

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF LANCASTER

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

THE Lancaster Journal of Monday, December 30th, 1816, contained an announcement that those favoring the organization of a German society, for the relief of distressed immigrants, were requested to attend a meeting at John Erben's coffee house on Wednesday, January 1st, 1817. Whether or not the meeting was held, is not known, as no subsequent references to it appeared in local papers.

Nearly two years later, another effort was made to form a similar society.

The Lancaster Journal of Friday, September 11th, 1818, contained the following announcement: "A number of Germans, and descendants of Germans, citizens of Lancaster, being duly sensible of the many disadvantages which those who are strangers in our country must necessarily labor under, (and also deploring the impositions often practiced by a number of worthless characters, who by taking advantage of the liberal dispositions of our fellow-citizens in general, and abusing their generosity, prevent many other immigrants, who are worthy of being assisted, from enjoying countenance and support amongst us), have entered into an association, headed by the Reverend German clergymen of this city, under the name and title of 'The German Society of Lancaster,' the objects of which are as follows:

1. "To afford needful counsel and advice to German immigrants who may arrive in Lancaster.

2. "To give or lend needful assistance to strangers who may arrive amongst us from Germany; and, in some particular cases, likewise to such Germans and descendants of Germans, arriving from other parts of our country, who may be deserving thereof.

3. "To see that proper justice be done to German redemptioners, who, having fled from government oppression, may be treated by their masters as human beings and according to the covenants of their indenture.

4. "To do its endeavor for the purpose of preventing impositions which may be attempted by immigrants, by which the chari-

table disposition of our fellow-citizens may be checked and thwarted, and the honor and welfare of the better immigrants injured."

Each member was requested to pay into the hands of the treasurer, for the benefit of the society, at the time of subscribing to the constitution, not less than two dollars; and, at every quarterly meeting, fifty cents. Life membership was thirty dollars.

There was to be invested, as a permanent fund, a sum at least equal to the amount of the original subscription of all the members on the books of the society. Persons donating five or more dollars became honorary members of the organization, and such donations were to be added to the permanent fund.

All persons desirous of becoming members of the society were informed that the subscription book had been left at the house of George Louis Mayer.

The first quarterly meeting of The German Society of Lancaster was held on Monday evening, October 5th, 1818, at the German Reformed school house.¹ Officers were elected as follows: President, Rev. Christian L. F. Endress; first vice-president, Rev. John Henry Hoffmeier; second vice-president, Rev. Constantine Miller; managers, William Reichenbach, F. A. Muhlenberg, Henry Keffer, Christian Smith, Jacob Eichholtz; treasurer, George Louis Mayer; collector, John Ihling; and secretary, Joseph Ehrenfried.

At a meeting of the society held in the German Reformed school house on Saturday afternoon, January 1st, 1820, the following officers were elected: President, Rev. Dr. Christian L. F. Endress; first vice-president, Rev. Samuel Reinke; second vice-president, Adam Reigart; treasurer, George Louis Mayer; collector, Jacob Snyder; managers, Henry Keffer, John Jungling, George Hoff, John Ihling, John Voight, George Koenig, Thomas Wentz; and secretary, Joseph Ehrenfried.

On the evening of that day, Rev. Dr. Christian L. F. Endress, pastor of Trinity Lutheran church, Lancaster, president of the society, delivered addresses in German and in English.²

¹ The Lancaster Journal of Monday, October 12th, 1818, stated that the meeting was held on Monday, October 6th. Subsequent issues and almanacs of that year show that the 6th occurred on Tuesday.

² The Lancaster Journal of Tuesday, December 28th, 1819, stated that "an oration in the German and English languages" would be delivered by the president of the society at 6 o'clock on the evening of Saturday, January 1st, 1820, in the court house.

His address in English was printed in the Lancaster Journal of Friday, January 7th, 1820, and filled more than two columns. It was an eloquent plea for assistance and for the humane treatment of German immigrants.

Dr. Endress spoke, in part, as follows:

“Will you indulge me the pleasing privilege to name my parents here? If I do, it shall be to shame the silly pride of men unwilling to acknowledge the poverty of their parent stock. For me, then, the afflictions of my parents have the more endeared them to my memory. I do not choose to forget that they once were trembling and afflicted strangers, far from their native home, poor and friendless in a foreign land. On the maternal side, especially, descendant from a race of suffering strangers, who fled from the persecutions of intolerant bigotry, which on one unhallowed night shed through the quiet habitations of France the blood of many thousand professors of religion.³ They sought in Germany an asylum from tyranic force. They found not there the smiles of heaven which America, the land of strangers, affords to every honest and industrious immigrant. Poverty and distress overwhelmed them. Their families were scattered over every quarter of the globe. My parent, in her tender years, was torn from her native home and sent to this country to obtain, under the protection of a sister, that nurture and cultivation which her mother was no longer living to give her. She came, and found her sister reposing in the tomb. A fatherless and motherless child, of just sufficient age to feel and know the full weight of her affliction, she sought relief and a home among total strangers. She found them under the roof of a family whose language even she did not understand. She blessed to the last the house which took the stranger in. She left to her sons and daughters such lessons of benevolence as will ever render their duty to the immigrant in distress deeply written in their feelings and strongly commending to the rational mind. . . .

“There was then no German society, no institution to relieve the immigrants’ distresses, none to shelter them against the unfeeling cruelties of the base; and many Americans forgot that they themselves had once been strangers here. Scenes of misery

³ Massacre of St. Bartholomew, August 24th, 1572.

occurred among the immigrant Germans, the relation of which often chilled my heart when in my younger days I heard my parents recounting them. . . .

“At length, about the year 1764, the inhabitants of Philadelphia began to enjoy the ability to give assistance to their suffering brethren. A few persons associated themselves together in ties of benevolence and honor, and united their efforts to relieve German immigrants. The number of members, in about two years after its first establishment, increased to upwards of sixty. Twenty shillings was the sum paid on entering the society; five shillings the quarterly contribution. The society grew from time to time in numbers and in wealth, until the last annual expenditure, without encroaching on the capital stock, amounted to nearly twelve hundred dollars. Fifty dollars of this sum were applied to the purchase of books for the library, and for the tuition of two students under the direction and guardianship of the society,—all the remainder was given for the original purposes of the association.

“About the same time, or soon after the establishment of the German society, we find four others of a similar nature existing in Philadelphia: The Hibernian, St. George, St. Andrews, and the Welsh societies,—the Welsh claiming a precedence in the date of organization. . . .

“It was not until a number of years later, that the Germans of New York followed the example of their Philadelphia brethren. They had not the same incentive to institute such a society, as Philadelphia continued, for many years, to be the principal resort of German immigrants. The German society of New York, has, however, now existed and flourished between thirty and forty years.

“At length, a few years ago, the Germans of Baltimore, finding the immigrations to that city more numerous than formerly, were likewise induced to follow the footsteps so strongly marked. The State of Maryland has given them special encouragement; and we have reason to hope, from the power the laws of the State have bestowed upon them and the respectability of its members, that this society will develop into one of the most useful of its kind.

“The origin of our society and the conditions which inspired it, are too recent not to be known. . . .

“It certainly redounds to the honor of Lancaster that within

a little more than a year a society established for such purposes as this has grown to a membership approaching seventy. I fondly hope that it may long flourish and increase, and be an ornament to the German name in Lancaster. The benefits that have already arisen out of its existence are not inconsiderable. I have spoken of these at length, in my German address. I need only to name them here for the information of those who do not understand the German language: Through the existence of our society, then, our city has been cleared of the swarm of German beggars who once infested it. The habit of begging has become discountenanced, and the German name rid of a blot occasioned by the practice. The society has also done some good in ameliorating the condition of some of the serving class of immigrants, and rendering them better servants to their masters. Upwards of 150 poor and distressed strangers have eaten our bread and received our aid in seeking permanent homes. We have sometimes been deceived; but who would expect us to be charitable, and, at the same time, escape every attempt at fraud? We must not withhold the gift of love from the truly distressed, fearing to be deceived by the arts of imposture. We will detect and expose them when we can; but if deceived, at least we will have done our duty, and heaven will not the less smile upon our act of kindness.

“When Germans go about in Lancaster with the design or pretext of gathering alms for their relief, it has become a practice to send them to the president or managers of the German society. This is right and proper; we make no objection; but sometimes people are sent, with whom we have nothing to do as officers of the society, and but for a misconception of the objects of the organization we might often be spared the trouble of examining and the pain of sending such persons away without giving them the assistance they hoped for.

“Our society was not instituted for the purpose of saving German immigrants the labor of working out their passage by their personal service. The funds of the society may not be applied by its managers for the purpose of redeeming servants from their masters. Immense funds would be required to carry such a purpose into effect; and who would consider it proper or beneficial?

“And, further, when German immigrants have already settled themselves in another part of our country, and then go forth to

gather alms for their present support, and come to us for that purpose, they need not be sent to the officers of the German society, for such persons are not the proper objects of our contributions.

“In general, the number of truly helpless strangers is really so considerable that our contributions can be given to none but the utterly needy, who having no place of residence, are seeking for a home; or living among us, are in need of employment and means of sustenance. And they who still have something left, and come to such a society as ours to ask for means of greater convenience, or perhaps of luxury, should rather be severely reprimanded, for they must certainly know that the pressure of the day has produced many thousands who are in need of the necessities of life.”

At a quarterly meeting of the society on April 3rd, 1820, the following were elected honorary members: Rev. Dr. Lochman, Harrisburg; Rev. Mr. Schmucker, York; Rev. Mr. Muhlenberg, Reading; Rev. Mr. Hendel and Rev. Mr. Ernst, Lebanon.⁴

At a meeting in the German Reformed school house on Monday, January 1st, 1821, the following officers were elected: President, Rev. Dr. Christian L. F. Endress; first vice-president, Rev. Samuel Reinke; second vice-president, Adam Reigart; managers, John Jungling, Henry Keffer, John Ihling, John Erben, George Koenig, John F. Voight and Thomas Wentz; treasurer, George Louis Mayer; collector, Jacob Snyder; and secretary, Joseph Ehrenfried.⁵

The Lancaster Journal of Friday, September 28th, 1821, contained an announcement that a quarterly meeting would be held in the German school house on Monday, October 1st, at which time an oration in German would be delivered.

At a meeting held in the German Reformed school house on Tuesday, January 1st, 1822, the following were elected officers of the society: President, Rev. Dr. Christian L. F. Endress; first vice-president, Adam Reigart; second vice-president, George Koenig; treasurer, George Louis Mayer; collector, William Ihling; managers, Henry Keffer, Thomas Wentz, John Erben, John F. Voight, John Ihling, John Bear and John F. Heinitsh; and secretary, Joseph Ehrenfried.⁶

⁴ Lancaster Journal, Friday, May 26th, 1820.

⁵ Lancaster Journal, Friday, January 12th, 1821.

⁶ Lancaster Journal, Friday, January 4th, 1822.

The Lancaster Journal of Friday, August 9th, 1822, contained a notice that at the last quarterly meeting of the society the secretary was directed to publish, for the guidance of delinquent members, the eleventh article of the constitution of the society, which was as follows:

“Each member shall pay into the hands of the treasurer, for the benefit of the society, at the time of subscribing to the constitution, not less than two dollars, and at every quarterly meeting fifty cents. In default of payment of the whole annual contribution, the person in default shall not be entitled to a vote at the general election; and in case of a default for two successive years, the person thus in arrears shall be notified thereof, and if he fail within ten days thereafter to pay such dues, he shall cease to be considered a member of the society. Any member may pay at once the sum of thirty dollars, which shall be received as in full for his contribution during life.”

The secretary, Joseph Ehrenfried, informed the public that in justice to the regular members, the article would be strictly adhered to and impartially enforced by exacting the payment of all arrears due at the time of expulsion.

The Lancaster Journal of Friday, February 27th, 1824, contained an announcement that a number of friends of German literature in Lancaster city had decided to establish a German library association by securing capital with which to purchase and import a selection of the best and latest German works treating of belles lettres, geography, civil and natural history, etc. These were to constitute a library for the use of members. All friends of German literature within the county of Lancaster were invited to become members of the association. A meeting in the interest of this purpose was planned to be held at the tavern conducted by William Cooper (the Red Lion, on West King street) on Saturday evening, February 28th. Whether the meeting was held, as announced, is not now known.

A meeting of the German society was advertised to be held on Monday evening, February 7th, 1825, in the German Reformed school house.⁷

Nothing further could be learned from local papers of the

⁷ Lancaster Journal, Friday, February 4th, 1825.

activities of the society, until two years later. The Lancaster Journal of Friday, March 30th, 1827, stated that a special meeting of the organization would be held on Saturday, April 7th, 1827.

The society doubtless continued to carry forward its good work, although we do not find further references to it in local papers until six years later. A general meeting was held on Friday, January 18th, 1833, in the German Lutheran school house, at which time the following officers were elected: President, Adam Reigart; first vice-president, George King; second vice-president, Henry Keffer; managers, John F. Heinitsh, John Bear, Christopher Hager, John Erben, John Ehler, Henry Young and John Mumm; collector, William Ihling; secretary, Joseph Ehrenfried.⁸ A meeting was advertised to be held on Monday, February 4th, in the German Lutheran school house.

The last reference to the society appeared in the Lancaster Journal of Friday, June 28th, 1833. A quarterly meeting was advertised for Monday, July 1st, in the German Lutheran school house. Whether or not it was held is not now known.

SILVER PITCHER PRESENTED TO MRS. ROSINA HUBLEY IN 1842

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

ON July 4th, 1842, a handsome flag was presented by the citizens of Baltimore to the Lancaster Fencibles, a military company composed of some of the finest men of the community. The committee delegated by the citizens of the Monumental City to make the formal presentation of the flag, was entertained at the White Swan tavern, at that time the leading hostelry in Lancaster. It was conducted by Mrs. Rosina Hubley, a most estimable woman.¹ Mrs. Hubley entertained the Baltimore committee so generously and with a lavish hospitality so fully in keeping with the best traditions of the famous tavern, that on their return home they de-

⁸ Lancaster Journal, Friday, February 1st, 1833.

¹ For a brief biography of Mrs. Rosina Hubley the reader is referred to Vol. 11, p. 413, of the Proceedings of The Lancaster County Historical Society.