

## *Charitable Ethnic Societies in Philadelphia and Charleston, 1740-1810s*

### Reports of the GHI-GSP Summer Fellows 2017



I spent four weeks at the Horner Library for research relating to my PhD on the German, English, and Scottish ethnic societies in Philadelphia and Charleston during the 1740s-1810s. The German Society of Pennsylvania is one of the main focuses of my

research because it was the first non-English-language society in Philadelphia, and was the model for later German societies in other American cities, including Charleston.

I spent the bulk of my time with the first volume of the "Minutes Der Incorporirten Deutschen Gesellschaft", which includes the years 1770-1802. These records detail the internal workings of the Society, including its financial, administrative, and membership records. They also discuss the Society's charitable and legal activities, in the form of short summaries and transcribed copies of relevant letters and legal forms. These records are significant, as they include many details regarding both wealthy and poor members of Society that would otherwise be unrecorded, such as names of individuals who were helped, and specific accounts of charitable assistance offered them.

The GSP diligently assisted immigrants — including widows, orphans, and those held in jail — by providing food and other necessities, or offering legal representation. In one report, the Society learned that there were a number of German immigrants being held in prison. The following day's account records that members of the Society went promptly to visit the Germans in jail. Upon seeing that they were being given only a bit of bread every day, they determined to provide them with both meat and vegetables as well.

Although they regularly assisted with individual

cases, such as the one above, the Society was also active in changing the legal system surrounding immigration, and the minutes also reflect these activities. In 1765, just a year after founding, they helped to pass a law to protect immigrants by establishing guidelines for treatment aboard ships, including medical assistance and standards for cleanliness, as well as mandating a translator's presence at port to inform immigrants of their rights. In 1785, they successfully petitioned for a law requiring the presence of translators when redemptioner contracts were negotiated and agreed to, thereby protecting the rights of new immigrants.

Since I am in the beginning stages of my PhD, my findings are limited, so I am looking forward to further research at the Horner Library over the course of the next year. As I continue to read and analyze the records, I hope to uncover more individual stories of charity and immigration to understand the experiences of both those organizing and dispensing charity, as well as those receiving it. I also plan to examine how the Society functioned in comparison with the other societies in my purview, in order to understand early American charity, and how it differed along ethnic and linguistic lines.

Many thanks to the German Society of Pennsylvania and the German Historical Institute for this opportunity, and to Frank Trommler, Maria Sturm, and Bettina Hess for their assistance. I am very grateful to have begun my year of PhD research as a fellow at the Horner Library, and the month spent here has been of great benefit.

- Rebecca Lott, University of St. Andrews

- Frank Trommler

*Engineers Philosophy: Industrialism, Theories of Technology, and Social Order in the Second Industrial Revolution, 1890-1930*



I teach the history of science and technology at the University of Pennsylvania, and my research is concerned with the history and sociology of German-American engineers and engineering. In

June 2017, I spent four wonderful weeks at the Joseph P. Horner Memorial Library of the German Society of Pennsylvania, to work on my current book project. This project deals with German and American engineers during the "Second" Industrial Revolution (c. 1890 to 1930), their temporary and permanent migration across the Atlantic, and the ways in which they exchanged ideas, skills, and financial and cultural support as part of this process.

Crucial for my work during this month was that the Horner Library is a popular library (*Volksbibliothek*), a preserved popular library. Its purpose was to provide reading material (and opportunities for socializing) for members of the Society and the German-speaking community of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. The part of the collection that I used is exemplary for popular literature: books that were used for schooling children, popular encyclopedias, popular history, and popular theories of culture and society. The Horner Library is a unique source and place for people, who, like me, are interested in the lives and worlds of immigrants from Germany to the US, in particular (for my case) engineers around 1900. With the help and guidance of Bettina Hess and Maria Sturm, my time at the Horner Library provided a fascinating window into these lives and worlds and the role that the library played in them. The extant collection helped me understand more about the books that we find in the library, who wrote them, why they ended up here, and who was supposed to read them. It is indeed not only the collection itself that is pre-

served, but also its "container": the room and building that house the books as well as the people who select and read them. I used the Horner Library as a microcosm, as a collection, and as an archive of a particular historical moment and a particular group of people.

The Library Collection was established by Oswald Seidensticker as a "repository of German-American print culture," as Bettina Hess explains in the Library's research guide. This purpose also involves preserving German-American culture as a whole. Among the prime aspects of this culture were the prototypical association life (*Vereinswesen*) with its bylaws and festivities, and the highly influential and evocative nineteenth-century notions of education and formation (*Bildung*) and the notion of "culture." For engineers and other educated elites at the time, such notions played a critical role in their understanding of social order and their place in it, both in the country they had left and in their new home country. The notion of "culture" in particular helped engineers on both sides of the Atlantic to establish themselves as a new social and professional group, and to claim for themselves a status in society that was on par with traditional academic elites. Such groups were at the time often referred to as "estates" (*Stände*).

The collection of the Horner Library is a panorama, a plethora of impressions and examples, for engineers, engineering, and industrialization in the ongoing discussion about the place of German immigrants in Pennsylvania and the United States, and the place of German culture in American culture. Rapid industrialization of the U.S. around 1900, and the influx of both German engineers (along with their expertise and concerns) into American society, entailed profound social and economic change, and it forced people to make explicit their understanding of this change and their imagined and actual contributions to it.

- Adelheid Voskuhl, University of Pennsylvania