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They "Speak Irish but Should Speak German": Language and Citizenship in Philadelphia's German Community, c. 1800 to 1820[1]

IN JULY 1816, PENNSYLVANIA'S ATTORNEY GENERAL, Jared Ingersoll, charged fifty-nine German American men with "unlawful and wickedly combining, conspiring and confederating together," in order to "defend with their bodies and lives, the German divine worship, and to oppose by every means, lawful and unlawful, the introduction of any other language, into the churches."[2] The resulting trial was the culmination of a linguistic battle that had divided Pennsylvania's largest Lutheran congregation, St. Michael's and Zion in Philadelphia, for over a decade. In 1803, the conflict first emerged in the form of petitions and proposals to allow English services in the church. By the middle of the 1810s, the disagreement over language choice had evolved into a battle that included

[1] George Witman, an advocate of English in his German church, claimed that anti-English members of the congregation had disrupted a meeting of the pro-English group by shouting that they should speak German and not Irish. See below for a discussion of the use of "Irish" in this context. *Trial of Frederick Eberle and Others, At a Nisi Prius Court, held at Philadelphia, July 1816 . . .* (Philadelphia, 1817), 9.

[2] Ibid., 219.

fistfights, bribery, intimidation, and, finally, threats of murder. Some Germans, so it seemed, were willing to kill in the defense of their mother tongue. The conflict demonstrates that language was a strongly contested cultural characteristic of the German American community. But the linguistic battles did not only have implications for the *German* community in the United States. Germans used language as a tool in their quest to participate actively in the formation of the new nation. To a large degree language choice determined these Germans' position in this larger society and, ultimately, their notion of American citizenship.

Two hundred years ago, a shared language was central to the concept of nation.[3] In light of the fact that a German nation as a *political* entity did not exist at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the emphasis in German ideology on cultural rather than political criteria in defining a nation's characteristics is not surprising.[4] During this period, German was identified as a national language; the linguistic community was identical with the nation. But a shared language was not just a signifier of a nation; in fact, it could actually help create it. The proliferation in Europe of German, Literary, and Reading societies dedicated to the cultivation of the German language attests to the perceived importance of German in the ideological formation of a German nation.

Americans shared, and continue to share, this confidence in the power of language.[5] In the first few decades after the Revolution, most agreed

[3] For a collection of essays dealing with the history of the relationship between language and nation, see Andreas Gardt, ed., *Nation und Sprache: Die Diskussion ihres Verhältnisses in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin, 2000). Linguistic nationalism is not the only form of nationalism that is important in binding people together and shaping identity. In fact, nationalism based in shared ideology and institutions, for example, can constitute a more powerful force within a community. This essay argues that linguistic nationalism was a central and divisive force within the German American community.

[4] For a study of the perceived connection between language and nation specifically during this period, see Jochen A. Bär, "*Nation* und *Sprache* in der Sicht romantischer Schriftsteller und Sprachtheoretiker," in *Nation und Sprache*, ed. Gardt, 204–28.

[5] In 1988, a survey in California revealed that 76 percent of the respondents felt that "speaking and writing English" was "very important" in making someone a "true American." Jack Citrin, "Language Politics and American Identity," in *English: Our Official Language?* ed. Bee Gallegos (New York, 1994), 40. The Republican platform in 2000 included the statement that one "sign of our unity is the role of English as our common language." Robin Toner, "A Closer Look at the Planks," *New York Times*, July 30, 2000, A24. The persistence of the myth that German almost—by one vote—became the official language of the United States is testimony to the importance we attach to the role of language. The myth lives on even though it has been proved a legend by Otto Lohr, "Deutsch als 'Landessprache' der Vereinigten Staaten?" *Mitteilungen der Akademie zur wissenschaftlichen Erforschung und zur Pflege des Deutschtums* 4 (1931): 283–90. See also Jürgen

with Noah Webster, who recognized the importance of language in the process of creating an American national identity. In 1789 he noted that "a *national language* is a band of *national union*."[6] Because of the presumed power of language in nation formation, the adoption of English among groups of different cultural origin was considered imperative to the stability of the Republic. Calls for a national language were particularly strong in Pennsylvania, an unusually heterogeneous region. An estimated 140,000 Germans resided in the state in 1790, constituting about one-third of its population.[7] To reduce the danger of disorder and foster cohesion among such diverse people, the Pennsylvanian Benjamin Rush called for a "uniform system of education, [that] will render the mass of the people more homogeneous, and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government."[8] Instruction in English was a crucial component of such an educational program. It was undeniable, the geographer Jedediah Morse wrote in his study on the United States in 1789, that "the English language is the one which is universally spoken in the United States, in which business is transacted, and the records are kept." It was simply inevitable that foreigners would embrace English customs and manners. The diverse people, Morse predicted, would "become so assimilated, as that all nominal distinctions shall be lost in the general and honourable name of AMERICANS."[9]

Despite this perception of the role of language, the framers of the federal Constitution decided not to name English as the official language of the newly created nation. The reasons for this omission were twofold: it symbolized a break with English culture, and it reflected the recognition that the United States was a diverse society with people of many national backgrounds. Despite the eagerness of Americans to create an American identity, however, they continued to rely heavily on English customs and manners—not surprising in a region that had been part of

Eichhoff, "The German Language in America," in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History*, eds. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia, 1985), 1:225.

[6] "Noah Webster's Plea for an American Language," in *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655–1819*, ed. Wilson Smith (Indianapolis, 1973), 282. Italics in original.

[7] For a table of national and linguistic stocks in the United States in 1790, see Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York, 1990), 67–68.

[8] "Benjamin Rush on Republican Education," in *Theories of Education*, ed. Smith, 243–44.

[9] Jedediah Morse, *The American Geography: Or, A View of the Present Situation of the United States of America* (Elizabethtown, NJ, 1789), 67–68.

the British Empire for almost two centuries and that was therefore both saturated with British culture and dominated by men of Anglo-Saxon origin. While many Americans resented this continued reliance on English cultural patterns, they agreed that a common language would both strengthen the union by reducing the danger of conflict and enable citizens to exercise their responsibilities. The presence of a large non-English population, especially one that tended to keep to itself and that displayed reluctance to embrace English, was, they believed, a threat to the stability of the nation.

Many German Americans insisted on the continued use of German for exactly the same reasons. They could not agree more with Webster's proclamation that a national language was a band of national union. The preservation of their language ensured the survival of their nation, meaning, in the American context, their cultural and social community.[10] Conversely, the loss of the German language meant the destruction of the German nation in America. Yet, in the early United States, Germans faced a dilemma: how could they reconcile the desire to preserve their cultural identity with the commitment to become members of the Republic? How could Germans speak German and still consider themselves, and be perceived as, patriotic Americans? Did those who embraced English relinquish their membership in the German nation? In the four decades after the Revolution, the German community grew increasingly divided over the meaning of the German language and, ultimately, the nature of German identity in the new American republic.

All areas of German cultural life were touched by the language question. Some of the most volatile clashes over language occurred in what was arguably the center of the German community, the church.[11] Churches were one of the few places where people of divergent backgrounds came into contact. In the context of worship, Germans interacted with neighbors and kin too distant or busy to see during the week, or they mingled

[10] German Americans frequently used the German term *Nation*, which can describe a political community, or *Volk*, a people who share cultural, social, and linguistic ancestry but are not necessarily part of the same political community, interchangeably. In this sense of the word, Germans in America and Germans in Europe belonged to the same nation.

[11] W. Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge, 1992), 241–95, 354–55. With their hierarchical structures and educational facilities, churches created cohesion and stability in an unstable society. See A. Gregg Roeber, "The Problem of the Eighteenth Century in Transatlantic Religious History," in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity: New German Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Europe and America*, ed. Hartmut Lehman et al. (University Park, PA, 2000), 124.

with fellow Germans whose social and economic standing precluded sustained social interaction.[12] The sharing of this central cultural institution by Germans of many different backgrounds—newcomer and resident, rich and poor, young and old—partly explains why the most intense clashes of divergent perceptions of ethnic identity emerged in this setting. In the colonial period, the use of English in German Reformed and Lutheran churches—to which most Germans belonged—had been accepted when the circumstances justified it.[13] Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the patriarch of the Lutheran Church in North America, regularly preached in English if non-Germans attended the services, or if younger, American-born Germans were unable to understand German.[14] The scarcity of churches in some areas on occasion necessitated the sharing of resources with non-Germans, thus encouraging the offering of services in English. Christian Streit, pastor of the German St. John's Church in Easton, held English services on a regular basis in prerevolutionary days, mainly because there was no English church in the town before 1819.[15] Even the Ministerium, consisting of Lutheran pastors and elected lay representatives of German and Swedish congregations, held services at the annual meetings that included prayers and sermons in English.[16] German

[12] Mark Häberlein points out the importance of churches in rural areas, where face-to-face interaction was difficult. See "Communication and Group Interaction Among German Migrants to Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Baden-Durlach," in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity,* ed. Lehman et al., 167.

[13] About two-thirds of the Germans were Lutheran and the majority of the rest belonged to the Reformed Church.

[14] See, for example, *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg,* trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, [1945]), 37, 54, 103.

[15] Armin George Weng, "The Language Problem in the Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania, 1742–1820," *Church History* 5 (1936): 374; Franklin K. Fretz, *Historical Sketch of St. John's Lutheran Church* (Easton, PA, 1915), 22.

[16] See, for example, the meeting in 1772, recorded in *Documentary History of the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States. Proceedings of the Annual Conventions from 1748 to 1821* (Philadelphia, 1898), 138. The Ministerium consisted of all ordained pastors. Lay delegates were permitted to present petitions and similar matters to the clergy, but they were not permitted to remain for deliberations. The Ministerium held annual synodical meetings, which were attended by ordained pastors, licentiates, and delegates from congregations that were served by a pastor. Since 1792, lay delegates could vote at these meetings under certain restrictions. Decisions made at the annual meeting had to be authorized by the synod in Holland, the highest church body. *Die Ministerial=Ordnung der deutschen Evangelisch=Lutherischen Gemeinen in Pennsylvanien und den benachbarten Staaten* (Germantown, PA, 1792), 13–14. On church organization see E. Clifford Nelson et al., eds., *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia, 1975), 3–128. For recent studies of the history of German Lutherans in Pennsylvania during the period under investigation, see Wolfgang Splitter, *Pastors, People, Politics: German Lutherans in Pennsylvania, 1740–1790* (Trier,

colonial churches were not free of problems, but quarrels did not involve significant conflict over language, nor did they result in widespread tensions.[17]

The willingness to be flexible in linguistic matters stemmed from the fragile position of German churches during most of the eighteenth century. In an environment that lacked established German religious institutions, colonials simply concentrated their efforts on setting up the church, and not on fighting off another language. If settlers embraced Lutheranism but did not know German, the clergy was prepared to offer spiritual care in English. This tolerance of English in certain circumstances, however, did not indicate indifference toward language. The occasional use of English was never intended to replace German or to encourage the adoption of English among Germans. Too much in their community depended on the preservation of their language; it was a crucial component of their cultural identity. A loss of German, or even just the corruption of German through linguistic amalgamation, threatened to destroy other cultural markers, including the most important of them, religion.[18] It is impossible to understand the nature of this intense and violent struggle over language if we ignore what was at stake.

While the colonial period remained relatively free of serious linguistic battles within the German community, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw an increase in the volume and intensity of congregational conflicts, sometimes resulting in permanent schisms of churches.[19] The struggles stemmed from the desire of German Americans to claim their rights as members of the new nation. Divergent opinions

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Ger., 1998), esp. 255–61; Paul A. Baglyos, "In This Land of Liberty: American Lutherans and the Young Republic, 1787–1837" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997).

[17] The quarrels encountered by Muhlenberg mostly involved unqualified pastors or teachers who refused to leave their posts. Johann Christoph Kunze noted in his eulogy for Muhlenberg that he remained in congregations "for many days, even years, in order to end quarrels." *Elisas Betraenter Nachruf bei der Hinwegname seines Gottesmannes Elias* (Philadelphia, 1787), 15. Translations of German sources into English are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[18] In 1772 the German Lutheran congregation near Mount Joy complained about linguistic amalgamation and asked for a German pastor who knew enough English to keep the two languages separate. *Documentary History,* 137. For a study of the connection between language, thought, and emotion, see Bär, "*Nation* und *Sprache,*" 199–228. See also Andreas Gardt, "Nation und Sprache in der Zeit der Aufklärung," in *Nation und Sprache,* ed. Gardt, 169–98.

[19] Linguistic battles were not the only causes for disruption in German churches. For a study focusing on disagreements arising out of political and ecclesiastical issues, see Steven N. Nolt, *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic* (University Park, PA, 2002).

concerning the nature of religious services were based on liberties that came directly out of the Revolution: freedom of religion and notions of equality. Some Germans denounced acculturation as a sign of corruption and celebrated their cultural heritage as a crucial component of the new republic. Others moved freely in Anglo-dominated society and encouraged the adoption of English customs and manners as prerequisites for success. Yet, as these Germans were outwardly embracing English manners, they continued to rely on German cultural institutions as the centers of their private lives. When, ultimately, this battle over the meaning of language was carried into the courtroom, both defenders of German and promoters of English based their demands on constitutional rights and identified themselves as the true guardians of republican liberties and portrayed the others, implicitly or explicitly, as un-American.

After the Revolution, delegates to the annual meetings of the Lutheran and Reformed churches began to report that the use of English in German services was becoming a problem. No longer was the issue linguistic amalgamation but the outright replacement of German with English.[20] This tendency did not affect all congregations equally or simultaneously. Some delegates to the meetings noted that in their communities the use of English was not common and German schools were well-attended. But many others were less positive. Mr. Krug of Friedrichstadt complained in 1795 that "many parents prefer to send their children to English schools." That same year, Pastor Melsheimer of Hanover and Pastors Justus H. C. Helmuth and Johann Friederich Schmidt of Philadelphia also lamented that in their congregations "the tendency towards English is very strong."[21] This problem was not confined to the Lutherans: in 1790, the German Reformed Church leadership was greatly disturbed by the poor attendance at church schools, presumably because parents now preferred English instruction for their children.[22] The very fact that the assessment of language usage became a common feature of these church reports indicates that the clergy was not only keenly aware

[20] All congregations were encouraged to send representatives with reports about the state of religion in their communities. Pastors, catechists, and, since 1792, elected laity attended the meetings that consisted of readings of reports and petitions, discussions, and religious services. Since not all congregations sent delegates, the data contained in the published records do not include notes on every congregation.

[21] See the reports for 1795, 1796, and 1797 in *Documentary History*, 279, 285, 291.

[22] *Minutes and Letters of the Coetus of the German Reformed Congregations in Pennsylvania, 1747–1792* (Philadelphia, 1903), 442.

of the growing influence of English, but that it was also becoming concerned about this development.

The first serious test of the strength of German in the Lutheran Church came in 1804. That year, the annual report of the Lutheran Ministerium noted that "a controversy has arisen in the Philadelphia congregation in reference to English preaching in the German church."[23] Judged by the casualness of this entry, no one foresaw that the "controversy" would evolve into an increasingly bitter decade-long battle and culminate in the conviction of dozens of members on conspiracy charges. The conflict took on special meaning because it involved St. Michael's and Zion, the largest Lutheran congregation in North America. Many of the most respected members of the German American community worshipped here. It was a group of these leading citizens who led the movement to introduce English into the services.

The year before, in 1803, a group of members, under the leadership of Peter Muhlenberg, then president of the congregation's board and one of the most prominent Germans in Pennsylvania, had introduced a plan to vote on whether English services should be permitted in St. Michael's and Zion. Muhlenberg, the American-born son of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, was fluent in German and English. He had served as a major general during the Revolution and after the war was elected to various public offices, including the United States Senate in 1801. A committed Republican and loyal supporter of Thomas Jefferson, he resigned his Senate seat after only four months to accept the president's appointment as Pennsylvania's supervisor of the internal revenue. At the time of the petition in 1803, he was collector of the port of Philadelphia, a lucrative and prominent position. Muhlenberg thus belonged to a group of successful and acculturated Germans who moved comfortably in English society. Like many leading German Americans, he was also active within the German community. In fact, he was serving as the president of an organization dedicated to the preservation of German culture, the German Society of Pennsylvania, when he submitted his proposal to introduce English into his church.[24]

[23] *Documentary History*, 342.

[24] On Peter Muhlenberg's life, see Edward W. Hocker, *The Fighting Parson of the American Revolution: A Biography of General Peter Muhlenberg, Lutheran Clergyman, Military Chieftain, and Political Leader* (Philadelphia, 1936); Henry A. Muhlenberg, *The Life of Major-General Peter Muhlenberg of the Revolutionary Army* (Philadelphia, 1849).

The argument in support of English was simple: increasing numbers of congregants no longer spoke German. In 1794, Peter's brother Frederick had already predicted that German churches would soon need to offer English services if they hoped to prevent the younger, American-born generation from joining English churches.[25] But in 1803, resistance to Peter Muhlenberg's proposal was strong and a sizeable German party (the two opposing groups were soon labeled the English party and the German party), led by the congregation's pastors, Helmuth and Schmidt, quickly organized opposition. Twenty men gathered to draft a response to Muhlenberg's petition. They listed eight points intended to prove that the congregation should remain German. Their argument was designed to make a legal argument but seemed pedantic: they admitted that the documents relating to Zion's founding did not include a prohibition of other languages. The consistent occurrence of the word "German" in these records, however, indicated that only German should be used in church services. Furthermore, the men argued, the charter, records, and early sermons clearly demonstrated that the church had been founded to serve only Germans. In closing, the men warned of the dangers posed by the introduction of English (a great number of congregations damaged by bilingualism, the men noted, could be named if space allowed it), but urged congregants to weather the storm: "Don't worry, our congregation will remain German." Thirteen men, including two merchants, a storekeeper, several artisans, and the two pastors, signed the statement. Eight of them belonged to the German Society.[26]

The two parties were comprised of men of similar background: long-time residents who were successful in their chosen careers but also actively involved in the German community. It is impossible to determine with certainty the language abilities of these men, but the nature of their occupations suggests that they were bilingual. Yet, for the members of the

[25] Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, *Rede vor der incorporirten Deutschen Gesellschaft in Philadelphia, im Staat Pennsylvanien, am 20sten September, 1794* (Philadelphia, 1795), 13.

[26] *Gegenvorstellung an die gesammelten Glieder der Deutschen Evangelisch=Lutherischen Gemeinde in und bey Philadelphia, auf eine gedruckte Schrift betitelt "Antrag," und so weiter, Veranstaltet von der Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Deutschen Gottesdienstes der deutschen Evangelisch=Lutherischen Gemeine in und bey Philadelphia . . .* , 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1816), 14. No copy of the original statement published in 1805 has been found. For a list of members of the German Society, see Oswald Seidensticker, *Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft von Pennsylvanien* (Philadelphia, 1876), appendix. I used Philadelphia city directories to determine occupations. The occupations of three men could not be identified with certainty.

German party, the commitment to English in their public lives was separate from their cultural behavior in their private lives. They remained members of the German community, which, for them, was characterized by the use of German. Their argument that English should not be admitted into their church because Zion was intended exclusively for Germans is revealing: there was no such thing as an English-speaking German.

The English party disagreed. By promoting the introduction of English into the church, the supporters of English challenged the validity of this linguistic boundary. These men spoke English in their public lives and apparently also privately, but they nevertheless claimed membership in the German community, including their church. In other words, they were English-speaking Germans. Not surprisingly, they rejected the claim that the exclusivity of German in services was irrevocably anchored in the church's founding documents. Such inflexibility was absurd, Muhlenberg's group charged, since it denied the congregation the right to respond to changing needs.

When the two groups were unable to reach a compromise, they petitioned the Ministerium to resolve the impasse.[27] A committee appointed to examine the issue concluded that the Ministerium was not authorized to interfere in the congregation's internal affairs. The leadership (i.e., the members of the Ministerium) was in a difficult position: interference with the goal of resolving the language problem in St. Michael's and Zion could lead to more problems due to meddling in the affairs of a congregation. The committee suggested that it was not generally opposed to the occasional use of English in church services. The pastors, however, were reluctant to introduce English into Philadelphia's congregation at that time. They therefore returned the petition with the impatient admonishment that the charter and constitution of the church should offer guidance in this matter. In 1805 the Ministerium rejected another inquiry by several members of Zion, this time regarding the feasibility of a separation of the church along linguistic lines, with the still impatient remark that the congregation should know the answer itself. Again, the leadership offered advice but was unwilling to resolve the matter. The official reply, however, barely masked a recommendation. Separation was acceptable, the statement read, but "this easy and obvious truth seemed to have been con-

[27] *Evangelisches Magazin unter Aufsicht der Deutsch=Evangelisch=Lutherischen Synode* 4 (1817): 5. Congregations were subordinated to the directives of the Ministerium which was, in turn, dependent on decisions by the superiors in Europe. Splitter, *Pastors, People, Politics*, 318.

cealed from the eyes of the questioners."[28]

The Ministerium was remarkably inflexible in its response to English-speaking Germans, which, the church leaders could hardly deny, were increasing in numbers. That same year, for example, a group in the German town of Lancaster openly declared its refusal to make monetary contributions toward a school for ministers if the school failed to prepare young pastors to preach in English.[29] In effect, the leadership's unwillingness to address the language issue in Philadelphia amounted to an endorsement of German as the only accepted language. This stance on the use of English in German churches, the leaders argued, was justified. There was "nothing unchristian if one is prepossessed in favor of the German language, especially if it is the language of his fathers, which they used in the worship of God, and he must fear that this mother tongue might finally be entirely crowded out."[30]

The proponents of English could not impose their wishes on German Lutherans who hoped to retain their ancestral language particularly because the Ministerium applauded those clerics who resisted English. The only acceptable solution to this language problem was to permit English-speaking Germans to form their own congregations, which would be members of the Ministerium. To avoid the appearance that approval of the use of English in individual congregations sanctioned the introduction of English in the Lutheran Church in general, the leadership prohibited the adoption of any rule that introduced another language into its business.[31] Delegates, including pastors and laity from English congregations, were required to participate in deliberations conducted in German.

In 1806, the English faction gave up its fight to introduce English into St. Michael's and Zion and founded its own congregation, St. John's Church. Philip F. Mayer, a native of New York and former student of Muhlenberg's brother-in-law Johann Christoph Kunze, was called as its first pastor.[32] The separation of the church was, of course, unfortunate,

[28] *Documentary History*, 342, 344, 352.

[29] Ibid., 356.

[30] Ibid., 356, 358.

[31] Ibid., 353–54, 356.

[32] Harry Julius Kreider, *Lutheranism in Colonial New York* (New York, 1972), 126. On Kunze (1744–1807), see Carl Frederick Haussmann, *Kunze's Seminarium and the Society for the Propagation of Christianity and Useful Knowledge among the Germans in America* (Philadelphia, 1917).

but such a clean break along linguistic lines averted the possibility that "parties will arise, which continually will provoke and vex each other."[33] The Ministerium knew that such festering internal problems posed a greater danger to the cohesion of the congregation, and ultimately, to religion, than the presence of non-German churches that shared a faith. In Philadelphia, the need for a German Lutheran church with English-language services was clearly demonstrated one year after St. John's founding, when Mayer confirmed 139 new members of his congregation.[34]

At around the same time, in response to the rising threat of English, some non-Lutheran German churches also took measures to reinforce their commitment to German. In 1808, a Reformed church in Whitehall Township stipulated that only German was permitted in its services.[35] Around the same time, the Reformed congregation in Philadelphia also made several new legal rules requiring, for example, that funeral sermons be held in German and that its schools be conducted only in German. Frederick Hartwig, the schoolmaster, received orders to dismiss all children who were presently enrolled in English classes at the end of the quarter.[36] Thus, after a period of accommodation, the Philadelphia German Reformed Church suddenly terminated English instruction of the children of the congregation and no longer met the wishes of some members to be eulogized in English.[37]

The reasons for the resistance to English by the leadership of the Lutheran and Reformed churches are complex. The fear that the use of English undermined the authority and influence of the German clergy and therefore threatened the preservation of order was partly responsible. Dr. Helmuth, Philadelphia's prominent Lutheran pastor, formulated this view in four essays on the disadvantages of embracing English as the primary or even sole language. The pieces appeared in the Lutheran journal *Evangelisches Magazin,* which he had founded in 1811 as an

[33] *Documentary History*, 352–53, 359.

[34] Hocker, *Fighting Parson*, 170.

[35] "Kirchen=Artikel der Jordaner Reformirten Gemeinde. In Whitehall Township, Northampton County. May 26, 1808," Roughwood Collection, 14071.Q. [uncatalogued], Library Company of Philadelphia.

[36] "Grievances against Pastor Helffenstein," Society Misc. Collection, German Reformed Church, Helffenstein, Samuel, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[37] For a study of the linguistic quarrels in the German Reformed Church, see Steven M. Nolt, "Liberty, Tyranny, and Ethnicity: The German Reformed 'Free Synod' Schism (1819–1823) and the Americanization of an Ethnic Church," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 125 (2001): 35–60.

organ of the Lutheran Church. Helmuth served as the editor of the magazine geared to German speakers until 1817, and he contributed many of its essays. The pastor had long been active on behalf of German culture. In 1789, he had founded the von Mosheim Society, which was dedicated to the preservation of his mother tongue. The members, mostly young men, including artisans and clergy, met regularly to converse on various topics in German.[38] In this society, and through the *Magazin*, Helmuth hoped to organize the forces in his battle against anglicizers, who were beginning to challenge the dominance of German culture in his community.

Helmuth was particularly concerned about urban Germans. Of course, he was right in arguing that Germans who worked or lived in cities were more likely than their rural compatriots to embrace English customs and manners. He knew this from his own experience, and other observers had noted this tendency as well.[39] Largely because of commercial activities, close residential proximity, and shared public spaces, interaction among different national groups was much more common in urban communities than in rural regions. The consequence of the interaction with the English, noted Helmuth in one essay in the *Magazin*, was the loss of the "noble German character": parents bestowed English names upon their children, Germans mixed up German and English in their speech, and, worst of all, they took pride in having a better command of English than of German. This loss, Helmuth cried, was destructive not only to Germans but to the entire society. The pastor recognized that knowledge of some English was necessary for achievements in business and politics, but he warned that caution and critical judgement were required to discern the limits of accommodation. Helmuth pointed to the German American

[38] This description of the society is largely based on A. Gregg Roeber, "The von Mosheim Society and the Preservation of German Education and Culture in the New Republic, 1789–1813," in *German Influences on Education in the United States to 1917*, ed. Henry Geitz, Jürgen Heideking, and Jürgen Herbst (Washington, DC, 1995), 157–76. See also "Ansprache der priviligirten Mosheimischen Gesellschaft zu Philadelphia," in *Praktische Belehrungen und Rathschläge für Reisende und Auswanderer nach Amerika*, by Ernst Ludwig Brauns (Braunschweig, 1829), 428–36. The society distributed small German-language booklets to German children. An example is *Unterhaltungen für deutsche Kinder* (Philadelphia, 1808).

[39] Benjamin Rush observed in 1789 that while Germans in Pennsylvania mostly spoke German with each other, those Germans who visited cities and towns and were engaged in trade spoke English. See *Account of the Manners of the German Inhabitants of Pennsylvania, Written 1789*, notes by I. Daniel Rupp (Philadelphia, 1875), 54–55. Since the early 1800s, one German visitor to America observed, the use of English had spread widely among Germans in urban areas. See Brauns, *Praktische Belehrungen*, 361.

Simon Snyder, Pennsylvania's governor at the time, who, he claimed, would never have been elected had he not been fluent in German.[40] Indeed, the true prerequisite for success, he and many other Germans insisted, was knowledge of German.

As clerics like Helmuth condemned urban Germans who mingled with Anglo-Americans, they held up rural Germans as the true guardians of virtue. For example, the Lutheran Synod reported in 1808 that many of its families had moved away from established communities and now resided in areas lacking schools and churches.[41] The absence of religious care and educational institutions in these settlements was certainly lamentable, but it brought with it one invaluable benefit: the likelihood of the preservation of German.[42] "Whenever the German mother tongue is valued among these removed brothers and maintained in the families," the report argued, "one also encounters, as among the majority of the first Germans in this country, German lifestyle, German frugality, domesticity and piety."[43] Here, people held on to the Lutheran faith. Vices and crimes occurred rarely because families read the Bible and obeyed laws. They did not read newspapers, study politics, or criticize legislation, all of which could unsettle a stable and ordered society.[44] In contrast to the advocates of English in the German community who explicitly pointed to political engagement and the ability to make critical judgments as benefits of knowledge of English, the church saw such abilities as dangerous. The Lutheran pastors juxtaposed the republican ideals of the simple German yeoman farmer with the presumably aristocratic and frivolous traits of urban Anglo-Americans and those Germans who became their "mere copies."

Here, in this pastoral image of a German family removed from the

[40] *Evangelisches Magazin* [1812], 46.

[41] *Kurzer Bericht von den Anstalten in den Deutsch Evangelisch=Lutherischen Gemeinden in Pennsylvanien und einigen benachbarten Staaten* (Philadelphia, 1808), 5.

[42] The synod dealt with this problem by dispatching traveling pastors to these communities. See *Plan einer Anstalt zur Erziehung junger Prediger in den Evangelisch Deutsch Lutherischen Gemeinden in Pennsylvanien und den benachbarten Staaten* (Germantown, PA, 1805), 7; *Kurzer Bericht*; and *Ansprache an die gesammten Glieder der Deutsch Evangelisch Lutherischen Gemeinen in Pennsylvanien und den benachbarten Staaten* (Philadelphia, 1811), 11. The dearth of clergy affected not just Reformed and Lutheran churches. For similar problems in the Catholic Church, see "Rev. Anthony Kohlman's S. J. Visitation of Germans of Pennsylvania in 1807," *American Catholic Historical Researches,* n.s., 1, no. 1 (1905): 130–31.

[43] *Kurzer Bericht*, 9.

[44] Ibid., 10.

influences of the Anglo-American world on the one hand, and the picture of the wicked existence of Germans in the midst of English society on the other, is the link between religion, language, and community. The first picture is an ideal, of course; it is a vision of a society that was already under serious attack and changing rapidly. It represented the belief (and hope) that ignorance of English shielded Germans from corrupting influences that threatened their religion and the stability of their society. The second image is a warning; it presents the depraved life that awaits those who betray their cultural heritage.

Parents bore most of the blame for the decline of German and the resultant loss of religiosity. In 1812, the Lutheran Synod accused parents of neglecting the German education of their children, who, as a consequence, grew up unfamiliar with church rules and ignorant of the German services.[45] In one instance, the Lutheran Church printed and distributed five thousand pamphlets in Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky aimed at encouraging Germans to support German schools and churches.[46] Parents who failed to teach their children German deprived them of the "edification they could receive through the beautiful German services—the beautiful German prayers—the magnificent children's teachings—the many godly songs and hymns which our ancestors used to console themselves in times of need and death."[47]

These components of German spiritual practice could not be replicated with English-language material. English, the church leadership argued, was simply insufficient to translate German elements of religious practice. The conviction that the German language was superior to English was widespread among the German intelligentsia; in fact, beginning during the German Reformation in the sixteenth century, a long line of German thinkers had described the German language as the oldest and therefore greatest language.[48] This view contradicted, at least partly, Martin

[45] *Evangelisches Magazin* 2, no. 1 (1812): 46–47.

[46] *Documentary History*, 466. The "Great Revival in the South" in the early nineteenth century raised fears in the Lutheran leadership that Germans would join Methodists and other English-speaking denominations. For the language struggle in Virginia, see Jessica C. E. Gienow, "The Decline of the German Language in Early America: The Henkel Family of New Market, Virginia, 1760–1840," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 26 (1991): 145–70.

[47] *Evangelisches Magazin* 2, no. 2 (1813): 67–68. See also Ralph Wood, "Lutheran and Reformed, Pennsylvania German Style," in *The Pennsylvania Germans*, ed. Ralph Wood (Princeton, NJ, 1942), 85–102, esp. 91.

[48] For studies of the history of "linguistic patriotism," see Joachim Knape's, Thorsten Roelcke's, and Andreas Gardt's essays in *Nation und Sprache*, ed. Gardt.

Luther's own conviction that the communication of religious ideas was not limited to one language. It agreed, however, with Luther's suggestion that one's mother tongue was best suited for the transmission of religion, since it brought the believer closer to God than a foreign language could.[49] The synod's argument that English services were less pure was clearly linked to this view that the German language was superior.

The clergy had to admit that the German churches and therefore religiosity suffered from the dying of the German language, but they were hopeful that both churches and language could be saved.[50] The leadership concluded that the best strategy to accomplish this goal was to let individual congregations decide the language issue independently, and divide into separate churches if necessary. In 1812, the Lutheran congregation in Hagerstown, Maryland, for example, was advised to end a language dispute by voting on its language preference. The recommendation was in response to a conflict involving the pastor, who preached in English. The church leaders reiterated their insistence on the importance of German ("No language **but German** shall be preached in our German churches") but at the same time refused to settle the matter.[51] The firm reminder that no language but German was allowed was intended to guide the membership in its decision. The notification that the pastor in Hagerstown was prohibited from delivering sermons in English until a vote in the congregation could be taken also clearly situated the Ministerium on the side of the German party.[52] Believing that the proponents of English were in the minority, the church leadership inadvertently opened the door for the entry of English.

The decision in the Hagerstown case served as a general recommendation for congregations in similar situations, particularly those with "young pastors." An emerging generational conflict within the ranks of the clergy had become evident. Young pastors tended to be American-born and conversant in English. The synod feared that they lacked the strong commitment to the German-language that characterized older, German-born clergymen. Indeed, one of the most promising young Lutheran pastors to have been ordained in recent years, Christian

[49] Joachim Knape, "Humanismus, Reformation, *deutsche Sprache* und *Nation*," in *Nation und Sprache*, ed. Gardt, 121.

[50] *Evangelisches Magazin* 2, no. 2 (1813): 67–69.

[51] *Evangelisches Magazin* 2, no. 1 (1812): 8. Emphasis in original.

[52] Ibid.

Endress, emerged as one of the strongest advocates of acculturation in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Endress, whose education had been financed by the German Society, was instrumental in introducing English services in Easton and Lancaster in 1808 and 1814 respectively. This transition provoked few objections in Easton but led to a permanent schism in Lancaster.[53] The synod did not prohibit pastors like Endress from offering English services, but it clearly assumed that young pastors would yield to the advice of more experienced clergy and laity, who were more likely to support German. In 1812, the synod ensured that new pastors would be fluent in German by refusing the ordination of preachers "if they cannot write their mother tongue orthographically."[54]

Generally, the Reformed Church also left it up to individual congregations to resolve language conflicts. In 1817, the request of a small Reformed congregation in western Pennsylvania between Greensburg and Somerset to hire a pastor who could preach in English and German was granted without deliberations, and the congregation was allowed to hire the pastor they thought best fit its needs.[55] This approach to settling language disputes seemed to work well; it frequently led to amiable resolutions. In 1820, for example, Lutheran Pastor Carpenter from Culpepper, Virginia, happily reported that "the precious peace which had for a time been broken because of the introduction of the English language was again restored in his congregation." The synod had advised him the year before to resolve the disputes in his church by acting "in accordance with the majority of his congregation."[56]

The Philadelphia congregation, however, presented a special case. Here, separation had not solved the problem and compromise seemed impossible. The defenders of German successfully prevented the introduction of English at St. Michael's and Zion, even though a substantial number of members who refused to transfer to St. John's continued to

[53] Liam O'Boyle Riordan, "Identities in the New Nation: The Creation of an American Mainstream in the Delaware Valley, 1770–1830" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 272–80.

[54] *Documentary History*, 444. An English Episcopalian pastor who applied for membership was required to learn German first. Ibid., 483.

[55] *Verhandlungen der Synode der Hoch=Deutschen Reformirten Kirche in den Vereinigten Staaten, von Nord=Amerika, gehalten zu Yorktaun, Pennsylvanien, September, 1817* (Philadelphia, 1818), 9.

[56] *Documentary History*, 539, 574.

support it. The synod had hoped that the laity would reach an amiable solution, but an increasingly militant German party was unwilling to budge. The consequences were devastating. "How inanimate, how dead, how spiritless, how deserted in 1815!" was their place of worship, according to one group of members.[57] The large building that had been bustling with hundreds of congregants only a few years before was now largely empty. Between 1805 and 1815, some previously active members, including Peter Muhlenberg, had died, while others had chosen to leave Zion rather than fight for the introduction of English in their church. But a group of English supporters had remained and now, in 1815, issued a report that noted with regret the failure of the Lutheran church to adjust to the changing times. In 1765, only thirteen years after the founding of St. Michael's, most members spoke German, and it was therefore appropriate to use it in services. Moreover, the membership of around 500 heads of household was large enough to justify the construction of a second church, Zion, in 1769. Now, in 1815, however, the entire membership could easily fit into St. Michael's, which could accommodate around 350 families.[58] The main reason for this steady decline in membership was the decreasing use of German. The report argued that "the character of the population [of Philadelphia] has entirely changed, and how great the necessity of change and reform along with it!" "Can ingenuity itself devise a reason," the report asked, "why, in such a situation of things, the German language should be preached, in utter exclusion of the English?"[59]

The renewed attempt to introduce English met with a fierce opposition that was no longer characterized by the respectful yet firm rhetoric of the earlier conflict. The confrontation now included intimidation, disruption of meetings, and physical violence. In September, several members of the German party tried to intimidate Andrew Busch and several other men who delivered a note on behalf of the English party to the church board. The note was written by Michael Leib, the elected chairman of the English party and a long-time proponent of English. Leib was a well-known physician and Republican leader prominent in both the German

[57] *Bemerkungen an die Mitglieder der Deutsch=Lutherischen Gemeine in und um Philadelphia, daruber dass nur deutsch gepredigt wird, und deshalb ihre Gemeine in Verfall geräth* (Philadelphia, 1815), 9. The English edition is titled "Observations . . . Upon the Subject of Preaching only German, and the consequent decline of their Congregation," in *Trial of Frederick Eberle,* 222–25. Citations are from the English edition.

[58] "Observations," 223.

[59] Ibid., 224.

and Anglo-American communities. His note was worded carefully and emphasized hope for reconciliation and a desire for future harmony. The group asked for a meeting to discuss the possibility of introducing English services in addition to German; Leib and the other men did not advocate the replacement of German.[60]

The violent response to the note made clear the seriousness of the language question. Upon receiving word of the planned proposal, around thirty men disrupted a meeting of Leib's party by acting disorderly, intimidating participants, and loudly singing German hymns. A fist fight erupted and serious threats of bodily harm were exchanged. Over the next few weeks, the division within the congregation grew wider until it seemed insurmountable. Old friends who had visited each other on a daily basis no longer spoke. Respected church members now insulted and threatened each other. Rumors of conspiracies inflamed tempers and deepened animosities. One man claimed that a group of 200 to 250 men listened as Christian Mannhardt, proprietor of the High Street Coffee House and one of the leaders of the German party, warned of the intentions of the English party: "they want to steal our property, to rob our Churches," and worse, they plan to "take in Irishmen, Frenchmen, Englishmen, and even black men to their Churches."[61] Mannhardt, a founding member of a society dedicated to the printing and distribution of German-language religious tracts, suggested that introduction of English essentially constituted theft since the church would be seized from Germans like him and thrown open to all Americans. This, he cried, would spell the end of German prosperity, religion, and ultimately the German community. One hundred twelve men heeded the warning and signed a petition against the introduction of English.[62] Anti-English agitation was so strong that some men demanded the prohibition of English among all members of the congregation, even outside of church.

The congregation could barely operate under these conditions. For example, disruptions during regularly scheduled church elections for officers were so great that the results were deemed invalid. The conflicts stemmed from the desire of both parties to gain influence by installing officers who sympathized with their cause. At one time a German petition

[60] "Mr. Leib's Note to the Congregation, requesting a conference upon the Subject of English Preaching," in *Trial of Frederick Eberle,* 221.

[61] Testimony of Andrew Busch, in *Trial of Frederick Eberle,* 4–5.

[62] The petition is included in the appendix of *Trial of Frederick Eberle,* 215–17.

for a candidate was read twice, while an English one was not read at all. In protest, several members refused to cast their ballots. Inspectors and judges found it impossible to assure the correct procedure in elections because of consistent insults and threats. There were numerous allegations that nonmembers had voted, voters had been drunk, or men had been bribed. Poor Pastor Helmuth urged his flock to behave like "Christians and brethren," but his efforts to restore peace were in vain.[63] The brawls involved supporters and opponents of English, but it was the German party that was eventually charged with conspiracy to kill in defense of German. The trial in the summer of 1816 aroused enough public interest that the entire proceedings were published in English the following year. The church leaders were distraught over the fact that the matter had led to violence and been taken to a secular court, but their continued refusal to mediate between the two parties was largely responsible for this development.[64]

The witnesses' testimonies offered not only explanations for the violent opposition to English but also exposed divergent views of the role of language in American identity. Perhaps the most revealing expression of identity that emerged during the trial was a German party election ticket that carried an image of the United States eagle along with the words *E Pluribus Unum*. By appropriating the American symbol of liberty for its own cause, the German party positioned its struggle squarely in the context of the revolutionary fight for freedom. The use of this symbol, more then anything, symbolized the nature of the contest between the two parties.

Because the display of an image on an election ticket constituted a violation of election rules, and had never been done before, this incident was brought up during the trial. Yet, to the opposition, the message conveyed by the eagle was far more upsetting than the violation of rules. George Witman, a witness, argued that the image was designed to influence voters in favor of German.[65] The image, of course, did not symbolize anything distinctly German. In fact, the use of the eagle shifted the focus from a commitment to German to a commitment to America. But by doing so, it also wedded the two loyalties: the members of the German party, the ticket signaled, defended their rights as Americans to practice

[63] Testimony of John Uhler, in *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 7; Testimony of John Long, in ibid., 18.
[64] *Evangelisches Magazin* 4 (1817): 8.
[65] Testimony of George Witman, in *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 10.

their (German) religion freely. By deliberately invoking the symbol of American liberty, they fused ethnic identity and American patriotism. German, they suggested, was an important component of American identity. The demands of their opponents, this message implied, constituted an encroachment on their religious freedom, which was their constitutional right and central to their identity as Germans. One of the main strategies utilized by the German party in this fight was the depiction of the English party as un-American. Despite the phrase *E Pluribus Unum*, the image and phrase thus became a symbol of *disunion*, not unity.[66]

But the use of the eagle by the German Lutherans also served another, more practical, purpose. By appropriating the symbol of liberty for their own objectives, the German party deliberately displayed their patriotism *despite* their continued insistence on the use of German. Germans who refused to become English were frequent targets of attacks by non-Germans and assimilated Germans. Many Americans viewed the refusal to assimilate, the desire to live apart from the larger Anglo-dominated society, and especially the reluctance to speak English, with suspicion. The German party was very aware of the potential attacks on their patriotism that could arise out of this particular confrontation. The display of the eagle as an unmistakable symbol of Americanism was designed to undermine potential accusations of disloyalty to America.

The English party found such demonstrations of Americanism unnecessary. These men were comfortable in their positions as respected members of both German and Anglo-American society. Their desire to speak English was evidence enough that they were members of the larger community. They simply did not anticipate attacks on their patriotism. In their struggle to introduce English, these church members never invoked their rights as Americans, even though such a claim would have made more sense to most Americans, who considered English a vital part of American identity.

Furthermore, even though prosecution lawyers did question the German party's loyalty to the United States, German promoters of English never accused their opponents of a lack of patriotism based on their choice of language. It is important to remember that the men who lobbied for English identified themselves as Germans too. Many were

[66] The presiding judge, Justice Jasper Yeates, called this symbol of disunion "unbecoming" for the occasion of electing church officials. He also declared these election tickets (over five hundred) void because of the prohibition on the use of images on election tickets. *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 240.

motivated to push for English because of a younger generation, claiming that this objective served the common good and not their own needs. George Rehn, a brewer, admitted that he and some others found it difficult to educate their children in German. He was for English only for the sake of his children.[67] The shoemaker Andrew Busch was also concerned about keeping the young in the church, and Henry Burchhardt, a merchant, noted that the main concern was to keep the youth, "so the church will not be destroyed."[68] The sole objective of the introduction of English, they insisted, was the strengthening of the church by reaching those young Germans. They were deeply worried that the members of Zion would "cut off their own children along with others" if they continued to prohibit English.[69] In contrast, Mannhardt and several witnesses for the defense appeared to be motivated by selfish concerns: when questioned about their family status, they stated that they were childless.[70] The English party's professed interest in the well-being of the German congregation suggested that they considered themselves *more* German than those who encouraged the decline of the church by insisting on the use of German. Paradoxically, their German church could only survive if it admitted English.

But the parties also understood the meaning of language in profoundly different ways. To members of the German party, Germans who embraced English were traitors to their people. They called them "Irish-Germans" and "Irishmen," thus denying those Germans who spoke English any claim to German identity.[71] Moreover, the consistent use of Irish, rather than English, served to suggest that English-speaking Germans were, in fact, not able to speak English, and that their attempts to emulate English culture were therefore futile. Defense attorney Moses Levy clarified in court that the term "Irishman" was generally understood to mean "a kind of man who knowing German, is unwilling to talk it; who is ashamed of his own language, and is unacquainted with any other."[72]

[67] Testimony of George Rehn, in *Trial of Frederick Eberle,* 20–21.

[68] Testimony of Andrew Busch, in *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 5. Testimony of Henry Burchhardt, in ibid., 15.

[69] "Observations," 224.

[70] Testimony of John Long, in *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 18. Testimony of Mr. Eringhaus, in ibid., 42.

[71] For the use of such labels see, for example, *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 9, 12, 134. Attorney General Jared Ingersoll defended the Irish in his closing statement. Ibid., 174.

[72] Ibid., 134.

The abandonment of German entailed the rejection of an identity as German, while the embrace of English did not turn Germans into Englishmen. These "Irishmen" were, therefore, neither German nor English. Moreover, English-speaking Germans, who tended to belong to the acculturated and wealthy segment of society, were thereby identified with a population that was generally considered to be inferior, both economically and socially.

The more important issue in the debate, however, was not whether these Germans were "Irish" or English or German, but whether they were American. The lawyers for the English party, not the Germans themselves, raised the question of the definition of "American" and attacked the German party for not fitting it. This questioning of American loyalty emerged as the central strategy of the prosecution. It was the English party, attorney Horace Binney declared, that was composed of Americans and that could therefore rightfully insist on the protection of liberties. The fact that these men embraced English was evidence of their membership in the American community. The prosecution found the assumption that the German party was somehow more American than the English faction absurd. In his statements, Binney repeatedly referred to the members of the English group as Americans, emphasizing that they were being "rejected by the church to make room for a fresh importation of strangers and aliens."[73] Binney, of course, agreed with the German party in denying the English group a German ethnic identity. Unlike Leib and his followers, however, he regarded this as a good thing.

It did not matter to Binney that some members of the German party were in fact long-term American residents.[74] He assumed that German immigrants would naturally and gradually replace German with English as they transformed into Americans. In his eyes, those who retained German remained strangers. It was not only impossible but also against nature, he charged, to retain German in the "centre of an American community." The fact that Leib and his allies advocated English, even as they held on to other components of German culture, made them more American than the members of the German party. By making the transition to English, they had divorced their ethnic identity from language. Binney made the distinction between the two parties clear: foreigners

[73] Horace Binney, Esq., in *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 99–100.

[74] Witnesses were asked to give their period of residency in the United States and membership in the congregation.

were driving Americans from the church by "obstinately maintaining the German language in the pulpit."[75]

The testimonies make evident that the conflict stemmed in part from the difficulty of reconciling the needs of long-time residents who knew English with those of newcomers who did not. The earlier struggle, between 1803 and 1807, had divided long-term and respected residents into two camps. Now, as trial participants pointed out on several occasions, the German proponents were primarily newcomers. Most of the 112 men who signed the 1816 petition in support of German do not appear in the city directories in the 1810s. Moreover, in previous years a steady influx of Germans had replenished the congregations with members who resisted the introduction of English. Due to a general lull in immigration to America in the four decades after the Revolution, however, the number of new church members who could only speak German was declining drastically. By the beginning of the 1800s the balance had shifted to give long-term, English-speaking residents an advantage.[76]

Attorney Binney was not surprised that these recent arrivals embraced German. But based on his assumption that all newcomers would eventually learn English and, indeed, would prefer it over their native language, he predicted that "those who are defendants today will be prosecutors in twenty years."[77] Class differences also divided the two groups. While German party leader Christian Mannhardt was an immigrant and also a man of some means, many recent immigrants belonged to the lower ranks of society.[78] Of the 112 signatories to the 1816 petition against English, 21 signed with their mark.[79] Only 4 men belonged to the German Society. Most of the defendants were "plain" men, Justice Yeates remarked, and most observers agreed with this assessment.[80] "No

[75] Horace Binney, Esq., in *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 99–100.

[76] Splitter, *Pastors, People, Politics*, 312. Grabbe estimates that about 111,000 Germans arrived in North America during the colonial period, and about 36,700 Germans, including 5,000 veterans of the Revolutionary War, arrived in the period between the Revolution and 1820. While in the prerevolutionary period, about 73 percent of these newcomers landed in Philadelphia, this portion declined to below 60 percent in the 1810s and then to around 10 percent in 1820. The lull in immigration was particularly pronounced in the years between 1805 and 1815 when European wars brought it almost to a halt. Hans-Jürgen Grabbe, *Vor der grossen Flut: Die europäische Migration in die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika 1783–1820* (Stuttgart, Ger., 2001), 53–61, 147–49.

[77] *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 100–101.

[78] Ibid., 80–81.

[79] Ibid., 215–17.

[80] Ibid., 212.

respectable men would attempt to uphold the German language any longer," one witness claimed, and attorney Binney argued that the men were "very plain and some of them very vulgar men."[81] The defense generally agreed that the defenders of German were poorer than their English-speaking neighbors. This, they claimed, was in fact one reason why they supported the use of German: unlike the wealthy, they did not have the resources to educate their children in better, English-language schools.[82] The witnesses' testimonies make clear that divisions between the two groups were determined to a large degree by class affiliation and length of residency in the United States. The search for community in a new and rapidly changing environment undoubtedly contributed to the fervor with which the poorer newcomers fought for the retention of German. Yet, the struggle was steeped in a rhetoric of identity that transcended questions of class and residency.

As the conflict among the Philadelphia Lutherans was escalating, the city's Reformed congregation also fought a linguistic battle that ended in court. In 1815, Pastor Samuel Helffenstein, the well-respected and long-time pastor of the German Reformed Church, had violated the church rule of 1806 by delivering a funeral sermon in English. The elders of the church charged him with this offense. He admitted the transgression and promised that he would refrain from preaching in English in the future. But six months later, in October 1815, Helffenstein again violated the rules by preaching in English. This time, the trustees, deacons, and elders charged him with "a breach and violation of the said ancient usages and customs," and "then & there lawfully expelled & removed [him] from the office of minister of the said Congregation and from the use of the pulpit of the said church."[83]

The pastor, however, fought back. First, he challenged the authority of the board by keeping the church doors locked at several occasions, which caused a number of members and curious onlookers to assemble outside the church.[84] Then Helffenstein took the corporation to court. The

[81] Ibid., 85, 103.

[82] Ibid., 165. For class division in Philadelphia's Lutheran churches in the 1790s, see A. Gregg Roeber, "Citizens or Subjects? German-Lutherans and the Federal Constitution in Pennsylvania, 1789–1800," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 34 (1989): 63–68.

[83] "Grievances against Pastor Helffenstein," 8–10. For a detailed study of the problems, including divisions over language, plaguing the German Reformed Church, see Nolt, "Liberty, Tyranny, and Ethnicity," 35–60.

[84] [Trial transcript, no title] Mar. 16, 1816, Society Misc. Collection, German Reformed Church, Helffenstein, Samuel, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

proceedings primarily focused on the question of whether or not the dismissal had been legal, although the nature of the alleged crime also received attention. William Rawle, a defense lawyer here as well as in the Lutheran case, argued that the corporation was simply justifiably apprehensive of innovation. He defended the actions of the lay leadership, which stemmed from its fear that the introduction of English challenged the status quo. Rawle took this position to the extreme when he remarked, to the astonishment of those present in the courtroom, that the jury should look upon *English* as a foreign language.[85] Not surprisingly, Horace Binney, one of Helffenstein's lawyers, pointed out the absurdity of this notion. The lawyer sarcastically announced that "S[amuel] H[elffenstein] has been guilty of delivering a Funeral Discourse in the Language of the Courts." Furthermore, as in the Lutheran case, the attorney drew a clear distinction between aliens and Americans, the latter being identified by their use of English. Mr. Ingersoll, another lawyer who was also involved in the Lutheran case, emphasized the futility of the attempt to preserve a minority language under present circumstances. "It is obvious," he remarked, "that the German Language must fall into Disuse in a Country where English is generally spoken." [86]

Justice Yeates ruled in Helffenstein's favor. The board, he argued, had no right to dismiss the pastor. But Yeates was unable to resolve the matter that lay at the heart of the conflict. He could merely recommend that the congregation find a compromise on the language question that would restore peace and harmony.[87] This, however, proved to be impossible for the Reformed Church. Linguistic disputes continued to creep from individual congregations into the statewide church organization and in 1822 resulted in the formal separation of the German Reformed Synod into English and German-speaking bodies.[88]

Similarly, Justice Yeates could not resolve the language problem that plagued the Lutheran church. He observed that it was indeed strange to oppose the dominant language in society but that the jury was only charged with deciding whether the men of the German party were guilty or innocent of conspiracy to commit murder. The verdict—guilty—therefore

[85] [Trial transcript, no title] Mar. 16, 1816, Apr. 2, 1816.

[86] [Trial transcript, no title] Apr. 2, 1816.

[87] The outcome is suggested in *An die Glieder der Hochdeutschen Reformirten Gemeine in und bey Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1816). Peace was not restored for several years as some Germans challenged Helffenstein on some occasions. See ibid., 3.

[88] Nolt, "Liberty, Tyranny, and Ethnicity," 48.

did not settle the matter.[89] The fact that, apparently, some Germans were willing to kill in defense of German only demonstrated the seriousness of the conflict.

Ultimately, in the late 1810s, the Lutheran Church found itself once again facing the unresolved dilemma over language. The synod, which feared that in taking a stance it could set a dangerous precedent, put off a decision in 1817, hoping once again that the problem would be settled peacefully. In 1818, two lay delegates of St. Michael's and Zion delivered another memorial to the synod. First, "a part of the congregation" requested permission to offer English services for the younger members of their church. More importantly, they asked the clergy to advise them what to do about the "most distressed" situation of the Philadelphia congregation.[90] The church leadership realized that the divisions between the English and German factions ran so deep that the problem could not to be resolved without intervention. That year, one year after the trial, the synod finally issued a recommendation.

In response to the changing circumstances of the Germans in America, the synod finally recognized the need for English instruction and occasional English services for the "younger portion" of Philadelphia's congregation. Most pastors apparently agreed with the claim of the English party that the children were left behind by the exclusion of English. There was little the clergy could do to halt the encroachment of English into the lives of Germans without risking a possibly drastic decline in membership. Any strategy to retain church members had to include concessions to English speakers. In an attempt to diffuse the explosive situation in Philadelphia, the synod recommended that Zion remain German and St. Michael's hold services in English, if the need should arise. This partial surrender to the English movement clearly constituted a blow to the German party. To make matters worse, the synod reprimanded those who had caused a "separation of the congregation by continued refusal" to allow English.[91] Even though the church leaders had displayed a remarkable inability to respond effectively to the

[89] For Justice Yeates's view, see *Trial of Frederick Eberle*, 208. Governor Simon Snyder pardoned the men.

[90] *Verhandlungen der Deutschen Evangelisch=Lutherischen Synode von Pennsylvanien und den benachbarten Staaten, gehalten in Harrisburg, in der Trinitatis Woche, als am 17ten May, 1818* (Lancaster, PA, [1818]), 8–9. For English-language records see *Documentary History*, 513–15.

[91] *Verhandlungen der Deutschen Evangelisch=Lutherischen Synode*, 8–9; *Documentary History*, 514.

anglicizing forces at work in their churches and, in fact, had consistently emphasized a commitment to German and rejection of English, they now branded those who were once seen as the protectors of the German faith as sowers of discord.

This changing role of German and English in churches was brought about by the growing number of Germans who abandoned their language but not their religious practice or, more significantly, the German community. It was no coincidence that the German Society of Pennsylvania, an organization dedicated to the preservation of German culture in America, decided in 1818 to keep its records in English, after having considered the issue on several occasions since 1812.[92] The members, several of whom were involved in the St. Michael's and Zion controversy, never considered leaving the society; instead, they introduced English into its proceedings. Whereas the retention of German had previously been regarded as a prerequisite for the preservation of German culture, these Germans now embraced the idea that an adoption of English was compatible with their identity as Germans. This process of reinterpretation of identity was undoubtedly triggered by the Revolution, which invited Americans to take part in the creation of an American identity and at the same time provided them with an ideological framework that stressed republican values, including liberty.[93] The use of English in a German church was the perfect expression of this new identity as German Americans. Germans who spoke English did not have to leave the German community, including their ancestral churches.

Opponents of English rejected this claim and, in fact, called their adversaries "Irishmen," and thus suggested that English-speaking Germans were neither English nor German. At the same time, they stressed that their desire to preserve the German language in the context of an Anglo-American society was not un-American but, on the contrary, was an expression of their rights as Americans. Germans like Christian Mannhardt and Dr. Helmuth certainly did not give up their struggle; in 1816, they were two of eighty-one Germans who founded a society dedicated to printing and distributing religious tracts in the German

[92] "Protocol der Incorporirten Deutschen Gesellschaft," Mar. 25, 1812, June 24, 1812, Sept. 29, 1817, Dec. 26, 1817, Mar. 25, 1818, Manuscript Library of the German Society of Pennsylvania.

[93] For the perceived link between language and liberty among the German Reformed, see Nolt, "Liberty, Tyranny, and Ethnicity," 52–53.

language.[94] The persistence and seriousness of the linguistic conflict in the German community reveal that language was widely regarded as a powerful tool in the shaping of the new nation. Moreover, the recognition that some Germans were willing to kill for the preservation of their language indicates that the embrace of English as a "band of national union," as Webster put it, was by no means uncontested.

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[94] This society was affiliated with the von Mosheim Society and most likely shared many of its members. For a list of the founding members see *Constitution der Gesellschaft zur Ausbreitung nützlicher und erbaulicher Aufsätze, in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1816), 6–10.