
Posterity is greatly indebted to many of its forebears for descriptions of the life and times of its past heritage. William L. Stone must certainly rank highly in this stream of scribes, along with those German officers who kept journals of what they witnessed. From these journals and their memories, these officers wrote letters to friends and relatives in Germany.

At the University of Gottingen in Germany, a Professor August Ludwig Schlozer conceived the idea of publishing a magazine titled Briefwechsel from 1776 to 1782. In this magazine he printed letters from Brunswick and Hessian soldiers serving in foreign lands. In 1891 Mr. Stone translated nineteen of these letters literally. From a knowledge of the German language, your reviewer can attest to the fact Mr. Stone performed a remarkable feat. He has indeed rendered a literal translation, while at the same time shortening those long complex sentences of which the Germans are so fond and emerging with a beautiful syntax. There are none of the confusing its sometimes found because the translator neglects to remember the English indefinite pronoun is not designed to show referral to a noun by gender.

The first nine letters are from Brunswick and Hessian officers serving with the British forces and relate primarily to the activities of the Convention Troops. The writer of the first letter shows an amazing amount of perception into the character of the Canadian people among whom the troops were quartered. In addition he gives a comprehensive description of their homes, food, customs, geography, and government.

The second letter starts off with a rare description of a Freemason funeral. This officer also wrote about his quarters and preparations for a spring assault on Fort Ticonderoga. A tinge of homesickness is found in his comparison of the Canadian scenery to that of Germany. He tells of the rebel sympathizers along the line of march, mentioning specifically the fact of Boston's Colonel Nugent having been a hairdresser in Montreal. A strong feeling of German superiority to everyone, and hatred of the French in particular, comes through in all of the letters. He lists the British ships on Lake Champlain and American ships destroyed, including the Royal Savage of General Arnold. Benedict Arnold was a man of whom the Germans
had a particularly low opinion, calling him variously a horse dealer, a bankrupt, a swindler, and an apothecary. This man closes his letter with the information it will be the last for four months as the St. Lawrence River will be ice-locked. One can not help but be thankful modern-day communication methods were non-existent in 1776, thereby making it possible for these men to write so descriptively. The average time for delivery of a letter was five or six months.

The fourth letter calls to mind an interesting debate of long standing ... just what kind of marksmen were the rebels? The writer first casts aspersions on their ability, but goes on to say they can cause three or four wounds with one shot at seventy-five yards — the outer limit of range of their weapons. The fifth letter closes so poignantly the reader for the first time feels deprived of knowledge — the knowledge of the identity of the writers, and therefore their ultimate fate.

Had Mr. Stone translated only the sixth letter, the book would have been worthwhile. The extremely observant author of this letter, which reads more like a diary, gives an eyewitness account of the battle of Saratoga in addition to much else. A touch of humor is provided for the reader who soon realizes, although the letter writer begins by saying paper is too scarce to write a long letter, he concludes his letter sixty-five pages later ... and then only because he is able to send it sealed with General Riedesel’s Adjutant who has been granted a parole by Congress to return to Europe. As you have no doubt guessed by now, this letter is started in freedom and ended in captivity. The trauma of his experience is evident when he ceases referring to rebels and starts writing about his captors as Americans. He warns others not to follow the path he has taken unless they prepare better, for “this entire nation has great military talent.” He dwells at length on the appearance and qualities of the American fairer sex, tempered of course with devotion to his own countrywomen. Whereupon Mr. Stone adds a lengthy footnote about German soldiers who either deserted or were hired out to Americans and ultimately married and stayed in America.

The next three letters are written by men while prisoners and call to mind the parallels existent with present-day Americans imprisoned by the North Vietnamese — the boredom occasioned by the loss of freedom until they establish a pattern of life for themselves.

Throughout the remainder of the letters it is incumbent upon the reader to remember each letter represents individual and necessarily limited points of view with each man’s subsequent tendency to general-
ize about all of America from the small section he himself has seen.

The only disappointing letter in the book is the one from Baron Steuben. And the disappointment lies not so much in what he said or did not say, but rather in facets of his character revealed therein, as well as the treatment accorded him by the Americans.

The appendix contains a brief word sketch of the Récollets and their convent in Quebec. The entire book is aided materially by the copious footnotes of Dr. Schlozer from the Briefwechsel, as well as those of Mr. Stone.

The question is raised in the mind of your reviewer as to the thoughts of the German populace who read letters from German soldiers serving on opposite sides in the same war.

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The idea back of this volume and the finished product would have been very appealing to Solon J. Buck, one-time Director of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey, because of the attention it gives to professional matters that were central to his interests. Indeed, it was one of Dr. Buck's successors in the post of National Archivist, Wayne C. Grover, who, as Chairman of the National Historical Publications Commission, was responsible for the survey of the use of original documentary source materials in the teaching of American History at the postgraduate level in American universities which provided the basic material for this book. A professor of history at the University of Oklahoma, the author has also been assistant executive secretary of the American Historical Association and director of its widely-known Service Center for Teachers of History. Moreover, he is the author of four other books, including a work written in conjunction with others on Bibliography and the Historian (Santa Barbara, 1968).

Rundell's survey involved visits by the survey director to 70 of the 114 American institutions of higher learning offering the Ph.D. in History, to two universities with a terminal M.A. in History, and to 40