

## Official Use of the German Language in Pennsylvania\*

FOLLOWING her political separation from the mother country, the United States sought to end her cultural dependence as well. Americans were particularly chagrined at being tied to the language of their former rulers; treatises were written on English as it was used in the New World, and conscious efforts were made to modify spellings. This quest for a national culture gave rise to legends that serious consideration had even been devoted to replacing English with another language. Greek and Hebrew were named in vague accounts which were soon discredited, but legends concerning the use of German instead of English have been both detailed and persistent.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the story that German was almost adopted as the

\* I wish to thank Professor Samuel Eliot Morison of Harvard University for calling my attention to the problem and for making fruitful suggestions in connection with it.

<sup>1</sup> Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North-America, in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782* (London, 1787), II, 265-266: "As for the Americans, they testified more surprize than peevishness, at meeting with a foreigner who did not understand English. But if they are indebted for this opinion to a prejudice of education, a sort of national pride, that pride suffered not a little from the reflection, which frequently occurred, of the language of the country being that of their oppressors. Accordingly they avoided these expressions, *you speak English; you understand English well*; and I have often heard them say—*you speak American well; the American is not difficult to learn*. Nay, they have carried it even so far, as seriously to propose introducing a new language; and some persons were desirous, for the convenience of the public [!], that the *Hebrew* should be substituted for the English. The proposal was, that it should be taught in the schools, and made use of in all public acts. We may imagine that this project went no farther; but we may conclude from the mere suggestion, that the Americans could not express in a more energetic manner, their aversion for the English." "Inchiquen's *Favourable View of the United States*," *Quarterly Review*, XX (1814), 528: "Nor have there been wanting projects among them for getting rid of the English language, not merely by barbarizing it . . . but by abolishing the use of English altogether, and substituting a new language of their own. One person indeed had recommended the adoption of the Hebrew. . . ." Timothy Dwight answered in *Remarks on the Review of Inchiquin's Letters published in the Quarterly Review* (Boston, 1815), 138-139, by denying that he or most other Americans had ever heard of any such scheme. Charles A. Bristed, "The English Language in America," in *Cambridge Essays, Contributed by Members of the University, 1855* (London), 75-76: "Dreams of a new or a different tongue did indeed haunt the imagination of some more zealous than wise patriots in the earlier period of American

official language of one or several of the states still enjoys a vigorous life despite efforts to scotch it.<sup>2</sup> The question has been raised in relation to states as widely separated as Wisconsin, Texas, and California, and a particularly ambitious version has German nearly becoming the official language of the entire nation.

Pennsylvania, however, is the state most commonly named. According to Franz Löher, a German visitor to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century, it happened as follows:

In the vote on this question: whether the dominant speech in the Assembly, in the courts, and in the records of Pennsylvania should be the German language,—the votes were tied. Half of them were for the introduction of the German language, and this was certainly of great importance when one considers that here it was a question of making a German state where English had previously been the official language. Then the Speaker of the Assembly, a Muhlenberg, through his vote, gave the decision in favor of the English language.<sup>3</sup>

This is the most specific account, and was vouchsafed in print as recently as 1942.<sup>4</sup>

Did any such thing occur? I think not. No proponent of the thesis has produced evidence that German was nearly adopted as Pennsylvania's official language, except to refer to another secondary work such as Löher's *Geschichte*. The present writer and others interested in this or related problems have found no mention of it in the contemporary sources which would certainly have noted it—legislative journals and other official matter, English and German-language

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history. It is still on record that a legislator seriously proposed that the young republic should complete its independence by adopting a different language from that of the mother-country, 'the Greek for instance'. . . ."

<sup>2</sup> Within the past quarter-century, the following have "debunked" the legend: A. B. Faust, *The German Element in the United States with Special Reference to its Political, Moral, Social, and Educational Influence*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1927), II, 652-656; T. G. Tappert, "Language and Legislation," *Lutheran*, XXII (Nov. 15, 1939), 11, 19; Ralph Hagedorn, "German the National Language," *American Notes and Queries*, II (May, 1942), 23; W. L. Werner, "The 'Official German Language' Legend," *American Speech*, XVII (1942), 246; H. L. Mencken, *The American Language, An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States* (New York, 1945), Supplement I, 138-140. Except for Faust, all contain inaccuracies, and none explains its origin satisfactorily.

<sup>3</sup> Translated from the German of Franz Löher, *Geschichte und Zustände der Deutschen in Amerika* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1847), 198. The book was also published in Göttingen in 1855.

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Dorpalen, "The German Element in Early Pennsylvania Politics, 1789-1800: A Study in Americanization," *Pennsylvania History*, IX (1942), 178.

newspapers, diaries, travel accounts and correspondence.<sup>5</sup> Pennsylvania published many documents in German, but these always formed a small proportion of the total and usually were mere translations of English works. They were never more than a limited accommodation to the large minority who could not speak English.

Other factors than the absence of positive contemporary evidence make it unlikely that the Assembly almost adopted German as Pennsylvania's official language. To believe the contrary, one would have to presuppose either a majority of German-speaking inhabitants or else a united and aggressive minority. Neither, however, existed. It is generally agreed that no more than one third of Pennsylvania's population was of German birth or descent.<sup>6</sup> Even this third was not a solid bloc working for German interests.

With some notable exceptions, the German settlers were largely indifferent to politics and not interested in holding office. They were willing to let first their Quaker and then their Scotch-Irish neighbors represent them in the Assembly. Not until the 1760's did Germans appear in the colonial legislature, and at no time did they form a large enough delegation to force an official acceptance of their lan-

<sup>5</sup> Centering his efforts about the years from 1780 to 1783—the period of F. A. C. Muhlenberg's speakership of Pennsylvania's Assembly—and extending his research several years in each direction, the author examined the legislative proceedings. Before 1790, they appeared in four series (1) to 1776, as *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania* (reprinted as Series VIII of the *Pennsylvania Archives*); (2) *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania . . . November, 1776 . . . October, 1781*; (3) 1781–1790, as *Minutes of the . . . General Assembly of Pennsylvania*, (4) *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, as Taken in Short-Hand by Thomas Lloyd*, for the third session of the Eleventh Assembly (1787) and for the Twelfth Assembly (1787–1788). Under the new state constitution of 1790, the House and Senate each issued its own journal. Transactions of constitutional conventions, and the extensive records published in the *Pennsylvania Archives* provided nothing, as was the case with all newspapers, letters, and journals searched. A somewhat briefer search conducted by the State Librarian of Pennsylvania, with equally negative results, is reported in Faust, II, 653. In certain specialized fields, the advice of persons more familiar with the material was sought. James O. Knauss, authority on German-language newspapers in the United States, has assured the present writer that he has “never found any reference in any of the thousands of issues of German-American newspapers published prior to 1801 to any attempt made by Pennsylvania to have German adopted as her official language.”

<sup>6</sup> “Linguistic and National Stocks in the Population of the United States,” American Historical Association, *Report* (1931), I, 291–294; Frank R. Diffenderffer, *The German Immigration into Pennsylvania Through the Port of Philadelphia, 1700 to 1775* (Lancaster, Pa., 1900), 102–106; Faust, I, 128–129; Oscar Kuhns, *The German and Swiss Settlements of Colonial Pennsylvania. A Study of the So-Called Pennsylvania Dutch* (New York, 1901), 58–59.

guage. Before the election to the state constitutional convention of 1776, restrictions which had limited naturalization and had led to under-representation for the western counties were eased. Even with the full force of their vote felt for the first time, hardly more than a quarter of the delegates chosen were German, and, except for David Rittenhouse who was born in America and spent most of his life in English circles, none of them was prominent in writing the new frame of government.<sup>7</sup>

Nor did those Germans who were active politically form a united party. During the elections of 1764, Reverend Henry Muhlenberg noted that the Germans split along religious and political lines, some even being exasperated at the election of two of their compatriots to the Assembly!

There was great rejoicing and great bitterness in the political circles of the city, since it was reported that the German church people had gained a victory in the election by putting our *trustee*, Mr. Henry Keple, into the *assembly*—a thing which greatly pleased the friends of the *Proprietors*, but greatly exasperated the *Quakers* and German *Moravians*. Never before in the history of Pennsylvania, they say, have so many people assembled for an election. The English and German *Quakers*, the *Herrnhuters*, *Menonites*, and *Schwenckfelders* formed one party, and the English of the High Church and the Presbyterian Church, the German Lutheran and German Reformed joined the other party. . . .<sup>8</sup>

The German immigrants and their descendants were tenacious of their native language, but their intransigence can be and has been exaggerated. "Germans" active in public life, such as Benjamin Shoemaker, Conrad Weiser, David Rittenhouse, and F. A. C. Muhlenberg, felt at home in English circles and were hardly interested in forcing their ancestors' language upon the colony or state. Inevitably, many farmers learned English from their Scotch-Irish neighbors. The German businessman in Philadelphia, away from the main body of his countrymen who had moved inland, found it necessary to speak English not only when working, but in social intercourse. Many came as indentured servants and, their indentures bought by Englishmen,

<sup>7</sup> A. D. Graeff, "The Relations Between the Pennsylvania Germans and the British Authorities (1750-1776)," Pennsylvania German Society, *Proceedings*, XLVII (1939), Pt. III, 250-251; Allan Nevins, *The American States During and After the Revolution* (New York, 1924), 146-149.

<sup>8</sup> H. M. Muhlenberg, *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, translated by T. G. Tappert and J. W. Doberstein (Philadelphia, 1945), II, 123.

had to learn their masters' language.<sup>9</sup> Inter-marriage weaned some away from German, and others learned English by joining with their neighbors in religious exercises.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the character of the German settlement was not conducive to forcing an official acceptance of the German language. How then, if the story is apocryphal, did it originate, and why, specifically, has it had such a long and vigorous life despite its almost patent absurdity? Turning to these questions, we find the answer in an amalgam of many confused factors.

An incident in the Third Congress of the United States helps to explain the rise of the German-language legend. On January 9, 1794, "a petition of a number of Germans, residing in the State of Virginia" was presented to the House of Representatives, "stating the inconveniences to which they are subjected, from an entire ignorance of the English language, and praying that a certain proportion of the laws of the United States may be printed in the German language."<sup>11</sup> It was referred to a committee consisting of Preston (Virginia), Hiester (Pennsylvania), and Peter Muhlenberg (also of Pennsylvania, and brother of F. A. C. Muhlenberg). On April first the committee recommended "That the Secretary of State be authorized to have such proportion of the laws of the United States printed in the German language as he may think proper and necessary to accommodate the German citizens of the United States."<sup>12</sup> No further action was taken until the second session, when the petition was again introduced. It was now referred to a committee which had been appointed "to report a method for the more regular promulgation of the laws of the United States."<sup>13</sup> This group eventually recommended that

the provision heretofore made has been entirely inadequate to the purpose of a due promulgation of the laws. . . . That for the accommodation of

<sup>9</sup> Gottlieb Mittelberger, *Journey to Pennsylvania in the Year 1750 and Return to Germany in the Year 1754*, translated by Carl T. Eben (Philadelphia, 1898), 110; A. W. Read, "Bilingualism in the Middle Colonies, 1725-1775," *American Speech*, XII (1937), 93-99.

<sup>10</sup> Kuhns, 146-147, 162, 186-187.

<sup>11</sup> *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, First Session, Third Congress* (Philadelphia, 1793), 65.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 203, 233; *American State Papers, Class X, Miscellaneous* (Washington, 1834), I, 81.

<sup>13</sup> *Annals of the Congress of the United States, Third Congress* (Washington, 1849), 945, 951-953; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, Second Session, Third Congress* (Philadelphia, 1794), 58.

such Germans, citizens of the United States, as do not understand the English language, it will be necessary that the laws be translated, and printed in the German language. Your committee therefore submit the following resolutions:

*Resolved*, That three thousand complete sets of the laws of Congress, to the close of the present session, be printed, and distributed among the different States in proportion to their numbers. . . .

*Resolved*, That such proportion of the above number of copies shall be printed in the German language as the representatives from the districts within which such German citizens reside, shall certify to the Secretary of State to be necessary. . . .<sup>14</sup>

The reports of this and another committee on "the more general promulgation of the laws of the United States" were discussed at several formal meetings of the House and in Committees of the Whole. A few dates were of particular significance concerning the proposed German translation. On February 16, 1795,

The clause relating to the publishing of the laws in the newspapers, and in the German language, produced each of them a discussion of some length. . . .

In favor of printing part of the edition of laws in the German language, Mr. Hartley [Pennsylvania] said it was perhaps desirable that the Germans should learn English; but if it is our object to give present information, we should do it in the language understood. The Germans who are advanced in years cannot learn our language in a day. It would be generous in the Government to inform those persons. . . .

Mr. Kittera [Pennsylvania], and several other gentlemen, spoke on the same side of the question.

Mr. Murray [Maryland] said, that it had never been the custom in England to translate the laws into Welsh or Gaelic, and yet the great bulk of the Welsh, and some hundred thousands of people in Scotland, did not understand a word of English.

Mr. Boudinot [New Jersey] was on the same side of the question.<sup>15</sup>

Two days later a bill passed the House for printing and distributing the statutes of the United States, without provision for a German edition. With minor amendments, it became law a few days after.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Annals, Third Congress*, 1009; *American State Papers, Miscellaneous*, I, 114.

<sup>15</sup> *Annals, Third Congress*, 1228-1229.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 827, 829, 848, 1229, 1230, 1234, 1278; *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America, Second Session, Third Congress* (Philadelphia, 1794), 71, 74, 101, 106-107, 109, 114.

Note the similarities between this incident and Löher's description of the proceedings in the Pennsylvania Assembly. The German language is involved in both. The legislative body in each was meeting in Philadelphia, the capital of both Pennsylvania and the United States. Most interesting of all, Frederick A. C. Muhlenberg had not only been presiding officer of the Pennsylvania legislature, but he was Speaker of the national House of Representatives during the First and Third Congresses. The similarities are such that, given *sufficient other factors*, the differences could have been obliterated as the story changed hands year after year.<sup>17</sup>

Löher was quite emphatic on Muhlenberg's role in defeating German as Pennsylvania's official language. After telling how the decision was given to English by the Speaker's casting vote, he described the reaction upon Muhlenberg's constituents. "This result produced a bad impression. There was something discouraging in it; a German had provided the English language with the victory."<sup>18</sup>

This portion of the legend can be explained as a distortion of

<sup>17</sup> See Tappert; Hagedorn; Mencken, Supplement I, 138-140. These three (the latter two merely give Tappert as their source) claim that the legend can be traced to this incident alone. The differences, of course, are great, greater than Tappert and his followers maintain, and the present writer cannot accept their explanation of the Löher story as arising solely from the Congressional events. During the debate on "the more general promulgation of the laws," a motion was lost by a 42-41 vote. Tappert *et al.* see this as possibly having been a tie vote on printing a German edition of the laws, which Muhlenberg's casting vote decided in the negative. This, they say, is the origin of Löher's having Muhlenberg defeat German as Pennsylvania's official language by his casting vote. For several reasons this is unlikely: (1) The 42-41 vote to which Tappert refers did not take place in a formal session of the House, but in a Committee of the Whole. Accordingly, the Speaker had stepped down, and David Cobb of Massachusetts was presiding. Had there been a tie, Cobb and not Muhlenberg would have exercised the casting vote. (2) If it had been necessary for the presiding officer to break a tie, this would probably have been specifically mentioned in the *Annals*. (3) The motion was not on whether a German edition of the laws should be authorized, but on whether the Committee should rise to report to the House. There were many other questions in connection with "the more general promulgation of the laws," and the *Annals* do not even tell us that a German edition was being debated at that time. The major debate on the German question took place on Feb. 16, more than a month later. (4) Whatever the subject of the motion, it was not permanently defeated. "The same motion was again made some time after, and agreed to."

Tappert's mistake on this point may be an understandable but misguided effort to make sense out of the garbled account of the vote in the *Annals* (1082) and in the *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser* (Jan. 14, 1795). The action is correctly given in the *Gazette of the United States and Daily Evening Advertiser* (Jan. 15, 1795) and in the *Aurora General Advertiser* (Jan. 22, 1795).

<sup>18</sup> Löher, 198.

Muhlenberg's career. His casting vote once did arouse deep antagonisms which were never forgotten. A bill appropriating funds to execute the Jay Treaty had come before a Committee of the Whole House over which Muhlenberg, no longer Speaker, was presiding. A resolution, "That it is expedient to make the necessary appropriations for carrying the Treaty with Great Britain into effect," received a tie vote. The chairman hesitated and then decided affirmatively.<sup>19</sup> This indeed "made a bad impression," costing Muhlenberg the next election, and nearly his life! A few days after the final Congressional action, Muhlenberg was stabbed by his enraged brother-in-law; and in the 1796 elections, he was badly defeated because of his part in breaking the tie.<sup>20</sup>

By the mid-1750's, thousands of Germans were arriving in America annually, and Pennsylvania was receiving more than her share of these newcomers. The English, fearful of losing their exclusive control, became alarmed. Benjamin Franklin, in 1750, lamented that "This will in a few years become a German colony: Instead of their Learning our Language we must learn theirs, or live as in a foreign country."<sup>21</sup> And in the following year he wrote:

Why should the *Palatine Boors* be suffered to swarm into our Settlements and, by herding together, establish their Language and Manners, to the Exclusion of Ours? Why should *Pennsylvania*, founded by the *English*, become a Colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs any more than they can acquire our Complexion?<sup>22</sup>

Franklin returned to this subject in 1754 with the remark that the Germans "who come hither are generally of the most ignorant stupid sort of their own Nation." He could "remember when they modestly declined intermeddling in our Elections, but now they come in droves and carry all before them, except in one or two Counties." "In short," he went on to say, "unless the Stream of their Importation could be turned from this to other Colonies, as you very judiciously

<sup>19</sup> *Annals of the Congress of the United States, Fourth Congress, First Session, 1795-1796* (Washington, 1849), 1280.

<sup>20</sup> P. A. W. Wallace, *The Muhlenbergs of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1950), 285-291.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Graeff, 31.

<sup>22</sup> "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.," in A. H. Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1905-1907), III, 72.



propose, they will soon so outnumber us, that all the advantage we have, will not in my Opinion be able to preserve our Language, and even our Government will become precarious.”<sup>23</sup>

To William Smith it seemed that

one half of the People [are] an uncultivated Race of Germans, liable to be seduced by every enterprizing Jesuit, having almost no Protestant Clergy among them to put them on their Guard, and warn them against Popery. . . . I know nothing that will hinder them, either from soon being able to give us Law and Language, or else, by joining with the *French*, to eject all the *English* Inhabitants.<sup>24</sup>

They were nothing but “a Body of ignorant, proud, stubborn Clowns”—because they were “unacquainted with our Language, our Manners, our Laws, and our Interests.” At any rate, they should be disfranchised until they had learned English language and customs.<sup>25</sup>

Others voiced similar fears that the English would be carried away lock, stock, and barrel, language, land, and government. Does this mean that German nearly became the official language of Pennsylvania, after all? Certainly not in the very specific way that Löher claims it happened thirty years later, nor in the 1750's either. Franklin and Smith could not foresee that within a year or two German immigration would drop to a negligible figure, but even when they were writing the Germans were hardly carrying “all before them, except in one or two Counties.” Franklin and Smith contradicted themselves on how soon the German language would be forced upon the English. Smith, for instance, once put it as “soon,” but elsewhere said, “it is well we can wait for the surer tho' slower Effects of Education among the rising Generation.” More specifically, “about twenty Years would make them acquainted” with the advantages of English customs.<sup>26</sup> Twenty years? The hounds baying at the doors of English dominance could not have had very sharp teeth. Nor is there any explanation of Franklin's “Palatine Boors,” “the most ignorant stupid sort of their own Nation,” who, he laments, “import many Books from Germany,” have two printing

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 139–140.

<sup>24</sup> William Smith, *A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed. (London, 1755), 19, 31.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 31, 40; letter from Smith to Thomas Penn, Dec. 13, 1753, quoted in Graeff, 36.

presses entirely in their native tongue and two more partially so, and who make "excellent Husbandmen," contributing "greatly to the Improvement of a country."<sup>27</sup>

These attacks were the expression of a dominant group's distrust of a minority which offered economic competition and whose language and customs were strange.<sup>28</sup> Hearing knots of people talking in a foreign tongue, the English assumed that plans of no good were being hatched. Franklin resented German participation in "our elections," and complained that "the Dutch underlive and are therefore enable [*sic*] to underwork and undersell the English who are thereby extremely incommoded. . . ."<sup>29</sup> When one's political power, social prestige, or economic welfare is threatened, one rarely takes a balanced view of his neighbors. It was this unreasoning mistrust which caused people to picture every German a "papist" ready to unite with the French in slitting the throats of the English, at almost the same time that an enumeration of Catholics in the province revealed less than one thousand Germans among them.<sup>30</sup> The Germans were even suspected of having sinister power to cause bad weather.<sup>31</sup> Especially if they were also among the disfranchised frontiersmen, the Germans would have been quite surprised to learn that, as Smith claimed, they were "indulged with the Privilege of Returning almost every Member of Assembly."<sup>32</sup> The charges that the Germans were controlling everything in their own interests—when the government from elected assembly, through governor and council appointed by the proprietary, to the royal veto, was solidly

<sup>27</sup> *Writings of Franklin*, III, 140-141.

<sup>28</sup> Although these attacks were particularly numerous at the height of German immigration in the 1750's, they made their appearance at least three decades earlier. In the mid-1720's, the size of the German settlement was lamented and fears voiced that the colony was dangerously close to being lost as an English possession. See John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1830), 473. A petition to Gov. Gordon in 1727 complained "that a large number of Germans, peculiar in their dress, religion, and notions of political Governments" and who were "resolved to speak their own language," were flowing into the colony. I. D. Rupp, *History of Lancaster County* (Lancaster, 1844), 194.

This factor could have operated unconsciously. Smith, however, may have been consciously exaggerating the dangers to English settlers in order to encourage contributions for schools to be set up by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

<sup>29</sup> Graeff, 31.

<sup>30</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives, First Series*, III, 144-145, Cf. Smith, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Mittelberger, 104.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, 40.

in English hands—were due primarily to the irrational hysteria from which America occasionally suffers.<sup>33</sup>

These statements that Pennsylvania was about to become a German state are not without significance, however. They helped to set the stage for the legend and made people more willing to believe that Pennsylvania nearly adopted German as her official language.

To weave the finished product from the strands we have noted, much national egotism and uncritical scholarship would be necessary. Both were present in ample quantity. Löher, for instance, came with “the proud consciousness of being a German,” and was bitter over the lack of credit given the Germans for their contributions to America.<sup>34</sup> “While writing, the thought imposed itself upon me more and more vigorously,” he said, “that the Germans in America have a higher destiny than to be absorbed by the Yankees and to serve as mere worthless servants.”<sup>35</sup>

There is extensive evidence of careless scholarship, of simply passing the story on as heard or in a slightly more lavish form. According to Löher,

The proofs for all this [the importance of the Germans in America] lie in the oldest documents of American history. Of that I have convinced myself, but had only enough time to compile sufficient facts from English histories and from other written and oral traditions to obtain a general view of American German history. *One will find that I have never claimed anything without examining and indicating the proofs therefor.*<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the work, many sources were given, but at least one statement crept in without “indicating the proofs therefor”—the description of how Pennsylvania almost adopted German as its official language! One of the most recent examples is in *Pennsylvania History*, organ of the Pennsylvania Historical Association. Writing on “The Political Influence of the German Element in Colonial

<sup>33</sup> In 1765, the Assembly provided for an inspector to visit all ships bringing Germans into the port of Philadelphia and to enforce certain health regulations. The inspector was not expected to be able to speak German; he was simply to take an interpreter with him. In other words, the Germans could not control even this relatively minor post—but one which was of particular interest to them—at this time. *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801*, VI, 433-435.

<sup>34</sup> Löher, ii.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. Italics are mine.

America," Andreas Dorpalen stated: "And when the Pennsylvania Assembly had to vote on the question as to whether to adopt English or German as *the* official language of the state, he as its Speaker cast the deciding vote in favor of English."<sup>37</sup> In 1942 the same author wrote, "When the Pennsylvania assembly was considering whether or not to make German *an* official language of the state, Frederick August Muhlenberg, who himself spoke German with difficulty, cast his deciding vote as speaker in favor of English."<sup>38</sup> Löher was the only source in each case.<sup>39</sup>

Thus the notion that Pennsylvania nearly adopted German as its official language has grown and spread. Four elements—a petition to Congress to print laws in German; F. A. C. Muhlenberg's vote on the Jay Treaty; diatribes against German settlers; and American efforts at a national culture after the Revolution—have been fused into a rather amorphous end product by a combination of egotism, wishful thinking, and uncritical scholarship.

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<sup>37</sup> Andreas Dorpalen, "The Political Influence of the German Element in Colonial America," *Pennsylvania History*, VI (1939), 237. Italics are mine.

<sup>38</sup> Andreas Dorpalen, "The German Element in Early Pennsylvania Politics, 1789-1800; A Study in Americanization," *Pennsylvania History*, IX (1942), 178. Italics are mine.

<sup>39</sup> Although arguing that the Germans were assimilating themselves to English-American life, Professor Dorpalen was not bothered by the seeming paradox that a minority, rapidly losing its distinguishing characteristics, should be interested in forcing its language upon the majority—and barely miss, at that.