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Sailing Souls: Colonial Philadelphia's German Merchants and the Development of the Transatlantic Passenger Trade

Hundreds of thousands of Central Europeans in the early modern period traveled the globe as missionaries, soldiers, settlers, and merchants. Among them were the German merchant community of colonial Philadelphia, who played key role in the transatlantic passenger trade connecting Central European migrants with British North America. These men were customers, business partners, regulators, and disruptors of that industry. Those merchants engaged in multiple ventures of intra-colonial and international trade either directly or as brokers. German colonists were those who identified as German, either through self-description, using the German language in their homes or businesses, and/or participating in German-language religious or civic institutions.¹ Through this merchant community's activities in the transatlantic passenger trade, we can see how German-speaking peoples were active participants in shaping colonial commerce and legislation as well as the fracturing of the British Empire in North America.

Customers

The first step for the Germans who eventually became part of colonial Philadelphia's merchant class was to make their way across the Atlantic. These men, like other German migrants traveling to British North America in the middle quarters of the eighteenth century, became customers of a maturing transatlantic transportation industry. Prior to the 1720s, German migration to British North America was largely organized by religious networks and agents of the British government. William Penn and other British Quakers

established connections with German-speaking Labadists, Mennonites, and Quakers in the 1670s and encouraged them to move to Penn's new proprietary colony in North America after its 1681 chartering.² The Dutch Committee on Foreign Needs, organized in the mid-seventeenth century to aid persecuted Mennonites and other Anabaptists throughout Europe, arranged for the transatlantic passage of hundreds of Mennonites from the upper Rhineland and Swiss cantons until discontinuing this form of relief in 1732.³

Besides William Penn's recruitment of continental European migrants to his proprietary colony, other British metropolitan and colonial officials oversaw the migration of Germans to North America in the early eighteenth century. Governor John Archdale of Carolina Colony attempted to lure German migrants to the proprietary colony through a promotional literature campaign similar to Penn's, as well as by contracting with the High German Company of Thuringia. When thousands of German-speaking migrants made their way across the English Channel to Britain in 1709, several colonial governors lobbied for the migrants to be sent across the Atlantic. Several hundred went to New Bern in Carolina and about three thousand went to New York to settle in the Hudson River Valley and to produce naval stores.⁴ Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood of Virginia recruited several scores of families in the 1710s from the Siegerland and southwestern portion of the Holy Roman Empire to settle on what was the western fringe of Virginia, operate an ironworks, and establish mines where possible.⁵

Beyond colonial governors, British merchant firms in London and Rotterdam began to independently organize voyages for would-be Central European immigrants starting in the 1720s.⁶ Rotterdam emerged as the primary port of embarkation for this trade thanks to its location at the mouth of the Rhine River. Taking the Rhine River downstream provided migrants a comparatively quick and cost-effective route to reach a port of embarkation for North America. The city also had an established history of sending out North America-bound passenger ships as Benjamin Furley, an English Quaker based in Rotterdam and William Penn's agent on the continent, helped organize many of the first voyages of Germans to Pennsylvania.⁷ Rotterdam merchants organized the recruiting of passengers, their entry into Dutch territory, and their embarkation. They also provisioned and outfitted the vessel for the first transatlantic leg. Those in London helped secure capital, insurance, and a ship to legally transport the migrants to British North America. Philadelphia merchants oversaw the debarkation, the collection of passengers' outstanding debts, and the preparation of the vessel for its next destination.⁸

The industry grew quickly in the 1730s when more and more would-be emigrants began to take the opportunity of passage on credit. In this system, the migrant became indebted to the merchant to a sum equal to the travel

cost, plus 20 percent, and had the debt ‘redeemed’ by friends, family. If the passenger’s debt was not redeemed within an agreed period of time, then the merchant or their agent could contract the passenger and/or family members into indentured servitude to pay off the debt. This “redemption system” helped fill the Mid-Atlantic colonies’ ever-growing demands for labor.⁹ The growing business facilitated a sizable migration of German-speaking peoples through Philadelphia, including approximately 55,000 between 1737 and 1754 with over 25,000 arriving between just 1749 and 1752.¹⁰

Prior to the 1720s, almost all Central Europeans going to British North America were sectarians fleeing religious persecution, who overwhelmingly travelled as families. Regular transatlantic shipping and the redemption system encouraged a new type of migrant: younger, single, poorer, disproportionately male, and motivated to travel primarily for better economic opportunities. As the century progressed, more and more of the migrants came over the Atlantic through the redemption system rather than paying their fares upfront, with up to half of passengers using credit to cover their voyage in the third quarter of the eighteenth century.¹¹

The future German merchants’ personal stories as passengers reflect these demographic shifts in German migration to British North America sparked by this maturing transatlantic passenger trade. They tended to be young and unmarried.¹² Caspar Wistar, born Caspar Wüstar in Waldhilsbach in the Electoral Palatinate, was twenty-one years old when he arrived in Philadelphia in 1717. His younger brother Johannes, who would become John Wister in Pennsylvania, was nineteen when he arrived in 1727. Heinrich, or Henry, Keppele was twenty-two and Georg Michael Hillegas was twenty-seven or twenty-eight when they made their transatlantic voyages to Philadelphia.¹³

They were men driven to move for economic advantage rather than to flee religious persecution.¹⁴ Most of these young men came from middling socioeconomic backgrounds in their German homelands. Caspar Wistar and John Wister were sons of a *Jäger* [hunter] in the service of Johann Wilhelm, Elector Palatine. Henry Keppele descended from local office holders on both sides of his family, and his father served as one in Treschklingen in the Duchy of Württemberg.¹⁵ They paid for their travel in full, albeit often by the slimmest of margins, as Caspar Wistar claimed to have just nine pence when he landed in Philadelphia. These men avoided becoming redemptioners, which gave them great flexibility in their early employment in the labor-hungry city. They could immediately accrue capital to finance their future intra-colonial and transatlantic trade.¹⁶

Most of the initial members of Philadelphia’s German merchant community started off as artisans, publicans, or retailers before starting ventures in transatlantic shipping and commerce. Caspar Wistar initially worked for

a soap-maker before securing an apprenticeship with a button-maker. He then founded his own button-making business before launching a successful career as a merchant, real estate investor, and glass manufacturer.¹⁷ Keppele first worked as a butcher before purchasing a property on Market Street where he operated an inn and tavern that by 1747 became his primary business. In 1748, Keppele started selling linseed oil wholesale. In the following years, Keppele established himself in Philadelphia-area real estate as well as in trade with the West Indies, Great Britain, and continental Europe.¹⁸ Adam Clamppfer and his son William operated a tavern on Elfreth's Alley and a retail shop. By the mid-1750s, William had opened a store on Second Street selling imported British manufactured goods and East Indian products routed through Britain.¹⁹ Daniel Steinmetz, who arrived in 1732, and Georg Michael Hillegas both became retailers and investors in real estate. Their sons, John Steinmetz and Michael Hillegas Jr. succeeded them and expanded their families' commercial operations around the Atlantic.²⁰

Two key factors enabled these young men and their progeny to become merchants: Philadelphia's rapid growth, and the creation of a path to naturalization as British subjects. Philadelphia, established in 1682, had over 2,000 residents within a decade of its founding, approximately 13,000 by 1742, and almost 25,000 by the start of the War of American Independence.²¹ The city's riverfront expanded as well with dozens of private and public wharfs, warehouses, piers, and harborage for vessels of various sizes. Tobacco, animal skins, and furs were the most lucrative early trade goods sailing out of Philadelphia, but over time wheat, flour, bread, lumber products, salted meat, and iron became the major exports. By the last years of the colonial period the city was British North America's busiest port. The German immigrants who would become merchants prospered in their initial ventures along with the city. Their early prosperity enabled them to place orders for imported goods and to invest in ships.²²

Whilst German migrants made their way to British North America's fastest growing port city they needed legal rights to become merchants that they did not possess upon debarkation. As aliens arriving in Pennsylvania, the Navigation Acts barred them from trading with British colonies or from owning a British ship or shares in such a ship.²³ While William Penn, as proprietor of Pennsylvania, had helped guide legislation through the colonial Assembly in 1709 to create a naturalization process, it received royal assent because it applied only within the colony's bounds.²⁴ This new law helped ensure continental European migrants to Pennsylvania could pass on real property to their heirs, but they remained barred from engaging in international and intra-colonial trade. Caspar Wistar sought a way around this restriction when he petitioned for naturalization in 1723. Wistar ensured that the subsequent

bill included a clause specifying to his ability to trade and transport all kinds of goods not barred by law, as if he were a natural-born subject of the King of Great Britain who had been born in Pennsylvania. Notwithstanding Wistar's diligence in seeing through his personal naturalization bill, his status remained tenuous. The bill had to receive royal assent, which often took years; and there was still the matter of the bill's applicability to Pennsylvania only. Hence it was unclear if Wistar, for example, could trade with metropolitan firms. Wistar realized the tenuousness of his legal status and when he went on to establish a glassworks in New Jersey in 1739, he secured his naturalization with that colony's legislature.²⁵

The would-be German merchants who followed Wistar could be more assured of their naturalized status and its application throughout the empire, thanks to the 1740 "Act for Naturalizing Foreign Protestants, and others therein mentioned, as are settlers or shall settle, in any of his Majesty's colonies in *America*." The act recognized that an "Increase of People is a Means of advancing the Wealth and Strength of any Nation or Country," and that migrants might be attracted to settle in the colonies if allowed to enjoy the privileges of being a subject. Starting June 1, 1740, aliens who provided proof of seven years of residency from a colonial government, as well as the witnessed taking of the sacrament within the past three months, were eligible to become naturalized British subjects.²⁶ The 1740 act paved the way for the emergence of an expanding German merchant community within the city.

The developing business of transporting continental European migrants across the Atlantic, Philadelphia's rapid economic growth, and the establishment of a legal path to naturalization for foreign colonists made the emergence of a German merchant community in Philadelphia possible. A few members, like Henry Keppele and Jacob Winey, would then become part of the very industry that brought them to their new homeland.

Business Partners

Philadelphia's small German merchant community emerged around midcentury as legal and financial barriers fell away. Men like Henry Keppele and William Clampffer started to invest their profits from their public houses and other businesses into shares of ships, and large wholesale purchases. Clampffer purchased a third of the newly built fifty-ton brigantine *Addison* in 1751, and less than two years later owned it outright with his father, Adam. Michael Hillegas Jr. by 1755 owned quarter-shares in a 120-ton ship and a twenty-four-ton sloop as well as a private wharf.²⁷ Keppele moved on from brokering linseed in the late 1740s to importing sugar and rum from Barbados and Jamaica starting in the early 1760s.²⁸

German merchants' trade patterns were almost indistinguishable from their Anglo competitors. The German merchant community in Philadelphia focused its transatlantic trade on the British Isles, the Caribbean, and the Iberian Peninsula. The bulk of the trade was with Britain importing textiles, hardware, and East India products. David Deschler, cousin of Caspar Wistar and John Wister, concentrated on selling imported hardware and domestic goods, like paints, pigments, kitchen pans, and chisels.²⁹ In one 1765 advertisement in *Der Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote*, John Steinmetz, son of retailer Daniel Steinmetz, listed over twenty types of textiles he had recently secured from London, Liverpool, and Bristol.³⁰ Caribbean ports were markets hungry for the Mid-Atlantic's surplus foodstuffs and timber, and German merchants helped meet the demand. In exchange, they brought back sugar, rum, ginger, and leather as well as bills of exchange and specie to pay off their debts to British merchant firms.³¹

Many of the leading German merchants also sent ships to Iberia and the Wine Islands of the Central Atlantic. Jacob Winey, independently, and with his partner, Andreas Bunner, son of German immigrant and Philadelphia innkeeper Rudolph Bunner, forged a relationship with the Lisbon-based British firm Parr and Bulkeley in the 1760s to import a variety of wines.³² Henry Keppele along with his son, Henry Keppele Junior, and son-in-law, John Steinmetz, regularly sent out their ship, *Charming Peggy* in the early 1770s to Lisbon and Tenerife to sell flour, grain, barrel staves, and North Atlantic fish. The *Charming Peggy* sailed back with tens of thousands of gallons of local wines as well as shipments of citrus, corks, oils, and silk.³³

Engaging in the transatlantic passenger trade represented a rare business opportunity to connect back to Central Europe. Five of the approximately fifty-five Philadelphia-based merchants and firms involved in the business during the 18th century were German: both Henry Keppeles, John Steinmetz, Michael Hillegas Jr., and Jacob Winey. Only the Keppeles and Steinmetz invested in multiple voyages. These five German merchants all entered the business at its peak in the early 1750s or afterwards.³⁴

The elder Henry Keppele was the most invested in the passenger trade and his path followed the larger pattern of Philadelphia merchants within the business. Initially Philadelphia merchants worked as agents for Rotterdam or London-based firms or took consignments of migrants. Over time, they started to finance these voyages independently, and to send out their own ships.³⁵ Keppele started out by securing a consignment of 386 German immigrants in 1752 from Captain George Parish of the ship *Queen of Denmark*. Over the next three years, he took six more consignments of German immigrants totaling almost 2,000 people, including almost nine percent of all adult male immigrants who arrived during the surge in German migration between 1751

and 1756.³⁶ Kepple sought to get around the Dutch government's strict regulations on the trade as well as the ensconced position of the well-established firms in Rotterdam, by having his migrants shipped from Hamburg. Five of his seven consignments in the 1750s came from there. Kepple's use of Hamburg was unique in the larger industry as only nine of the 255 redemptioner transport voyages between 1727 and 1775 began there.³⁷

Kepple hoped Hamburg would be a place where he would have the advantage as a native German-speaker and with his connections in the city. Hamburg also offered a proximate point for attracting immigrants from the large Protestant populations of north German states. The Seven Years' War ended Kepple's hope of opening Hamburg, but by the 1770s Kepple reentered the passenger trade with his son and son-in-law. No longer relying on consignments from Hamburg and Rotterdam, Kepple and his partners took aboard German immigrants and other passengers in London where they regularly sent their ship, *Catharine*. London was a growing point of embarkation for transatlantic German migrants thanks to its greater shipping traffic with Philadelphia. Yet, the parties of immigrants the three merchants loaded onto their ship were much smaller than Kepple's consignments from the 1750s. These smaller shipments of immigrants were due both to the relative decline in the trade in the 1770s as well as the fact that the Keppeles and Steinmetz were taking on passengers to supplement imported goods, rather than filling up a ship predominantly with people.³⁸

While Kepple was the largest Philadelphia German player in the eighteenth-century Central European transatlantic transportation business, several others also sought to profit in the trade. Michael Hillegas Jr., using his co-owned ship, *Henrietta* carried at least 239 German immigrants from Rotterdam in 1754 in coordination with the Dunlop Company. Jacob Winey's 150-ton *King of Prussia* sailed 143 immigrants to Philadelphia from Rotterdam in the fall of 1775, one of the last passages of the trade prior to the Revolution.³⁹

Thus, starting in the 1750s several former customers of the transatlantic German migrant transporting business and their sons began to participate in the industry. Investing their money, time, and vessels, these merchants hoped to diversify their business ventures and turn a profit by bringing their colinguists to British North America. The elder Kepple's profits from consignments of migrants from Rotterdam and Hamburg in the 1750s may have helped finance his later trade in the Caribbean, Britain, and Iberia. Yet, overall, the Philadelphia German merchant community's involvement in the trade was very limited, both in the number of men participating and the duration of their involvement in the trade. Perhaps this was because the market was primarily in the hands of large British firms on both sides of the Atlantic. Instead, the German merchants largely focused on commerce with the city's

most popular foreign markets: Great Britain, the Caribbean, and the Iberian Peninsula. These merchants had a much larger influence on the transatlantic passenger trade with Central Europe as activists pressing for greater regulation of the industry.

Regulators

Philadelphians were shocked in November 1764 following the arrival of a ship crowded with terribly sick and hungry passengers. A letter to *Der Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote* described the clinic where many of the sickest migrants wound up as “*ein rechtes Tophet, ein Land lebendiger Todten, ein Gewölbe voll lebender Leichen, von welchen nicht als ihr Gewinsel und die thränende Augen zu erkennen gaben, daß die Seelen noch in ihren verwesenden Leibern seyn.*” [a real hell, a land of living dead, a vault full of living corpses, from which nothing but their whimpering and their watery eyes signified that the souls were still in the rotting bodies.]⁴⁰ This shocking incident motivated leading members of the city’s German community, including its merchants, to organize a society devoted to the care and protection of their newly arrived colinguiists. Sixty-five men gathered together at the Lutheran schoolhouse on Cherry Street on December 26, 1764 to form the German Society of Pennsylvania (GSP).

Many of Philadelphia’s German merchants played leading roles within the organization’s founding and operation during the colonial and revolutionary eras. Henry Keppele helped organize the initial meeting and was elected president. He served as president until 1781 when he refused reelection, citing his declining health. Jacob Winey served as the organization’s first treasurer and following his withdrawing from the post in the middle of 1766, Henry Keppele Jr. was elected in his stead. Keppele Jr. held the post of treasurer until 1779. Philadelphia merchants held the position of treasurer for so long probably because they had the accounting skills as well as the necessary property to bond as security for holding the GSP’s treasury.⁴¹

While the GSP devoted many of its resources to providing material and legal aid to recently arrived Germans, one of its first actions was to lobby the colonial Assembly to pass stronger regulations on the transportation and treatment of immigrants on ships and on arrival at Philadelphia. At the body’s first meeting in December 1764, the members voted to present the Assembly as well as Lieutenant Governor John Penn, the highest executive in the colony at the time, with English translations of their founding articles as well as a petition calling for new regulations on the shipping of immigrants.⁴² While the colony had previously passed legislation to establish health inspections for incoming ships, a pest house on Providence Island for sick arrivals, a mini-

imum width and length for berths, and a minimum standard for necessary provisions, the petitioners found these earlier regulations to be wanting.⁴³ The GSP's petition contained nine points that they wanted a new law to address in order to better protect migrants' lives and property during and immediately after their voyages. These points included safeguarding passengers' goods from seizure to pay off debts to preventing spouses from being separated in their indentures.⁴⁴

Less than two weeks after several GSP officers presented their founding articles and petitions, the Assembly began debating a bill that addressed their concerns about the transatlantic passenger trade. While the bill passed the Assembly, Lieutenant Governor Penn declined to sign it and asked that the bill be reviewed again at the next Assembly session later in the year. Penn's hesitancy to sign the bill at first may have been because of a counter-petition by some Philadelphia merchants objecting to the legislation and arguing that the immigrants coming over as redemptioners were free people making contracts in German, so no abuse or exploitation was taking place. When the bill passed again in the May session, Lieutenant Governor Penn approved it.⁴⁵

The law placed a range of new responsibilities on ships' masters during voyages. They had to have a well-regarded surgeon and a fully stocked chest of medicines onboard whenever they carried fifty or more freights. There were also now required cleaning procedures, like fumigating between decks by burning tar and twice weekly cleanings of all decks with vinegar. Ships' masters also had to provide bills of lading for passengers' luggage that they would not have access to during the voyage to prevent the theft of goods. They also had to declare all goods for customs on behalf of their passengers. If any of a passenger's goods were seized for failing to pay customs, the ship's master was liable and had to make good on the passenger's lost property.⁴⁶

The law also provided new protections for passengers upon their arrival in Pennsylvania. When unredeemed passengers went ashore to look for opportunities to pay their debts and their luggage remained onboard as security, the ship's master had to provide the passenger with a certificate detailing the goods and their value. There were also bans on ships' masters charging passengers to unload their luggage at their port of destination as well as keeping all non-sick passengers and non-heavily pregnant women onboard for more than thirty days after arrival, even those still indebted. Only immediate family members, excluding wives and mothers of children, could be made responsible for a dead spouse or child's freight costs, and any contract made between passengers and the ship's owner or master violating this principle was immediately void.⁴⁷

The law improved the enforcement mechanism for both the old and new regulations by having officers inspecting vessels with passengers bring with

them “a reputable German inhabitant of the city of Philadelphia well versed in the English and German languages to be . . . interpreter.” The paid interpreter was to go onboard and loudly introduce themselves and the officer in German, help the officer read aloud the regulations, and then begin an inquiry among the passengers about the conditions during the voyage. If there were passengers remaining on the ship thereafter, the inspecting officer and translator were to make weekly visits to the ship to examine conditions onboard.⁴⁸

The GSP’s merchant leaders and members played central roles in this passage of the strictest regulations of the transatlantic passenger trade during the colonial era. They were men of moderate to sizable wealth and growing political connections and clout. Several of the merchants were already active in some of Philadelphia’s civic institutions. Caspar Wistar, John Wister, and David Deschler were three of the earliest members of the Fellowship Fire Company, the city’s second oldest fire company. Many of the German merchants were regular donors to Pennsylvania Hospital.⁴⁹ As prominent figures within the colony’s German-speaking communities, the petitioning German merchants carried the political clout of the growing numbers of German colonists who naturalized and were eligible to vote by the early 1760s.⁵⁰

No German merchant did more to pass the reform legislation than GSP president Henry Keppele. He shepherded the bill through the Assembly, where he was serving his single term after the October 1764 election. Keppele was well-suited to the task. He was intimately familiar with both sides of the trade. His transatlantic passage on the ship *Charming Nancy* in 1738 took almost six months and a contagious fever broke out on board killing scores of passengers. By the time the ship reached Philadelphia only about sixty of the 312 passengers survived. By 1765, twenty-seven years later, he had overseen the ‘redemption’ process for seven shiploads of German migrants.⁵¹

The efforts of Philadelphia’s German merchant community and other German leaders in the colony led to a more stringent regulatory regime for the transatlantic passenger trade. The new requirements on passenger voyages and redeeming passengers’ freight costs may have contributed to the declining volume of German migrants to British North America after the Seven Years’ War. Other actions of the city’s German merchants in the 1760s and 1770s certainly did.

Disruptors

While the Seven Years’ War interrupted the transatlantic passenger trade between Central Europe and British North America for its duration, the War of American Independence started a nearly complete cessation in the business with German-speaking Europe for a generation. The British Navy controlled

the transatlantic shipping routes during the war. Thereafter the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars disrupted nascent connections between German ports and the United States.⁵² Philadelphia's German merchants helped spark the initial conflict that disrupted the trade as some of the city's strongest critics of British imperial policy after 1763 and loudest voices for independence in the run-up to 1776. Through their actions, they disrupted the industry as well as reshaped the British Empire.

Philadelphia and its citizens were comparatively quiet in the years leading up to the break with Great Britain. The city had almost no crowd actions or formal protests before the late 1760s. In fact, Philadelphia was the lone port where the local stamp agent's home and property were protected by a crowd, rather than ransacked by one.⁵³ The city's elites sent a petition against the 1767 Townshend Acts, but only nine months after Boston and New York sent theirs and without the threat of a boycott. The city finally organized a boycott of British goods in response to the Townshend Acts in 1769 after the city's increasingly patriot artisans and laborers pressured local leaders. Even then many of the city's merchants within months began agitating for a revision or rescinding of the non-importation agreement.⁵⁴

The German merchants, however, represented a reliable and active corps in favor of protesting and resisting the new revenue legislation from Parliament. John Wister, his son Daniel, David Deschler, Jacob Winey, William Clampffer, Adam Hubley, John Steinmetz, and both Henry Keppeles signed a non-importation agreement for British goods on November 7, 1765 in protest of the Stamp Act's passage.⁵⁵ After the port of Boston was closed in response to the 1773 Boston Tea Party, Adam Hubley, Michael Hillegas Jr., Henry Kepple Jr., and Jacob Winey served on the city's corresponding committee; and Francis Hasenclever, Kepple Jr., and Winey served on the Committee of Inspection and Observation to enforce the city's new non-importation agreement.⁵⁶

The German merchants were more willing to resist for several reasons. As merchants, the changes in imperial policies, from new charges on imported goods and documents vital to transatlantic trade to increased enforcement of previous regulations threatened their businesses' profits.⁵⁷ The Stamp Act levied a double duty on all the items produced in the colonies and taxed under the act, if they were written in any language other than English.⁵⁸ The Stamp Act thus placed an extra financial burden on the German merchants and their less well-to-do colinguists. The double duty in the Stamp Act may have also served to remind the merchants of their days before naturalization when they had more limited rights. The German merchants or their fathers had gone through the laborious process of naturalization to pursue their livelihood, and they knew intimately the disadvantages of being a non-subject residing in the

British Empire. The wave of post-1763 revenue legislation and the growing military presence in the colonies seemed to be chipping away at the foundation that girded their social status and economic opportunities.

Following the violence at Lexington and Concord, many German merchants took up arms and helped create Pennsylvania's new constitution and government. Henry Kepple Jr. served with the third battalion of Pennsylvania state troops from July 1776 until his death in 1782.⁵⁹ Jacob Winey partnered with fellow Philadelphians Robert Morris and Thomas Mason in August 1775 to send a ship to continental Europe to secure war materiel for the Continental Army, as well as pick up cargos previously ordered by the Continental Congress.⁶⁰ Frederick Kuhl served as an elected delegate for the city of Philadelphia at Pennsylvania's constitutional convention in July 1776, having established himself as a leading radical and pro-independence voice. Kuhl and Kepple Jr. became members of the newly formed Council of Safety that was to serve as the state's executive organ, and Hillegas Jr. served as its treasurer.⁶¹

During the war, many of the merchants worked to keep their nascent state and country afloat financially. In March 1776, the Continental Congress appointed and authorized Frederick Kuhl, Adam Hubley, and Samuel Hillegas, son of Michael Hillegas Jr., along with several dozen others, to sign and number four million dollars in bills of credit.⁶² In 1780, John Steinmetz, along with Henry Kepple and Michael Hillegas Jr. pledged subscriptions backed by their credit and property to the newly established Bank of Pennsylvania. The Bank of Pennsylvania's creators planned to raise 300,000 pounds in Pennsylvania currency to guarantee the loans the institution made to provision the Continental Army. The elder Kepple and Steinmetz pledged 2,000 pounds each and Hillegas Jr. pledged 4,000 pounds. The Bank of Pennsylvania influenced the formation of an institution that came to supersede it in financing the war effort the following year: the Bank of North America.⁶³ Hillegas Jr. rose to the highest rank within the revolutionary government among the German Philadelphia merchants. He became the first Treasurer of the United States, first jointly in May 1776 and then individually in August 1776.⁶⁴

Merchants like the Henry Kepples, Fredrick Kuhl, and John Steinmetz likely thought very little about how their refusal to import British goods, their participation in patriot organizations and nascent independent government bodies, and their military service impacted the transatlantic passenger trade to Central Europe. German merchants in Philadelphia focused their actions in the 1770s and 1780s on moving much of British North America towards independence. The War of American Independence, and its globalization by the entry of Great Britain's European rivals, effectively shut down shipping between Central Europe and British North America. In the first years of the newly formed republic, the focus of the transatlantic passenger trade shifted

more towards Ireland. It would be only after the end of the Napoleonic Wars that the passenger trade for Germans to America would re-emerge in fits and starts, and under a largely altered framework.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The transatlantic passenger trade between British North America and Central Europe was critical to the migration of tens of thousands of German immigrants over the first three quarters of the eighteenth century. From this larger migration, a small number of men established themselves in Philadelphia midcentury as merchants trading around the Atlantic Basin. Their rise from being artisans and small retailers was due in part to their earlier socio-economic standing in their homelands, the city's rapid economic growth, and the formation of a naturalization process by British colonial governments and Parliament. Despite their personal connections with Central Europe and knowledge of German, few of these newly established merchants entered the transatlantic passenger trade. Instead their oceanic trade focused around ports where other British colonial merchants also commonly ventured: London, Bristol, Liverpool, Lisbon, Tenerife, and Bridgetown.

Yet, Philadelphia's German merchant community did shape the transatlantic passenger trade in critical ways both directly and indirectly. German merchants were founders and early leaders of the German Society of Pennsylvania, and they spearheaded the campaign to introduce further reforms to the trade to protect passengers' lives and property. Their efforts led to the passage of an act in 1765 that placed new responsibilities on merchants and ship captains to provide adequate provisions, sanitation, and medical care aboard their passenger vessels as well as protect passengers' luggage and their rights in making contracts for their indenture. German merchants' growing resistance to new British imperial policies and legislation after 1763 and subsequent support for the colonies' independence, helped trigger a war that began a series of major disruptions in the transatlantic passenger trade with Central Europe that lasted almost thirty years. Through these merchants' actions we can see the impact Germans had on the British Empire's development as well as the eighteenth-century world. Eighteenth-century Germans were neither isolated from, nor passive in contemporary global political and economic transformations. They were active participants in the thickening web of global trade, the expansion of European empires, and the sparking of political revolutions.⁶⁶

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Notes

¹ Thus, the German merchant community I define includes only a few Quaker merchants and no Jewish merchants, even when the merchants themselves or their ancestors came from German states.

² Dieter Pesch, ed., *Brave New World Rhinelanders Conquer America: The Journal of Johannes Herbergs* (Nümbrecht: Martina Galunder-Verlag, 2001), 12-13; Ingrid Schöberl, 'Daniel Pastorius and the Foundation of Germantown,' trans. Robert W. Culverhouse, in Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *American and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 17; Marianne Woceck, "German Immigration to Colonial America: Prototype of a Transatlantic Mass Migration," in *ibid.*, 3-4.

³ Lucy Forney Bittinger, *The Germans in Colonial Times* (New York, Russell & Russell, 1968), 96-97; Richard K. MacMaster with Samuel L. Horst and Robert F. Ullé, *Conscience in Crisis: Mennonites and Other Peace Churches in America, 1739–1789 Interpretation and Documents* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 36.

⁴ Walter Allen Knittle, *Early Eighteenth Century Palatine Emigration: A British Government Redemptioner Project to Manufacture Naval Stores* (Philadelphia, Dorrance & Company, 1937); William O'Reilly, 'Working for the Crown: German Migrants and Britain's Commercial Success in the Early Eighteenth-Century American Colonies,' *Journal of Modern European History* 15.1 (2017): 136-38, 141, 144; Philip Otterness, *Becoming German: The 1709 Palatine Migration to New York* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁵ Georg Fertig, 'Transatlantic Migration from the German-Speaking Parts of Central Europe, 1600-1800: Proportions, Structures, and Explanations' in *Europeans on the Move: Studies on European Migration, 1500–1800* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994), 211; Klaus Wust, *The Virginia Germans* (Charlottesville, The University of Virginia Press, 1969), 20-25.

⁶ Marianne S. Woceck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (University Park, PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999): xxi, 69, 75.

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