

²⁵ Birte Pflieger, *Ethnicity Matters: A History of the German Society of Pennsylvania* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 2006), 21-5; Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock*, 79-108.

²⁶ David Glassberg, "Public Ritual and Cultural Hierarchy: Philadelphia's Civic Celebrations at the Turn of the Century," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 107 (1983): 421-48.

²⁷ C. F. Huch, "Das Zweihundertjährige Deutschamerikanische Pionier-Jubiläum," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Pionier-Vereins von Philadelphia* H. 16 (1910): 1-18.

²⁸ Günter Moltmann, "Der 'Deutsche Tag' in Amerika: Geschichte und Gegenwart," in *The Transit of Civilization from Europa to America: Essays in Honor of Hans Galinsky*, eds. Winfried Herget and Karl Ortseifen (Tübingen: Narr, 1986), 235. See C. F. Huch, "Die Entstehung des deutschen Tages," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Pionier-Vereins von Philadelphia* H. 7 (1908): 31 f.

²⁹ As Walter Kamphoefner conveyed to the author, German Day celebrations caught on rather quickly in Texas. The first celebration took place in Houston in 1889, according to the *Galveston Daily News*, October 7, 1889, p. 3. Benham followed in 1890.

³⁰ "German Day in New York," *German American Annals* NS 1 (1903): 32.

³¹ Marion Dexter Learned, *Germanistik und Schöne Literatur in Amerika* (Milwaukee: The Herold, 1900?) 13.—See also Learned, *German as a Culture Element in American Education: A Lecture* (Milwaukee: The Herold, 1898).

³² Frank Trommler, “Negotiating German ‘Kultur’ and ‘Wissenschaft’ in American Intellectual Life, 1870–1918,” in *New Perspectives on German-American Educational History: Topics, Trends, Fields of Research*, eds. Jürgen Overhoff and Anne Overbeck (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2017), 83-103.

³³ John J. Appel, “Marion Dexter Learned and the German American Historical Society,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 26 (1962): 290 f.

³⁴ Charles Thomas Johnston, *The National German-American Alliance, 1901-1918* (New York: Lang, 1999), 10.

³⁵ Rudolf Cronau, *Drei Jahrhunderte deutschen Lebens in Amerika: Eine Geschichte der Deutschen in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Berlin: Reimer, 1909), 610.

³⁶ Kasal, *Becoming Old Stock*, 134.

³⁷ “The German American Historical Society (Incorporated in 1901),” *Americana Germanica* 4:2 (1902): 207.

³⁸ Kasal, *Becoming Old Stock*, 138-43.

³⁹ Albert B. Faust, *Francis Daniel Pastorius and the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of Germantown* (Philadelphia: Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1934), 5.

⁴⁰ See note 1).

⁴¹ Christine M. Totten, “Elusive Affinities: Acceptance and Rejection of the German-Americans,” in *America and the Germans*, vol. 2, 199.

⁴² Higham, “The Ethnic Historical Society,” 41.