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The Importance of Preserving Traditions

By JOSIAH H. PENNIMAN, Ph.D., Litt.D., LL.D., L.H.D.

*Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, delivered before the
Society November 21, 1930*

I ACCEPTED the invitation of the President of your organization to address you briefly this evening because of my friendship for him and my desire to do what he asked me to do. A man who, throughout a long life, has devoted himself to the alleviation of human suffering and to the cheering and inspiring of lives that needed such assistance is one whose requests cannot be denied unless for some particularly good reason. But there is also another reason for my presence here and that is my desire to add to those of countless other speakers my tribute of respect for a remarkable group who, because of religious persecution, not only by those from whom it might have been expected, but also by those from whom it ought not to have been expected, were obliged, as other groups had been, to accept exile in a distant land in order that they might, uninterfered with, worship God according to their own distinctive beliefs. Such a result could occur only when men valued their religion above all else in this world—more than worldly goods, more than social position, more than friends, more even than residence in their native land. They gave up everything they possessed and were willing to give up life itself, if need be, rather than bow the head in submission to others who persecuted them for their beliefs. However much others might differ from them, and they from others, they held fast and faithfully to what they believed to be the truths of Christian religion. For such men I have profound respect and deep gratitude, for they show us by the history of their example how far the spirit of man can rise, under the influence of religion, above all earthly considerations.

It was Kaspar von Schwenkfeld of Silesia who, differing from Lutheran and other Protestant Reformers during the first half of the sixteenth century, gathered congregations of those who shared his particular religious opinions and, forced to flee from persecution to persecution, died in 1561 at Ulm. His followers or co-religionists held meetings at various places in Silesia, in Italy and in Switzerland. Finally in 1734 two hundred persons of the Schwenkfeldian faith crossed the Atlantic and landed at Philadelphia, where they found among the Quakers a welcome and a refuge. They became, like other groups that had preceded them, a part of the people who were to become a great nation. Their contributions to the personnel

and to the life of that nation are familiar to most of you and I need not try to recite them. They were and continue to be very great—these contributions that emanate from that little group of exiles.

What I wish to emphasize on this occasion is the "Importance of Preserving Traditions." There are no pages of history more inspiring and uplifting to him that reads them aright than those that record the history of Schwenkfeld, his followers and their descendants. There is about this history something that marks these people as leaders of thought and also leaders of action. In every field of human endeavor Schwenkfeldians and their descendants have left their mark. To fail to hold these men in grateful remembrance would be itself the basest ingratitude, for they lived and died to hand on unaltered their faith in God, their belief in the salvation wrought by Christ and their own uncompromising opinions concerning the right conduct of life in the light of the teachings of Christ. Such faith and such conduct as theirs may well be held up proudly by their descendants as examples to be studied and to be followed by a generation from which too frequently we hear it said that it matters little what your religious faith is or whether you have any. The Schwenkfeldians, holding as they did and do distinctive religious ideas, made no effort to compel others to agree with them in their beliefs. They had such faith that they believed that truth would prevail and men would be made happier and better. Had it not been for such faith the little bands of exiles would never have sought these shores or would never have found them. It is faith that sustains men in the journey through life—men who with faith accomplish great things for the world. Martyrs are sustained by it in their hours of pain. Pioneers are sustained by it in their invasion of new territory. Columbus was sustained by it. Paul was sustained by it. Jesus was sustained by it in his hours of suffering and as he walked in the midst of an unbelieving and ungrateful world. So absorbed were these in the importance of life and the meaning of what they were doing that there was complete forgetfulness of self.

Herbert Spencer in his *Essay on Education* says that the chief use of historical facts is to serve in establishing principles of conduct. "Only of late years have historians commenced giving us, in any considerable quantity, the truly valuable information—"

The interpretation of history throws light on the purposes and uses of life. The memory of great men and great deeds of the past reveals to us the possibilities of life, in itself an inspiring thought.

The desire to be remembered by those who come after us is very natural and very human. No one would be happy in the

thought that he might be completely forgotten. Men wish to be remembered for the good they have done. Immortality on earth may be accomplished by the perpetuation of one's ideas by succeeding generations. There is a kind of immortality in this, for, somehow, it seems that after the body is dust the soul goes marching on in the souls of other men. The perpetuation of a name is accomplished by the naming of children, by the erection of monuments, by the establishing of foundations, but the most complete earthly immortality is that which is the teaching by one generation to the next of those ideas, ideals and spiritual beliefs that have come from a great soul like Schwenfeld. The man has been dead 369 years and yet we are thinking of him and talking about him and writing of him and his ideas today. Christ who, so far as we know, wrote nothing, except the words written on the sand, is more alive in the world today than when he walked the streets of Jerusalem, the pathways on the plains, and the rugged slopes of the hills of Palestine. The immortality of the soul, in an existence apart from the flesh, is satisfying to the minds of men because they all recognize that no one in this life can develop all his spiritual possibilities. The flesh is frail, the time is short. Eternity only can afford full opportunity under such conditions as may exist. The human soul is never satisfied unless it is making spiritual progress and is entering into a larger possession of God's truth. Schwenfeld, and the descendants of the exiles that bore his name, are alive today in the thoughts that they have inspired, and the lives that have been guided and controlled by those thoughts. The traditions have been preserved. The memory of the exiles is revered. Our gratitude to them for their remarkable leadership is profound.



Early German Newspapers in Pennsylvania

By HERMAN L. COLLINS

(Inquirer's Girard), before the Society June 1, 1929, at Ursinus College, Collegeville

NOT to foster class hatreds, it is yet a most desirable thing to retain these ancestral lines and distinctions which you descendants of Schwenkfeldian Exiles have done in such a notable way.

To be offspring of a people who in primitive times, when merely crossing an ocean entailed hardships comparable to a war, must be regarded as a great honor. To travel 4000 miles under such conditions to plant a home on the edge of a wilderness covering a whole continent and to do that for a high principle stamped those pioneers as exceptional men and women.

To me there is no mystery about the origins of such world-famed characters as Washington and Lincoln, Franklin and Adams, Jefferson and Hamilton and scores of others. True, they grew up amid American savagery, yet they all had in them the right blood. And since it is true that the sinew and stamina of a race horse can be traced back 300 years to an Arabian ancestor, it must also be true that the high spirit and vast courage which led ancestors to flee a continent and cross an ocean just naturally kept on expanding when it reached American soil.

It is not my purpose to speak about your own ancestors. You know already far more than I could tell you. But in the few minutes during which I shall claim your patience I shall point out what another racial group (who like the Schwenkfeldians came to Pennsylvania) accomplished as newspaper publishers.

A noted scholar a few years ago argued that Pennsylvania German editors were largely responsible for that dialect known here and everywhere as "Pennsylvania Dutch." But if you use newspapers printed in German today as a yardstick, you must conclude that the Pennsylvania German as a distinct racial group has almost reached the point of extinction. Where once Pennsylvania had scores of German newspapers it today has a scant *eight* in this entire Commonwealth of more than 9,000,000 inhabitants.

In those great, original, pioneer German counties, Bucks, Northampton, Lehigh, Berks, Lebanon, Dauphin, Lancaster,

York and Adams, there is now but one solitary German newspaper.

Philadelphia has only two German newspapers, while a century-old German paper published in Berks perished during the World War. We now have in Pennsylvania more Polish newspapers than German and we also have more Italian newspapers than German. Populous counties in which are printed newspapers in such languages once so strange to American ears as Armenian, Ukrainian, Russian, Slovakian and Lithuanian you find today not a single daily or weekly German publication.

Philadelphia has as many negro newspapers as German and more Jewish than either and with a greater circulation. An oddity is found in Erie County which you rarely think of as peopled by Germans and yet Erie has two German newspapers, or twice the number found in these nine famous old Pennsylvania Dutch counties in the southeastern corner of our State. Yet there was a day when Germans in those nine counties and in Philadelphia comprised a third of the Commonwealth's population, when thousands read only German, attended only German schools and listened only to German sermons.

Lackawanna County, containing a city of 150,000, reads two Ukrainian, two Polish, one Italian and one Slovakian newspaper but no German. Its big neighbor Luzerne reads three Polish, two Slovak, two Italian but only one German newspaper. In Berks with its fine metropolis of Reading of 125,000 population you find two Polish and one Italian newspaper but miracle of miracles not a German. That great kingdom of coal called Schuylkill demands a Lithuanian and a Polish paper but does not apparently need one in German. In our neighbor Delaware County, now a teeming industrial center, thousands of people read their stock market reports and baseball scores in Italian. Fayette has a negro newspaper but no German. Johnstown has a lively Polish paper but not enough Germans to demand one in that tongue. Philadelphia has three Italian, three Polish, a Russian, an Armenian, several Jewish and two negro newspapers.

But in the century from 1750 to 1850 the only foreign language newspaper known in Pennsylvania was German. In that century hundreds of them were born. Some flourished and exerted wide influence and some others speedily died. That was true when the population of the State ranged only from 300,000 to a couple of millions. But as I've said, with a population of more than 9,000,000 today we demand only eight German newspapers.

This rapid extinction of the once mighty German press is something of a literary tragedy. It was in Pennsylvania where

was born the first alien language newspaper in all America and it was German.

That pioneer was issued 190 years ago by that master publicist, Christopher Sauer. He named it "The High Dutch Pennsylvania Historiographer, or Collection of Important Intelligence from the Kingdom of Nature and the Church." Quite a mouth-filling name for any publication and when the subscriber had gone through with the title he had gotten fairly his money's worth of reading. It was first a quarterly, then changed to a weekly. Doubtless for the reason that subscribers had only seven days in which to read it, Sauer cut down the name to "Der Germantowner Zeitung."

I think the name as it was originally is of deep interest to students. You observe that Sauer called his periodical the "High Dutch Pennsylvania Historiographer"—and not "High German."

Those quibblers who constantly remind us that Pennsylvania Dutch is a silly expression since the people were not Dutch but German must reckon with Christopher Sauer himself who started it. As the title "Germantowner Zeitung" implies, it was published at Germantown, the first American home of German people, a name it still bears, as a part of Philadelphia, although during the World War some over-zealous patriots who remained about 3000 miles behind the guns wished to obliterate that historic and honorable name from the map of Pennsylvania.

It is not my intention to enumerate here the names of that ever-swelling number of German newspapers which, following the star of old Christopher Sauer, began to flood Eastern Pennsylvania. Indeed, I shall not weary you by naming even one. But they sprang up rapidly. They appeared at Easton, Reading, Lancaster, York, Lebanon, Harrisburg and in many lesser towns. Montgomery County also had its German newspapers which went into many hundred homes. Bucks County saw at various times the birth, prosperity and demise of many more.

It was certainly true that numerous ones in that gallant band of Schwenkfeldian Exiles who pushed into this fertile region read German rather than English newspapers.

America's first religious publication was printed by Sauer in German as was also the first American Bible. Both came from his Germantown press.

When a third of this State's population was German, the war of languages was intense. It was waged along all the avenues of social, political and religious life. Until quite recently city ordinances in Philadelphia appeared regularly in

German newspapers. It was the practice for years in many eastern counties to use German as well as English papers for the dissemination of official documents and advertisements.

That intermingling of German and English in print was a potent cause for the creation of that historic dialect we know as Pennsylvania Dutch. The *printed* rather than the spoken word did the trick. Read the records in some of those olden-time journals and you find many instances where a German editor would burst forth with an English word or phrase the more forcibly to nail down his thought. This was so in the primitive schools of that era and also true in the churches. What a war it was to banish German and substitute English in scores of public schools scattered throughout these populous southeastern counties where the German element was so powerful!

You see near this spot the first Lutheran Church built in the United States but it was many a year before any Lutheran Church witnessed the phenomenon of all the services conducted in English. That battle was won in old St. John's Church in Philadelphia where recently they removed the dust of many an ancient grave to make room for the mammoth Delaware River bridge.

The early Pennsylvania German press was a staunch and loyal thing. It preached law, order and thrift.

When Charles Godfrey Leland won immortality with his "Hans Brietman Ballads," the fashion of using broken English became a rage. The Jewish comedian had not yet appeared and it was heyday for the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect.

There was one widely-known humorist in the Lehigh Valley who wrote for a newspaper over the pen name Peter Schwefflebrenner. Many are living today who greatly enjoyed the wit and philosophy of that pioneer column conductor. Classics there were, too, which appeared in admirable German. Who can read and fail to admire the Rev. Dr. Henry Harbaugh's "Old Schoolhouse on the Crick" and his really fine poem, "The Waves"?

The German newspaper helped greatly in that extraordinary and sweeping change in names of people as well as of food, clothing and other material things. They were notoriously bad spellers in those days and anything might happen to an immigrant's name when registered at the Philadelphia dock by an unlettered British clerk. French, German, Dutch and English all suffered alike and often in a laughable way. Thus there were three brothers who were Frenchmen. One lived among French in Pennsylvania and was known as Pierre. Another moved to Lancaster and was called by his German

neighbors Stein. The third came to Philadelphia and was plain Mr. Stone. Pierre, Stein and Stone all mean the same thing in the three languages. And so with another trio of French brothers Tonnelier. One became known in his German settlement Kieffer, while British neighbors called the third Mr. Cooper. Again all three mean the same. There were hundreds of other changes in family names. Chateau is now "Shadow," Le Char is now "Lesher," Bandemon is "Boatman," De La Plank, Eddie Plank; De Cessua, plain Cessua.

The originator of Boyertown was Jacob Bayer, not Boyer. The name was often spelled in German and English newspapers Beyer. The same ship which brought to Philadelphia 201 years ago Jacob Bayer also carried a family named Beyer. They settled in Montgomery County. But soon after their arrival the name begins to appear in local annals written Boyer.

Shakespeare, it is said, spelled his own name a dozen different ways. One of our American immortals is Abraham Lincoln and yet that family name has more than 20 different forms, such as Linkhorn, Linkin, Linkon, Linkern.

Some early German newspapers catered to their public by printing a column or two in English.

Relatively speaking, in no other State was the foreign language newspaper so important as it once was in Pennsylvania. With a third of the State's population, and a decidedly important part, of that native tongue, the German newspapers inaugurated by Sauer wielded a great influence.

In the far interior as they were in Revolutionary times, York, Lancaster, Dauphin and Berks German newspapers were strongly loyal. In Philadelphia the Sauer newspaper had a different story to tell. But due in considerable measure to the work of German editors, a large part of the first eight companies of soldiers who marched away to join Washington's army at Boston in 1775 were gallant German youths.

Before any soldier from Quaker Philadelphia or Chester Counties got into that war there were hundreds of Germans from what are now Adams, York, Dauphin, Lancaster and Berks Counties. Because there was such a large sprinkling of Germans, officers from other places referred sometimes to this daring contingent as the Pennsylvania Dutch.

The extinction of the German newspaper in Pennsylvania must mean one of two things. First, that the German has become so staunchly amalgamated with the British race in Pennsylvania that there is no longer need for separate language newspapers. Second, that the immigrants who now arrive are so conversant with English they do not care for home tongue

reading matter. The contrary is true of tens of thousands of Polish, Slovakian, Hungarian, Russian, Jewish and Italians who migrated to Pennsylvania during the past two decades. They have not yet had time to acquire English, although children almost immediately do so in their play and at school.

I congratulate you descendants of Schwenkfeldian Exiles on the spirit which keeps alive the traditions of your ancestry. In these days when the world is overrun with autos, smothered beneath airplanes, jazzed to somnolence by radio, accumulating material wealth at a rate not deemed possible even twenty years ago, driven mad by speculation and world political intrigues, it is refreshing to turn back again to the calm simplicity of our pioneers.

In high social circles they may fight over this or that candidate for President of the Colonial Dames, but the real Colonial Dame had not one social frill. Better than that she could drive a yoke of oxen to a plow in a stump-filled field; she could chop down forests; she could and did scalp Indians and she could and did rear families in surroundings which to us seem savage.

The life of our ancestors who came into Pennsylvania 175 or more years ago was a fine blend of high courage, deep principle and hard work.

Those three will make any people great.



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of the
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