With the possible exception of a few areas in the Hudson Valley and in up-state Virginia, Pennsylvania was unique among the English colonies in possessing a bilingual culture. *Deitsch,* the dialect of the Pfalz or Palatinate area in the upper Rhine Valley, was spoken by a large minority of the population on the eve of the Revolution; and for that matter is still spoken by their descendants to this day. These Pennsylvanians left their literary records in "high German"; so that the sources for our present knowledge of the early history of this state are sharply divided between such records, and the still larger bulk of sources in English.

Later historians who did not use German have tended to employ only the English sources, so that the story of a large and important part of the original population has been frequently neglected. Many readers thoroughly familiar with the English colonists from Penn to Franklin know little of the German pioneers from Pastorius to Muhlenberg. To correct this, various writers of German descent have cultivated their own tradition. But the two themes—English and German—have never been merged as they should into a single tradition for the entire state.

It may be of interest to those members of the Society who are not familiar with Pennsylvania-German history to know that we possess in the Cassel Collection what amounts to one of the most valuable special libraries in that field. This collection consists of more than twelve hundred books and pamphlets relating to the Pennsylvania Germans. Most of these were printed in Pennsylvania between 1740–1840, and most of them are in the German language. They are kept in the Gilpin Library, which houses the rare book collections of the Society.

On January 10, 1882, the minutes of the trustees of the Gilpin Library recorded that a collection of about one thousand titles was
purchased from Abraham H. Cassel of Harleysville, Montgomery County. In point of fact, Cassel's library in Harleysville was once estimated as holding fifty thousand titles, and was appraised by Samuel W. Pennypacker in 1880 as "the only place in which the history of the Germans in Pennsylvania can be found." Cassel, fearing that his books might become scattered after his death, and anxious to have them preserved for research, provided for the distribution of his possessions during his lifetime. A great part of the books went to the Brethren's Collegiate Institute in Mount Morris, Illinois; others eventually found their way to the library of Juniata College, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. That part of the collection which came to The Historical Society of Pennsylvania is not large but is carefully selected. It covers almost the whole amount of writing done by the Pennsylvania Germans themselves and comprises most of the publications in which they were interested: their Bibles, prayer books and hymnals, as well as the Pennsylvania reprints and translations of German and English literature. During the sixty years that the collection has been in The Historical Society some additional books, mostly writings by Pennsylvania Germans, have been added. The bulk, however, still consists of those books and pamphlets that Abraham H. Cassel gathered during his long life of diligent labor and love of books.

This Cassel Collection had its beginnings in 1830 when Abraham Harley Cassel, then ten years old, became the proud owner of his first book. Cassel was a descendant in the fifth generation of Hupert Cassel who came to Pennsylvania about 1715-1720 from Kriesheim in Baden, Germany, and settled in Skippack. Other members of the Cassel family had arrived previously. Three brothers, Heinrich, Johannes, and Yillis, or Julius Cassel, Mennonites in Kriesheim, heard William Penn preaching on his travels through Germany in 1681. And the first of the family who followed Penn's immediate invitation settled in Germantown in 1686. On the maternal side, Abraham H. Cassel was the great-great-grandson of the Germantown printer, the first Christopher Saur.

Born on a farm in Towamensing township, Montgomery County,

2 Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, IV (1880), 41.
Cassel lived there until 1834, when his parents moved to another farm in Lower Salford, near Harleysville. Here he was to spend the greater part of his life. His father, Yelles Cassel, was a member of the Dunker or German Baptist Church, now known as the Church of the Brethren. The elder Cassel was a stern man who did not believe in the blessings of book learning, fearing the proselytism of other denominations. An older sister taught the boy to read, and six weeks in a country school was all the formal education granted to him. When Yelles Cassel discovered his son’s bookish inclinations, books and even candles were taken away and more work assigned on the farm. However, the boy went on reading and studying secretly. He was so successful in his self-education that at the age of eighteen he began to teach school.

During the eight years of his teaching, Cassel laid the foundations of his library. According to the custom of the time, a young schoolteacher was paid in part by receiving room and board in the homes of his pupils’ parents. Boarding around, Cassel discovered books, often not much thought of by their present owners, which had been acquired by their fathers and grandfathers, or brought over from Europe by more remote ancestors. Putting all his spare earnings into books, Cassel’s library and his knowledge grew simultaneously. Moreover, he had the natural ability to make good use of his library, which was increased on the occasion of later travels—sometimes with John F. Watson and Israel Daniel Rupp. Cassel’s main interests were history and theology. He wrote for English and German periodicals; and his lonely farmhouse became a center of learning. Yet he remained always the plain Pennsylvania German farmer. A prominent member of the Brethren Church, he refused to become a minister as not being “called of the Lord.”3 Subsequently, Martin G. Brumbaugh paid him tribute in these words: “with a zeal that knew no quenching, and an industry that has almost cost his sight and his hearing, [Cassel] has clearly earned the right to be called the Historian of the church.”4 A photograph taken in his later years shows him with the clear-cut, almost ascetic but gentle features of a patriarch, looking a little like Saint Jerome surrounded by his books.

3 Cassel, op. cit., 75.
4 Martin G. Brumbaugh, A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America (Elgin, Illinois, 1899), xii.
The first need of the early German settlers was religious books, since many of them migrated in search of religious freedom and others came as missionaries following their urge to spread the Gospel in the New World. Naturally, therefore, the Cassel Collection is particularly strong in the religious field; and the preponderance of books in this category was increased by the religious controversies which flourished among the Germans. But, however fierce the fight between the various denominations, there must always have been a sense of unity, stronger than all the differences, between these people tied together by a common language. Evidence of the unifying force of the language is found in the books issued by Christopher Saur, and his son, the Dunker bishop, for the Moravians, the Schwenkfelders, the Reformed and the Lutheran churches. In fact the first books put out by the printing press of the Seventh-day Baptists in Ephrata were devotional books for the Mennonites.

The German settlers were also deeply interested in the English religious movements of the time. Translations of sermons by Gilbert Tennent and George Whitefield and of William Law’s *The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration* are among the first publications printed on a German press in America. A favorite form of literature was the allegory, and in this class, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* was the most popular. The Cassel Collection contains the first American edition of Seidel’s German translation of this. Part one and two were printed by the Brotherhood in Ephrata in 1754; a third part to *Pilgrim’s Progress* was published, together with a translation of Bunyan’s *The Acceptable Sacrifice, or the Excellency of a Broken Heart*, by Christopher Saur in Germantown in 1755. A translation of Bunyan’s *The Holy War* was printed by Samuel Saur in Baltimore in 1795. A copy of the same author’s *The Heavenly Footman*, published by Johann Bär in Lancaster in 1828, is also in the collection.

Some European imprints that belong to the collection show the background of the German immigrants, their attempts to adjust themselves to the new surroundings and make themselves understood by their English neighbors. There is, for example, the first edition of the English translation of the Dordrecht confession of 1632, *The Christian Confession of the Faith of the Harmless Christians, in the Netherlands Known by the Name of Mennonists*, printed in Amster-
dam in 1712. It was published, according to the preface, “at the desire of our Fellow-believers in Pennsylvania.” It served the American Mennonites as an apologia before their English-speaking countrymen until the publication of Andrew Bradford’s reprint in 1727. “It had been thought worth the while to turn it also in English,” says the preface, “that so those of that Nation may become acquainted with it, and so might have a better opinion thereof and of its professors . . .” This *Christian Confession* is a little book of forty pages, possibly one of the rarest in the collection.

The first printers in Pennsylvania to do some printing in German were Andrew Bradford and Benjamin Franklin. In 1738 Christopher Saur, or Sower, started his press in Germantown, introducing German types in American printing. His was the first printing done in Pennsylvania outside Philadelphia. Included in the Cassel Collection are 243 titles printed in Germantown by the three Christopher Sauers, father, son and grandson, and by their successors, Peter Leibert and Michael Billmeyer.

The most famous book in the collection is doubtless the German Bible, printed by Christopher Saur in Germantown in 1743, and generally known as “the first Bible printed in America in a European language.” This Bible was preceded only by Eliot’s Indian Bible, printed in Boston in 1663, while the first complete Bible in the English language was not printed until 1782. Saur’s Bible is Luther’s translation with some additions from the Berlenburg Bible of 1726. It is a sturdy quarto volume, printed in large German type, the title page in black and red. The book is bound in heavy wooden boards covered with calf and ornamented with brass corners and clasps. Included in the collection are copies of the second and third editions of the Germantown Bible, printed by Christopher Saur’s son and namesake in 1763 and 1776. The whole sequence of Saur’s seven editions of the New Testament, printed between 1755–1775, and the following nine editions printed in Germantown by Michael Billmeyer between 1787–1822, with the exception of the seventh edition, are in the collection.

To the well-known Germantown imprints found in the Cassel Collection belong also Christopher Saur’s newspaper, *Der Hoch-Deutsch Pensylvanische Geschicht-Schreiber*, and his almanac, *Der Hoch-Deutsch Amerikanische Calender*. Both started in 1739, but the
almanac for 1739 was published in the previous year. Here is also Saur's first book, printed during 1738 after the completion of several broadsides but not published until 1739, the hymnbook, *Zionitischer Weyrauchs Hügel*, ordered by the Brotherhood in Ephrata. This publication was to trouble Saur's religious conscience and led to his controversy with Conrad Beissel. Incidentally, this controversy is said to have prompted the establishment of the second German press, that of the Brotherhood in Ephrata.

A great number of hymnbooks followed this first one on the Saur press. In 1742, there was the first American edition of the *Ausbund*, a hymnbook originating in the sixteenth century with the Swiss Anabaptists and throughout the eighteenth century in great favor with the Mennonites in Pennsylvania. In 1744 *Das Kleine Davidische Psalterspiel der Kinder Zions* appeared. Containing hymns selected by the Dunker elders, Peter Becker and Alexander Mack, from the larger *Psalter* used by the "Inspired" in Germany, it was one of the most popular of the hymnbooks, as the many editions prove.

Many of the earliest hymnbooks issued for the American-German denominations were printed in Germantown. The long line of "firsts" was begun in 1742 by a little book, *Hirten Lieder von Bethlehem*, prepared by Graf Zinzendorf. This was the first Moravian hymnbook printed in America. The Reformed church published the *Kern Alter und neuer in 700 bestehender, Geistreicher Lieder und Neu vermehr- und vollständiges Gesangbuch* in 1752 and 1759. The Lutheran *Marburger Gesangbuch* appeared in 1759. It was replaced in the use of the Lutheran denomination in 1786 by the *Erbauliche Lieder—Sammlung*, compiled under the direction of Heinrich Melchoir Muhlenberg. This was the first hymnbook published by the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States. One of the most remarkable hymnbooks of all was the Schwenkfelder hymnal of 1762, *Neu-Eingerichtetes Gesang-Buch*, with Christopher Schultz' introduction. Interestingly enough, the first hymnbook issued by the Church of the Brethren was an English publication, *The Christian's Duty*, printed by Peter Leibert in 1791. And it was not until 1803 that the Mennonites had their own hymnbook, *Die kleine geistliche Harfe*, printed by Michael Billmeyer.

The most popular prayer books were Pennsylvania reprints from earlier German editions. They are represented in this collection by Johann Arndt’s *Paradies-Gärtlein*, Johann Habermann’s *Christliche Morgen- und Abend-Gäbet*, Gerhard Tersteegen’s *Geistliches Blumen-Gärtlein*, and others.

A curiosity included among the books is *Der Frommen Lotterie, oder Geistliches Schatz-Kästlein* (1744). This is a collection of 381 cards in a leather box, each ticket containing a passage from the Bible followed by a verse from Tersteegen, intended for use as a pious game on Sunday afternoons.

One of the rarest books in the collection is a pamphlet printed by Saur in 1744, *Ein Spiegel der Tauffe mit Geist, mit Wasser und mit Blut*. A defense of baptism by affusion, this was written by the Mennonite bishop Heinrich Funck, who had settled along the Indian Creek, Montgomery County. Funck’s other important book, *Eine Restitution, oder eine Erklärung einiger Haupt-punkten des Gesetzes*, published after his death and printed by Anthony Armbruster in Philadelphia in 1763, is also in the collection.

The first treatise on pedagogy published in this country was written in 1750 by Christoph Dock, the Mennonite schoolmaster on the Skippack, in answer to questions prepared by the elder Christopher Saur and by Dielman Kolb. It was printed by the second Christopher Saur in 1770. Some years ago it was described and translated in Brumbaugh’s *Life and Works of Christopher Dock*. Dock’s little book shows original thinking, far ahead of the educational trends of the time, and, as the title page truly says, was written in love to mankind.

Some of Dock’s writings were published in 1764 in *Ein Geistliches Magazien*, the first religious periodical in America. Another American author represented in its pages was the younger Alexander Mack, the Dunker bishop. His religious poetry appeared here under the pen name “Theophilus.” This periodical was started by the second Christopher Saur after the successful completion of his Bible, and Saur considered it, as he says in the preface, as his obligation in thankfulness towards God. *Ein Geistliches Magazien* was not sold but given away. Most of the numbers consisted of half a sheet,

because Saur thought a concise treatment more likely to reach people who otherwise would not read at all. However, at the end of the first volume Saur complained bitterly that some people had thrown the magazine in the fire without reading it, not wishing to be disturbed in their sinful ways, and that others had read it and then used it as wrapping paper.⁷

Saur obviously had less trouble with the textbook and grammar he wrote, *Eine Nützliche Anweisung oder Beyhilfe Vor die Teutschen um Englisch zu lernen*, which went through several editions. In 1764 he became involved in the political struggles of the time and wrote a pamphlet in favor of the proprietary government, opposing vehemently the re-election of Benjamin Franklin, the “... Wunder Thier... Streit- und Strauss-Vogel.” Sixteen years earlier, in 1748, his father had been fighting another controversy with Franklin, answering the latter’s *Plain truth: or, Serious Considerations on the Present State of the City of Philadelphia with Verschiedene Christliche Wahrheiten*, which advocated peaceful measures on religious grounds. Once, however, Franklin found favor in the eyes of the Pennsylvania Germans. This was when he attacked the “Paxton-boys” in his *A Narrative of the Late Massacres in Lancaster County*. The German translation is supposed to have been printed in Ephrata in 1764.

The printing press of the Brotherhood of the Seventh-day Baptists deserves special mention. Some illustrated manuscripts of the Ephrata cloister as well as many books printed there are in the collection. There are with the printed books the Superintendent Conrad Beissel’s own mystical and theosophical writings; here are also the hymnbooks containing his hymns and those by the Brothers and Sisters, created in religious fervor and spiritual devotion. The *Chronicon Ephratense* by Brother Lamech and Agrippa, i.e., Prior Peter Miller, printed in 1786, is here. This is the great source of information on the life in the convent of Ephrata. There are books by Quakers and by Lutherans, and there are the books printed for the Mennonites: the prayerbook *Ernsthaffte Christenpflicht* and the devotional book, *Güldene Äepffel in Silbern Schalen*, both printed in 1745. And there is, under the printing date of 1748, the *Martyrs’

⁷ Of this periodical, the entire first volume of fifty numbers is in the Cassel Collection. Of the fifteen known numbers of the second volume, printed between 1770 and, probably, 1772, numbers ten, eleven and thirteen are present.
Mirror, by the Dutch Mennonite, Tieleman Jans van Braght, in the German translation by Peter Miller. This is one of the most famous books in the collection and is popularly known as “the largest book of the Colonial period.”

The collection comprises books issued in all the more important printing places in Pennsylvania—Philadelphia, Lancaster, Reading. In addition, numerous small towns where printing was done are represented, among them Allentown, Bethlehem, Chambersburg, Chestnut Hill, Doylestown, Easton, Ephrata, Germantown, Gettysburg, Harrisburg, Lebanon and York. A number of imprints from the neighboring states are included also, for example, books from Baltimore, Hagerstown and Frederick, Maryland; from Cincinnati, Lancaster and Osnaburg, Ohio; from New Market and Harrisonburg, Virginia.

The value of a collection containing so much of America’s early printing is great; but perhaps even greater is its worth as a source of information on the period and on the people who wrote and read these books. Thanks to the understanding and knowledge of the collector, Abraham H. Cassel, these books have been preserved for the use of students.

Simmons College

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