OSWALD SEIDENSTICKER, BIBLIOPHILE

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Germans in Pennsylvania, from their earliest immigration, created and developed industries which had a lasting influence on the culture of the early settlers of the country. Printing, strongly centered in Pennsylvania and active in surrounding states, was one of these industries. Christopher Sauer's printing press and publishing house was in existence for two generations, during which time many books, pamphlets and three quarto editions of the German Bible were published. Benjamin Franklin's press was also active in issuing German imprints, as was that of Ephrata where much religious literature was issued. Through the eighteenth century German presses were established in other sections and their publications became more numerous. One scholar recognized the value of knowing and preserving the knowledge of these numerous German publications. From time to time he compiled lists of the books he handled. He gathered information painstakingly in preparing lists of the books he heard about but had no opportunity to handle. Friends with first-hand knowledge offered other information, until this scholar-bibliophile, Oswald Seidensticker, brought to realization his well known book, *The First Century of German Printing in America, 1728-1830.*

Because of its authenticity this book has been used by many people as a check-list for the early German publications of the country. The compiler, Oswald Seidensticker, had a background that was thoroughly German. He was born in Gottingen, Hanover, May 3, 1825. His father, Dr. Christian Friedrich Seidensticker, became connected with a German movement which wanted a more liberal constitution, and was made commander of the civil guard. Suppressed by an army of some size, Seidensticker was imprisoned along with other leaders. The trial lasted five years with a verdict of life imprisonment. In 1845,
however, he was pardoned on the condition that he emigrate to America without seeing his family.

During the imprisonment the young wife lived near the university with her five children. Only Oswald felt the loss of the father and the pain of the mother. He tried to be father to the children. The mother established a private school. Oswald attended the Gymnasium, and later matriculated at the University of Gottingen as a student of philosophy and philology. In 1846 he received a doctor’s degree with distinction. In the same year he came to America with the family to join his father, then located in Philadelphia.

In America young Oswald studied medicine in order to have a profession to earn money. Later he decided to give up this field and took a position as teacher at Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts, now a suburb of Boston. In 1852 he felt capable of taking a directorship of a private school in Brooklyn, New York. While here he met a Miss Logo, an Anglo-American, whom he married in 1858. The same year he returned to Philadelphia and presided over "eine Privatschule" until 1867. He found recognition among the people and in 1867 was made professor of German language and literature at the University of Pennsylvania. As an instructor he was greatly esteemed, bringing to the students not only a knowledge but a real appreciation of the German writers, and especially an understanding of Goethe and Schiller. "Er war ein Lehrer im höheren, fortschrittlichen Sinne."¹

Dr. Seidensticker was interested in the intellectual movements outside the university and collected a great amount of material concerning the Germans. He became a member of the American Philosophical Society, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Philadelphia Library, which was established in 1824. From these sources he was able to obtain help in his research work. The first fruit of the field of research was a historical sketch under the title "Johann Kelpius, der Einfiedler am Wissahickon," which appeared about 1870 in the _Deutschen Pionier_. Other historical sketches that appeared from year to year were: 1870-71, "Franz Daniel Pastorius und die Gründung


Dr. Seidensticker wrote articles for periodicals not only in Philadelphia, but also in New York and Baltimore: “A Colonial Monastery,” Century Magazine (December, 1881); “The Relation of English and German Literature in the Eighteenth Century,” Poet Lore (Feb.-Mar., 1890).3 He was also the author of a volume of historical sketches, Bilder aus der Deutsch-pennsylvanischen Geschichte, which appeared as Vol. II of Geschichtsblatter, Bilder und Mitteilungen aus dem Leben der Deutschen in America, edited by Carl Schurz.

In 1858 Dr. Seidensticker became a member of the Deutschen Gesellschaft and from 1863 to 1870 held the position of librarian. Later he became president of the library committee and was the prime mover in developing an “Archives” division of the library. “Mit diesem Archiv, fur das er unermuendlich thätig

war, wollte er eine zuverlässige Quelle für deutsch-amerikanische Geschichtsforschung schaffen."  

Not only was Dr. Seidensticker the promoter of a new department in the library, he was also the founder of the Deutschen Pionier-Verein von Philadelphia.


The organization was formed on March twenty-fourth, 1881, and officers were duly elected. Dr. Seidensticker was the first president.

The strenuous life of writing and attending meetings, teaching, and meeting the demands of many requests affected his health, so that he and his daughter returned to Germany. He seemed greatly refreshed upon his return, and continued his duties and the carrying on of the many activities he loved. To do this he was forced to work late into the night. It was not long until death, which came in 1894, claimed a man loved and revered by the mighty throng of German-Americans whose history, welfare, and cause were always with him.

Comments from various estimable people show how highly he was thought of. Mr. Heinrich Armin Rattermann, editor of Der Deutsche Pionier, pays, in Erinnerungen aus dem Pionier-Lebendeer Deutschen in Amerika, published at Cincinnati, Ohio, a glowing tribute to the great German-American. There was a constant correspondence between the two men, one the contributor to the magazine, the other the receiver. There was a kindly


understanding between them, and their esteem for each other was beautifully brought out in Mr. Rattermann's tribute to one whose correspondence was sparkling, whose criticisms were fair, and who wrote about his own people with consummate knowledge.

Mr. Julius Goebel in his article, "The Place of the German Element in American History," says:

The remarkable awakening of interest among German-Americans in the history of their American past, which I have briefly described, was due chiefly to the labors of the late Prof. Seidensticker. His papers on the early history of the Germans in Pennsylvania, published during the seventies, may still be considered unsurpassed, models, of scholarly accuracy and thoroughness, behind which there can be felt the pulse of a strong patriotic feeling that easily communicates itself to the reader.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania-German Society, held at Reading on April 12, 1894, attention was called to the death of the late Professor Oswald Seidensticker, of the University of Pennsylvania, which occurred on January 10, 1894. On motion, a committee, of which Dr. J. Max Hark was made chairman, was appointed to prepare a suitable minute relative to the demise of that eminent scholar and author, which is here appended:

Whereas, Though he was not nominally a member of the Pennsylvania-German Society, yet was always recognized by it as one of the most sympathetic, distinguished, and valuable co-laborers in the work which the Society has set for itself; therefore

Resolved, That the Pennsylvania-German Society herewith expresses its profound sense of the great loss to the community, to the literature of the Germans in America, and to the cause of the Pennsylvania-Germans in particular that has been sustained by the decease of Dr. Oswald Seidensticker, the eminent scholar, historian and literateur and distinguished representative of the best elements of our German-American citizenship.

For articles by Oswald Seidensticker, see A. P. C. Griffin, "Bibliography of American Historical Societies," American Historical Association, Report, II (1905), index.


Sometimes a dedication in a volume will interest the reader. The dedication to the Bibliography indicates a source of Seidensticker's inspiration: "To Mr. Abraham H. Cassel of Harleysville, whose unselfish zeal and inspiring example have been of eminent service to German-American Bibliography, this book is dedicated as a token of sincere esteem." Dr. Seidensticker's interest in the history of the Germans in Pennsylvania was stimulated by Abraham Cassel, the Dunker antiquarian and book-collector of Harleysville, Pa., thereby answering the question: What relation could there be between a scholar and a layman? Again, what did Mr. Cassel, a farmer and a man with eight weeks education, know about German imprints? Though Mr. Cassel spent almost his entire life at this secluded spot, six miles from any railroad, following the occupation of a farmer, he was well known in this country and in Europe for his remarkable literary attainments and great success as a collector of rare books, pamphlets, papers, and manuscripts, never happier than when sharing his thirst for knowledge with editors, authors, learned men, and students of history. Dr. Seidensticker writes:


Samuel W. Pennypacker, one of the governors of Pennsylvania, in the compilation of an article, wrote, "I am indebted to Abraham H. Cassel, of Harleysville, Pa., whose valuable history—it is, perhaps, not too much to say—is the only place in which the history of the Germans of Pennsylvania can be found."

Mr. Cassel was born with a love for books. As a child he preferred books more than any plaything. A self-educated man,

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10 Oswald Seidensticker, "Deutsch-amerikanische Bibliographie bis zum Schlusse des letzten Jahrhunderts," *Der Deutsche Pionier*, IX (August, 1877), 179.
he obtained thorough knowledge of German and English, and was familiar with Latin and Greek. He prospered as a farmer. Early he became interested in Colonial literature and began to collect rare and valuable books.

So the wonder grew until this plain farmer astonished the historical societies and learned men when it became known that he owned a valuable library of over 50,000 books and pamphlets. He brought together probably the most complete collection of Franklin and Schwenkfelder publications in America. His library established the fact that the Germans in Pennsylvania were the most prolific publishers of books in this country before the Revolution.

Dr. Seidensticker as the compiler of *The First Century of German Printing in America, 1728-1830* was innately a specialist in the subjects of German language and literature. His training, his teaching, the close association with the Pennsylvania Germans, and his connection with the historical societies to which he made many noteworthy contributions, all fitted him for the compiling of a bibliography of German imprints, a contribution to the early history of printing.

The care and industry expended on its contents makes it one of the most creditable bibliographies ever compiled in this field. The titles are given with great accuracy. The labor expended to put them together is impossible to estimate, for, according to H. A. Rattermann, the author worked eighteen years with indefatigable industry on the bibliography. Within this period he visited libraries, consulted items at the historical societies, interviewed many persons who gave help and suggestions as to where to locate items, besides much research on original sources. The work was finished but a few weeks before his death.

The bibliography is a selected one, limited chiefly to the German language, with a few English entries because these were so closely related to the literature of the time. A series of articles contributed in 1876-78 by the author appeared in the *Deutsche Pionier*, a German monthly published in Cincinnati. These were a bibliographical survey of German books printed in America during the first century of German printing; newspapers and almanacs were treated in later publications. He extended the period in his book until 1830, thus rounding a full
century. A splendid piece of work of its kind, it is a basis for building up the cultural history of the German customs in this country up to the beginning of the so called immigration of the nineteenth century. There are 252 octavo pages and one facsimile (photographic reproduction of the title of the first German print by Benjamin Franklin) in the volume. The book gives information about 2,507 German products of the printing press in the United States for the period mentioned. There are listed 1,404 book prints; 624 periodicals; 479 almanacs. What time consuming effort was put in the work can be known only by one active in a similar field.

Arranged by date and alphabetically by place with further subdivision of alphabetical arrangement of printer or publisher, it gives one an idea of the reading possibilities of the period. The printing of the Bible, the first to be done in America, indicated the strong religious sentiment among the early Germans. The almanacs, products of the Christopher Saur press, listed almost from the beginning of the book, give a picture and meaning to the social life of the family. Political tracts revealed the reactions to the politics of the time. The newspapers took form and as means of enlightenment spread the news:

The Bibliography of Seidensticker is not a mere enumeration of books which were printed in America according to titles and format. Everywhere the learned researcher has inserted historical remarks about the printers and authors of the various works as well as critical remarks; and the contents and its effects on the cultural state; the spirit and the attitude of the people for which these products of the printing press are considered. He compared also the texts in the case of American reprints of older editions and everywhere he indicated the sources and the causes of the deviations.

In the Bibliography the whole German population from an intellectual point of view is brought to life. Its religious views, its political stand, the social relations and inclinations for the intellectual feeling of mind and practical inspiration. Presented so simply, one sees the past as it were the Pioneers of the German Americans. No one before Seidensticker had the ability of presenting the facts in this way. He could use knowledge of lan-
The first entries in the Bibliography were the writings of Franz Daniel Pastorius, which do not strictly belong with the issues of the German-American press. He was prominent among the German immigrants and took an interest in their affairs. As one of the founders in the new world, as a good practical businessman, as a philosophical thinker, and as a good leader, he made a great impression on Dr. Seidensticker. He was a pioneer in establishing schools. His patriotic feeling inflamed English-American poets, and it was Whittier who wrote of Pastorius as a Pennsylvania Pilgrim. "In 1692 Franz Daniel Pastorius published his four Treatises, the first original scientific work. The most eminent scholars among the early emigrants to America were Pastorius, who wrote fluently in eight languages, and Henry Bernard Koster, who had translated the Bible from the Septuagint Greek, both of Germantown."

The First Century of German Printing in America had some interesting features to be noted. In the history of printing the sects seem to take a prominent place and the Dunkers are among those who take the lead. The publications of Ephrata have about them a mysticism not clearly discernible. Der Blutige Schau-Platz oder Marlyrer Spiegel der Tauffs-Gesinten... its outstanding publication caused a controversy. The one illustration representing the division of the good and the bad caused dissension among the members.

Kleine Davidische Psalterspiel, a favorite hymn book in Germany, was reprinted many times in Pennsylvania and was popular with the different sects. The first German Bible to be printed in America was the work of Christopher Saur, noted by Dr. Seidensticker as spelled either Saur, Sauer, or Sower. There were three editions, 1743, 1763, and 1776.

Sower as the editor of a religious and of a secular paper, the publisher of three editions of the Holy Bible,

12 Henrich A. Rattermarm, "Dr. Oswald Seidensticker und die deutsch-amerikanische Geschichts forschung," Deutsch-Amerikanische Geschichtsblatter, XI (July, 1911), 147.
13 "Where the Pennsylvania-German has been First," The Pennsylvania-German, VII (July, 1906), 199.
of a family almanac, and of scores of religious and secular volumes, was indeed the Sower of good seed in Colonial America and the champion of the cause of the poor Germans.

He was the shepherd of a lonely German flock surrounded by English pitfalls and French snares. With a resolution that never wavered, and an energy and capacity that were remarkable, he led the thought of the German-Americans and defended their rights against every open and secret foe.14

The Lutheran and Reformed congregations used a reprint of the Marburger Gesangbuch until an American authorized collection was published. Neu-Vermehrtes Gesäng der einsamen Turtle-Taube, printed by the Ephrata Brüderschaft, contained 183 hymns; eighty were written by C. Beissel, and the rest by other inmates of the cloister. The staff and text were printed, while the music was written in by hand. Some of the inmates elaborated the title pages with scrolls and flower designs—one curious volume has, near the end of the book, a staff filled in with a row of faces—a bit of humor, or relaxation from the drab life. Sometimes a floral design or flashes of color with the tulip rather prominent finds its way to pages of the song book.

Controversies in religious affairs led to a lively exchange of pamphlets in which prominent men took part in exchange of attacks. Political dissensions led to many printed papers. The Revolution reflected in the German publications a tendency in favor of armed resistance, though the Dunkers took the opposite view.

After the Revolution, German printing began to spread over a wider area; the older centers receded. Lancaster, Reading, Allentown, Lebanon, and other towns became more active in German printing. Lancaster boasted of the largest Bible till then printed, 1817; and the first Bible west of the Alleghenies was done in 1813 at Somerset, Pennsylvania.

According to Dr. Seidensticker, the total number of places where German printing was carried on during the first century amounted to forty-seven. In Pennsylvania there were thirty-one, Maryland three, Ohio four, Virginia five, Massachusetts one,

14Martin G. Brumbaugh, "Christopher Sower, Jr.," The Pennsylvania-German, II (April, 1901), 57.
New York one, New Jersey one, Nova Scotia one. The largest proportion was in Pennsylvania. Maryland, Virginia, and Ohio can claim some German printing during the period. The only German publication in New Jersey was a Testament printed from plates that came from Philadelphia. The only one in Massachusetts was a German Reader that was used in Harvard college, and New York is represented by a feeble attempt to start a German newspaper in 1819.

To sum up the estimate of this work, *The First Century of German Printing in America, 1728-1830*: the author had not only a background by birth and association in the German field, but a thorough knowledge of its language, in a critical and appreciative way. He was a writer in the field, for it has been shown he made many contributions to the German periodicals of his day. The *Bibliography*, probably his last work, was motivated by the idea of a real need. He compiled it through inspiration, because he wanted to write it.

The order and arrangement is such as to effect clarity and usefulness. It is an original contribution and as such is very important. The *Bibliography* is not an exhaustive list. The author makes note in the preface, "In spite of these efforts to make the record as complete as possible the writer is quite aware that there must be gaps and inaccuracies." The Rev. A. Stapleton noted that "More than a decade has passed since Prof. Oswald Seidensticker issued his valuable work, 'The First Century of American Printing 1728-1830,' and which embraced books, papers, pamphlets, and broadsides down to 1830. In the very nature of the subject it must be clear to anyone that such a work, however valuable, must be far from complete." Again,

In this article we will only note issues of the German press omitted by Oswald Seidensticker for the reason that they had not come under his observation. The subject is by no means exhausted. Scores of publications will yet come to light. There are still great gaps to be filled.

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26 A. Stapleton, "Researches in the First Century of German Printing in America (1728-1830), The Pennsylvania-German, V (January, 1904), 81-89.
Finally, Dr. Seidensticker’s *Bibliography* is based upon actual knowledge of the books. Done with energy, skill, and efficiency, it is a bibliography that is vital. Dr. Seidensticker loved his people in America; he wrote for them; he helped them in their organizations; and he wanted to make a contribution that would make living their development. As one studies carefully the chronological arrangement of this living book, one discovers important historical facts which show the beginnings and development and the trends of the early German Americans through the first century of the history of German printing in America.