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The German-American Tricentennial: A Closer Look

Every time one lifts the lid to take a look at the past, one should be prepared to find something that one did not know was there. This is much more enjoyable and adventurous than assuming in advance that everything worth finding has already been found and that past accounts remain standard except possibly for some minor revisions and additions.

This year, when we celebrate the arrival of Francis Daniel Pastorius in Pennsylvania on August 20, 1683, and the arrival of the Crefeld settlers nearly seven weeks later, on October 6 (OS), we can be assured of hearing much repeated history, with some nice embroidery and variations on a set of familiar themes. And this can be quite pleasant, with much that is new for the young and much that is reassuring and rememorative for those who have heard it before.

If this is all that happens, then these celebrations will have satisfied one very human trait, complacency, at the expense of two other very human traits, curiosity and skepticism. It is restful to have the reassurance that what one has learned about the past remains standard and accepted knowledge, on which one need merely fill in the details. But some people are restless; they insist on rocking the boat, much to the indignation of those who want only a smooth voyage to a familiar port. They do not want to be taken off course to a strange landfall with all the disquietudes of the unknown and unpredictable.

Personally, it would be to my interest this year to carry on in the course traditionally laid down, for on my shoulders has fallen the task of editing the essential parts of the great unpublished manuscript of Francis Daniel Pastorius' *The Beehive,* and seeing to it that at least the verse and the autobiographical and historical parts of it be finally published in a responsible fashion. I shall pass over the vicissitudes that have intervened through the years to cause the loss of the bulk of the transcriptions made and to postpone publication again and again. *The Beehive,* of course, is far from being an unknown quantity. Since the

1880s, 1890s, and early 1900s there has been a succession of scholars who have examined the manuscript, excerpted it, published bits and pieces out of it, even made a start toward a more systematic publication of the whole of it, but then gave up in despairful resignation at the sheer size of it. It remains one of the largest unpublished manuscripts of colonial America and literarily one of the most important.

It would be incautious to claim more than this, because colonial American literature is still in the process of being discovered and the standard handbooks give little indication of what is really there. Even though in my *First Century of New England Verse* the newly found material far exceeded the already known, still more continued to come to light in the ensuing years, including one very large verse manuscript and several other substantial ones, so that a revised edition will have to be greatly expanded. Indeed it was my exploratory New England work that brought me the invitation to edit the Pastorius manuscript. The first step was the research that opened up startling new vistas on the beginnings of American-German relations, and with it incidentally the finding of a remarkable body of early verse that quite changed colonial literary perspectives. The resultant publications brought about election to the American Antiquarian Society and acquaintance with a wide circle of scholars in the early American field, among them the New England poet and scholar, Samuel Foster Damon, grandson of Washington Pastorius. He liked the bold new approaches of *The First Century* and its disregard of established canons that were contradicted by the facts and phenomena. He had contributed materially to it; he actively expanded my perspectives, and we had many a fruitful interchange before he invited me in the name of the Pastorius family to undertake publication of the essential parts of *The Beehive.*

The best earlier work had been done by Marion Dexter Learned, especially in *The Life of Francis Daniel Pastorius, the Founder of Germantown* (1908). Features about it may nowadays strike us as old fashioned and pedestrian; there are occasional lapses and lacks of perspective; his transcriptions from manuscript, though better than Seidensticker's, were not as reliable as they should be; but realistically speaking, we can only be fervently grateful that the task of writing this work fell into the hands of a solid, reliable, truly comprehensive (and comprehending) biographer whose lapses were relatively few and minor.

Till now everyone has been satisfied that Learned covered the biographical ground with thoroughness and reliability and that few matters of importance could be added. Actually there were several likely places where Learned and the others had failed to look and new materials have come to light. To be sure, the status of Pastorius is not likely to change radically through any further research. What is likely to change, however, are some of the larger perspectives. We have just been too downright and absolute in maintaining that the founding of Germantown was something truly new and that here were the beginnings of German settlement in what was to become the United States of America. To be sure, isolated earlier instances of German individuals coming to America have been known and recorded in the standard

accounts of the Germans in America. The point is, however, that what is known and what has been recorded about Germans in the colonies before 1683 and outside of Pennsylvania is only a modest part of what can be known. And at times it was not merely an isolated individual German, here and there, but more than that. How they came over and why, what they brought over from there and what left its impress over here, is sure to be of interest and may even turn out to be of importance. I do not want to review again the well-known incidents of prominent Northwest Germans who became leaders in the early Dutch and Swedish colonies. For these one can go to Faust, Cronau, and the other historians of the Germans in America.[1] Instead I should like to offer some fresh material that may help enlarge our perspectives and show how some of these Germans left a permanent, sometimes even decisive impact on the English-speaking populace among whom they settled and in some instances even upon the native Indian populace as well as on the colonists' perception of these natives. One still unwritten chapter about the Germans in America would be about those among them who maintained remarkably cordial mutual relations with the Indians. Some instances of this are well known, many are not, and the total picture, when it is completed, will be most impressive.

What concerns us at this point is the question: Was there actually an earlier *group* of Germans who came over together to settle in the British colonies or were the Crefelders truly the first? Such a claim can hardly be made for the German artisans who came to Jamestown at the time of the founding of Virginia Colony. They came without families, and the most we can gather from between the lines of Captain John Smith's hostile and unreliable narrative was that their relations with the Indians were all too friendly. In the New Netherlands and New Sweden the situation was different: There actually were German families among the colonists at an early date. And, as is well known, one man, Peter Minuit from Wesel on the Lower Rhine was successively governor of New Netherlands and New Sweden. And this brings us to a point that needs to be clarified, especially because it has been so often confused by American historians unacquainted with the linguistic and territorial situation of the Lower Rhine region in earlier centuries.

Quite a number of the Germans in America during the seventeenth century came from the Lower Rhine region: Wesel, Cleve, and other towns, including Crefeld. This means that their native language was *Plattdeutsch*, Low German, in a dialect that differed only slightly (hardly at all) from the language of the adjoining territory of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, only recently liberated from Spanish Hapsburg rule and formed into an independent republic. Even the Flemish provinces to the south, continuing under Hapsburg rule and largely Roman Catholic, did not lose cultural touch with the independent provinces in language and literature. Joost van den Vondel's parents were refugees from Antwerp to Cologne, where he was born and spent his childhood, though his great literary career was realized in Amsterdam. Anna Maria Schurmann, then almost as famous, and her family, were refugees from Cologne to Utrecht, and the Netherlands remained

her home except for the Altona interlude. Peter Paul Rubens was born in Siegen, Westphalia; nevertheless, he began as a Flemish artist and became a cosmopolitan artist. Hundreds of others, conspicuously groups of radical sectarians, commuted in both directions. Some of the Crefeld emigrants were of Dutch and Flemish descent, whereas prominent leaders and lesser persons in the early New Netherlands could be from Wesel, Cleve, and other German cities. Dutch/*Deutsch* was the common designation for people on either side of the border; although when High German more and more came to be the official written language of the Germans in the northwest (thus gradually dividing them more and more from their neighbors across the border), the designation "High Dutch" came to be used at times even for those Germans who continued to speak Low German. The situation in the region of Crefeld in the transition period is neatly formulated in a report of 1725: "Die ordentliche gemeine Sprache in Stadt und Fürstentum Mörs ist mehrenteils clevisch und holländisch, nach dem niederländischen Idioma, wie wohl sonsten in publicis scripturis und im Predigen nur die hochdeutsche Sprache im Gebrauch, wie insonderheit der Stylus curiae auch überall hochdeutsch ist."[2] Pastorius, although from the Main region of Germany, wrote verses in Low German or Dutch as well as in High German (beyond this in five other languages). In Germantown from the beginning the official languages were High German and English.

In sum, from the early decades of the seventeenth century onward there were German families in the New Netherlands and also in the other colonies to the north and south. They quickly adapted to their larger social environment and soon became indistinguishable, all the more because many of the German names needed no more than slight changes in spelling to appear as Dutch or English names, while others underwent more drastic changes toward the same end. Only special circumstances, documentary or otherwise, caused certain of the colonists to be clearly identified as Germans, and there are such from all the colonies, north, middle, and south, occasionally as prominent as the Crowninshields of Massachusetts or as John Lederer who ranged from the Carolinas, Virginia, and Maryland to Connecticut.

There was one group of German settlers, however, that, albeit assimilated to the vanishing point, did leave a marked influence upon their more numerous English neighbors. They came over more than a half century before the Crefelders. They remain unmentioned in the standard accounts of the Germans in America and one has to look hard to find even a mention of them elsewhere, and then it is only a mention without the further filling in of the background that would make the whole matter intelligible. Here too confusion lurks, especially for those whose hold on history is a bit shaky.

Thus with regard to these early emigrants of 1630, we need first of all to remember that there were two times in history when larger groups of people from the Palatinate left their land, each time to become refugees in England, some staying there or in Ireland, others continuing on a westward course to a new home in a strange new world. The second

and greater wave of Palatine refugees is well known and frequently mentioned, the generation that suffered an unremitting series of disasters, from the terrorist French invasions on to the climatically calamitous winter of 1708-1709, that brought them by the thousands to England, where Christian charity had one of its great opportunities to be put into effect, in part under the leadership of Queen Anne's husband, the pious Prince George of Denmark and his court chaplain, Anthony William Boehm, a Pietist and disciple of August Hermann Francke of Halle.

By contrast, all too little is known about the American consequences of some prior Palatines having to flee their land early in the Thirty Years' War when Spanish Hapsburg forces invaded the land and subjected Heidelberg to Catholic control from 1621 onward. The number of refugees reaching England on this occasion was smaller, but the impact was probably larger. Just how large it was cannot be simply gathered from any one extant historical treatise, the one partial exception being the little-known but important work by Frances Rose-Troup, *John White, the Patriarch of Dorchester [Dorset] and the Founder of Massachusetts . . .* (New York and London, 1930)—hardly a likely place to look for German Americana. For this work she had the good fortune to have available the manuscript diary of one of John White's parishioners at Old Dorchester, William Whiteway the Younger (ca. 1599-1635) who recorded not only the local events but also the news from the rest of England, also from the Continent, especially Germany as it became engulfed in the Thirty Years' War, and, notably, from the people who were preparing the way for the settlement of Massachusetts Bay. Among these the Reverend John White was one of the most active and effective leaders. Thus from Whiteway's diary Rose-Troup was able to inform us that in 1626 "4 gentlemen, all of the Palatinate, came hither for shelter, and were entertained. Their names were:—Mr. Sleer, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Haake and Mr. Hopff" (pp. 43 f.). And from other sources she could add the names of two further refugees, the Heidelberg and Dorchester physician and author Frederick Lossius, and John Nicholas Rulizius (or Reuliss or Rulice), who became a pastor of the Church of England and John White's assistant from 1627 to 1631. John Caspar Hopff married White's niece, Katherine Gardner, and took his medical degree at Oxford. Among them all Theodore Haak attained the greatest fame as the original founder of a scientific society that was later to develop into the Royal Society, but also as a friend of Milton and the first translator of *Paradise Lost* into German blank verse.

We learn much more about these Palatine exiles and their English associates from G. H. Turnbull's *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius: Gleanings from Hartlib's Papers* (1947), for us an essential supplement to Rose-Troup and an extension to further vistas.

A historical pattern begins to become visible here for one, when we add that Theodore Haak was also a friend and correspondent of John Winthrop the Younger, the founder and long-time governor of Connecticut, but especially when we learn that other Palatine refugees in England gravitated to localities where the Puritans were strong, for instance northward to Old Boston where another famous Puritan pastor

befriended several of them, including young Peter von Streithagen who after the war and the restoration of the Palatinate rose to prominence in the Reformed Church and in gratitude to his benefactor (who had meanwhile moved to Boston, Massachusetts) translated John Cotton's *Way of Life* into German—this apparently the first American book to be so translated. John Davenport, later founder of New Haven Colony, also maintained close contact with the German refugees. The point is that the English Puritans were not primarily or strictly Calvinist; in the New England libraries the theological works from Geneva were far fewer than those from Heidelberg and Herborn, the intellectual centers of the German Reformed Church. Even before the Thirty Years' War there were notable personal and epistolary contacts; one New Englander, Nathaniel Ward, even reported on his Heidelberg conversation with David Pareus, one of the most gentle and conciliatory of the Reformed theologians. And by the way, Gottfried Arnold lists Cotton's *Weg des Lebens* among the mystical books, and truly, it is in no way the work of a stern, uncompromising Calvinist. Thus it is only natural that the Palatines in English exile should seek out the like-minded Englishmen, go to live with them, and become interested in their plans to escape Archbishop Laud's persecution and settle in the freedom of the New World. One of the books the Puritans took with them to America was the *Politica* by the Herborn jurist Johann Althusius, demonstrating logically and biblically that the republican form of government was the best. The manuscript notes by Samuel Mather in the family copy show how its influence continued to the days of the American Revolution.

All this makes more meaningful and comprehensible the treatise on the new American settlement that John White issued at the time of the departure of the Winthrop fleet for Massachusetts Bay. The title reads: *The Planters Plea. Or The Grovnds of Plantations Examined, And vsuall Objections answered. Together with a manifestation of the causes mooving such as have lately vndertaken a Plantation in Nevv-England: For the satisfaction of those that question the lawfulnesse of the Action* (London, 1630). The full title indicates some of the suspicion and hostility with which this enterprise was regarded by those who felt that the Puritans, who in England were merely anticeremonialist yet generally loyal members of the episcopal Church of England, would in the New World change from nonconformists to separatist Congregationalists. White admits that some modifications might take place, in part out of consideration for the non-episcopal Germans embarking with the Winthrop fleet. Here are his words, here is his statement that the presence of the German colonists in the community would be an influence on the way of life in the New World. It comes on page sixty-five of the original edition where White analyses the varied motivation of settlers sailing for New England, turning last to "the most and most sincere and godly part":

> That of them, some may entertaine hope and expectation of enjoying greater libertie there than here in the use of some orders and Ceremonies of our Church it seemes very probable. Nay more then that, it is not improbable, that partly for their sakes, and partly for respect to some

> *Germans* that are gone ouer with them, and more that intend to follow after, euen those which otherwise would not much desire innovation of themselves, yet for the maintaining of peace and unitie, (the onely soder of a weake unsetled body) will be wonne to consent to some variation from the formes & customes of our Church. Nay I see not how we can expect from them a correspondence in all things to our State civill or Ecclesiasticall: Wants and necessities cannot but cause many changes.

But what happened to these early New England Germans? Where in the records of the Massachusetts Bay is there any further mention of those who went over with the Winthrop fleet and those who "intend to follow after"? The only German whom Winthrop mentions by name was Jost (or Justus) Weillust, the surveyor of ordnance, but he, much to Winthrop's regret, returned to Germany after only a year and a quarter in New England. What happened to his name as it was passed on by speech, ear, and writing among the colonists and their English friends may offer some clue of what happened to the other Germans. His name "Justus" pronounced in the German way was soon understood to be Eustace, and so by 1633 he actually appears in the correspondence as "Mr. Eustace," the namesake of St. Eustachius. This may be an extreme example of the English assimilation of the foreign, though there are others just as colorful. And when a German was named Fischer, or Braun, or Arnold, or Thomas, or Lang, or in any one of a dozen or twenty other ways, his name could be Englished with only slight change. In those days there was a sovereign indifference to orthography, and a person would spell even his own name in three or four different ways, depending on the mood he was in. Thus many a German in New England could have disappeared into an English recording, either easily or with some help from the ear and the imagination.

Another, grimmer factor was the danger of mortal illness during the early years in this strange new world. And this could affect the most privileged and resourceful as well as the most humble. Two sisters of the young Earl of Lincoln were among the early colonists. Lady Arabella and her husband, Isaac Johnson, who came over with the Winthrop fleet that spring, died before the summer was over. Her sister, the Lady Susan, who came over with her husband, John Humfrey, in 1634 survived, only to be subjected to a more prolonged distress. By the same token some or many of the Germans may have died within a few months or years after their arrival. By contrast, other settlers, including some of the prominent leaders, lived on in good health to their eighties and even nineties, enjoying the invigorating climate of their new home. How many Germans returned to Europe, once peace was again established after 1648, we do not know. We do know that some of the Palatines in England did return to Heidelberg and environs. We also can name some of the Germans who lived in New England during the seventeenth century.

We cannot count one transient Swiss from Zürich, Felix Christian Spöri, a physician, who stayed in Rhode Island for several weeks in 1661, recounted a fine bear story and encountered a "Ratelschneak."

Another physician, John Lederer, after his explorations of western Virginia and Carolina, practiced medicine in Connecticut, continued his study of the American Indians, including their medical practices, and corresponded with Governor John Winthrop the Younger in 1674 and 1675 before returning home to Hamburg via Barbados. In the 1680s there were two more German physicians, Henry Burchstead of Nahant and Johann Caspar Richter von Kronenscheldt of Lynn, from whom the eminent Crowninshield family of Salem has descended. Literarily the most active was Christian Ludwig or Lodowick of Newport and Boston who published his first American work in 1692 and his first important German work in 1706. Aside from the physicians there were such assorted Germans before the turn of the century as the Boston silversmith Willem Ross from Wesel, another army engineer, Colonel Wolfgang Romer, and one of the first settlers of Rhode Island, Captain John Luther. No doubt there were others not yet identified.

In the Middle and Southern Colonies there were a number of individual Germans whose names and activities have been recorded in past publications. Outside of Pennsylvania there were relatively few before 1700, in contrast to the many in the next century in settlements ranging from New York, Maryland, and Virginia, through the Carolinas to Georgia. Pastorius after his arrival encountered Germans who had been in America twenty years or more: Silesians, Brandenburgers, Holsteiners, Swiss, etc. But one fascinating German has been entirely overlooked. It was Henry Jacob Falckenberg of Burlington, New Jersey, who by 1684 had been long enough in America to have acquired a mastery of the local Indian language and to serve as translator for the Quaker settlers there. Translations of his were published by Thomas Budd in a pamphlet entitled *Good Order Established in Pennsilvania & New-Jersey*, printed at Philadelphia by William Bradford in 1685. Thus Falckenberg was apparently the first German author with an American publication, preceding Lodowick (1692), Pastorius and Köster (both 1697) by several years. And his work is intrinsically interesting, the first part being: "The Dying-Words of Ockanichon, spoken to Jachkursoe, whom he appointed King after him . . ." (pp. 30 f.). What follows is a fine early example of native Indian eloquence and wisdom. Next comes (pp. 32 f.) the report on a conference held with the Indians, this translation not designated as being by Falckenberg but almost certainly by him, again a pioneer example, this time of an Indian oration, of which more and greater ones were to be recorded in the following century, particularly those in the supple, sensitive renderings of Conrad Weiser, with his awareness of the remarkable individuality developed by the several noted orators, in their range from high seriousness to charming whimsical humor, characteristically with a vivid metaphorical incisiveness. As printed by Benjamin Franklin, his reports on the proceedings for the various Indian treaties and conferences in Pennsylvania have entered American literature as pieces truly worthy of critical attention, although they remain largely unknown even to many an admirer of early American literature.

The chief point to remember is that the whole field of German-American studies is still in a state of flux and that all the supposedly established verities continue to be subject to question and to possible revision, sometimes radical revision. Unfortunately, many of the writers in the field are unaware of this; they take it for granted that the past centuries have been adequately surveyed and that the only chance for something really new lies in the twentieth century. Quite the contrary is the case, as Morton Nirenberg, for instance, showed for the earlier nineteenth century and Guy Hollyday for the mid-century. Most of the boundary posts for that period have now been moved. One further example: Some years ago in Ulm I found an old book entitled *Briefe eines jungen Gelehrten an seinen Freund* (1802); leafing through it later I found that in the 1770s there was a young South Carolinian, Francis Kinloch, who was living on terms of close friendship with the soon-to-be famous Swiss historian, Johannes von Müller, whose early correspondence with Carl Victor von Bonstetten constituted the volume. Subsequently at Schaffhausen I found over a hundred still unpublished letters from Francis Kinloch during his European and American years, also a few from his brother Cleland in Hamburg in a colorful imperfect German. For literary style as well as for content the Francis Kinloch letters are outstanding, and of course Johannes von Müller is known as one of the distinguished prose stylists of the age of Goethe. It is therefore to be hoped that his half of the correspondence can be traced to some Southern plantation house or local historical society.

That further German Americana of equal or greater value is still to be found is all but certain. Among the recently achieved and in progress is the monumental, fundamental work that such scholars as Karl J. R. Arndt and George Fenwick Jones have been carrying on. And one can only hope that there will be further publications of the excellence of Christoph E. Schweitzer's edition of Pastorius' *Deliciae Hortenses or Garden-Recreations and Voluptates Apianae* of 1982. Such achievements will make it easier to accept the more derivative efforts as well intended and even useful tributes to the early German pioneers who decisively helped to give form to those United States in which we continue to live. And a positive, more lasting benefit will come if these celebrations stimulate further young scholars to look more closely at these pioneers and find out what further rich yields a closer study of them would bring. The eighteenth century is rich in the still unexplored. And there are also later fascinating individuals who have been forgotten or largely neglected.

Inasmuch as one of the phenomena we have noted in passing has been the succession of German pioneers who came into close cordial contact with the native Indians, allow me to conclude with another individual of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century who deserves to be better known and more widely studied. It was Rudolf Cronau, who began his career with his important researches on the several landings of Columbus in the West Indies, researches that were given full recognition by the great historian of the early voyages, Samuel Eliot Morison. Cronau's important later volume on the German element in the United States was overshadowed by the more extensive and

detailed work of Albert Bernhardt Faust that became standard in the field. There is much in Cronau, however, to supplement Faust, and there is one section in his work that is vastly superior, namely the one on the German artists in America, though here too we now need a more comprehensive survey. I later found out why his treatment of German-American art was superior when I came upon a splendid folio volume of colored plates done from his paintings of American scenery and American natives during his far-ranging expeditions. One of the portraits he painted while out in the Far West was that of Sitting Bull, and during his sojourn with him a warm friendship developed between the two men, as I learned only after I had located the lengthy obituary of Cronau that appeared in the *New York Herald-Tribune* for October 28, 1939, just forty-four years ago. The choice piece of news was that Sitting Bull had been stimulated by his friendship with Cronau to learn German from him and to converse with him in that language. One can only hope that since his victory at Little Big Horn he and that more unfortunate German American, General George Custer, have met again on the Happy Hunting Ground and achieved a conciliation of their earthly differences. Under such phantasmagoric circumstances it might even be possible to propose that Sitting Bull should in this centennial year be declared an honorary German American.

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Notes

[1] Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909); Rudolf Cronau, *Drei Jahrhunderte deutschen Lebens in Amerika* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer [Ernst Vohsen], 1909).

[2] Quoted in Friedrich Nieper, *Die ersten deutschen Auswanderer von Krefeld nach Pennsylvanien*, (Erziehungsverein Neukirchen Kreis Moers, 1940), p. 58. The volume contains much valuable material on the German backgrounds, not only of the Lower Rhine but also, e.g., of the crucial ones in Wittgenstein (Berleburg and Schwarzenau).