

SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF LUDWIG REINGRUBER, 1836-1885

Ludwig Reingruber, the Bavarian artist, who was a citizen of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, from 1870 to 1883, was the son of Maximilian and Frances Reingruber. He was born August 11, 1836, at Ratisbon on the Danube. Ratisbon, from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, was the foremost flourishing city in Southern Germany, and from 1663 to 1810 was the permanent seat of the Imperial Diet. This city occupies an important position in the history of mediaeval art, and in it remain many remarkable structures of that period.

There is the Cathedral of St. Peter, with richly sculptured portals, glorious stained glass and elegant open towers. There is a Rathhaus with fine facade. In the "Street of Ambassadors" many buildings are ornamented with picturesque armorial bearings. Across the Blue Danube stands the Walhalla, a magnificent German Pantheon, erected by King Ludwig.

Seventy miles north of Ratisbon is the city of Nuremberg (home of Albrecht Drurer and Peter Vischer), and about the same distance southward lies Munich, capital of Bavaria, with its magnificent treasure houses, richly filled with works of classic, mediaeval and modern art.

His Early Days.

Ratisbon was Reingruber's birth-place and early home; Munich at the period of its greatest art activity was well known to him; and Nurem-

berg he was doubtless familiar with. In such richly historic and artistic environment, our artist spent his early life, details of which are but little known. In the matter of his early education, we are told he was largely self-taught. Having chosen the career of artist and decorator, he served a rigorous German apprenticeship, compared with which, he afterward said, "an American apprenticeship is as a golden dream." We have learned from German artists, who were his contemporaries, that the young Reingruber was first honor student in both day and night art classes and worked under George Stindt and Jacob Filse. Afterward, as a fresco painter, he found employment in Munich, Leipsic and Vienna, acquiring a thorough mastery of the principles and technique of his profession.

Came to America.

In 1868 our artist, aged thirty-two years, came to America, and we learn of him first in Erie, where he executed interior decorative work, frescoing the Opera House, public halls and churches.

And now we chronicle the happy circumstance which accounts for his coming to Lancaster.

While decorating a church in Erie, of which Rev. A. L. Bentze was pastor, he met Miss Mary Kiehl, of our city, who won the heart of the Bavarian artist, and their marriage followed, February 27, 1870, in Lancaster. They returned to Erie, that he might complete work there, and came back to Lancaster in June of the same year. Reingruber must have been impressed with the absence of an artistic atmosphere in Lancaster, although he probably felt at home among the Ger-

mans of our city. How provincial and barren of ornament and picturesqueness must the Lancaster of 1870 have appeared to a native of Ratisbon (a city of about the same size), where there was so much of artistic and historic interest. There was here, at the time, of course, the Trinity Lutheran Church, that remarkably fine example of Gregorgian architecture, the Court House and Prison. There were the swinging hotel signs (now unfortunately gone), and the carved wooden image of Robert Fulton, over the entrance of the "Hall," which bore his name. That was about all of architecture and sculptural significance. The interiors of the churches were Puritanically bare of ornament, on the walls and ceilings. Reingruber, however, caught sight of a sign in front of the Examiner printing office, representing a pair of hunting dogs, cleverly painted by Charles Wise, sign painter and aeronaut, whom he immediately sought and became associated with. They, together, soon afterward executed the decorations of the Cooper House office and "tap room," producing an excellent work "in oil," principal features of which were large hunting scenes ensconced in stucco-effect panels, between which were graceful festoons of fruit and flowers. Their next work was the decorating of the interior of the Lutheran Church, New Holland. After that work, Wise discontinued decorative work and Reingruber started for himself, upon a career, which, by his marked ability and indefatigable industry, led to the artistic enrichment of many churches and public buildings of Lancaster and neighboring cities, including Philadelphia.

Character of Decorative Work.

The general characteristic of Reingruber's style of interior decorative work, whether in church, civic building or residence, was a scheme of panel treatment with enrichments, all in stucco effect of classic style, introducing within the panels pictorial representations of religious or other appropriate subjects. The latter he painted directly on the plaster (not as at present the custom, on canvas, to be afterward attached). Adopting this general plan, he followed the masters of the Renaissance, and introduced into Lancaster a style of artistic and pictorial decoration not previously seen here, but which is one of the glories of the Old World.

Church Interiors Decorated.

Among the first churches decorated by Reingruber was Zion Lutheran Church, on East Vine street, about 1873 in the classic manner described above. The strong representations of Luther and Melancthon, which were part of the scheme, were unfortunately destroyed when the church was remodeled.

The decoration of the interior of St. Anthony's Catholic Church, on East Orange street, under the rectorship of Rev. Anthony F. Kaul, was begun in the spring of 1874. One can well imagine the delight of Reingruber when he received this much-desired commission, which gave him the opportunity to execute a richly artistic church interior. The stucco effect treatment, with pictorial enrichments, was followed. The subjects about the chancel and upon the ceiling were beautifully and artistically rendered, especially the reproduction of Correg-

gio's "Madonna of the Night," at left of the altar, and the series of medalion heads of saints in the ceiling, which are in the nature of ideal portraits. This work was completed in June, 1875, and the many visitors from other sections of the State who were competent judges pronounced it a work of high character, and it won for Reingruber the reputation of a master decorator.

The interior of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, Duke and Church streets, was frescoed by our German artist, and, when afterwards remodeled, the pictorial work was studiously retained. Reingruber decorated St. James' Episcopal Church under the guidance of Rev. Watson, who was much interested in historic church decoration. William H. Miller, grandson of Jacob Eicholtz, assisted in this work. Reingruber frescoed the interior of a Catholic Church at Lamokin, near Wilmington, Del., in the chancel of which he painted a large representation of the Crucifixion. Among many other churches frescoed was a Catholic church in Columbia.

His Decorations of Civic Buildings.

In Lancaster Reingruber frescoed the Masonic Temple and Fulton Hall. In Millersville he decorated the chapel of the State Normal School, which the artist considered one of his best works; in Columbia he frescoed the Opera House in stucco effect of classic design, introducing, in panels, representations of the Muses; in Marietta, he decorated the Odd Fellows Hall; in Erie, he frescoed the Opera House. In other places, work of similar character was done by the Bavarian artist, and, even after going to St. Louis, in 1883, he was invited

to bid on decorative work in Erie, on the decoration of the Pennsylvania State Hospital and on other proposed work.

Residential and Other Work.

Residences were frescoed by our artist in a high-class manner, including those of Samuel H. Reynolds, R. H. Brubaker and the Haldemans of Columbia and Chickies. He also painted landscapes, game, fruit and flower pieces, and even signs and curtains.

Portraits by Reingruber.

In addition to all the church, civic and other work, Reingruber found time to execute a great number of portraits (a partial list of which is appended to this sketch). His style or manner was acquired before the broad, impressionistic style swept Europe. His handling was conservative. His colorings were those of the Munich school of the times. He was a great admirer of the works of Eicholtz, which he delighted to copy, doubtless gaining greater breadth of handling from the experience. We are indebted to Reingruber for preserving the visages of many of Lancaster's most prominent people of the period. He also executed portraits of a number of dignitaries of the Catholic Church of Philadelphia and elsewhere. In St. Louis, Judge Krumm was among his "sitters." He rendered, in pastel, a portrait of "Mary Anderson" for his studio which is said to have been much admired. He painted, in 1871, portraits of himself and his wife. At the recent Portraiture Exhibition in Lancaster (1912) he was represented by portraits, in oil, of Rev. Anthony F. Kaul, Elisha Reynolds, Esq., Dr. M. L. Herr, Hon. O. J.

Dickey, Charles Kline, and a crayon likeness of Rev. John Crumbach.

In the Studio.

Reingruber occupied various studios while in Lancaster. In 1878 he was tenanted in the large upper room of the First National Bank, where, we are prone to believe he was lured by the classic architecture of the building. It was in this studio that the writer often visited him. There he would unfold his ready mind, ardently stating his ideas of artistic and other matters. He was an interesting talker, speaking English fluently and with little foreign accent. He often contrasted German and American ideals and customs, as when he noted how our people "roosted" about the soldiers' monument, instead of reverencing it, in the manner of his countrymen, as if it were a shrine.

Having been given a copy of "Hunt's Talk on Art" by the writer, Reingruber was so enthusiastic over the sayings of the New Englander that he marked the passages which impressed him. He then instructed his apprentice to copy those passages. After the young man had accomplished his task, it was discovered that Reingruber had marked practically the entire book, the apprentice being overwhelmed by his labors.

Reingruber—The Man.

A remarkable man was Ludwig Reingruber—he had distinctively the Teutonic spirit—strong, persistent, idealistic, romantic, and, in the American environment, he seemed to delight in a certain liberty which no circumstances could brook. It is interesting to note that Ludwig Reingruber was from Bavaria, where men delight in

expressing their ideas and sense of the beautiful in plastic art, in music and in poetic form. He had a realizing sense of his ability; he was yet modest.

He was indefatigable, working nights and Sunday, and often, under great difficulties and being deeply conscientious, he would destroy much work so that it might be executed in a better manner. It is difficult to learn how far his pictorial works were original conceptions, and how far adaptations from classic or accepted prototypes, but much of it was of a high order and admirably executed.

Apart from his ability as an artist and decorator, one is deeply impressed by his sterling character, and it is with reverence for his memory that we note his extraordinary devotion to his wife and children.

After Reingruber had been a highly valued citizen of Lancaster for thirteen years, he went, in 1883, with his family, to St. Louis, Mo. There his wife had relatives, and he hoped to be successful in securing commissions for portraits and decorative work, especially as there was in that city a strong German element. Soon after reaching his new home came impairment of the sight of the artist (whose eyes had served him so well). This was a great affliction, and he lived only two years after his arrival.

On May 28, 1885, Ludwig Reingruber, Bavarian artist, passed to the Great Beyond. His earthly body was brought to Lancaster for its final resting place, and Monterey Lodge of Odd Fellows, No. 242 (of which he became a member in 1875), performed the last rites at their hall on South Queen street, and interment was made at Zion Cemetery.

We of Lancaster, in appreciating the artistically beautiful decorative work done by Reingruber in our churches and public buildings, may well regard that work as a memorial of an accomplished and remarkable German artist.

Partial List of Portraits by Ludwig Reingruber.

Dr. John L. Atlee, Sr.

Charles Kline.

Rev. Anthony F. Kaul.

Henry Sener.

Mrs. Henry Sener.

George A. Kiehl.

Rev. E. Greenwald.

Members of the Amweg family.

Members of the Baumgardner family.

George Diller.

J. Steinman.

Rev. Watson,

S. H. Reynolds, Esq.

Judge J. B. Livingston.

M. L. Herr, M. D.

Mrs. M. L. Herr.

B. Frank Eshleman, Esq.

Mary Wilson, M. D.

G. Arnold.

Mrs. Chambers (pastel).

J. L. Steinmetz, Esq.

Rev. David Geisinger.

Isaac Hiester, Esq.

Frank Brenneman.

Charles Brenneman.

Rev. Dr. C. E. Haupt.

Wm. Roy.

Members of the Zahn family.

John F. Long (crayon).

Mrs. Charles Locher,

Sener Bros.

Mrs. Samuel Schwartz.

Master Harner.

Henry Gerhart.

Carl Siebert,

William Peiper.

Mrs. Wm. Peiper.

Ludwig Reingruber.

Mrs. Ludwig Reingruber.

Isaac Diller.

Mrs. Brenneman.

✓ Elisha Reynolds, Esq.

Judge Krumm (St. Louis).

Peter Blow (St. Louis).

Smith P. Galt, Esq., (St. Louis),
formerly of Lancaster.

— Rev. John Crumbach (crayon).

“Mary Anderson.”

The above were painted in oil, except where otherwise noted.

Note.—The writer gratefully acknowledges indebtedness for information to Mrs. Ludwig Reingruber, wife of the subject of this sketch, and from their daughter, Mrs. Caroline R. Wilson, both of St. Louis, where also a son of Reingruber resides. Also to Rev. Anthony F. Kaul, Hon. J. P. McCaskey, Louis Knauskoph, Martin Rettig and William H. Miller, the latter having had the privilege of working with the German artist. Especially appreciated was the series of letters from Mrs. Wilson, whose great devotion to her father's memory is worthy of note.

Author: Hager, Walter C.

Title: Sketch of the life of Ludwig Reingruber, 1836-1885 / by
Walter C. Hager.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Reingruber, Ludwig, 1836-1885.
Artists--Pennsylvania--Lancaster County.
Lancaster County (Pa.)--Biography.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1913

Description: 197-106 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 17,
no. 7

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.17

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

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