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**Colonial News, German Words:
Christoph Saur's Newspaper and the Linguistic
Topographies of News in Early America**

In the closing months of 1755, it was reported in colonial newspapers that a familiar instance of backcountry violence had unfolded along the Pennsylvania frontier. Not long after sitting down to their evening meal in their homestead along the Mahoning Creek, so it was reported, a group of Moravian settlers of uncertain number were systematically massacred by a group of French-allied Indians, also of uncertain number (perhaps twelve). Only a few settlers (between two and six) had managed to survive the ambush, having jumped to safety from the upper floors, with one woman hiding herself in a ditch (or behind a tree trunk) until the vengeful attackers retreated. The survivors promptly made their way to Bethlehem, the center of the Moravian missions in British North America, where they proceeded to relate their lamentable travails. They described how their homestead had been set ablaze, burning all who remained inside, including a small child, while their grain and livestock, upon which over eight-hundred souls in Bethlehem and Nazareth depended for sustenance, were also committed to the flames. By the time messengers from Bethlehem brought word of the attack to the New Jersey militia stationed near Easton, it was already too late: between ten and fourteen Moravians were killed that November night in Gnadenhütten.

Depending on the newspaper, the nature and extent of the Gnadenhütten massacre were communicated in different ways to local readers in British

Pennsylvanische Berichte, Dec. 1, 1755

Wir hören daß die Indianer welche sich zu Gnadenhütten aufgebalten und von der Gemeine zu Bethlehem reichend ankommen, und ihre Leiden angehöret, die haben sich inwendig dessen daß der 2. Wochen kaum so klar der, Heiber und Männer in allem noch übrig geblieben; und diese haben Bescheidt von einem bekommen, sie sollten auch zu ihnen kommen; wo nicht, so sollten sie noch 7 Tassen kommen, und sie alle eßten. Hierauf setzen einmüt mit den Verwandten gesungen, und die übrige setzen über die Drellkammer ins Licht 4 stübe geschoben, und haben einen nach Bethlehem geschickt, welcher ihnen dieses angezeigt: Hierauf haben die Bethlehemern einen Botten dahin geschickt; als dieser aber nahe dahin kam, sah er daß die Häuser in voller Flamme brannten, und hielt es nicht vor ratsam daher hinzu zu gehen; es wird gesagt: es seien 2 aus einem Haus entkommen, welche sagen daß alle übrigen umgebracht sind. Als dieser Bericht nach Bethlehem kam, sandten sie zu Colonel Andersen welcher mit einer Compagnie selbst kam die Indianer aufzusuchen. Viel Einwohner von Tiorchamilton sind gleichfalls ihnen nach. Mehr Bericht wird folgen wie es sich gefunden haben.

Pennsylvanische Berichte, Dec. 16, 1755

Philadelphia den 6. Decemher.
Ankündigung eines Briefs, betreffend die Nachkommen und Schaden, welches geschehen in den Wohnungen der Mährischen Brudern zu Gnadenhütten.
Der Verlauf zu Gnadenhütten ist in Wahrheit betrübt und beklaglich: Als die Leute (16 an der Zahl) überm Abend-Essen waren, kamen etwa 12 Indianer, wie die einige sagen, die das Stünd hatten zu umgeben. Da die Hunde sehr bellten, und eine ungewöhnliche Stimme machten, stand ein Knabe (16 Jahre alt) vom Tisch auf, und öffnete die Thür. Gleich schossen einige Indianer hinein, und rüderten 4 am Tisch: Dem Knaben straffte eine Kugel unten am Kinn hin, und verwundete ihn ein wenig; worauf ein sehr lautes Schreien im Haus entstand. Eine Frau wies aus dem Haus laufend, sie wurde aber wieder zurück gezogen: Einige entliefen die Treppe hinauf, bis auf den obersten Boden. Der Knabe der die Thür aufgemacht, lag in eine Stube im 2ten Stockwerk, und da er zum Fenster hinaus sehen wollte, wurde nach ihm geschossen, aber nicht getroffen: Er ging auf die andere Seite, und sprang von oben herab, und kam davon. Eine Weibsperson sprang auch herab und verbarg sich in einer Kalk-Grube. Und noch eine Mannsperson sprang auch herab und kam davon. Noch ein Eubent der die Indianische Sprache lernte, sprang auch oben herab: der wurde aber erschossen und geköpft, hatte auch einige Hiebe im Rücken von einem Weibsen. Die oben auf dem Boden hatten eine Fall-Thür über der Stube, die beschwereten sie, daß die Indianer nicht hinauf konnten: Die Indianer schossen durch den breiteren Boden vielmahl hinauf, endlich verließen sie die Oben, und folgten die die unten im Haus lagen, holdem Stroh in der Scher, und steckten das Haus in Brand. Alle sind verbrannt, 6 Männer, 1 Weib, und ein kleines Kind 8 Wochen alt. Das Weib in der Kalk-Grube hörte das Kind noch eine weile sehr schreien, da das Dach schon eingestürzt war. Also sind 10 im Hause verbrannt, und einer außer dem Haus geblieben, auch 3 Mannspersonen sind sonstig davon gelaufen; die Weibsperson hatte sich vom springen Weib getrennt, und hielt sich in der Grube fest, bis etwa im Wintermache. In mehrerer Zeit hatten sie das Haus verbrannt, das Stroh-Dach beraubt, Pulver und Leinwand ge-

nommen, und das Versammlungs-Haus, die Schenke und Stallung mit der Stucht und Heu in Brand gesetzt, und bey 40 Stüd melckend- und fetz Kind-Weib, und 7 Pferde so lebendig verbrannt, und ist nur ein Lohs mit dem Leben davon kommen. Sie saßen sich zum Weib-Haus, aufen, tranken und jacheten bis zu Mitternacht, berrieten einen Topia über einen Baum-Stumpfen, legten einen Hut oben drauf, und steckten 1 blutiges Messer drein, welches so viel bedeuten soll, als sie wollten wieder kommen, oder es sei ein Zeichen ihrer Victorie. Da sie abgezogen waren, suchte die Weibsperson ihren Weg durch den Busch, und fand 2 Bränder, mit denen sie nach Bethlehem ging. Die weißgebrant Knochen sind auf dem Platz begraben.
Man hört daß in Bethlehem 600 Menschen sind, und in Nazareth 200 Weibsen-Kind, welche alle ihr meistes Brod, Butter und Fleisch von Gnadenhütten bekamen. Die Kinder und ihre gestaute Indianer sind nun auch zu den übrigen nach Bethlehem gekommen. Der Schaden so geschähen, an Gebäuden, Stucht, und Weib, rechnen sie auf 1000 Pfund.
Die Indianer welche in Gnadenhütten von den Indianern getödtet worden, sind: Gottlieb Anders und seine Frau und Kind, Martin Nitzschmann und seine Frau, Catharina Sensemahn, des Joachim Sensemahns Frau, Christian Fabricius, Georgi Schweiger, Leonhard Barmeyer, Friedrich Kesse, und C. F. Preffer.
Der Colonel John Andersen welcher auf seinem Marsch war nach Gnadenhütten, mit einem theil von der Neu-Jersey Miliz, und einer Compagnie von dem christen Eilement, hätte diesem Uebel können vorzucken, dann er war nur 6 Meilen vom Platz, was ihm nicht einer begehrt wäre, der ihm gesagt: Es hätten 600 Indianer den drei Gnadenhütten schon überfallen; und weil es nacht um 10 uhr war, so dachte er, es sei nicht ratsam einen solchen großen Haufen Indianer in der Nacht anzugreifen, daher zog er sich zurück, um den Eingang in das Gebürge zu beobachten, bis er weiteren Bericht erhalte.
Wir hören daß auf dieser seite des Gebürges des Quicks Sand verbrannt worden: es war aber niemand drinnen, dann sie waren schon vorher entkommen.

Figure 1: The Gnadenhütten massacre as reported in the *Pennsylvanische Berichte* newspaper in 1755. Microfilm images of the Saur newspaper courtesy of the Kellock Library at the Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture (hereafter OIEAHC).

North America.¹ Readers of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* or the *New-York Mercury* would have learned how this Moravian community located along the banks of the Mahoning Creek, which had been “cut off by the French Indians,” had been massacred with guns and tomahawks, their houses and barn set ablaze, leaving only two survivors. Readers of the *New-York Mercury* would have learned the victims’ names, but it would be the readers of the German-language *Pennsylvanische Berichte* who received the most detailed and graphic account of the events at Gnadenhütten (Figure 1). Unlike the *New-York Mercury* and the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the German newspaper gave a detailed account of the devastating repercussive effects of the attack outside of Gnadenhütten: “Man hört daß in Bethlehem 600 Menschen sind, und

in Nazareth 200 Waisen-Kinder, welche alle ihr meistens Brod, Butter und Fleisch von Gnaden Hütten bekamen. Die Kinder und ihre getauffte Indianer sind nun auch zu den übrigen nach Betlehem kommen. Der Schaden so geschehen, an Gebauen, Frucht, und Vieh, rechnen sie auf 1500 Pfund.”²

At first glance, the massacre of the Moravian community at Gnadenhütten slots easily into standard narratives of spiraling backcountry violence in the years surrounding the French and Indian War and, subsequently, the American Revolution. Just a month prior to the attack at Gnadenhütten (in present-day Lehigh, Pennsylvania), a similarly brutal massacre by French-allied Indians³ had occurred at Penn’s Creek along the western frontier, resulting in the death of German-speaking settlers. These early massacres of the French and Indian War have been pinpointed by scholars as pivotal moments of escalation within the war, when spats of violence and back-and-forth retaliation between backcountry settlers and indigenous groups increasingly characterized life along the British frontier. This violent escalation in the backcountry mirrored political polarization and heightened ethnic tensions within the Pennsylvania assembly, with Benjamin Franklin and the proprietary faction supporting the raising of a militia to defend the frontier, against the protestations of the pacifist Quaker-allied faction. In particular, British colonial administrators blamed the factionalism of Pennsylvania politics on the outspoken printer Christoph Saur in Germantown, “who now prints a News-Paper entirely in the *German* Language, which is universally read and believed by the *Germans* in this Province.”⁴ Saur’s newspaper, the aforementioned *Pensylvanische Berichte*, which had reported the Gnadenhütten massacre most thoroughly of all colonial newspapers, was specifically cited by British administrators as the source of provincial discontent.

While the characterization of these massacres as both partisan and wartime escalations rings true in retrospect, it risks simplifying these massacres to mere preludes of future conflict in the mid-Atlantic. It presupposes an inevitable clash of cultures between German-speaking migrants, who constituted a substantial minority in the province, and the English-speaking majority.⁵ In reality, the reception of these dramatic flashpoints of war also depended on the uneven topography of news in colonial America, news which traveled along linguistic lines as much as spatial and temporal ones.⁶ To understand the significance of backcountry violence and warfare for colonial contemporaries, we must consider how knowledge about these perceived escalations would have circulated within local and transregional communication channels.

What united the massacres at Penn’s Creek and Gnadenhütten was not only the circumstances and perceived brutality of the attacks, but also their transmission and dissemination through the medium of print, both in English and in German. Once news of the massacres had filtered down

through local oral and written communication networks (as illustrated in the figure of the Gnadenhütten messenger [*Botte*], who was likely a German-speaker, bringing the news of the massacre to Easton from the Moravian town of Bethlehem), the reports eventually found their way into printed newspapers, usually within a week for local newspapers, but often later if the issuing newspaper was geographically distant or published with lower periodicity. For events that occurred further afield, printers had to rely on letters or other newspapers for information, which delayed the reporting time further. Newspapers connected local readers with imperial news, making them an important refractive lens through which political knowledges were formed. Differences in the timing of reporting, the periodicity of publications, the availability of information, and translation meant that German readers of newspapers would have understood the news differently than readers of English newspapers. Using as a case study the German-language newspaper published by the eldest Christoph Saur, I highlight some of the ways in which the printer Saur used editorial techniques in the composition of his newspaper, and thereby helped shape German reactions to colonial news and imperial conflict throughout the tumultuous 1740s and 1750s.

Christoph Saur and his newspaper

The printer Christoph Saur (1695-1758) was a significant figure in political, social, and religious life in colonial Pennsylvania.⁷ After having spent his earliest years in the war-ravaged Palatinate in southwestern Germany, Saur had spent much of his young adulthood in the County of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein, a remote region around the Lahn river which, since the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, had provided refuge for radical Pietist groups from across Europe. After migrating to Pennsylvania in 1724, Saur practiced a myriad of craft trades, including clockmaking, farming, and medicine, before settling on printing. By 1738, fourteen years after arriving in British North America, Saur had managed to gather the requisite equipment, labor, and know-how to start his printshop in Germantown, a lively road-side town said by contemporaries to be about a “two-hours walk” from the city of Philadelphia. The output of the Saur press was, at least in the beginning, printed entirely in the German language. The following year, Saur published the first issue of his German newspaper, the *Hoch-Deutsch Pensylvanische Geschicht-Schreiber*.⁸ The *Geschicht-Schreiber* quickly found broad circulation among German readers along the eastern seaboard, with subscriber numbers exceeding 4,000 by 1752.⁹ Although the *Geschicht-Schreiber* was not the first German newspaper in the colonies, it was by far the most successful, and it was printed continuously until the events of the American Revolution forced

a halt to the activities of the Saur press.

Despite the broad circulation of Saur's newspaper by colonial standards, it remains unclear how this German newspaper fits into the broader news landscape of early America. Traditionally, scholars have neglected in-depth studies of Saur's newspaper in favor of his more explicitly political and religious publications. Excellent studies of Saur's broadsides, pamphlets, and almanacs (which could contain acerbic political commentaries) have sought to reconstruct the political culture of Pennsylvania's German population in the colonial period.¹⁰ Another publication from the Saur press that has traditionally attracted much scholarly attention is the Saur Bible, a theological heavyweight and publishing masterstroke to be sure, but a book that is still touted unreflectively as the first American Bible published in a European language.¹¹ Together, these genres represent the unique hardships faced by "German" migrants from the founding years of the province. Along with their political content, these works have been mined for answers to questions about cultural continuity, religious pluralism, popular knowledge, and practices of Biblical scholarship among German communities in the New World.¹² However, a critical look at Saur's newspaper reveals two underappreciated insights about the German experience in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania: first, that German news was inevitably filtered through the communication channels of the British Empire, and second, that the printer-publisher Christoph Saur exercised considerable influence in shaping the reception of that news.¹³ It was thus in the *Geschicht-Schreiber* and its later iterations that the Saur printing family was arguably at its most influential.

The influence of the Saur family over German newsprint becomes difficult to refute when one considers the relative scarcity of German newspapers for much of the colonial period.¹⁴ Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, there were dozens of English-language newspapers in circulation across the thirteen colonies. The competition over English-language print markets meant that printer-publishers in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia enjoyed far less latitude in transgressing the boundaries of the newspaper genre than their German counterparts. By contrast, although there were some short-lived attempts by other printer-publishers to enter the German news market, Saur's newspaper was the only one to stay in business across multiple decades (between 1739 and 1777).¹⁵ The dominance of the Saur printing house over German newsprint lent a veil of objectivity to the news paragraphs in Saur's newspaper, since they could not be easily cross-checked or reprinted in papers elsewhere. Simply put, Christoph Saur was a powerful newspaper editor in the German Atlantic world.

The transformation of news from English into German

Let us turn to how this editorial hegemony looked in practice. At hand are the processes and strategies of news compilation upon which Saur drew to compose his newspaper. For this we must begin with the building block of the eighteenth-century newspaper: the news paragraph. For colonial contemporaries, the news paragraph constituted what historian Will Slauter has called “information technology” for printers, in that it allowed for the rapid replication of news stories (i.e., paragraphs) compiled from newspapers near and far.¹⁶ While news reports were often copied verbatim from other newspapers, this was not always the case. Printers could exercise simple acts of curation through the omission of information (or conversely, through the addition of previously unpublished information) or through the purposeful arrangement of text on a sheet; translation itself could constitute an act of editorialization. By comparing the news paragraphs from English-language newspapers with the translated ones in Saur’s newspaper, I show how the German reading experience curated by Saur—through paragraph arrangement, hidden commentaries, and translation—was marked by eschatological dread and political anxiety, making them qualitatively different from English-language newspapers.

In deciding what to include in his newspaper, Saur borrowed heavily from American colonial newspapers, including the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and papers in New York and Boston. This fact itself is worth pause, as it is a reminder of the ways in which the material realities of life in the colonies shaped German print culture, rather than German sectarian culture developing in isolation from the British majority and the orthodox religious establishment.¹⁷ Once news paragraphs were selected, they then had to be translated into German. A survey of news paragraphs across newspapers reveals that, for the most part, the news was translated faithfully from English into German, but not always. Even with a faithful translation, commentaries or additional information could be added that were not present in the original news paragraph.

The unbidden insertion of commentary was one of Saur’s favorite pastimes. Many examples of this editorial practice can be observed within the pages of the *Geschicht-Schreiber* and, later, the *Pensylvanische Berichte*. To take an example from the Oct. 16, 1749 issue of the *Pensylvanische Berichte*, not long after the conclusion of the War of the Austrian Succession, a news paragraph appeared in Saur’s newspaper which reported how England had sent warships to monitor shipbuilding on the French coast. Comparisons with contemporary colonial newspapers reveal how this news paragraph was translated into German from an English-language newspaper, likely the

Boston Weekly News-Letter, Sept. 14, 1749

L O N D O N, June 27.
The Ventilators invented by the Rev. Dr. Hales being daily more and more experienced to be of great advantage to the health of those who have not oblige them to breathe the putrid air of a prison or other close place; the good Dr. by desire of the secretary at war, was this day at the Savoy prison to direct a proper place for erecting a large ventilator. One of these useful machines is also fixing in each of the transport ships, which are to carry 500 Germans to the British plantations, so that it is not questioned but this invention will be brought into general use in the navy.—For this a ship may not be crowded with slaves and passengers, or laden with corn, in which case the ventilators have been chiefly recommended: presently to all other methods; yet being worked but half an hour in each day, into the hold, they will be of very considerable benefit, by introducing fresh, and send out the foul damp air, which sets the lumber.
July 8. The new Duke of Parma, Don Philip, has not seemed to have much Enjoyment of his late Elevation.— This Prince has been driven from his Palace of Sala, by an Earthquake, which has much damaged that building, splitting the thickest Walls of it from the Top to the Bottom: and he now waits for a Minister from Spain to relieve him from the troubled mas Tolls of Government.
We hear that eight men of war of different rates, are ordered to be got ready for the sea.
France continues to prosecute with great Diligence her new Designs of naval Glorieux.— Spain is in high Expectation of an Return of Wealth from America, in order to pursue her present favourite Project of suppressing the Algerines.— The King of Portugal, from a Motive of Policy and Filial Obedience, has condescended to join the Spaniards and Italians in that Project; which the Court of Rome, to give it the greater Efficacy, has sanctioned by the Name of a *Crusade*: A Word that, for many Ages, had more powerful Charms in it than all the Lights of Reason, and Diligence of the Civilian.

Boston Evening Post, Oct. 9, 1749

London, July 3. We have Advice from Paris, by the Way of the Hague, that his most Christian Majesty will soon recall the Count de Murets from his Exile, and restore him to his former Employment.
July 7. Two Maiden Gentlewomen have purchas'd a large Piece of Ground near the Ivy House at Haxton, in order to erect ten Almshouses for People in their own State.
July 11. We are assured from very good Authority, that eight Men of War are ordered to be got ready for sailing, which are design'd as a Fleet of Observation upon the Buildings carrying on in the French Ports.

Pennsylvania Gazette, Sept. 21, 1749

L O N D O N, July 6.
They write from Algiers, June 10, that the prizes taken from the Venetians, Maltese, and republic of Genoa, are converted into bomb vessels, and stationed at the mouth of the harbour. Ramparts of earth are thrown up along the coast, and provided with artillery, so that there are 600 pieces of cannon in battery there, and on the walls. It is given out, that 300,000 Moors from the mountains, have been called in to the assistance of the city and coasts; that 40,000 are actually on their march, and a part of them arrived. One thing is certain, that a great number of Moors are daily employed on the fortifications.
July 11. The French protestants who are quartered at Deptford, Greenwich, &c. (in Number about 500, have orders to repair on board, to go to Nova Scotia.
Private letters from Toulon, by the last French mail, assure us, that they have received orders from the court to hasten as much as possible eight ships of war that are upon the stocks there, viz. two of eighty, four of sixty, and two of forty pieces of cannon.
We are assured from very good authority, that eight men of war are ordered to be got ready for sailing, which are designed as a fleet of observation upon the buildings carrying on in the French ports.

Pensylvanische Berichte, Oct. 16, 1749*

Fonden den ziten Juli.
Wir haben Bericht von solchen, denen man glauben kan, daß 8 Engl. Kriegsschiffe sich fertig machen, die nur gleichsam Schiltwache stehen sollen, weil der König in Frankreich so viele Kriegsschiffe bauen läßt. Inögemein wird geglaubt, daß der Frieden nicht lang dauern werde.

Figure 2. News migrating between newspapers about English warships patrolling French shores. Note the last two lines of text in the *Pensylvanische Berichte*, which were added by Saur. Microfilm images of the Saur newspaper courtesy of the Kellock Library at the OIEAHC.

Pennsylvania Gazette, which had printed the same report a few days earlier (Figure 2).¹⁸ In large part, the paragraph was a direct translation of the English-language report. However, a closer look reveals that an additional line of commentary was tacked onto the end: “Insgemein wird geglaubt, daß der Frieden nicht lang dauern werde.”¹⁹ What at first appears to be a natural continuation of the report is revealed to be editorial commentary by the printer Saur, perhaps meant as a summarizing statement, but editorializing nonetheless as the news was translated from English into German. The suggestion that yet another war lay on the horizon would have stoked the fears of German readers, many of whom had fled the war-torn German lands of the 1740s. Among the readers of the *Pensylvanische Berichte* were presumably also many radical Pietists—a capacious category encompassing the Moravians, the Schwarzenau Brethren, the *Inspirierten*, and more—for whom pacifism was non-negotiable.

The news could also become infused with Biblical significance during the translation process from English into German. On May 10, 1753, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* reported on the movement of French troops and

French-allied Indians to a fort on Lake Ontario. Included in the news was a statement by Onondago chiefs, who were said to have supplied the original report, warning that an attack against British-allied Indians was imminent. A few weeks after the paragraph was printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Saur printed the translated paragraph in the *Pensylvanische Berichte* and tacked on his own millenarian commentary at the end: “Dieses sind so Vorbotten, der nahe-heran-kommenden Gerichten Gottes über den Erdboden” (Figure 3).²⁰ The use of martyrological language through the invocation of the Last Judgment was a calculated rhetorical strategy by Christoph Saur throughout his printed *oeuvre*. As Jan Stievermann has pointed out, discourses of Christian martyrological suffering would have resonated with Pennsylvania’s German sectarian religious groups, who remained staunchly pacifist during the French and Indian War even after devastating attacks like the Gnadenhütten massacre.²¹

Another example of added commentary can be found in the Sept. 1, 1749 issue of the *Pensylvanische Berichte*. In this issue, Saur reprinted a news paragraph reporting on the French repossession of Louisbourg on Île-Royale in Nova Scotia, which had been ceded by Britain back to France as part of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748). The loss of Louisbourg, which also meant the loss of an important maritime fort along the Atlantic seaboard, on July 12th was lamented by the English-language newspapers as a “Black Day” for “our New England Callenders.”²² When Saur translated this paragraph into German, he added four lines of commentary following the main body of text: “Sie verstehen nicht was Salomon sagt: Ein Gedultiger ist besser, als ein Starcker: Und wer seines Muth sein Herr ist, der ist besser als der Städte gewinnet. Noch weniger wissen sie: Wie ein Christen-Hertz die Feinde liebet” (Figure 4).²³ In invoking Solomon and the Old Testament, Saur appealed to the religious sensibilities of radical Pietists. The insertion of this proverb following the news announcing the surrender of Louisbourg was an unambiguous call to disassociate from

Pennsylvania Gazette, May 10, 1753

And by Way of New-York, there is this further Intelligence, viz. “That an Army of French and Indians, to the Number of 1200, besides the Battoe-men, were seen by some of the Six Nation Indians, the Middle of April last, in their March, well equipped for War, to Cadaraquet, a French Fort (and the usual Place of Rendezvous) situate near the East End of Lake Ontario, among whom were a great many Officers, and young Gentlemen. This Information was sent by the Chiefs at Onondago, who gave it at the same time as their Opinion, that if this Armament passed peaceably by their Castles, it was certainly designed against the Ohio Indians, and Twighewees.”

Pensylvanische Berichte, June 1, 1753*

Und von New-York ist Bericht, daß eine Heere Franzosen von 1200 samt den Battoe-Männern seyen mitten im April von einigen den 6 Nationen geschen worden auf ihrem Marsch gegen Cadaraquet, einer französischen Festung, wo sie sich sonst pflegen zu versamen, nahe den dem Ost-Ende des Ontario. Es waren viele Officier des Heeres und junge Gentlemen. Diesen Bericht haben die Vornehmsten von den Onontageren gesandt, welche zugleich ihre Meinung bezeugten, nemlich, daß diese gewaltsame Heere friedlich den ihnen Vorbey marschiren wird, so glaubten sie gewis, daß die Vorhaben sey, gegen die Ohio und Twighewees Indianer anzuziehen. Dieses sind so Vorbotten, der nahe-heran-kommenden Gerichten Gottes über den Erdboden.

Figure 3. Example of Saur's insertion of additional commentary during the translation of news paragraphs from English into German. Here, the additional commentary creates a sense of eschatological urgency consistent with Saur's radical Pietist background. Microfilm images courtesy of the Kellock Library at the OIEAHC.

New-York Gazette, Revived in the
Weekly Post-Boy, Aug. 21, 1749

BOSTON, Augst 14.
Thursday last Capt. Stevenon arrived here in a Ship from Fyul, who informs us, that on his passage he spoke with a London ship homeward bound from Jamaica, the Captain of which informed him, that he had on board the Crew of a Brigantine bound from Jamaica to Rhode Island, which he had taken up at Sea, their Vessel having foundered. He would have had Capt. Stevenon take the unfortunate People on board his Vessel, but being short of Provisions, and the Weather tempestuous, he could not comply with his Request.

Saturday last we had a Vessel in from Chebucta, (now call'd Halifax) by which is Advic'd, that the famous City of Louibourg was deliver'd up to the French on the 12th Day of July past, who have now a Garrison of about 600 regular Troops in it; and that the British Troops lately in Garrison there, were all arriv'd safe at Chebucta. (May the 12th of July, that Black Day, be forever hereafter left out of our New-England Calendars; but let the 17th of June, [the Day on which Louibourg hereafter'd to our gallant Countrymen] be had in everlasting Remembrance.)

Pennsylvania Gazette,
Aug. 24, 1749

BOSTON, August 14.
Thursday last Capt. Stevenon arrived here in a Ship from Fyul, who informs us, that on his passage he spoke with a London ship homeward bound from Jamaica, the Captain of which informed him, that he had on board the crew of a brigantine, bound from Jamaica to Rhode-Island, which he had taken up at Sea, their vessel having foundered. He would have had Capt. Stevenon take the unfortunate people on board his vessel, but being short of provisions, and the weather tempestuous, he could not comply with his request.

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Pensylvanische Berichte,
Sep. 1, 1749

Boston den 14ten Augusti.
Am vergangenen Sonntag kam ein Schiff hier an von Chebucta; (welcher Ort nun fünffüßig Halifax heißen soll) damit haben wir Bericht, daß am 12ten Juli die berühmte Stadt Louisbourg den Franzosen in die Hände übergeben worden, und daß nun eine Garnison drinnen, von 600 Mann. Die englische Garnison ist in Chebucta angekommen, und der Befehlshaber schreibt: Daß der 12te Julius der unglückliche Tag aus dem neu Engländischen Kalender heraus wäre, und der 17te Junius; an welchem Tag die Louisbourg an die tapferen Helden von New-England ergitten müßten) nicht mehr gegeben werde.
Sie werden nicht was Gedenken fien: Ein Gedächtnis ist besser, als ein Grabstein; und wer seines Vaters ein Denkmahl ist, besser als der Grabstein. Doch wenige wissen es: Nicht ein Verräther, Ders die Feinde liebet.

Figure 4. The capture of Fort Louisbourg in Nova Scotia was reported differently in Saur's German newspaper compared to English-language reports. When translating the news paragraph into German, Saur added Biblical commentary. Microfilm images of the Saur newspaper courtesy of the Kellock Library at the OIEAHC.

British imperial sentimentality resulting from the loss of the northern fort.

German news was also shaped by the physical properties of the paper on which the newspaper was printed. The spatial limitations of the *Geschicht-Schreiber* and the *Pensylvanische Berichte*, which was smaller and shorter in length than Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*, made the selection and juxtaposition of paragraphs as much an exercise in editorial prerogative as logistical planning with the composing stick. The decisions made within Saur's printshop meant that some news reports were given more proverbial airtime than others (if they were not omitted altogether).

The spatial arrangement of paragraphs also mattered. In eighteenth-century newspapers, the reporting of news generally followed an implicit spatial hierarchy, with "world" news reported first, followed by continental and regional news, then local news, and ending with advertisements. The sequential ordering of news meant that foreign news paragraphs could lend color to how local news was subsequently read. In the *Pensylvanische Berichte*, foreign news paragraphs emphasizing disasters (both natural and man-made) were sometimes chosen to fill the entire front page of the newspaper, only to abruptly end with the heading "Germanton," announcing the beginning of the local news section. Exemplative of this is the Oct. 16, 1749 issue of the *Pensylvanische Berichte*, in which the front page (and most of the second page) consists almost exclusively of news about weather disasters and civic unrest. The opening news paragraph about a "tempest" in Rome was likely taken by Saur from either the *Boston Post-Boy* or the *Boston Evening-Post*, both of which had published the story one month prior. The paragraph about the Italian tempest in the *Pensylvanische Berichte* was a faithful translation of the original English paragraph, in that the storm "threatened the return of all the Elements into their first Chaos...in one Word, leaving in every part of this City marks of its Fury, which we shall

long feel, and ever remember.”²⁴

Like the English paragraphs, the German version reports on the flooding of houses and Church of La Rotonda, which “was so fill’d with Water, that the Service was interrupted for two Hours.”²⁵ The only difference in reporting between the German and English versions appears at the end of the German paragraph, when Saur adds his own commentary in smaller type: “Diß scheint ein Vorspiel zu seyn, auf das, was noch künftig nachfolgen soll, wovon schon so lang und viel prophezeyet ist.”²⁶ News of the hurricane is followed by news about an anti-Jewish riot in Altona, about which Saur may have learned through personal correspondence or from a German periodical, since an equivalent paragraph cannot be found in English-language colonial newspapers. The news from Hamburg is followed by reports about an attempted coup in Bern, the so-called *Bürgerlärm* of 1749. Two short paragraphs round out the foreign news section (including one paragraph reporting on the planned siege of Algiers), before the newspaper pivots toward local affairs under the heading “Germantown.” In this extended section of local news, Saur reports on a case of highway robbers (“Malificanten” and “Geldmachern”) who landed before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and received light sentences for robbing and beating a shopkeeper four miles from Philadelphia.²⁷ The juxtaposition of societal collapse in Europe with reports about local crime and the corruption of Pennsylvania’s judicial system would have contributed to a constrained reading of the news for the province’s German readers. These German-speaking communities, left with few options besides English newspapers, would have likely had to rely on Saur’s newspaper if they wished to stay abreast of current events at both the local and transregional level. Even if they disagreed with Saur’s politics, which was undoubtedly inflected by his radical Pietist background, their options for alternative media sources in the German language remained limited. It would not be until the 1760s and beyond that alternative news sources emerged under printer-publishers like Henrich Miller and Charles Cist. Until then, the Saur family remained the principal distributor of German news.

Conclusion

As suggested by the opening anecdote about the Gnadenhütten massacre, information about backcountry violence and wartime movements in the colonial period could be uncertain and incomplete. Unlike the instantaneous “breaking news” alerts of modern smartphones, the news circuits through which information traveled in the eighteenth century created an uneven topography of news in colonial Pennsylvania. These informational landscapes were fractured not only along geographic and temporal lines, but also linguistic ones.

The importance of linguistic difference for news reporting becomes evident when looking critically at Christoph Saur's newspaper, which ran almost forty years between 1739 and 1777. When the building block of the eighteenth-century newspaper, the news paragraph, is compared across both English and German-language newspapers to trace the circulation of "breaking news," it becomes clear that the reading experience between languages differed in important ways. Knowledge about local crime, backcountry violence, and wartime movements in the 1740s and 1750s were shaped by access to information in the British colonies. The news reports in the German-language *Pensylvanische Berichte*, previously named the *Geschicht-Schreiber*, resulted in a reading experience that was qualitatively different from English-language newspapers. Christoph Saur's editorial prerogative as the printer-publisher meant that he could control paragraph arrangement, insert hidden commentaries, and alter word choice through the English-to-German translation process. The insertion of hidden commentaries was a particularly sneaky slight-of-hand, since these insertions only became undeniable when the German paragraphs are compared to their original counterparts in English-language newspapers. The result of Saur's efforts was a newspaper that was marked by eschatological dread and political anxiety, a qualitative difference that separated the *Pensylvanische Berichte* from other colonial newspapers.

However, even though the *Pensylvanische Berichte* may have contributed to the worsening political climate in colonial Pennsylvania, we cannot ascribe German political behavior in the mid-eighteenth century solely to the eldest Christoph Saur, much less his newspaper. How Saur's readers reacted to the news depended on a confluence of factors, including geographic location, theological convictions, and legal position within the British Empire as naturalized subjects or recently arrived migrants. It is also possible that many of his readers were fluent enough in English to read the English-language newspapers, or that they had access to other sources of German news in the form of letters or periodicals sent from Europe. The addendum of Biblical verses on a news paragraph lent enough ambiguity to the eschatological meaning of the news that readers could craft localized responses out of proscribed political knowledge. It did not matter that Saur, in publishing news of the Gnadenhütten massacre or the loss of Louisbourg, had meant to take aim at jingoist imperial administrators, the political failures of the Proprietary Party, and their supporters in the Pennsylvania government. Once the translated newsprint left his workshop in Germantown, it was left to his subscribers to interpret the news based on local conditions.²⁸

Despite the unpredictability of reader behavior, Saur's newspaper was still crucially important in early American life. The mid-eighteenth century, as other scholars have shown, constituted a formative period for the so-called "German element" in colonial Pennsylvania. Imperial warfare combined with

frontier violence to create a volatile landscape against which German sectarians attempted to redefine themselves both politically and religiously.²⁹ Yet what these studies about German sectarian political culture have not sufficiently acknowledged is the extent to which German sectarians—alongside the other approximately 100,000 Germans who had settled in British North America before the Revolutionary War—were irrevocably dependent on the structural realities of the British Empire. The case of Saur's newspaper is an example of this dependency. German settlers' geographic embeddedness in the British colonies meant that any German American newspaper would be forced to copy news paragraphs in large measure from English sources. Even if these news paragraphs were subsequently reinterpreted and reworked by a German editor, like Christoph Saur, their original source remained rooted in British concerns. Perhaps this is where the irony is greatest: as German readers became more aware of colonial news and imperial developments with a periodicity previously unavailable, this subset of the "German element"—those consumers of news both written and oral—became exposed to "British" news with a distinctly "German," if not sectarian, flare. Christoph Saur was an important newspaper editor in the German Atlantic world because he determined, to a non-trivial extent, the availability of political knowledge for the German population in colonial Pennsylvania. And yet this world could not be separated from colonial politics and the British empire. The complexities of these multilingual news topographies will hopefully generate future studies of the Saur newspaper in colonial Pennsylvania.

Notes

1. For both German-language and English-language newspapers, the Gnadenhütten massacre of 1755 was spread out over two newspaper issues. The *Pensylvanische Berichte* reported the massacre on December 1 and December 16; the *Pennsylvania Gazette* reported it on November 27 and December 4; the *New-York Mercury* on December 8 and December 15. While the *Pennsylvania Gazette* broke the news first, this was likely because of its weekly periodicity, as opposed to the semimonthly format of the *Pensylvanische Berichte*. The inclusion of extra information in the latter suggests that at least some first-hand information about the massacre had been reported orally in German before, or simultaneous to, English oral reports.

2. English: "We hear that 600 people in Bethlehem and 200 orphans in Nazareth were much dependent on Gnadenhütten for their supply of bread, butter, and meat. The children und their baptized Indians have now joined the others in Bethlehem. The damages incurred to buildings, crops, and cattle are estimated at 1,500 Pounds." "Philadelphia den 6 November," *Pensylvanische Berichte* (Germantown), December 16, 1755.

3. From the accounts, it is unclear to which Native American group(s) these "Indians" belonged. For the sake of consistency with the original newspaper source, I will generally default to the word "Indians" when describing the events of the 1740s and 1750s.

4. William Smith, "A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania" (London: Printed for R. Griffiths at the Dunciad, in Pater-Noster-Row, 1755), 29.

5. For example, Steven M. Nolt has described the political behavior of early German settlers as manifestations of “peasant republicanism”; see *ibid.*, *Foreigners in their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002). The temptation to read ethnic identity back onto the eighteenth-century is not helped by the oft-quoted statement by Benjamin Franklin, who asked his friend Peter Collinson in a letter, “Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion?,” which was later published as *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind* (1751). The other problem with studies that engage with the ostensible clash of cultures between the British and the German population is that they adopt the premises of British colonial administrators who saw Christoph Saur as the “Pied Piper” thought-leader of the Germans.

6. For recent studies on news networks in early America, see Jordan E. Taylor, *Misinformation Nation: Foreign News and the Politics of Truth in Revolutionary America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022), and Joseph M. Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks: The Business and Politics of Printing the News, 1763-1789* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

7. There are many orthographic variations for Saur’s name, which also crops up as “Sauer” and “Sower” in the archive. I have chosen Christoph Saur, because this spelling variation was the one preferred by Saur in his print publications. The eldest Christoph Saur is not to be confused with his son (1721-1784) or his grandson (1754-1799), who both carried the same name.

8. The *Geschicht-Schreiber* was renamed to the *Pensylvanische Berichte* in 1745, and in 1762 it was rebranded again as the *Germantowner Zeitung*. When referring to Saur’s newspaper, I will use the name that was in use during the given year.

9. This figure derives from Saur’s own calculations as printed in the Feb. 1, 1752 issue of the *Pensylvanische Berichte*.

10. Excellent studies of Saur’s broadsides, almanacs, and editorials have been conducted by other scholars. These studies demonstrate the ideological and religious discourses which Saur drew upon in his printed output. See Jan Stievermann, “A ‘Plain, Rejected Little Flock’: The Politics of Martyrological Self-Fashioning among Pennsylvania’s German Peace Churches, 1739-65,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2009): 287–324; Hermann Wellenreuther, “Pennsylvania Politics and German Political Broadsides, 1730–1830,” in *Citizens in a Strange Land: A Study of German-American Broadsides and Their Meaning for Germans in North America, 1730-1830* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013); and Bethany Wiggin, “Poor Christoph’s Almanac: Popular Media and Imperial Education in Colonial Pennsylvania,” in *New Perspectives on German-American Educational History: Topics, Trends, Fields of Research*, ed. Anne Overbeck and Jürgen Overhoff (Klinkhardt Verlag, 2017).

11. A fresh study of the Saur Bible is arguably overdue as well.

12. The importance of local practices for German print in the New World is addressed in Benjamin M. Pietrenka, “From Text to Ritual: Radical Pietist Approaches to Scriptural Translation and Protestant Diversity in Early America,” *Early American Studies* 23, no. 3 (2025): 295-325.

13. In other words, Christoph Saur represents an important node in the “communications circuit.” See Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?” *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65–83.

14. By the 1760s, other printer-publishers had begun breaking down the Saur’s dominance in the German newsprint market. Foremost among these newcomers was the erstwhile Moravian Henrich Miller, whose *Pensylvanischer Staatsbote* later became famous for having been the first newspaper to print the Declaration of Independence in German.

15. One example is Benjamin Franklin's *Philadelphische Zeitung*, which had had a very short lifespan in 1732, and was rebooted between 1755 and 1757 under the stewardship of Johann Handschuh. Another example is Joseph Crell's short-lived *Hoch-deutsche Pennsylvanische Journal* from 1743, which ceased operation after a few months.

16. In tracing the movement of news paragraphs between eighteenth-century newspapers, my methodology is indebted to Will Slauter; see *ibid.*, "The Paragraph as Information Technology: How News Traveled in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World," *Annales: histoire, sciences sociales* (English edition) 67, no. 2 (2012): 253–278.

17. In this, I concur with the argument in Pietrenka, "From Text to Ritual," 323–324.

18. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* was likely Saur's main source of colonial news, given the influence of the paper and Philadelphia's geographic proximity to Germantown. It is also possible that the original paragraph was taken from the *Boston Evening Post*, since the phraseology resembles that of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. The source was not the *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, which used different phraseology and cited a different date (July 8 instead of July 11) in reporting the incident.

19. English: "It is thought that the peace will not last long." The paragraph can be found under "London," *Pennsylvanische Berichte* (Germantown), no. CXIII, October 16, 1749: [2].

20. English: "These are harbingers of the impending Final Judgement of God upon the Earth." The paragraph can be found under "Baston den 14ten Augusti," *Pennsylvanische Berichte* (Germantown), no. CXI, September 1, 1749: [3].

21. Jan Stievermann, "A 'Plain, Rejected Little Flock': The Politics of Martyrological Self-Fashioning among Pennsylvania's German Peace Churches, 1739–65," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2009): 287–324.

22. The same news paragraph was printed in both the *New-York Gazette* (August 21) and the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (August 24).

23. Here Saur is likely paraphrasing Proverb 15:18 from the Luther Bible: "Ein zorniger Mann richtet Zank an; ein Geduldiger aber stillt den Streit."

24. "Rome, June 14," *Boston Post-Boy*, September 11, 1749: [2]. The same phraseology can be found in the *Boston Evening-Post*.

25. "Rome, July 1," *Boston Evening-Post*, September 18, 1749: [1].

26. English: "This seems to be a prelude to what soon shall follow, about which much has already been prophesied." The article can be found under the heading "Rom den 14ten Juni," *Pennsylvanische Berichte* (Germantown), no. CXIII, October 16, 1749: [1].

27. "Germanton," *Pennsylvanische Berichte* (Germantown), no. CXIII, October 16, 1749: [2].

28. A number of studies over the past decade have highlighted the diverse reading practices among German migrants in the New World: see Benjamin M. Pietrenka, "From Text to Ritual," as well as Patrick M. Erben, "Wie ein Nimrod/like a nimrod": Babel, confusion, and coercive bilingualism in the eighteenth-century Mid-Atlantic," in *Babel of the Atlantic* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), and Jan Stievermann "Faithful Translations: New Discoveries on the German Pietist Reception of Jonathan Edwards." *Church History* 83, no. 2 (2014).

29. The mid-eighteenth century has been characterized as a time of "sectarian ecumenicity" for Pennsylvania's radical Pietists. See Steven M. Nolt, "Rethinking German Sectarians: Compound Singularity in Colonial Pennsylvania," *Yearbook of German American Studies* 58 (2025): 7. The participation of German migrants in Pennsylvania politics has been described in detail by Aaron Spencer Fogleman; see *ibid.*, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717–1775* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).