

A RESOURCE REDISCOVERED: THE REOPENING OF THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARY

Symposium jointly organized by the GHI and the German Society of Pennsylvania at the Joseph B. Horner Memorial Library in Philadelphia, November 5, 2006. Conveners: Hardy von Auenmüller (GSP) and Dirk Schumann (GHI). Participants: Hans-Jürgen Heimsoeth (German Consulate, New York), Christof Mauch (GHI), Kevin Ostoyich (Valparaiso University), Birte Pflieger (California State University, Los Angeles), Frank Trommler (University of Pennsylvania), Christof Mauch (GHI).

Founded in 1817 by the oldest German immigration society in North America, the Joseph B. Horner Memorial Library in Philadelphia represents a valuable treasure house of sources about the history of Germans in America, their culture, reading tastes, local and national politics, and close relations with German-speaking countries. Its reopening on November 5, 2006, in the presence of Hans-Jürgen Heimsoeth, Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany in New York, Christof Mauch, Director of the GHI, and a large group of members of the German Society of Pennsylvania, offered an opportunity to take stock of an at times stormy, at times sleepy history of this collection of about 70,000 volumes, arguably the largest privately owned German-American library (outside of universities).

After being restored and catalogued (mainly in its holdings before 1917) thanks to a five-year project in 1994–99, the Horner Library is currently in the process of redefining itself as a research collection that opens its holdings to students, scholars, and visitors interested in all facets of German-American history and culture. The GHI has been most helpful in furthering this transformation in which the one-time *Volksbibliothek*, rendering its services mostly to members, becomes a document of a long-standing passion for popular fiction and non-fiction (especially popular science) in German that is of great value to historians, cultural historians, and Germanists. Its core is the German-American Collection, an archive whose holdings reach back to Francis Pastorius, the founder of Germantown. This archive was certainly used by historians during the course of the twentieth century, though it was not always easily accessible. The new GHI Reference Guide no. 20, *The German Society of Pennsylvania: A Guide to Its Book and Manuscript Collections*, will make access much easier. (It is available free of charge in hard copy and as a pdf file on the GHI web site.) The guide was written, thanks to a grant from the GHI

in 2005–2006, by Kevin Ostoyich, who has brought the information about the recently catalogued German-American collection and the manuscript collection up to date.

Celebrating the publication of this book was a central feature of the November 5 event in Philadelphia. In the symposium part, under the title of “Pennsylvania and the German-American Heritage,” Hans-Jürgen Heimsoeth illuminated the history of the GSP and its importance for the physical and spiritual needs of German-speaking immigrants since its founding in 1764. Heimsoeth emphasized that its primary mission was charity work, which had its ups and downs according to the tides of the immigrant waves, while the cultural commitments—and conviviality—did not fully develop until the latter part of the nineteenth century. In his talk “In Search of the German Americans,” Christof Mauch provided an intriguing frame of reference for these humdrum activities as he located this amazingly large but hardly visible ethnic group in the United States in its often inconspicuous contributions to the well-being of the larger society. His preferred example was the German-American architect Adolf Cluss, who gave Washington DC a distinctly modern profile in the second half of the nineteenth century but is hardly remembered for his innovative architecture and urban planning.

It was fitting for the occasion that a new history of the GSP, the first since the comprehensive volume by Oswald Seidensticker and Max Heinrici of 1917, was unveiled and distributed. Sponsored by the GHI in 2005–2006, the study represents the efforts of Birte Pflieger, a scholar of Germans in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. She has gone into the archives and produced a critical history of the Society that provides new information about earlier developments, as well as the active Women’s Auxiliary and the sometimes erratic activities of the GSP in the era of the two world wars. Also published under the auspices of the GHI, the book has the title *Ethnicity Matters: A History of the German Society of Pennsylvania*.

Equally fitting for the celebration of the Library’s reopening was the announcement of the newly established “GHI Fellowship at the Horner Library.” The fellowship, co-sponsored by the GHI and the GSP, will support two to four scholars for up to four weeks for research at the Horner Library between June 1 and July 15, 2007. (More information can be found on the GHI web site). It is designed to expand the use of the Library for the growing scholarship in German-American studies and German and American cultural history, as well as German popular literature and science before 1900.

Frank Trommler