

Randall P. Donaldson

## Genealogy versus History: Generating Synergy

Anyone studying the history and culture of the German element in North America or, indeed, any branch of immigration studies has likely experienced the phenomenon. A researcher walks into the library of a local historical society or a state archive and finds him- or herself working alongside a genealogist. In fact, the historical researcher may well have reason to envy the genealogist. While the historian seeks a pattern in the life stories of a thousand, often nameless, individuals, the genealogist pursues the minute details of the life of a single individual. Generally, the genealogist has the name of an ancestor to work from. He or she is intimately familiar with census records, ship lists, city directories, and the papers and diaries of this or that family, religious congregation, or organization. Yet, one could argue that the genealogist approaches the task of assembling historical data with a distinct bias. The focus on a single individual or family necessarily narrows the researcher's perspective on the material.

There is a certain natural tension between history and genealogy. That tension is often heightened when one is dealing with the history of a specific immigrant group. Perhaps more than in many other intellectual endeavors, the need to generalize is at odds with the need to discern the highly individualized influences behind the decision to relocate. Scholars who seek to understand the forces which drive immigration must of course try to identify trends and commonalities amidst a variety of competing factors. Most will attempt to reduce myriad individual motives and decisions and hundreds of contributing influences to a single narrative.

The resultant narrative can vary widely in emphasis, however. In the field of German-American studies there are examples as different as Rudolf Cronau's *Drei Jahrhunderte deutschen Lebens in Amerika*<sup>1</sup> or his *German achievements in America*<sup>2</sup> on the one hand and Robert Frizzell's *Independent Immigrants*<sup>3</sup> or Kathleen Conzen's *Germans in Minnesota*<sup>4</sup> on the other.

Cronau celebrates the degree to which the traditions and values ostensibly

inculcated in certain individuals from birth influence their accomplishments in their adopted homeland. He seems to have extrapolated the genealogist's interest in the history of a single family to an examination of all those of German heritage taken as a group, attributing to all those of German heritage a certain "family resemblance."

Conzen and Frizzell use records of the everyday experience of German-speaking immigrants as a framework within which to better understand the settlement of the American heartland. Both document the lives of individual immigrants. In fact, Frizzell is investigating the migration of a disproportionately large number of inhabitants from a single tiny village in the area of Hannover to a very circumscribed area of northwestern Missouri. Yet the focus is finally on the historical forces which play themselves out in the immigrant experience of certain individuals from German-speaking lands.

The present discussion seeks a middle ground between a narrow family chronicle and a broader study of German-speaking immigrants to North America. The focus here is on three different individuals, unrelated to one another, who are connected only by the fact that they left a German-speaking area of Europe and emigrated to a relatively similar geographical area. They enter the United States or the American colonies, as the case may be, in three different centuries and follow very different paths as they settle in. None might be considered a man of extraordinary achievement, although each made his mark within his limited sphere of influence. Each, of course, had a family as well. In fact, in all three cases a descendent supplied the basic biographical facts which provide the framework for the larger narrative.

There are differences among the stories, but each details the forces at play on both sides of the Atlantic in motivating an individual to emigrate and in shaping his experience in the New World. The goal is to allow the lives of three individuals to illuminate the narrow historical and geographical circumstances of the period in which they lived and to let those circumstances in turn deepen our understanding of the life of each of the three German immigrants. In his recent article with the tantalizing title, "Elvis and Other Germans,"<sup>5</sup> Walter Kamphoefner urges scholars in *German-American Studies* to provide as much context as possible for each observation or assertion made. It is in that spirit that the three vignettes which follow here are offered.

The story to be told here then is of three immigrants from German-speaking territories in Europe who ultimately settled in the colony established by Cecil Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore, on the shore of the Chesapeake Bay or its successor American state, Maryland, which honors Queen Henrietta Maria, the wife of England's King Charles I, by taking her name. The first, Moritz Wörschler, left the Palatinate in 1752 and arrived in Baltimore around 1758, having spent his first years in southern Pennsylvania. Vincent Potthast

sailed from Bremerhaven directly to Baltimore in 1891, and Kurt Möller was born in Pomerania in present-day Poland and arrived in Annapolis in 1948.

**Moritz Wörschler (1719–ca. 1795)<sup>6</sup>**

Moritz Wörschler was born on 4 December 1719 in Herxheim am Berg in the Palatinate.<sup>7</sup> Moritz was the sixth of the ten children of the shoemaker Johannes Wörschler and his wife Anna Catharina, née Lutz. Moritz married Anna Elisabeth Stuffus in Trippstadt, his bride's hometown, on 31 October 1741. By the time of his marriage he had established himself as a school teacher in nearby Stelzenberg, where the couple subsequently lived and worshiped.<sup>8</sup> On 27 May 1749, after almost precisely eight years and eight months of marriage, Elisabeth gave birth to a baby boy, Johann Friedrich. The child died just short of ten months later on 21 March 1750, and there is no evidence that the couple ever had any more children. Given both the number of years it seems to have required Elisabeth to conceive the first time and the general tendency toward numerous children at the time, it seems likely that Moritz and Elisabeth had no other children even after they settled in America.

Moritz and Elisabeth must have remained in Stelzenberg until at least early 1751 as Moritz is listed as a sponsor at the baptism of Anna Elisabetha, daughter of Johann Nickel Lüttig and his wife Maria Magdalena on 9 November 1750. After that, there is no record of either Moritz or Elisabeth in church records, although Moritz is listed as a baptismal sponsor in a couple of earlier instances. Presumably the two of them emigrated to America in the late spring or summer of 1751.<sup>9</sup> Information is sketchy, but it is very likely that Moritz and his wife traveled a route similar to that taken by many from the Palatinate, including two of Moritz's brothers and one of his sisters. That voyage would have taken Elisabeth and Moritz down the Rhine to Rotterdam and from there to Philadelphia with likely a stop in Portsmouth, England.

Although there is no documentary evidence of the Wörschlers in the colonies until 1758 when Moritz and Elisabeth served once again as baptismal sponsors,<sup>10</sup> it is likely that the two settled almost immediately upon arrival in what is now Adams County, Pennsylvania, in the area known as Bermuda Springs between Gettysburg and Carlisle. Moritz's older brother, Johannes, had been in the area since 1741.<sup>11</sup> His sister, Anna, and her husband arrived in the area in fall 1752,<sup>12</sup> and the youngest brother, Heinrich, and his wife and daughter left Trippstadt for south-central Pennsylvania around 1753.<sup>13</sup> Moritz and Elisabeth likely moved to Baltimore in late 1758 or early 1759. By 1760, Wörschler is definitely living in Baltimore,<sup>14</sup> where he leads an active and somewhat colorful life for at least twenty years.

As Moritz becomes active in Baltimore, the family history of the

Wörschlers in America intersects in a significant way with the growth and development of what would become Maryland's major city. It is worth noting here that the history of German settlement in Maryland differs markedly from that of other states along the eastern seaboard. Although there were early settlements of individuals from German-speaking territories in the tide-water area around the present border with Delaware, Germans settled primarily in the western section of the colony initially, in many cases entering from Pennsylvania many miles inland.

Sherry Olson estimates that by the middle of the eighteenth century Baltimore was "a mere village of twenty-five houses."<sup>15</sup> When Moritz arrived almost a decade later it would not have been much larger, although growth accelerated during the 1760s. The town of Baltimore was originally laid out in 1730 in sixty lots of approximately one acre each rising from the riverbank in the south to high bluffs in the north and to the marshes adjacent to the Jones Falls in the east. On the eve of the Revolutionary War there were almost six hundred houses built on approximately two-hundred acres.<sup>16</sup>

Maurice Wersler, as Moritz was often listed on legal documents, seems to have quickly become an active member of the community. His name appears frequently as a witness in real estate transactions, of which there were many in the burgeoning town. When his occupation is mentioned, it is as a school teacher, which seems logical in view of the fact that he had held a similar position in Stelzenberg. Documents in the archives of Zion Lutheran Church in the City of Baltimore attest to the fact that Moritz was, indeed, the first schoolmaster at Zion, a significant fact in itself, made even more notable by the fact that Moritz's tenure preceded the well-known Scheib School by seventy-five years.<sup>17</sup>

But Moritz was much more than schoolmaster to the congregation. Following a practice replicated in other Lutheran and Reformed churches in the seventeenth and in the eighteenth century, schoolmaster Wörschler served as chief clerk and administrator in the early years when the number of congregants was small and good advice and assistance at a premium.<sup>18</sup> He was deputized in a number of instances to speak for the young, struggling congregation, the first and, for many years, the only German Lutheran congregation in Baltimore. He also participated financially in the purchase of a package of land parcels bounded by Holliday, Saratoga, Gay, and Lexington Streets on which the present church building sits and on which the first wood frame church was built. Indeed, Moritz's ability to support the purchase of the church property as well as a number of additional land purchases seem to indicate a source of income beyond that of schoolmaster.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Moritz was a signatory on both the first and the second Zion constitutions (1769 and 1773 respectively) and served with the first group of elders.

Moritz was also an outspoken opponent of what he considered the anglicization of Zion. Although the question of whether or not to conduct services exclusively in German with appropriate liturgical texts was one which lasted well into the nineteenth century,<sup>20</sup> the issue was at the heart of discussions concerning the survival of the struggling congregation. Although Moritz's point of view had its adherents, it had powerful opponents, particularly in the person of Dr. Charles Frederick Wiesenthal, a well-known Maryland physician and stalwart supporter of Zion. As Klaus Wust expresses it:

The conflict was of a fundamental nature. On the one hand stood Moritz Wörschler, the eager, stubborn teacher of the old school, who had devoted his life to the language of the fathers, to whom German was everything. . . . On the other hand stood Charles F. Wiesenthal, the enlightened, well-educated physician who looked forward and was well aware that, unless something unforeseeable should happen, the days that the church would remain purely German could be counted.<sup>21</sup>

Wiesenthal not only prevailed, but his insistence on the use of English in church dealings as well as his inclination not to define the congregation in strong confessional terms likely guaranteed the survival of the young congregation, which was always in competition with a much more robust Reformed Church in those early days.

Although Moritz Wörschler was instrumental in the organization of the congregation at Zion and despite the fact that his open feud with Wiesenthal was ostensibly settled amicably, Moritz fades from the historical record of Baltimore and Zion around 1780. The meticulous record of income and expenses established by the first resident pastor, Kirchner, shows frequent small reimbursements to Moritz, presumably for purchases made on behalf of the congregation. That activity ends relatively abruptly in April 1776. Of course, the Revolutionary War may well have caused certain disruptions in the general course of life, but in any event, by 1780 the ledger documents payments of £300 annually, a modest but seemingly just amount, to a "Henry Simon, schoolmaster." Moritz himself was definitely still living in 1790 as an inventory of the estate of his older brother Jonathan in Pennsylvania lists interest due on a bond from "Morice Wershler."<sup>22</sup> However there is no direct evidence of an economic or professional life. Although Wiesenthal was buried from Zion upon his death in 1789, Wörschler's name does not appear in the burial register. It would seem that by 1780 Moritz had moved on, perhaps returning to Pennsylvania where one of his two brothers and his sister were living.

**Vincent Potthast (1866–1911)**<sup>23</sup>

According to family legend, in June 1891 twenty-five-year-old Vincent Potthast, the second-oldest of four brothers, was attending a party in the family village of Borgholz in eastern Westphalia not far from the Weser River when the festivities got a bit out of hand. Vincent found himself in a fight and knocked his opponent down. When his adversary failed to get up again immediately, Vincent assumed that he had accidentally killed the man. He fled the scene immediately, traveling the three-hundred kilometers up the Weser to Bremerhaven, where he boarded the first available ship, the SS *München* of the North German Lloyd Line, which happened to be sailing for Baltimore.

It should be said that Vincent did not, in fact, kill his adversary. His opponent had merely been knocked out. The man said that he bore Vincent no ill will, and a messenger was dispatched to Bremerhaven to convince Vincent to return to Borgholz. However, by the time the messenger arrived in Bremerhaven, Vincent's ship had already departed.

Vincent arrived in Baltimore on 2 July 1891<sup>24</sup> and immediately found employment at the Knabe Piano Factory as a cabinet maker. Encouraged by the relative ease with which he found employment, Vincent wrote to his brothers in Germany and urged them to come to Baltimore, where he was certain they would find good jobs. The prospects for financial security seemed much rosier in Baltimore than on the other side of the Atlantic. Vincent's three brothers heeded his words and ultimately joined him in Baltimore, although it was almost a decade before all four were reunited. William arrived in June 1892, John in November 1894 (on his twenty-fourth birthday), and Theodore came finally in August 1900.

The Potthasts were all cabinet-makers in Europe, and the four brothers decided to save their money and start their own furniture company in Baltimore. For a time they made furniture in the basement of their homes, but eventually they went into business making new furniture and repairing antiques. The firm, which became known as Potthast Bros., Inc., was officially founded in 1892, after William arrived in Baltimore. It flourished for eighty-two years, becoming a Baltimore institution known well beyond the borders of Maryland. Numerous Potthast pieces are now treasured antiques; many are still in use. In fact, the mahogany desk in the private office of the Governor in the Maryland State House was made by Potthast. The firm also made a desk for Governor Theodore McKeldin (1900–74)<sup>25</sup> from a large branch which fell from the Wye Oak, then the state tree. McKeldin took the desk when he left the governorship and went back to City Hall as mayor of Baltimore for the second time.

But this story is about Vincent. Vincent married Lena, also an immi-

grant, in 1892. They settled at 124 W. Saratoga, near Park Avenue and St. Alphonsus Church. Between 1894 and 1909, they had seven children at approximately two-year intervals, three sons and four daughters. None of Vincent's sons appears to have joined the family firm, perhaps because Vincent himself died in 1911, when the boys were relatively young.

All the other males in the second generation—six in all—were, however, involved in the business. Together they brought the company successfully through good times and bad, from the prosperity of the early twentieth century to the anti-German hysteria of the First World War, the Great Depression, yet another world war, and the post-war period. When Theodore, John's son, retired in 1975, the company closed. Its factory in the 1300 block of Wicomico Street, as well as its retail store at 924 N. Charles Street, was sold. The Charles Street store became the Brass Elephant restaurant, which became known not only for its food but also for its beautifully carved wood paneling which for decades had served as the showcase for the handcrafted mahogany furniture of the Potthast Bros. The restaurant itself closed in August 2009.

#### **Kurt Möller (1896–1980)<sup>26</sup>**

Kurt Gustav Friedrich Möller was born in Stettin (now Szczecin, Poland), then the provincial capital of Prussian Pomerania, on 27 February 1896. He was the second child, and only son, of senior government clerk<sup>27</sup> Julius Möller and his wife Amalie, née Schmelzeisen. When Kurt was two years old, the family moved to Berlin, where he attended the humanistic *Gymnasium* in Friedenau, the then-fashionable and growing section of south-central Berlin. He received his *Abiturium* in February 1914.

By April of that year, Kurt Möller had enrolled at the University of Berlin, known universally today as the Humboldt University, where he studied physics with a number of professors who would later gain world renown, including Max Planck. Möller remained at the Humboldt until October 1919, when he apparently finished his studies. He received his highest academic degree, a doctorate in science (*Dr. Rer. Nat.*), many years later at the end of 1938.

In reviewing his employment history years later, Möller lists his first job as “Chief of Laboratory for Telecommunications” for the Bureau of Ordnance of the German Army (*Heereswaffenamt*), a position he held until 1933, when he was appointed Professor for Telecommunications at the Technical University in Berlin.<sup>28</sup> He must have felt that the position was secure despite the financial and political turmoil of the time because in 1921 he married Johanna Koschorek, ending a seven-year courtship which had spanned World War I. One year later, their only son, Gerhard, was born, followed in 1928

by a daughter, Ilse.

In 1939, Möller was appointed acting Vice-President and Department Director of the German Bureau of Standards. For all practical purposes he functioned as the director of the Bureau, but he could not hold the position officially because he was not a member of the NSDAP, the Nazi Party. In fact, he continued to hold his university position and was paid through the university.

In 1943, after American saturation bombing of Berlin had begun, Dr. Möller relocated part of the Bureau to an empty shoe factory in Weida, a small town in Thuringia near Gera. Meanwhile, his wife remained in their apartment in Berlin, and daughter Ilse stayed with friends in what is now Poland because the schools in Berlin had been closed. Gerhard had been killed in September 1941, at the age of nineteen, in the Battle of Leningrad. In November 1943, the Möllers' apartment house in Berlin was bombed out, and Mrs. Möller joined her husband in Weida. Daughter Ilse was reunited with her parents in Weida as well.

In April 1945, allied forces moved into Weida, and all local men were required to register. As a trained scientist with an important post in the Bureau of Standards as well as a university position, Dr. Möller was considered both a valuable asset and a political question mark by the Americans. Indeed, as the war in Europe came to an end in the late spring and early summer of 1945, the personal and professional life of Kurt Möller, the after effects of World War II, the history of the state of Maryland, and the politics of an inchoate cold war converged. Kurt Möller came under scrutiny by those charged with recruiting German scientists to work in the United States.

As Linda Hunt tells the story, ". . . as American troops coped with the chaos and ruin of what once had been Hitler's Third Reich, the scientific teams held thousands of German scientists captive in detention camps across Germany."<sup>29</sup> The goal was to "exploit"<sup>30</sup> the expertise and technical knowledge of German and Austrian scientists for the good of the war effort. Men like Air Force Colonel Donald Putt believed that the "Germans were years ahead . . . in aircraft design."<sup>31</sup> Initially many hoped that German expertise could be used to develop techniques and equipment to shorten the war in the Pacific, but the focus quickly changed. Almost from the beginning, great effort was expended to recruit German scientific talent and import it to the United States before the Russians could do the same on their own behalf.

In 1945, the Joint Intelligence Committee, the intelligence arm of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, responsible for advising the Joint Chiefs on the intelligence problems and policies and furnishing intelligence information, established a subcommittee known as the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency. That subcommittee was given direct responsibility for operating the foreign

scientist program, initially code-named Overcast and subsequently code-named Paperclip. Among the Agency's duties were administering the program's policies and procedures, compiling dossiers, and serving as liaison to British intelligence officers operating a similar project. It was also responsible for collecting, declassifying, and distributing technical intelligence reports on German science and industry.

Operation Paperclip in particular has entered the public consciousness because of controversy surrounding the National Socialist sympathies of certain celebrated German scientists, especially those involved in the American space program. Despite a determination to forbid enemies of the United States, including those who fought for or sympathized with Hitler's Germany, entrance into the country, there was considerable debate in military, government, and intelligence circles about the relative value of scientific information and political sentiments. Amidst and despite considerable controversy, over 1,500 German and other foreign scientists, technicians, and engineers, including Kurt Möller, were brought to the United States under Project Paperclip and similar programs.

Initially Dr. Möller resisted efforts to entice him to work with and for the occupation forces. Ultimately, however, the Americans made Möller an offer which he accepted rather than sacrifice the safety of his wife and daughter by having to leave them while he sought work elsewhere. Thus began a journey of almost five years which led from a small village in Thuringia to a home in Maryland.

Almost immediately the whole family was loaded onto an open three-ton truck with a few possessions and driven through Germany to a destination unknown even to the soldier-drivers, who received directions from checkpoint to checkpoint. Ultimately, the truck arrived at a former police academy in Heidenheim an der Brenz in Württemberg. By daylight it became evident that the place was filling up with German scientists of all stripes. The Möller family was assigned a barracks room with four bunk beds, one of which was occupied by a cancer researcher, a total stranger who had arrived alone literally sitting on his desk chair!

Gradually, all the scientists were interviewed individually by U.S. Army officers. Ilse Möller and one other young woman served as volunteer interpreters because many of the scientists had no background in English despite their training in Greek, Latin, and French. Dr. Möller was confined with several other scientists in a building guarded by American soldiers. No reason was given for Dr. Möller's incarceration, but it became clear that the Americans believed he could not have held the position he occupied without having been a member of the Nazi Party. Finally, after seventeen months of confinement, Möller was released because his assertion that he was not a member of

the party had been confirmed "in Berlin."<sup>32</sup>

As a certified non-Nazi, Dr. Möller was a highly desirable commodity. Eventually it became clear that "the Americans" wanted him to come to America. With that bit of insight, Dr. Möller began accepting job interviews with the occupation forces which he had previously declined. On 10 February 1947, Möller signed a contract with the U.S. Navy. Once Möller was under contract, the Military Government allowed him to accept a job as Technical Deputy Director for the Department of Weights and Measures in the province of Württemberg with a guaranteed annual salary of 23,000 *Reichsmark* for a minimum of six months. However, Möller was almost immediately put on a temporary leave of absence without pay while plans to bring him to the United States were put into place. As Möller understood the situation, he was to spend up to a year in the United States under the supervision of the U.S. Navy looking for a suitable position. At the end of the term he could decide to return to Germany or to stay in the States and have his wife and daughter join him there. However, the documents in his Operation Paperclip dossier present a somewhat more complex scenario.

"German Specialist, Dr. Kurt Moeller"<sup>33</sup> arrived in New York on 24 June 1947 aboard the *Edmund B. Alexander*.<sup>34</sup> Immediately upon arrival he was sent to the Naval Research Facility at Sands Point on Long Island for rest and recuperation while the Navy sought a position for him. The building itself, known as Hempstead House, was once the home of Daniel Guggenheim and is currently part of Sands Point Preserve in the hamlet of Fort Washington on the north shore of Long Island. From 1946 to 1967, however, the estate was leased to or owned by the U.S. Navy which used the property for the design and testing of electronic systems.

On 14 October 1947, specialist Moeller was released by the navy, and his services were offered to other interested military agencies. Those in charge of "Civil Exploitation of German Scientists" at the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency began shopping Moeller for civil employment as well. At the same time, Moeller was relocated to the U.S. Naval Barracks "K" in Arlington, Virginia, outside Washington D.C., from where naval personnel accompanied him to a number of locations in search of a job.

It would appear that a number of processes were underway simultaneously. The record indicates that both the Department of Commerce and the Carnegie Institute of Technology were unable to find a suitable position for Dr. Moeller. Daughter Ilse recalls that her father was escorted to several Navy research facilities to experience the range of possible postings, but there is no archival evidence of such trips.

In early 1948, Moeller moved again, this time to Annapolis, Maryland, where he had accepted a job as a consultant at the Naval Engineering Experi-

ment Station (EES) across the Severn River from the U.S. Naval Academy, bringing the job search to an end. Just before his wife and daughter arrived in June, he found housing for the three of them in nearby Arnold. He was reunited with his family on 5 June 1948, when his wife and daughter arrived in the United States. A little more than a year later, on the first of July 1949, Kurt Moeller signed a personal services contract as a civilian with the EES. For his services he was paid twenty-five dollars a day, or approximately \$6,500 a year.

Once Dr. Möller left for America, Mrs. Möller and Ilse were moved from Heidenheim to Landshut an der Isar in Bavaria, where they lived in a dependents' village under the auspices of the U.S. Military Government. Once Dr. Möller could provide for his family and had a place to live, arrangements were made for his wife and daughter to come to the States as well. The ocean transit from Bremerhaven to New York City took fourteen days in a small Army transport ship with ninety women and children in one big dormitory in the bow of the ship. On arrival in New York, the passengers were transported to the Brooklyn Navy Yard in busses with locked doors and armed guards stationed at the doors. Dr. Möller, escorted by a Navy officer, came to pick up his wife and daughter for the trip to Maryland by train. Not quite a year from the time that Kurt Möller arrived in America, he and his family began a new life in Maryland.

Moeller was fifty-one years old when he started to work at the EES as an "enemy alien." At first, when he wrote a scientific paper, it would be stamped "SECRET" and he would never be able to see it again! Eventually, he became a U.S. citizen, complete with secret and top-secret clearance. He received over twenty patents and numerous awards for his work and achieved the position of Associate Director for Research at the institute, which underwent multiple name-changes during his tenure. When he reached retirement age at sixty-five, the Navy asked him to stay on. This became an annual ritual until his seventy-second birthday, the mandatory retirement age. He continued to serve as a consultant for several more years until his health forced him to finally retire. Kurt G. F. Möller died on 17 February 1980, ten days before his eighty-fourth birthday; his wife died a year later, on 25 May 1981.

## **Conclusion**

Definitions of "synergy" vary modestly among themselves although all emphasize a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. The most appropriate and appealing phrasing for the current discussion, however, appears in Merriam Webster on-line: "A mutually advantageous compatibility . . . of resources or efforts."<sup>35</sup> Each of the three original informants had a vested

interest in the life story of his or her relative, whether father, great uncle, or distant cousin. Yet each had a somewhat restricted perspective on the details.

At the one extreme, Leo Wastler was frustrated by the lack of specifics on his relative who lived almost three centuries ago. At the other extreme, Ilse Moeller Harrop experienced the events which eventually led to her family's emigration herself although she could not have known the specifics of the plans to exploit German scientists and technicians nor have anticipated the controversy which would ultimately surround some of the more well-known recruits to Operation Paperclip. Ted Potthast finds himself between the two extremes. He grew up in a family of successful furniture makers and was there at the end to attend to the legal details of dissolving the company for his father, but he was born after Vincent's death and knows the story of the arrival of his grandfather and his great uncles secondhand at best.

Yet, when one brings the biographies of three unrelated immigrants to Maryland together in the context of German immigration to the mid-Atlantic region, both the genealogist and the historian benefit. The family of each of the subjects gains factual information as well as perspective. The historian, too, gains new perspective on known facts. Although Dieter Cunz makes it clear in *The Maryland Germans*, his definitive history of the German element in Maryland, that in the early years Germans settled in the western part of the territory, Moritz Wörschler's story illustrates the degree to which Baltimore was a small, relatively insignificant and overwhelmingly English village in the eighteenth century. The story of Vincent Potthast and Potthast Bros. furniture highlights a remarkable immigrant success story. Despite two world wars and a worldwide depression, four brothers from Westphalia were able to build and maintain a business founded on their skill as craftsmen and their pride in a solid product. Finally, Kurt Moeller is an example of a scientist who was brought to the United States under Operation Paperclip through a process which seems thorough yet rational, even if it was somewhat opaque to Moeller and his family.

Of course, each person's story deserves further scrutiny. The current discussion can only be a beginning, laying the groundwork for more work, both broadly across time and deeply into the historical moment. It is always difficult to discern the issues and thoughts which motivate a person or a group to leave the relative comfort and security of home, no matter how meager, and to take up a new life in a foreign country. Genealogists looking at a family tree many years later will be inclined to applaud the bravery and accomplishments of an ancestor, perhaps attributing success to strong character traits in the family lineage or, more broadly, to certain ethnic characteristics. The scholar presumes him- or herself to be more objective, generating the tension alluded to in the title and early paragraphs of this essay. Yet the academic researcher

likely approaches a topic with a certain theoretical bias which affects both the evaluation and the weighting of the documentary evidence. Combining the genealogist's biographical data with the historian's broader perspective generates a synergy which can resolve any tension between the two approaches. To paraphrase Walter Kamphoefner, the more context one can provide, the better and more reliable the result.<sup>36</sup>

Loyola University Maryland  
Baltimore, Maryland

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Cronau, *Drei Jahrhunderte deutschen Lebens in Amerika: Eine Geschichte der Deutschen in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1909).

<sup>2</sup>Rudolf Cronau, *German achievements in America: a tribute to the memory of the men and women who worked, fought and died for the welfare this country, and a recognition of the living who with equal enterprise, genius and patriotism helped in the making of our United States* (New York: R. Cronau, ca. 1916).

<sup>3</sup>Robert W. Frizzell, *Independent Immigrants: A Settlement of Hanoverian Germans in Western Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Germans in Minnesota* (St. Paul : Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup>Walter D. Kamphoefner, "Elvis and Other Germans: Some Reflections and Modest Proposals on the Study of German-American Ethnicity," in *Paths Crossing: Essays in German-American Studies*, Cora Lee Kluge, ed. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 33–53.

<sup>6</sup>My thanks to Leo Wastler of Lititz, Pennsylvania, for sharing the results of decades-long research into his Palatine ancestors.

<sup>7</sup>In every instance specific dates in the biography of Moritz and his immediate family are supported by appropriate contemporary documentation, for the most part church records and the Stelzenberg [evangelisches] Kirchenbuch in particular.

<sup>8</sup>Erhard Brenk, *Die Geschichte von Stelzenberg* (Stelzenberg: Gemeinde Stelzenberg, 1994), 31.

<sup>9</sup>Although there is no definitive record of Moritz and Elisabeth in America until 1758, we know that Moritz' sister Anna Magdalena (born 1717) did emigrate to America in September 1752. Moreover, younger brother Johann Heinrich, known as Heinrich (b. 1729), also left in 1752. Moritz and Elizabeth did not travel with his sister and brother-in-law. So unless they traveled with Heinrich and his wife, it is likely that they left Stelzenberg for Pennsylvania sometime in 1751.

<sup>10</sup>The private pastoral record of the Reverend Jacob Lischy, minister of the German Reformed Church, lists "Moritz Würstler/Anna Elisabeth" as witnesses for the baptism of Johann Philliph [sic] Bechtel under the heading "den 18. Juni 1758." Lischy served over ten congregations in York County, Pennsylvania, some of them of "union" (i.e., Lutheran and Reformed combined) churches, so it is impossible to determine the exact church in which the baptism took place.

<sup>11</sup>List 82A in Ralph Beaver Strassburger and William John Hinke, *Pennsylvania German Pioneers: A Publication of the Original Lists of Arrivals in the Port of Philadelphia From 1727 to*

1808, Volume I: 1727–1775 (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1966), 295, lists Johannes Worschler, age 30, as among those arriving on the ship Marlborough and taking the oath of allegiance on 23 September 1741.

<sup>12</sup> Johann Nicolaus Deischer, his wife Anna Magdalena (née Wörschler) arrived in Philadelphia from Rotterdam on 27 September 1752, on the Anderson, having made an intermediate stop in Portsmouth.

<sup>13</sup> Heinrich's first child, Anna Barbara, was born 8 February 1752 in Stelzenberg. The second child, a son named Jacob, was born in York County, Pennsylvania, in 1754.

<sup>14</sup> Mauritius Werschler served as a Grand Juror in Baltimore County in spring 1760 [Provincial Court: (Judgment Record) BT 5, pp. 509–510, April Term 1760 (Md HR 792-2, 1-17-2-5)]

<sup>15</sup> Sherry H. Olson, *Baltimore, the Building of an American City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Olson, 10, states that there are 564 buildings by 1774.

<sup>17</sup> See Klaus G. Wust, *Zion in Baltimore 1755–1955: The Bicentennial History of the Earliest German-American Church in Baltimore, Maryland* (Baltimore: Zion Church of the City of Baltimore, 1955), 76–78, for a further discussion of the transformation of the parish school under Pastor Scheib. As Wust writes (77), “[t]wenty classrooms, a faculty of sixteen carefully selected teachers, a library and study rooms served the needs of its many pupils from all over the city. The essence of this successful institution of learning, however, was Pastor Scheib’s own pedagogical genius. His philosophy of education was far advanced over most of the contemporary concepts of teaching.”

<sup>18</sup> Dieter Cunz, *The Maryland Germans: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), 117: “When there was no preacher available, the schoolmaster assumed the spiritual leadership of the community. Furthermore, in his capacity as a sort of town clerk, he performed all necessary clerical tasks, and in general was the man to whom recourse was had when counsel was needed.”

Klaus Wust has noted the same tendencies in the career of Thomas Schley in Frederick [Klaus G. Wust, “Johann Thomas Schley (1712–1790): Schoolmaster, Musician, and Fraktur Artist of Frederick, Maryland,” *The Report: A Journal of German-American History* 42 (1993): 81–89].

<sup>19</sup> Moritz participates in two real estate transactions relevant to the purchase of property for the church in 1771. His total financial burden was £56.50. Moritz was involved in a number of other real estate transactions that year which have no apparent connection to the congregation at Zion. Most significant for what it seems to indicate about Moritz’ financial situation is a sale of property by “Morice & Elisabeth Wersler” on 21 November 1771 which netted the couple £217 [c.f. Baltimore County Deed Records, Liber A.L. No. D. 1771–1772 as reflected in: John Davis, compiler, *Baltimore County, Maryland. Deed Records* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1997), 149].

<sup>20</sup> The argument continued at Zion and elsewhere. See, in particular, Friederike Baer, *The Trial of Frederick Eberle: Language, Patriotism and Citizenship in Philadelphia’s German Community, 1790–1830* (New York: New York University Press, 2008). Baer uses legal conflict as a lens through which to explore the significance of language in the early American republic.

<sup>21</sup> Wust, *Zion in Baltimore*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Moritz’s older brother, Johannes, died in 1789, in Douglass Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, about twenty miles east of Reading. The inventory of his estate (7 May 1790) lists interest due on a bond from “Morice Werschler.”

<sup>23</sup> I am grateful to Theodore Potthast for supplying the details of the life of his great uncle as well as for verifying some of the details with family members who have done genealogical research on the Potthast brothers. The basic story has been augmented and verified with ship

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passenger lists and census records.

<sup>24</sup> Family memories, published ship lists, and the actual ship manifest are at odds on the exact date. The confusion is typical, if frequently disconcerting. The date cited here is taken from the photostat of the ship manifest in the National Archives. According to that document, Vincenz Potthas, a twenty-five-year-old German laborer, arrived in the United States on 21 July 1891 aboard the SS *München* from Bremen. Yet there is another date, 2 July 1891, on the document as well, and the photocopy is filed under the earlier date. Moreover, the manifest itself lists New York as the port of arrival, but is filed with other manifests for Baltimore. The *München* often traveled to Baltimore by way of New York. So a number of explanations are possible, the most likely being that someone in Bremen simply grabbed the wrong sheet initially and never bothered to correct the error. My thanks to the reviewer who caught the discrepancy and brought it to my attention.

<sup>25</sup> McKeldin was Governor of Maryland from 1951–59 and twice Mayor of Baltimore, from 1943–47 and from 1963–67.

<sup>26</sup> My thanks to Moeller's daughter, Ilse Moeller Harrop, who supplied the initial narrative of her father's life. Biographical details and the actual chronology of events as the Möller (Moeller in the United States) family emigrated to the United States has been reconstructed from the approximately seventy-five separate documents in Kurt Moeller's file created as a part of the process of bringing him and his dependents to America under Operation Paperclip [Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of Research and Engineering, Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency, RG 330 Foreign Scientist Case Files 1945–58, Box 113, File: Kurt Moeller, Adelphi, MD, United States National Archives and Records Administration].

<sup>27</sup> *Rechnungsrat*.

<sup>28</sup> Employment and educational information is excerpted from the extensive questionnaire Möller completed at the behest of the U.S. Military Government in occupied Germany. The original is a part of his Operation Paperclip file (see note 26 above).

<sup>29</sup> Linda Hunt, *Secret Agenda: The United States Government, Nazi Scientists, and Project Paperclip, 1945 to 1990* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 22. Hunt's book is a valuable resource for anyone seeking information on Operation Paperclip. As she says herself, the "book would not exist were it not for the Freedom of Information Act. . . . (ix). Hunt had to pursue legal action under the Act in order to obtain materials necessary to complete her work. At times, her tone in the book is unnecessarily inflammatory, but the documentation is thorough.

<sup>30</sup> "Exploitation" was always the word used.

<sup>31</sup> As quoted in Hunt, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Items 6, 7, and 8 of the Moeller's questionnaire (see notes 26 and 28 above), captioned "Report of Denazification Procedure," "NSDAP Record," and "Records of Other Nazi Organizations" respectively are relevant here. A search of the records held in Berlin by the occupation government revealed no file for Kurt Möller. He was also brought before the denazification court, convicted as a "follower" (*Mitläufer*), and fined 300 RM.

<sup>33</sup> The change in spelling is conscious. Of course, the family name was Möller, but Moeller was the orthography used by the occupation forces. It was the form of the name entered into the dossiers of Operation Paperclip and became the American identity of the family. See also note 26 above.

<sup>34</sup> The manifest for the voyage of the *Edmund B. Alexander* which brought Moeller to the United States is fascinating. Moeller himself is listed as a professor from Landshut, Germany. Twenty-seven others from Landshut are also listed, many with occupations like "engineer" or "physicist." Clearly, Moeller was one of a considerable number of German scientists and technicians being transported to the United States at the time.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/synergy?show=0&t=1290609131>, accessed November 25, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Kampfhoefer, "Elvis and Other Germans," 37: ". . . regardless of the source involved, the more context one can provide for it, the less likely one is to assert something stupid.