"To Rescue the Germans Out of Sauer's Hands": Benjamin Franklin’s German-Language Printing Partnerships

When Benjamin Franklin drew up a contract to make David Hall the managing partner of the Philadelphia printing house in 1748, he promised not to become involved in other publishing ventures for the eighteen-year duration of the contract. However, he violated that covenant. Franklin’s reasons for doing so emanate from his political involvements, his moral convictions, his civic loyalties, and his desire to leave his ideological stamp on German immigrants, who constituted a segment of colonial society Franklin thought particularly needful of moral education.

When Franklin informed Cadwallader Colden of his decision to take “the proper Measures for obtaining Leisure to enjoy Life and my Friends more than heretofore” by turning over the Philadelphia printing house to David Hall and retiring from its daily labors at the age of forty-two, he was

1 “Articles of Agreement with David Hall," Jan. 1, 1748, in Leonard W. Labaree et al., eds., The Papers of Benjamin Franklin (hereafter, PBF) (30 vols. to date, New Haven, 1959—), 3:265. There is no documentary evidence that Hall protested Franklin’s financing of German-language printing houses in Lancaster and Philadelphia, but since the two men worked together and saw each other regularly, it is unlikely that such an objection would have been made in writing. Hall probably objected, though, in much the same polite manner as he did the following decade, when he suspected Franklin had helped finance William Goddard’s Pennsylvania Chronicle, a newspaper initiated in 1767 to challenge Hall’s Pennsylvania Gazette. Hall informed Franklin of the rumor that he was a silent partner in Goddard’s printing house, but added “this, I will never allow myself to believe, having still, as I always had, the highest Opinion of your Honour." However, he took the opportunity to remind Franklin of the terms of the partnership contract, even though it had expired the previous year. David Hall to Benjamin Franklin, Jan. 27, 1767, in PBF, 14:17. For Franklin’s involvement with Goddard’s paper, see John J. Zimmerman, "Benjamin Franklin and the Pennsylvania Chronicle," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (hereafter, PMHB) 81 (1957), 351-64.

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probably not as surprised at the public response as he suggests in his autobiography. As he later wrote, "the Publick now considering me as a man of Leisure, laid hold of me for their Purposes; every Part of our Civil Government, and almost at the same time, imposing some Duty upon me." More likely, Franklin developed political aspirations early in life, less as a way to wealth than as a means to wield direct influence over public affairs.

Franklin’s interest in governing may have been fueled by his early opinion that “few in Public Affairs act from a meer View of the Good of their Country” and “fewer still in public Affairs act with a View to the Good of Mankind.” From the relative safety of Poor Richard’s Almanack, Franklin had ridiculed political partisanship as “the madness of many for the gain of a few,” and asserted that “Ignorance leads men into a party, and shame keeps them from getting out again.” Franklin’s pessimistic view of politics pervaded many of his writings. He viewed politics as a haven for the self-serving and corrupt, as suggested by his poem “The RATS and the CHEESE.”

Your Politicks are all a Farce;
And your fine Virtues but mine A---:
All your Contentions are but these,
Whose Art shall best secure the CHEESE.

The poem suggests that avarice is the chief motive for political service and shows how the seductions of public office entice greedy charlatans. Franklin held this view throughout his life. As he told a correspondent more than four decades later, “Avarice is infinite.”

But as his prominence increased in the 1740s, and as the social status of colonial printers gradually escalated from manual laborer to information broker during midcentury, Franklin earnestly plunged into politics as a

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2 Benjamin Franklin to Cadwallader Colden, Sept. 29, 1748, in PBF, 3:318.
4 “Observations on Reading History in Library,” May 9, 1731, in PBF, 1:193.
7 Franklin to Thomas Cushing, June 10, 1771, in PBF, 18:124.
means of influencing public virtue by working within the system. Years of service as clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly had indelibly impressed upon him the power possessed by a colonial legislator—perhaps not as capable of shaping public opinion as a printer, but certainly able to exert a more direct influence for the public weal. "I conceiv’d my becoming a Member would enlarge my Power of doing Good," Franklin recalled of his election to the legislature. He noted with pride that his "Promotions" to political posts stimulated his ambitions to manipulate government affairs for the general good, and he conceived of himself as having a mandate from the people.8

One of Franklin's foremost political challenges came from German immigrants, who had flocked to Pennsylvania during the first half of the 1700s and who by midcentury had become both populous and powerful. Driven from their homeland by military conscription and economic woes, the Germans had the votes potentially to alter the political status quo in Pennsylvania. They also had the fortitude to resist cultural mainstreaming into English-speaking society. Eighteen ships transported Germans to Philadelphia in 1732 and 1733, and from 1737 to 1754 ship arrivals from Germany averaged eleven annually. The proprietary colony was the clear preference of Germans who migrated to the New World, most of whom (about 55,000) came between 1730 and 1756. More than half came as indentured servants, having secured passage by binding themselves to ship captains, who auctioned them off to the highest bidders.9 Upon arriving in America, many requested and were usually granted naturalization upon promising


Pennsylvania was the preferred destination of German immigrants for three reasons: a solid reputation for opportunity, which had been crafted both by promoters and settlers who sent back favorable reports to their homeland; the willingness of Germans already settled in Pennsylvania to assist newcomers in relocating and starting a new life; and the readiness of Rotterdam merchants to adapt the English system of transporting indentured servants to America to facilitate immigration and turn a profit. See Marianne S. Wokeck, “German and Irish Immigration to Colonial Philadelphia,” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 133 (1989), 128-43.
“Allegiance to the King of Great Britain, and fidelity to the Proprietors of this Province.” When informed that about 100,000 of Pennsylvania’s 190,000 residents in 1753 were Germans, proprietor Thomas Penn expressed surprise at the German majority. “The Number I imagined larger and a greater proportion of English and others, to the Germans,” he wrote.

Most came, according to a naturalization petition from more than a hundred Germans, because of “the great Blessings of Peace and Liberty enjoy’d by the People of Pennsilvania under a good and Pious Proprietor.” However, a more plausible motive for many was the opportunity to re-create their culture—and reshape it—in a new land with few societal traditions. Consequently, the hinterland was attractive to many Germans. They could live relatively independent of eastern laws and values. Residing in their own enclaves, German immigrants were reluctant to assimilate into the English-speaking mainstream. Franklin was sympathetic to this cultural isolationism. In response to a proposal to induce Germans to adopt English culture and language, Franklin wrote, “Their fondness for their own Language and Manners is natural: It is not a Crime.”

The preponderance of Germans was, however, a serious threat to the balance of political power. At first, working-class Germans declined to become politically active, preferring instead to concentrate on making a living. Later, upon perceiving their cultural self-determination under attack, they did enter the political arena. The Germans’ political clout, resulting from their sheer numbers, plus their reluctance to assimilate, made the English middle and upper classes fearful that they might be enticed by the French in the west into some form of military confederation. As a result, the proprietarians courted the Germans, both to gain their votes in an effort to break the Quaker stranglehold on the Pennsylvania Assembly, and to assimilate them into British society in order to steer them away from the influence of the Religious Society of Friends. The Quakers had long before lured the

10 “Petition to the Governor and Representatives of Pennsylvania,” 1734, Bucks County Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter, HSP).
12 “Petition to the Governor and Representatives of Pennsylvania,” 1734.
13 Franklin to Peter Collinson, [1753?], in PBF, 5:158. For the argument that “German self-consciousness ... remained a significant cultural force ... at least into the early 1800s,” see Robert D. Mitchell, Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley (Charlottesville, Va., 1977), 106.
immigrant Germans to their political camp, promising that the pacifist principles of their religion—and its legislative representatives—would protect the Germans from the conscription and oppressive taxes that had impelled their transatlantic voyage.\(^4\)

For political and cultural reasons, the proprietary party wooed the Germans in order to break the German-Quaker alliance, using vituperative pamphleteering. However, when German-language printer Christopher Sauer responded with publications of his own, which convinced German immigrants the proprietary party had hatched a plot to “enslave them; to force their young Men to be Soldiers, make them serve as Pioneers, and go down to work upon our Fortifications,” most Germans eligible to vote supported pacifist Quaker candidates.\(^5\) This prompted one observer to complain that the Germans were incapable “of using their own Judgment in matters of Government.”\(^6\) The Germans’ sudden and unified political activism prompted Franklin to complain to a correspondent, “I 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.”\(^7\)

As tensions escalated between proprietarians and Quakers just before the 1742 election, allegations that the Quakers would induce unnaturalized Germans to vote were countered by accusations that the proprietary party would use violence to scare Germans away from the polls. Both proved true, and a bloody riot ensued. The violence was symptomatic of the ethnic and religious prejudice that fragmented Pennsylvania’s politics and society.\(^8\)

Although Pennsylvania Germans were separated by culture and language from their British neighbors, one issue continually aroused interest and partisanship: military defense, especially against American Indians on the frontier. The German pietist sects were usually pacifist, preferring peaceful coexistence with the Indians. Their pacifism was based partly on moral


\(^6\) James Hamilton to Thomas Penn, Nov. 8, 1750, Penn Papers, HSP

\(^7\) Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, in *PBF*, 4:484.

grounds but also on their opposition to the expense of a militia and their fear of again becoming serfs in a military state. As Conrad Weiser warned in a circular letter to his fellow Pennsylvania Germans, "the Governor & his Party, actually intended to deprive us of our Libery, & to obtrude upon us a Militia Act," requiring the establishment of frontier defense. Opposition to it aligned Weiser and other pacifist Germans with the Quakers, who opposed violence on religious grounds.\textsuperscript{19}

The matter came to a head in the summer of 1747. While England was fighting King George's War against France and Spain, attacks by privateers in the Delaware Bay alarmed Philadelphia merchants. The assembly, however, deadlocked by pacifist Quakers and Germans, could take no action to protect the city. Franklin cut the Gordian knot with his pamphlet \textit{Plain Truth}, in which he argued persuasively that an effective compromise would be the establishment of a voluntary provincial militia to protect against foreign incursion, particularly from French and Spanish raiders. "The Way to secure Peace is to be prepared for War," he wrote. "All we want is Order, Discipline and a few Cannon." To marshal public support, Franklin appealed to Philadelphians' darkest fears, cautioning "your Persons, Fortunes, Wives and Daughters, shall be subject to the wanton and unbridled Rage, Rapine and Lust, of \textit{Negroes, Molatooes}, and others, the vilest and most abandoned of Mankind," if there was no military defense of the city. Franklin's argument was carefully balanced to avoid partisanship; he contended it was the responsibility of the populace to obey government, and government's reciprocal duty to safeguard the populace.\textsuperscript{20} Franklin's pamphlet succeeded, for Pennsylvanians approved the plan within days, formed themselves into militia companies and sent Franklin and other leaders to borrow cannons from New York governor George Clinton.\textsuperscript{21}

Franklin's ability to unify the laboring classes and devise a politically expedient defense plan catapulted him to prominence throughout the province. Even Quakers, who had opposed military defense because of religious pacifism, grudgingly accepted. "Indeed I had some Cause to believe, that the Defence of the Country was not disagreeable to any of


\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Autobiography}, 110.
them, provided they were not requir'd to assist in it," Franklin wrote in his memoirs. "And I found that a much greater Number of them than I could have imagined, tho' against offensive War, were clearly for the defensive."22 Franklin's ability to unite disparate ethnic, political, and religious groups to work for a common goal had made him a leader of the artisan classes and a tribune of the people, but he rankled partisan leaders with his refusal to commit to either the proprietary or Quaker camps. As provincial secretary Richard Peters wrote to the proprietor, "considering the popularity of his character and the reputation gained by his Electrical Discoveries... he may prove a Dangerous Enemy."23 Franklin's strength lay in his ability to appeal to the "middling People, the Farmers, Shopkeepers and Tradesmen," whom he regarded as the most vital voting bloc in the province.24

However, Franklin was dismayed by the Germans' lack of support for the plan, despite flattering them in Plain Truth by calling them "brave and steady," and possessing "the most obstinate Courage."25 The immigrants were more influenced by the views of Sauer, the first successful German-language printer in the American colonies, who was as much a leader of public opinion among the Germans as Franklin was among the artisans. Sauer responded harshly from his press in Germantown, attacking Plain Truth in one pamphlet and publishing another anonymous one against it. Sauer opposed the plan because of his pacifist inclination, his religious convictions, and his fear that service in Franklin's militia could be transformed from voluntary to mandatory.26

22 Ibid., 111.
24 Plain Truth, Nov. 17, 1747, in PBF, 3:201.
25 PBF, 3:203.
Sauer's attacks on his character plus the reluctance of most Germans to defend the city augmented Franklin's already dismal view of the ethnic group. He resented their unwillingness to assimilate, loathed their unquestioning belief in leaders like Sauer, and esteemed them as lacking virtue. Although praising the German immigrants' husbandry and conceding that "their industry and frugality is exemplary," Franklin found fault with their tendency to "swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours," and complained the Germans "will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion." London scientist Peter Collinson, who shared Franklin's fear of a political threat to Pennsylvania from the Germans, believed that cultural assimilation could best be accomplished by shutting down German-language presses and prohibiting the importation of all German books. These actions would force the Germans to accustom themselves to the English language. However, the idea of fettering the press conflicted with Franklin's Enlightenment ideals. Instead, he believed that Germans simply needed greater access to anglicized information. He saw two ways to achieve this goal: provide free English schools and publish a competing German-language newspaper. Both projects were implemented, but both failed due to the editorial disapprobation of the powerful Sauer. In his Pensylvanische Berichte, Sauer attacked the plan to provide free English education for Germans as an imperial scheme to anglicize Germans. His criticism, conveyed to tens of thousands of readers, contributed to the project's collapse several years later.

Sauer also contributed to the failure of Franklin's effort to provide the immigrants access to anglicized information: a newspaper that would enable him to impart his ideology of virtue (which by midcentury included political as well as moral virtue) to the German audience. Franklin had first

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English readers. "Sauer" is the anglicized version which the family of printers most often employed and is used here for that reason.

27 Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, in PBF, 4:485; "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind," 1751, ibid., 4:234.

28 Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, in PBF, 4:485; Franklin to Collinson, [1753?], ibid., 5:159-60. On the plan to furnish free education to Germans, see Whitfield Bell, "Benjamin Franklin and the German Charity Schools," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 99 (1955), 381-87; William Frederic Worner, "The Charity School Movement in Lancaster, 1755," Papers of the Lancaster County Historical Society 42 (1938), 1-11.
attempted to publish a German-language newspaper in 1732. Recognizing that German immigrants were becoming a populous segment of Pennsylvania society, the opportunistic young Franklin arranged for linguist Louis Timothee, a recent immigrant from Holland, to publish the *Philadelphische Zeitung* on alternate Saturdays. In the sample issue, Timothee told German readers, “My promise will be that through good Correspondence with Holland and England I will always have the most distinguished and noteworthy news from Europe as well as here.” He also promised to publish ship schedules, market prices, a history of Pennsylvania, and a digest of provincial laws and rights. “To cover the overhead,” Timothee wrote, he and Franklin required 300 subscribers, and he asked readers to voluntarily distribute the *Zeitung* and collect revenues.29

The partners received only about fifty subscriptions but were confident the requisite number would arrive. First, though, they suspected that German readers needed to see another issue of the *Zeitung* before committing their money and support. Seven weeks after the prospectus, the partners published the *Zeitung* again. “I thought that among the German Population of this Country I would be able to find more interest and support, especially among the young Persons, for a Newspaper,” Timothee chided his readers in the June 24 issue. “Nevertheless I didn’t want to fail in the beginning and hope that we will find some more supporters, otherwise I will be forced to cease.” That is exactly what occurred. Few German immigrants supported the newspaper, and no further issues are known to have been published.30

Several years later, Sauer flourished where Timothee and Franklin failed, with the inception of his *Hoch-Deutsch Pensylvanische Geschicht-Schreiber* newspaper in Germantown. Soon after the *Zeitung*’s demise, Timothee was named librarian of the fledgling Library Company of Philadelphia, one of Franklin’s philanthropic projects.31 He subsequently relocated to South Carolina to replace the deceased Thomas Whitmarsh as Franklin’s Charleston

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partner, as part of Franklin's growing printing network. The network, encompassing Franklin's business partners, trade associates, and family members, was the most prominent and geographically extensive early American printing organization. It stretched from New England to the West Indies and spanned more than half a century. As an economic entity and source of mutual support, the network was integral to the success of many printers and played a vital role in the development of American journalism. As a mechanism for disseminating Franklin's ideology of virtue to a mass audience, the printing network was an influential shaper of a national moral character.

Sauer quickly became a persuasive and vigorous leader of the burgeoning Pennsylvania German populace. A contemporary recalled him as "a religious man of a quick sharp understanding in Natural & Spiritual things" who was "not eloquent in speech but a ready writer." Sauer's religious beliefs required him to devote his life to guiding his German brethren in ways he thought best. His principles dictated that his press issue only instructive reading material, clearly designed to impart moral and Christian teachings to his audience. "My small printing shop, now started, is dedicated to God, and I hope . . . that nothing shall be printed except that which is to the glory of God and for the physical or eternal good of my neighbors," he informed a correspondent. "What ever does not meet this standard, I will not print. I have already rejected several, and would rather have the press standing idle. I am happier when I can distribute something of value among the people for a small price, than if I had a large profit without a good conscience."

Having fled Germany to secure personal freedom and religious toleration, the immigrant readers made the idealistic Sauer their intellectual leader, rewarding him with their patronage. One scholar estimated that Sauer's newspaper had a paid circulation between 8,000 and 10,000. His prominence

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33 For more on the Franklin printing network, which was composed of more than two dozen printers, see Ralph Frasca, "From Apprentice to Journeyman to Partner: Benjamin Franklin's Workers and the Growth of the Early American Printing Trade," PMHB 114 (1990), 229-48; Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin's Printing Network," American Journalism 5 (1988), 145-58. For a more extensive treatment of the subject, see Frasca, "The Virtue of the Art."
35 Christopher Sauer to Henry Ehrenfried Luther, Oct. 11, 1740, in Durnbaugh, "Christopher Sauer, Pennsylvania-German Printer," 329.
in the German community gave him a virtual monopoly on German-language printing, and competitors' efforts to make inroads into his revenue or influence consistently failed.\textsuperscript{36}

Sauer's ascendancy among the Germans piqued Franklin, who viewed his German counterpart as isolationist, foolishly pacifist, and a vexatious impediment to the cultural assimilation of the immigrants. In the wake of the Sauer-influenced German resistance to supporting the voluntary militia, and fearing an unbreakable political bond was forming between the Quakers and the Germans, Franklin decided once again to create a publication that would influence the immigrants. He shared the proprietary party's desire to lure the Germans away from the Quakers, teach them better politics, and secure their support for such vital provincial concerns as military defense. The problem, as Franklin saw it, was that the Germans were "of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation." He regarded them as dullards who routinely succumbed to lies but were habitually suspicious of truth. The difficulty of persuading the Germans was compounded by the fact that "as few of the English understand the German Language, and so cannot address them from either the Press or Pulpit, 'tis almost impossible to remove any prejudices they once entertain."\textsuperscript{37}

Franklin could do little to influence the Germans from the pulpit, but he thought it was within his means to influence them from the press. Accordingly, he formed a partnership with immigrant copperplate printer Johann Bohm in 1749 to publish a German-language newspaper in competition with Sauer's \textit{Pensylvanische Berichte} and an almanac to rival his \textit{Hoch-Deutsch Americanische Calender}. The prospects for success were dubious. Since the establishment of Sauer's newspaper a decade before, two short-lived competitors failed in their bids to secure a segment of his audience. In 1743 Joseph Crellius, a German and an acquaintance of Franklin, printed the \textit{Hoch Deutsche Pennsylvanische Journal}, and tended an evening school. His paper, the first German weekly in the colonies, folded within the year. Former Sauer apprentice Gotthard Armbruster then began publication of his


\textsuperscript{37} Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, in \textit{PBF}, 5:483-84.
Philadelphia Zeitung in 1748. Sauer magnanimously promoted his former worker's new venture in his own newspaper, and added, "please, may the dishonest who have never yet paid Sauer not do the same to him." Even with Sauer's endorsement, Armbruster also failed to establish a foothold among German readers, and his newspaper ceased the following year.

With no competitors to challenge Sauer's dominance of German public opinion, Franklin bought Armbruster's equipment and placed Bohm at the helm, referring to him as "the Man that takes Care of my Dutch Printing Office." The partners' Philadelphier Teutsche Fama was published from 1749 until Bohm's death in July 1751. Undaunted, Franklin continued the newspaper several weeks later with a new name and a new format. The Hoch Teutsche und Englishe Zeitung contained news, opinion, and advertisements in both English and German, with the two languages usually printed in adjoining columns. Franklin's transparent attempt at cultural assimilation is evident in the newspaper's statement of purpose: to publish "entertaining and useful Matters in both Languages, adapted to the Convenience of such as incline to learn either." Franklin hoped German readers would be anglicized through exposure to the English language, and that some English patrons would learn German and thus be able to persuade the immigrants in their language.

His half-German and half-English Zeitung sputtering along in Philadelphia, Franklin decided to geographically extend his mission of influencing the Germans through the press. He formed a partnership with two of his former journeymen, Samuel Holland and Henry Miller, for a printing shop

39 Pensylvanische Berichte, May 16, 1748. Showing he was no Sauer truckler, Armbruster published a German translation of Franklin's Plain Truth. See PBF, 3:184n.
40 Franklin to Abiah Franklin, April 12, 1750, in PBF, 3:474.
41 Pennsylvania Gazette, Aug. 22, 1751. "Fama" means "rumor," or perhaps more colloquially, "news." The identity of Franklin's German translator for the half-English, half-German newspaper is unknown, but it may have been Gotthard Armbruster, who would have been qualified to work at the press, or perhaps his brother Anton, who worked with Franklin several years later. As this newspaper was published three years after Franklin's retirement from active printing, it is likely that his partner was both German and a printer. The activities of the Armbruster brothers during the brief lifespan of the German-English newspaper are unknown.
in Lancaster, a burgeoning town on the western frontier which featured a formidable German population. The partners commenced publication of the first newspaper there, the biweekly *Lancastersche Zeitung*, on January 15, 1752. Like Franklin's Philadelphia version, Holland and Miller's *Zeitung* was printed in both German and English in an effort to break down cultural and linguistic barriers. The Lancaster shop also sold German translations of *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which pointedly counseled Germans, "When Reason preaches, if you won't hear her she'll box your Ears." And, seemingly firing a volley at the pacifism of Sauer and the Quakers, Poor Richard observed, "Serving God is Doing Good to Man, but Praying is thought an easier Service, and therefore more generally chosen." Franklin's "Poor Richard" character was designed to provide moral tutelage. As Franklin explained, "I consider'd it as a proper Vehicle for conveying Instruction among the common People," including German immigrants.43

To gain influence over the views of German immigrants, Franklin returned to the formula that had succeeded previously in the construction of his printing network. He sent partners to towns that had no local printer. This, he reasoned, would enable him to erode Sauer's influence in the Pennsylvania hinterland. Meanwhile, he was making no progress in Philadelphia, and just a few weeks after Holland and Miller commenced their paper, Franklin stopped publication of the *Hoch Teutsche und Englishe Zeitung* following its thirteenth issue. In a valedictory notice to readers, Franklin deftly avoided admitting defeat by noting, "This English and Dutch Paper, No. 13 ending the half Year, will be no longer printed in Philadelphia; one of the same kind being now done in Lancaster, by good Hands." Using his privileges as Philadelphia postmaster, he offered a subscription to it "without Charge of Postage." But the real reason for the newspaper's demise was obvious. Sauer's overtly Christian and proudly ethnic press had the moral and economic support of German readers.44

42 *Poor Richard Improved*, 1753, in *PBF*, 4:403-6. No partnership contract between Franklin, Holland, and Miller has survived, but years later Franklin explicitly listed the two men as his printing partners. See Franklin to Francis Childs, Feb. 8, 1785, in John Bigelow, ed., *The Works of Benjamin Franklin* (12 vols., New York, 1904), 11:8-9

43 *Autobiography*, 93.

Sauer had weathered Franklin’s efforts to shape German public opinion in Philadelphia, and he did the same in Lancaster. Although Franklin made Holland the town’s postmaster to provide him with additional revenue and free access to the mail, the Lancaster venture fared no better in siphoning off Sauer’s audience. Within the first few months Miller left the partnership. Holland issued the *Lancastersche Zeitung* for more than a year afterward but discontinued it June 5, 1753. In nine days later, he and Franklin mutually voided their partnership contract, replacing it with a lease. According to its terms, Franklin rented his press and assortment of types to Holland for twenty pounds per year.

In agreeing to abrogate the partnership contract, Franklin recognized that Holland’s low circulation and minimal advertising revenue meant that Holland would be unable to pay him the requisite one-third of the profits and remain in business. Still, Franklin believed in the strategic importance of the Lancaster operation, and it was his hope that a printing house mirroring his views could remain in Lancaster, thereby offering the hope of influencing hinterland Germans. Thus, Franklin encouraged Holland to stay on in Lancaster, relinquishing newspaper publication but continuing to print in German. Holland was unsuccessful, though, and ceased printing several months later. “I heard that S. Holland was broke up,” Franklin wrote to Lancaster merchant Edward Shippen in February 1754. Franklin was surprised by his erstwhile partner’s failure in Lancaster, having believed that “a Printing-House would be thought a publick Convenience in such a Place.”

Imputing Holland’s failure to a lack of industry, frugality, or virtue, yet still desiring a printer under his aegis who could communicate with the Germans of the Pennsylvania interior, Franklin formed a partnership with his nephew William Dunlap. Franklin recommended him to Shippen as “a


47 Franklin to Edward Shippen, Feb. 14, 1754, in *PBF*, 5:199. For an example of a standard Franklin partnership contract, see “Articles of Agreement with Thomas Whitmarsh,” Sept. 13, 1731, ibid., 1:205-8. Franklin’s desire that his partners mirror his views in the products of their presses is implicit in his criterion for promoting to partnerships those workers “who had behaved well.” See *Autobiography*, 108.
sober young Man" who "desires to make a little Tryal of Lancaster." Discouraged by his own repeated failures to establish a foothold among German readers, Franklin seemed dubious about Dunlap's chances for success. He initially agreed to let Dunlap print in Lancaster only for several months, rather than drafting the standard six-year contract. "If he meets with Encouragement he will settle among you: Otherwise, he will bring away the Press and Letters," Franklin told Shippen. 48 To help his relative and partner drum up some business, Franklin announced in the Pennsylvania Gazette that "All Sorts of Printing Work, Dutch and English, done by WILLIAM DUNLAP, Printer at Lancaster." 49

Dunlap had been apprenticed to William Bradford in Philadelphia, where he helped publish the Pennsylvania Journal, and he arrived in Lancaster intending to use his journalistic skills to commence a newspaper there. 50 He told a local merchant, "As I have got all Materials ready for the carrying on a Weekly Newspaper, and a pretty large Number of Subscribers engaged, [I] intend to publish one in a short time." Whether he intended to resurrect Holland and Miller's half-English, half-German paper is unknown, but Dunlap never succeeded in his ambition. He fared slightly better than his Franklin-allied predecessors, though, printing a school primer, religious tracts, sermons, and a description of harsh treatment suffered by a colonist captive of the Indians, before leaving Lancaster for Philadelphia in early 1757. 51

Several of Franklin's propaganda efforts had failed, but he nonetheless remained worried about German immigrants' stance on provincial politics, military defense, and cultural assimilation. Furthermore, the threat of war between Britain and France for control of the Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley renewed his fears that the Germans might not only refuse to fight with the British but would actually align with the French. "Unless the stream of their importation could be turned from this to other Colonies," Franklin wrote to Collinson in 1753, "they will soon so out number us, that all the advantages we have will not (in my Opinion) be able to preserve our language, and even our Government will become precarious." Franklin

48 Franklin to Shippen, Feb. 14, 1754, in PBF, 5:199. For more on Dunlap, see Mary D. Turnbull, "William Dunlap, Colonial Printer, Journalist, and Minister," PMHB 103 (1979), 143-65.
49 Pennsylvania Gazette, Feb. 19, 1754.
50 Thomas, History of Printing in America, 386.
51 William Dunlap to ?, n.d., HSP, printed in PMHB 22 (1898), 372-73.
added that French soldiers and settlers in the Ohio Valley, "who watch all advantages," may "come to an understanding with" the Germans. "[I]ndeed in the last war our Germans shewed a general disposition that seems to bode us no good," Franklin wrote, still smarting from German rejection of his voluntary militia idea during King George's War. 52

When European religious leaders began soliciting funds for the classical education and spiritual formation of rural Germans in the province, Franklin and other prominent Pennsylvanians saw an opportunity to anglicize Germans through classroom training. The concept of free English schooling for Germans ostensibly began as a social and religious movement, designed, as Rev. William Smith claimed, "to qualify the Germans for all the advantages of native English Subjects." However, the plan soon became subordinate to political motives. Education for the Germans would achieve two purposes: anglicize their thinking and behavior, thereby inducing them to share British concerns; and make them independent in thought and deed, so they would be less susceptible to the blandishments of Sauer and the Quakers. This was implicit in Smith's assertion that the project would enable the Germans, "in a Word, to judge and act entirely for themselves without being obliged to take Things upon the Word of others, whose Interest it may be to deceive and mislead them." 53 In Franklin's estimation, the remedy for the German problem was "to distribute them more equally, mix them with the English [and] establish English Schools where they are now too thick settled." 54 As he informed Collinson, "The Dutch Wou'd fain save all the Money that they Touch; If they can have English Schooling gratis, as much as they love their own Language they will not pay for German schooling." 55 The plan was executed soon after, with the establishment of the Society for the Relief and Instruction of Poor Germans. The society collected funds on both sides of the Atlantic and opened schools in several predominantly German towns. Franklin was asked to serve as a trustee of the society, and adhering to his

52 Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, in PBF, 4:484-85.
53 William Smith, A Brief History of the Rise and Progress of the Charitable Scheme . . . for the Relief and Instruction of Poor Germans (Philadelphia, 1755).
54 Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, in PBF, 4:485.
55 Franklin to Peter Collinson, [1753], PBF, 5:158-60.
credo “never to ask for an Office, and never to refuse one when offer’d to
him,” he dutifully accepted.56

At their first meeting, in August 1754, the trustees read a letter from the Re
everend Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, a German-born minister, to several Lutheran congregations in Pennsylvania. He praised the society’s “Scheme for promoting the Knowlege of God among the Germans in Pennsylvania &c. and for making them loyal Subjects to the sacred Protestant Throne of Great Britain.” However, he expressed concern that “some ill-minded Persons would strife to defeat” the plan “to the OFFence of many thousand ignorant, but well-meaning Souls, unless proper Measures were taken to prevent it.”57

Chief among the “ill-minded Persons” was Sauer, who recognized the charity-school plan for what it was—an attempt at cultural indoctrination of Germans—and vigorously attacked it in his Pensylvanische Berichte. Sauer editorialized that the society’s project was part of a plan to forcibly impose the English language and culture on immigrants, even in church. This would compel them “to hear English ministers preach and, being ignorant in that language, they would be obliged to sit in their meetings like geese, and hold their tongues like sheep, for which reason they would rather avoid such charitable gifts.”58 Muhlenberg found darker motives in Sauer’s editorial stance. Conceding Sauer’s newspaper is “universally read by the Germans all over Pennsylvania and the neighbouring Colonies,” and that other products of his press have opposed the plan, Muhlenberg lamented “that such a Man has it much in his Power, and too evidently in his Disposition, greatly to retard this good work and stir up the People” against both the proprietary government and non-Quaker religious denominations.59

Muhlenberg lauded Franklin’s journalistic efforts “to rescue the Germans out of Sauer’s hands,” attributing the repeated failures to the “Want of a German Printer with sufficient Skill and Correspondence, and a proper Interest made to support Mr. Franklin’s Undertaking.” The “proper Meas-

56 Bell, “Benjamin Franklin and the German Charity Schools,” 381-83; Worner, “The Charity School Movement in Lancaster, 1755,” 1-5; Autobiography, 111.
57 Henry Melchior Muhlenberg to the Society for the Relief and Instruction of Poor Germans, Aug. 3, 1754, in PBF, 5:418.
58 Pensylvanische Berichte, Feb. 16, 1755. For other examples of Sauer’s opposition, see, e.g., Pensylvanische Berichte, June 15, July 1, 1754.
59 Henry Melchior Muhlenberg to the Society for the Relief and Instruction of Poor Germans, Aug. 3, 1754, in PBF, 5:418.
Muhlenberg envisioned to counteract Sauer's clout and "to cure this growing Evil" required the trustees to purchase a printing press "and make a proper Interest to support a News Paper." His suggestion was adopted. The society bought a press and types from Franklin at below market value, secured German immigrant Anton Armbruster to publish the half-English, half-German newspaper, and made Franklin and Smith the editorial directors. Franklin and Armbruster drew up terms of partnership, and the *Philadephische Zeitung* commenced publication July 12, 1755, as the official organ of the first Americanization society for immigrants.  

By supporting the society's plan and overseeing its printing press, Franklin had one final opportunity to redeem himself and accomplish what had repeatedly been beyond his grasp, the acculturation of the German immigrants. He had long distrusted their isolation and stubborn preservation of their native tongue and customs, but as war with the French loomed on the horizon, he felt a moral imperative to bring the Germans solidly under the English flag. It was a time "when unanimity is became more than ever necessary to Frustrate the Designs of the French," Franklin wrote. This chance to establish a German-language press was slightly different, though. For the first time he had the financial and political backing of a transatlantic group of powerful men, who would be sure that "a proper Interest" was made to support the press. Franklin was further encouraged to make his fifth attempt at counteracting Sauer's hold on German minds because he sincerely believed in the merit of the society. "I cannot but applaud most sincerely, so judicious, so generous, and so pious an Undertaking; and the Society may depend on everything in my Power that may contribute to its Success," he wrote to Collinson, one of the English architects of the plan.  

The Society for the Relief and Instruction of Poor Germans and its press began auspiciously. By April 1755, Smith was able to report to proprietor Thomas Penn that four schools were operating in the province, six more would soon be open, and fifteen more were being contemplated. In addition to their biweekly newspaper, Armbruster and Franklin published education tracts, religious exegeses, and, in order to avoid criticism from Sauer, a German translation of the history of the society, written by Smith.  

60 *PBF*, 5:418-19; Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 381-82. Thomas errs by presuming that the society began as early as 1740 and financed Crellius’s press.  
61 Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 28, 1754, in *PBF*, 5:332.  
62 William Smith to Thomas Penn, April 10, 1755, Penn Official Correspondence, HSP.
The profile emphasized that the charity schools would offer religious instruction to promote "Industry and true Godliness." The partners developed a cordial relationship, with Armbruster naming a son after Franklin.63

Just as the charity's inception was fostered by mass communication, so was its demise. Derogatory characterizations of Germans—the very group the society was trying to aid and persuade—written for print by two of its prominent trustees contributed to its disbandment several years later. In pamphlets published in 1755 and 1756, Smith called Germans "an uncultivated Race . . . liable to be seduced by every enterprizing Jesuit," and described them as "insolent, sullen, and turbulent."64 Franklin compounded the insult when his "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind" was printed in America in 1755. In it he described Germans as "Palatine Boors" who were turning Pennsylvania into "a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them."65

Such slurs augmented German distrust of Franklin and the society. These views, coupled with Sauer's claims that the charity schools were ploys to subordinate German identity and interests to British will, spelled the beginning of the end. The Zeitung, which had never generated much more than 400 subscribers, folded after the December 31, 1757, issue, with Armbruster deeply in debt and Franklin trying to distance himself from the group, the newspaper, and his beleaguered partner. From London he instructed his wife "to speak to Armbruster not to make Use of my Name any more in his News Paper, as I have no particular Concern in it, but as one of the Trustees only."66

Glad to be free of the political tempest involving German immigrants, Franklin served in London as colonial agent for Pennsylvania, trying to

63 Smith, A Brief History; Thomas, History of Printing in America, 382. For an example of the instructive material issued by Franklin and Armbruster, see Das Leben Gottes in der Seele des Menschen, or The Life of God in the Soul of Man, 1756.

64 William Smith, A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania (London, 1755); Smith, A Brief View of the Conduct of Pennsylvania, for the Year 1755 (London, 1756).

65 Benjamin Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind," 1755, in PBF, 4:234.

66 Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, June 10, 1758, PBF, 8:93. On Armbruster's debt to Franklin, see, e.g., Anton Armbruster to Benjamin Franklin, June 13, 1763, ibid., 10:289; "Chattel Mortgage and Inventory," Oct. 29, 1765, ibid., 12:342-45. Franklin and Smith were on friendly terms and were allies in designing and implementing the society, but squabbles over provincial politics and printed scurrility made them bitter enemies. See Ralph Ketcham, "Benjamin Franklin and William Smith: New Light on an Old Philadelphia Quarrel," PMHB 88 (1964), 142-63. Their disaffection contributed to Franklin's desire to distance himself from the society.
persuade the monarchy to wrest provincial control from the proprietors. Upon returning in 1762, he resumed his role in Pennsylvania politics and the postal system. However, his popularity was declining. In 1756 he had gleefully written, “The People happen to love me,” but by 1764 he was forced to concede, “I have many Enemies.” The political climate had changed, and Franklin was routed in his 1764 bid for reelection to the assembly. His fierce opposition to the Paxton Boys’ slaughter of Indians alienated Scots-Irish frontiersmen; his polemic Cool Thoughts on the Present Situation of Our Public Affairs angered proponents of proprietary government; and his character was assaulted by scurrilous pamphleeters, who accused him of greed, wickedness, and immorality. A major factor in his abasement was German opposition, which had been fueled by widespread republication of a decade-old Franklin pamphlet which insulted Germans. Franklin’s enemies “carried (would you think it!) above 1000 Dutch from me, by printing part of my paper,” he recalled, “where I speak of the Palatine Boors herding together, which they explain’d that I call’d them a Herd of Hogs. This is quite a laughing Matter.”

During his stint as colonial agent, Franklin—by this time firmly opposed to the proprietarians—waged a pamphlet war in an effort to secure a royal charter for Pennsylvania. Such techniques of persuasion were “necessary to prepare the Minds of the Publick; in which the Proprietors will be gibbeted up as they deserve, to rot and stink in the Nostrils of Posterity.” This propaganda campaign came on the heels of his struggle to prepare the minds of a specific segment of the public—the Pennsylvania Germans. Franklin’s involvement with them had been a source of continual frustration to him for nearly two decades, beginning with military defense of the province and ending with the close of a chapter in Franklin’s civic life. Initially willing to


68 Franklin to Richard Jackson, Oct. 11, 1764, in PBF, 1:397. According to Franklin, the number of voters was fewer than 4,000, so more than 1,000 opposing votes from Germans would have been pivotal in the election.

69 Franklin to Joseph Galloway, Feb. 17, 1758, in PBF, 7:374.
respect the Germans' cultural isolationism, Franklin grew to loathe their unwillingness to assimilate once they began using their strength of numbers to influence the outcome of elections and public measures. As a result, Franklin made repeated attempts to use his printing partnerships to influence the recalcitrant German-speaking settlers for political purposes, and also to exhort them to public virtue. His repeated attempts at mass persuasion were calculated to expand his printing network in a new direction—political influence and cultural assimilation. However, Franklin's bid to anglicize the Germans he so thoroughly distrusted failed.

The efforts of Franklin and his political and journalistic allies to acculturate the Pennsylvania Germans were replete with tactical errors, cultural haughtiness, and naivete about their ethnic solidarity. Influenced by Sauer, whom they viewed as one of their own, the Germans spurned the repeated and thinly disguised attempts at indoctrination. Their nominal patronage of the printed matter intended to influence them put Sauer's rivals out of business, and sent a clear message to British political and opinion leaders in Pennsylvania.

Failure also haunted most of the men Franklin enlisted in his attempts to elevate German virtue. Holland faded from sight after he quit the Lancaster printing house. Dunlap's life was filled with tribulations, including bankruptcy, health woes, threats of scandal and lawsuits regarding his mismanagement of the Philadelphia post office, and a turbulent tenure as an Anglican rector. Armbruster was reduced to journeyman status after the charity's newspaper failed, serving under Isaac Collins and others while battling insanity and insolvency. "He imagined that he could, by a special charm, raise or lay the devil," printer Isaiah Thomas remembered, and "he apprehended that he had intercourse with invisible spirits." When he and Franklin were both elderly, Armbruster wrote three pathetic letters seeking succor, "as there are Bonds between us." Franklin seems never to have acquiesced. Miller was the only colonial German-language printer to enjoy

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70 Turnbull, "William Dunlap, Colonial Printer."
71 Thomas, History of Printing in America, 384.
72 Anton Armbruster to Benjamin Franklin, Nov. 12, 1785 (quotation), April 26, 1786, June 26, 1788, Franklin Papers, American Philosophical Society.
modest success against the Sauer dynasty, but only years after he was beyond Franklin’s aegis.  

Ultimately, Franklin and his printing partners wielded little influence on the political and social conduct of immigrant Germans. None of his five attempts successfully countered the awesome influence of Christopher Sauer, who is credited with helping to maintain the distinctly German character of eastern Pennsylvania for generations afterward. Fueled by political fervor and patriotic adherence to the emerging American national character, Franklin’s ambition to educate and persuade the Germans had exceeded his capability.

East Islip, New York

RALPH FRASCA

73 The best source on Miller is Adams, “The Colonial German-Language Press and the American Revolution.”

74 For the view that Sauer “contributed a great deal to the preservation of German culture in Pennsylvania through the two hundred years since his death,” see Oller, “Christopher Saur, Colonial Printer,” 164.