

William E. Petig

Carl Schurz and the University of Wisconsin

Only a year and a half after settling his wife Margarethe and their daughter Agathe in their new home in Watertown, Wisconsin, in the fall of 1856, Carl Schurz had already acquired considerable recognition for his oratorical skills on the state political stage. The Achaean Society of Beloit College invited him to deliver the commencement address on July 12, 1858, in the Congregational Church in Beloit, Wisconsin. His speech, titled "America and Americanism," focused on the importance of the American idea of freedom for the world. The address was well received, and he repeated it to the Literary Society of the University of Wisconsin two weeks later to enthusiastic reviews. Two days after his talk the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin nominated him for a professorship in modern languages. However, Schurz declined the offer, arguing that his business interests required his presence in Watertown. Five weeks later, on August 31, 1858, Governor Alexander W. Randall appointed Schurz to the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin to fill out the term of Professor E. S. Carr, who had resigned, and the following February Schurz was re-elected by the legislature on a straight party vote. Opposition to Schurz's election as a regent came from the *Madison Argus*, which feared that he would "abolitionize" the university, and from Democratic State Senator William Chappell, who had defeated Schurz in the election of 1856 for the state senate from his district.¹

Schurz's Beloit College commencement address on "Americanism," large parts of which he reused in later speeches, was one of his first major addresses in English. It demonstrated how well he had mastered the English language, established his reputation as a skillful orator beyond the borders of Wisconsin, and resulted in invitations to speak before other groups. His audiences were impressed with his command of the history of civilization and of democracy as well as with his views on slavery, tolerance, and education.



Carl Schurz, 1861.

The speech received favorable reviews in the Republican newspapers in Madison and Milwaukee, and the *Chicago Press and Tribune* concluded that he had won over his audience by his “spirit, genius, learning, and great ideas.”²

When Schurz and his wife had arrived in New York City on September 27, 1852, their ability to express themselves in English was still limited. When his wife became ill, Schurz mentioned in his *Reminiscences* how fortunate they were to find a doctor in their hotel who spoke some French. Even though Schurz had lived for well over a year in London, during which time he had supported himself by teaching languages and music, he had spent most of his time among his German friends and acquaintances, who were also

refugees of the 1848 Revolution, and he consequently had not acquired more than a rudimentary knowledge of English. This changed, however, when the Schurzes settled in Philadelphia in 1852, where Schurz set out to teach himself English by reading the *Philadelphia Ledger* from beginning to end, including the classifieds.³ These early speeches are testimony to both the success of his efforts to learn to English as well as to his linguistic ability. By 1858 Schurz’s command of English had improved so much that he mentioned in letters to his friend Gottfried Kinkel that he found English in some respects easier than German and that he was now more popular among the Americans than among the Germans because he spoke English better than most Americans and had a better knowledge of European affairs.⁴

The University of Wisconsin had enrolled its first students in 1850, two years after it was chartered at the time when the State of Wisconsin was founded. Thus the University was only in its eighth year of instruction when Schurz was appointed to the Board of Regents in 1858. Schurz wrote to his friend Friedrich Althaus that in his view the University of Wisconsin had not yet reached “the standard of German universities, but rather that of the German ‘gymnasium,’ only more liberal and without elementary classes.”⁵ When the Board of Regents appointed Henry Barnard (1811–1900), former Connecticut state superintendent of schools, as the new chancellor of the

University of Wisconsin, the regents chose Schurz to deliver the official welcome at the inauguration.⁶

The ceremonies for the inauguration of the new chancellor were held in the Madison City Hall at 10 o'clock on July 27, 1859, with not only faculty and students of the university in attendance, but also state officers, judges of the State Supreme and Circuit Courts, and members of the State Teachers' Association. Following an invocation by the Rev. Dr. Aaron L. Chapin, president of Beloit College, Carl Schurz addressed the assembly.⁷

After a short introduction, in which Schurz waxed poetic about the hill where once Indian campfires had burned and now the university buildings stood, he turned to the achievements of the last quarter century, "the geographical expansion of civilization," which opened and developed the West through the hard work and enterprise of those who, like himself, had not been born there, but who had come to Wisconsin to "better their condition in life." The pursuit of gain applied the mechanical arts and sciences with considerable success, and thus "material interest was the principal motive power which laid the foundation for our social and political structure." After this positive picture of such accomplishments, Schurz warned about the darker side of their origin: "When the pursuit of gain has once taken exclusive possession of a human soul, it may make man prudent and energetic, but it will rarely develop his higher attributes." To counter the effects of this materialism Schurz pointed to universities as "those institutes of a superior order, in which arts and sciences are taught not only with a view to their interior connection and their ennobling and improving influence upon the human soul."

The principal object of University education is not, to fit the student for this or that avocation in life; it is not to make clergymen, or lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or engineers, but it is to form *men*. It is not to furnish the mind with a certain store of scientific material, which can immediately be turned to practical advantage and converted into ready money; but to expand the mind according to its gradual process of development, and to open before it a panoramic view of the world or arts and sciences as a whole.⁸

Schurz believed that the primary goal of education, along with intellectual training, was the development of character, and he extolled the study of classics and classical literature as a measure to promote the culture of the ideal to counterbalance the practical:

In the literature of antiquity, man is magnified beyond his natural dimensions. . . . Classical literature excels all other in the harmonious

chastity of form. In a democratic organization of society like ours, we become apt to forget what influence the beauty of form exercises upon the mind. It imparts to us a sensitiveness of feeling which often, almost imperceptibly, determines the current of our thoughts. . . . And thus it may be said that classical studies not only elevate our minds, but enoble [*sic*] our aspirations and chasten our feelings. In a society which, like ours, is ruled by a spirit of materialism, classical and aesthetic studies, foreign as they may seem to the general tendency of life, are of special importance.—For, in my opinion *the stronger we lean to the side of the material, the more it is necessary that we should promote, by education, the culture of the ideal*. In cultivating the noble and the beautiful along with the useful, we shall evade the onesidedness of character which may make a people for a while rich but not good, powerful but not great.

The effects of this kind of education will not be confined to those who have enjoyed its immediate benefits. Where men live in a state of social and political equality, they will educate each other by mutual influence. As scientific and aesthetic education gives tone to the mind and even to the character of an individual, so a great number of men so educated, will give tone to society, and what comparatively few have acquired by individual efforts, will, in varied and multiplied form, be transmitted to many by daily social intercourse. . . . Such are the ends to be accomplished by the University. It has to educate not individuals only, but the people.⁹

Schurz remained a staunch proponent and defender of the liberal arts curriculum or what he called the “impractical courses,” by which he meant not only the classics, but also history, philosophy, great literature, and foreign languages.

The regents originally voted to publish Schurz’s address along with other welcoming speeches as a separate publication. However, a motion that the secretary of the Board publish only summaries of the speeches, which was made by his fellow regent Harrison C. Hobart, who soon was to be the Democratic candidate for governor, was passed, thereby suppressing Republican Schurz’s speech. The speech was not included in the official records of the University, but Schurz’s friend Horace Rublee, owner of the *Wisconsin State Journal* saw to it that Schurz’s complete speech was published in his newspaper.¹⁰

Schurz often spoke extemporaneously, but he usually prepared his formal speeches with utmost care, writing them out first and then committing them to memory. Thus Schurz could not only be certain that his grammar and

idioms were correct, but he also was able to supply reporters with a copy of his manuscript. Schurz was therefore quoted accurately, and in addition many of his speeches were published in their entirety in newspapers. Schurz's reputation as an orator was based both on his eloquence and dramatic presentation as well as on the "terrible sincerity" with which he spoke according to one listener who had heard him often.¹¹

A review of the minutes of the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents for the years of 1858 to 1863 shows that Schurz attended board meetings regularly until he was posted to Madrid as U.S. Minister to Spain in 1861 and commissioned as a brigadier general in the Union Army in 1862. Schurz served on committees of the Board of Regents that dealt with which subjects should be taught at the university, the hiring of tutors and professors, their salaries, the reorganization of the university under the new chancellor, and the organization of preparatory, normal, and scientific departments. Schurz was actively involved in the search for a suitable candidate for the position of professor of modern languages, which had originally been offered to him.¹² In November 1858 Schurz had written to his friend Friedrich Althaus to ask whether he might be interested in the post, and later Schurz raised the possibility of inviting Gottfried Kinkel, his former professor at the University of Bonn, to fill the professorship.¹³ On Schurz's recommendation the board voted unanimously to appoint Dr. J. P. Fuchs as professor of modern languages.¹⁴

In 1904, forty-five years after Schurz had given the inaugural address for Henry Barnard, the University of Wisconsin celebrated its fiftieth anniversary and planned to honor Carl Schurz with an honorary degree.¹⁵ However, Schurz was recovering from a serious illness that made it impossible for him to attend the celebration. Although still not in the best of health the following year, Schurz traveled from New York City to Madison, Wisconsin, with his daughter, Agathe, to deliver the commencement address at the University on June 22, 1905, and to receive the honorary Doctor of Laws degree.¹⁶ In his citation President Charles R. Van Hise of the University of Wisconsin stated that Schurz was "being recognized, by common consent here and abroad, as the foremost German-American" and as "a sincere and bold leader of public opinion and an ardent advocate of wise measures of national reform."¹⁷ During his stay in Madison, Schurz and his daughter were houseguests of Governor Robert M. La Follette, whom Schurz encouraged to run for the U.S. Senate to continue his reform work.

Like his welcome speech for Henry Barnard over four decades earlier, Schurz's commencement address in 1905 stressed the importance of education in a democracy and the central role of the university in this endeavor. After a nostalgic opening in which Schurz expressed how he "remained sentimentally

Address of C.S. at Univ. of Wisconsin
June 22, 1905. Printed Copy - pg. 104
scrub. book.

The scene I see before me calls up most pleasant memories of days long past.

Nearly half a century ago I had the honor to be a member of the Board of Regents of the Wisconsin State University, which was then still in its infancy. My opportunities for making myself useful to it were cut short by the civil war, the consequences of which set adrift many of those who took part in it. But I have always watched the growth and prosperity of this institution of learning and instruction with keen sympathy and heartily rejoiced in its renown. I assure you, it is no affectation when I say that I have always remained sentimentally attached to the State of Wisconsin by memories especially dear to me, for they are the memories of my American youth - a youth buoyant with a jocund, hopeful idealism which illumined

Handwritten copy of Schurz's Commencement Address at University of Wisconsin, Madison, June 22, 1905, in the Library of Congress.

attached to the State of Wisconsin by memories of my American youth—a youth buoyant with jocund, hopeful idealism which illumined the struggle of life with inspiring sunshine,” he introduced his major theme:

that education should not only supply the mind with knowledge, but also build up character. This is especially important in a democracy in which the character of the people determines the character of the government. If this applies to education in general, it applies with greatest force to the highest agencies of education among which the University stands foremost,—for it is to serve the noblest purposes of civilization, to hold aloft the highest standards in morals as well as in science, to maintain the truest ideals and to stand as the stoutest bulwark against vicious currents of opinion or sentiment,—which currents, whether set in flow by selfish interest or emotional impulse, may tend to unbalance judgment or obscure the moral sense of the people.¹⁸

To counter rampant materialism and the pursuit of wealth, Schurz believed that universities

should cultivate in their students that intellectual honesty which seeks the truth without prejudice and speaks the truth without fear; that civic courage which unfortunately is far more uncommon than bravery on the battlefield, of which there is always a plentiful supply, —I mean the moral courage to do one’s own thinking and stand alone against the world for one’s convictions of truth, justice, right, and duty; and that sturdy rectitude, that true pride of manhood, which scorns hypocrisy and will not compromise falsehood and wrong.

In fact, according to Schurz, “If this republic is to endure and to be successful in its highest mission, it must put its trust rather in schools than in battleships.” For “if it is important that our soldiers in case of necessity shoot straight, it is doubly important that our citizens should under all circumstances think straight, and that they should give straight utterances to straight thoughts.” Schurz continued his speech with the warning that

It is the teaching of false patriotism that any moral iniquity will become a virtuous and praiseworthy act if committed in behalf of one’s country. Such doctrines are only relics of the primitive notion that every stranger is a barbarian presumptively hostile, having no rights entitled to respect.

He admonished his listeners to adhere to the original values on which this country was founded, and to listen to the idealists, whom he regarded as the most useful citizens, because they “have the courage to tell bitter truths and thus counteract the poison instilled in the popular mind by the sycophants of wealth, or of power, or of the multitude.” And he concluded with an admonition about the “dangerously deceptive cry: ‘Our country, right or wrong.’ A safer and more truly patriotic cry will be: ‘Our country,—when right to be kept right, when wrong to be put right.’”¹⁹

Schurz admitted that his speech contained essentially nothing new, but ideas that merit constant repetition. And although delivered 114 years ago, his speech has a remarkably modern ring even today.

At a reception for Carl Schurz, Governor La Follette asked the Madison Männerchor to perform some German songs for the honored guest. Schurz was visibly moved and held his head in his hands when the chorus broke into “Weh, dass wir scheiden müssen” (“How can I bear to leave thee”):

Weh, dass wir scheiden müssen,
lass dich noch einmal küssen;
ich muss an Kaisers Seiten
ins falsche Welschland reiten:
Fahr wohl, fahr wohl, mein armes Lieb.

Ich werd auf Maienauen
dich niemals wieder schauen,
der Feinde grimm'ge Scharen
sind kommen angefahren:
Fahr wohl, fahr wohl, mein armes Lieb.

Ich denk an dich mit Sehnen,
gedenk an mich mit Tränen;
wenn meine Augen brechen,
will ich zuletzt noch sprechen:
Fahr wohl, fahr wohl, mein armes Lieb.²⁰

After the chorus finished, Schurz explained that his friend and former professor at the University of Bonn, Gottfried Kinkel, had written the words, and that Kinkel’s wife, Johanna, with whom Schurz had studied piano, had composed the music while he was a visitor in their home in London. The following evening the German Americans of Madison feted Schurz with a second welcoming party in Turner Hall, and just before leaving the festivities



Carl Schurz, 1906.

Schurz requested that the singers perform once more “Weh, dass wir scheiden müssen.”²¹

In 1907, the year after Schurz’s death, the Carl Schurz Memorial Association of Wisconsin was founded with General F. C. Winkler, one of his lifelong friends, as its president. The goal of this organization was to raise \$60,000 by general subscription to endow a chair at the University of Wisconsin in Madison to be known as the Carl Schurz Professorship and to be filled annually by a distinguished professor from Germany, who would enhance the entire academic program of the University of Wisconsin, but who would also give public lectures throughout the state. In spring 1911

Winkler informed the regents of the University that \$30,000 was available, and the Schurz Memorial Professorship was officially established on March 31 at public exercises in Lathrop Hall with President Charles R. Van Hise presiding.²²

The first holder of the Carl Schurz Memorial Chair (1912–13) was the well-known German professor of philosophy, Dr. Eugen Kühnemann, from the University of Breslau. Kühnemann was not unfamiliar in Madison, since he had lectured at the University of Wisconsin in 1905, when the German government had sent him to America to determine the feasibility of setting up exchange professorships between Germany and the United States, and again during his second exchange professorship at Harvard in 1908–09, when he filled in for Professor Kuno Francke, who was on sabbatical. During his first visiting professorship at Harvard in 1906–07, Kühnemann had delivered one of two eulogies in German at the memorial service for Carl Schurz in Carnegie Hall on November 21, 1906.²³ As the Carl Schurz Professor, Kühnemann gave courses at the University of Wisconsin on Goethe’s *Faust*, Schiller, and modern German drama, and he also lectured in Milwaukee and other cities in the state that had contributed to the professorship.²⁴

Kühnemann began his inaugural lecture by pointing to the historical significance of the Carl Schurz Memorial Chair: “For the first time there has been founded by Germans living in a new fatherland a professorship



Eugen Kühnemann, first holder of Schurz Professorship.

for the purpose of making an enduring intellectual bond between American and German life.” He then continued to lay out the goals and benefits of the professorship. Only the exchange professor could bring fully the perspective of his own culture to academic instruction:

Etwas von intimsten und innerlichsten Leben der andern Kultur soll im Lehren lebendig werden. . . . In diesem Sinne berühren sich in einem solchen Unterricht die Nationen untereinander and treten in einen wahren Verkehr des Lebens und der Seelen.²⁵

Kühnemann viewed the Schurz Professorship not simply as an exchange professorship or as a program of the university, but as a completely new and particularly American idea. For it was endowed by the German Americans of Wisconsin, who entrusted their state university with the task of preserving and promoting the best of German intellectual thought and culture in their new homeland. The professorship was created to honor Carl Schurz, who as few other German-Americans imbued American life with the German spirit and tried to shape America according to the principles of German idealism.²⁶

The Carl Schurz Professorship at the University of Wisconsin in Madison is in its 107th year of existence, making it one of the oldest endowed professorships for visiting scholars from Germany to the United States. Since its inception in 1912, it has brought over forty distinguished faculty members from German universities for a stay of one semester every other year, except for hiatuses during the two World Wars. The holders of the Schurz Professorship have taught in a wide array of academic fields at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, ranging from German literature, history, musicology, sociology, and economics to chemistry, physics, mathematics, agriculture, engineering, and pathology.

Stanford University
Stanford, California

Notes

¹ Chester Verne Easum, *The Americanization of Carl Schurz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), 197–212; Hans L. Trefousse, *Carl Schurz: A Biography* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 69; Claude Moore Fuess, *Carl Schurz: Reformer* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1932), 59. An abbreviated version of this article appeared in the *Max Kade Institute Friends Newsletter* 27, 2 (spring 2018): 1, 4–6, published at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

² Easum, 200–05; *Chicago Press and Tribune*, July 20, 1858, quoted in Easum, 205.

³ Carl Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, 3 vols. (New York: The McClure Company, 1907–08), 2:8–13.

⁴ Joseph Schafer, trans. & ed., *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz: 1841–1869* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1929), 182–86; these letters are from February 15 and 23, 1858. This collection of letters by Schurz, provided by Marianne Schurz, then the only surviving member of the immediate family, was published to mark the centennial of the birth of Carl Schurz. Also see Easum, 147.

⁵ Letter to Friedrich Althaus of November 5, 1858, in Fredric Bancroft, ed., *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, 6 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 1:36–38.

⁶ Henry Barnard (1811–1900), a lawyer by training, turned to education, and after serving as chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, he became president of St. John's College, Annapolis, MD, and then served from 1867 to 1870 as the first U.S. commissioner of education. In the early years the head of the University of Wisconsin was called either president or chancellor.

⁷ *Wisconsin State Journal*, July 27, 1859, p. 1.

⁸ *Wisconsin State Journal*, p. 1.

⁹ *Wisconsin State Journal*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Easum, 205–12.

¹¹ Fuess, 57–61.

¹² Minutes for 1859 to 1863 of the Board of Regents, pp. 215–58, University Archives and Records Management, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Since Schurz did not reside in Madison, he was paid \$2.50 a day to attend and \$0.05 cents a mile for travel; see expenses for regents not living in Madison in minutes for January 21, 1857.

¹³ Letter to Friedrich Althaus of November 5, 1858, see note 5; Easum, 106.

¹⁴ Fuchs was paid an annual salary of \$800, whereas the other professors were paid \$1000 in 1860. Salaries for professors had been reduced in 1859 from \$1500 to \$1250 due to the debts of the University of Wisconsin and now were reduced again in 1860. Although not mentioned, the annual salary of \$1750 of the newly appointed chancellor, Henry Barnard, and the salary of \$750 of tutors were probably also reduced; see minutes of the Board of Regents, 234, 254.

¹⁵ The fiftieth anniversary of the University of Wisconsin was postponed when the president, Charles Kendall Adams, died in 1901, and it was decided to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary together with the inauguration of Charles R. Van Hise, the new president, in 1904.

¹⁶ Ernst K. Voss, "Perpetuating the Spirit of Carl Schurz," *La Follette's Weekly Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 49 (December 7, 1912): 7–8. Schurz received honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from Harvard in 1876, Columbia University in 1899, and from Washington University in St. Louis in 1904.

¹⁷ Fuess, 379–80.

¹⁸ Carl Schurz, Commencement Address at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, June 22, 1905. Handwritten and typed versions of the address are located in the Library of Congress, Carl Schurz Papers, container 193 (reel 102) of the collection. The file consists of two hand-written drafts of the speech (one is approximately thirty-three pages and the other is

sixteen pages), a thirteen-page typescript of the speech, and a newspaper account published on June 23, 1905, most likely in the *Milwaukee Free Press*, which provides a substantial transcript of the speech.

¹⁹ Schurz, Commencement Address.

²⁰ In English it has the title "Soldier's Farewell":

How can I bear to leave thee?
One parting kiss I give thee;
And then whate'er befalls me,
I go where duty calls me,
Farewell, farewell, my own true love;
Farewell, farewell, my own true love.

Ne'er more may I behold thee,
Or to this heart enfold thee;
With spear and pennon glancing,
I see the foe advancing.
Farewell, farewell, my own true love;
Farewell, farewell, my own true love.

I think of thee with longing,
Think thou, when tears are thronging
That with my last faint sighing,
I'll whisper soft, while dying:
Farewell, farewell, my own true love;
Farewell, farewell, my own true love.

²¹ Voss, "Perpetuating the Spirit," 7.

²² Voss, "Perpetuating the Spirit," 8; "Carl Schurz Memorial" (Milwaukee: The Carl Schurz Memorial Association of Wisconsin, n.d.), which includes a letter from University of Wisconsin President Charles R. Van Hise endorsing the creation of the Carl Schurz Professorship; Ernst K. Voss, "The Schurz Professorship," *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (January 1910): 145–48. For the program, including speeches and responses, at the university function establishing the Schurz Professorship, see "The Carl Schurz Memorial Exercises," *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 8 (May 1911): 357–68.

²³ Trefousse, vii, 297, reports Kühnemann's eulogy at Schurz's memorial gathering was the only one in German, but according to Fuess, 382, Professor Hermann A. Schumacher from Bonn also spoke in German.

²⁴ Voss, "Perpetuating the Spirit," 8. For Professor Eugen Kühnemann's inaugural address on his appointment as the first holder of the Carl Schurz Memorial Professorship at the University of Wisconsin with introduction by President Charles R. Van Hise, see *The Inauguration of Professor Eugen Kuehnemann as the First Carl Schurz Memorial Professor* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1912), 5–31. Kühnemann's address is in German except for the first paragraph, which he gave in English. An English translation of the address was produced by W. E. Leonard, 21–31.

²⁵ *The Inauguration*, 11; the English rendering by W. E. Leonard, 22:

Something of the most intimate and innermost life of that other civilization shall become alive in the teacher. . . . In this sense the nations draw closer together under such mutual instruction, and enter upon a new and splendid traffic of life and spirit.

²⁶ *The Inauguration*, 12–13.