The journey of the *Charming Molly* from Rotterdam to Philadelphia in the fall of 1773 ended catastrophically for the family of Jacob Uleckinger. After a stopover in Portsmouth, England, the *Charming Molly* took ten weeks to cross the Atlantic. Jacob and three of his five children died en route before reaching the New World. His wife succumbed just as the ship arrived in Philadelphia. Jacob’s brother-in-law, George Seess, survived but had to be brought to the sick house, where he reported that money his late sister had given to a fellow passenger to exchange for local currency had disappeared. It was not clear whether Jacob and his family had paid their fare or if they had planned to sell their labor to the highest bidder upon arrival to pay for the voyage. Regardless, the two surviving children, Peter, age 13 and handicapped by a malformed hand, and Andrew, age 9, would have to enter some kind of servitude to earn their keep now that both of their parents were gone. An unnamed weaver offered to pay twelve pounds for Andrew, and Nathaniel Witmore was reportedly “willing to take the eldest lame Boy without paying any thing for him.” Negotiating the boys’ indentures as well as recovering the missing money and Jacob’s chest, which was still aboard the *Charming Molly*, required inquiry and supervision. Leaders of the German Society of Pennsylvania looked into the matter.

The Uleckinger family tragedy was exactly the kind of case the society had been established to handle almost a decade earlier. According to the first rules, the GSP founders, “moved by the sorry condition of many of our countrymen who have arrived lately on ships from Europe,” gathered to “provide relief for these strangers.” The German Society quickly became the voice for German-speakers in the Delaware Valley and beyond. In addition to paying for medical care and providing legal counsel, it offered job referrals as well as monetary gifts and loans to Germans in the area. The mostly well-established Pennsylvania Germans who joined together to create the German Society ensured not only that children like Peter and Andrew would receive their inheritance but that ship captains, masters, and others in positions of authority did not abuse their power over newly arrived German immigrants.

Pennsylvanians of German descent have a long history in the Mid-Atlantic region. Starting with the arrival in 1683 of the first thirteen Krefelder families led by Daniel Francis Pastorius upon William Penn’s invitation, over 100,000 German speakers came to British North America before the American Revolution. Germans made up 10 percent of all...
colonists, constituting the largest group of immigrants to the colonies in this period second only to Africans. Tens of thousands of these newcomers made Pennsylvania their home where they composed one-third of the population by the 1750s. The steadily growing influx reached its peak between 1737 and 1754 when more than 55,000 German speakers arrived in Philadelphia. During the same period a mere 16,000 people emigrated to the Mid-Atlantic colony from England. By 1790, German speakers made up 33 percent of Pennsylvania’s population, while 35 percent was of English descent. 11 percent were Scotch-Irish, 9 percent were Scottish. The remainder were of various other European ethnic backgrounds, some Native Americans and African Americans.

With its incorporation in 1781, the GSP expanded its mission beyond aiding immigrants and became a cultural broker. No longer subjects of the British crown, Germans quickly embraced their new status as citizens of the United States. They were the first group of non-British European immigrants to assert their ethnicity within the context of their identity as Americans. The GSP briefly supported German literacy and classical education by paying the expenses for several promising boys to study at the University of Pennsylvania. Trying to preserve the German language in the United States and to bring elite German culture to Pennsylvania proved difficult, however. Even when the society began in earnest in 1817 to create a library of German literature, which it had planned to do since 1781, works of popular fiction (Trivialliteratur) quickly came to outnumber serious literary works. Within a few years, GSP readers demanded that the library also make available books in English; for much of the nineteenth century, works in English accounted for more than half of the library’s holdings and loans. The GSP itself switched to English as its official language in 1818. Promoting German language and culture in the new nation was difficult, not least because most German immigrants were simple artisans and farmers with little interest in highbrow literature.

German immigration dwindled to a trickle between 1790 and 1830, and the German Society’s activities diminished accordingly. The renewed influx of Germans after 1840, especially in the years after 1846, brought the GSP back to life. More than 100,000 Germans entered the United States annually during the 1850s, reaching more than 200,000 annual newcomers during the 1880s. Altogether, an estimated 5.5 million Germans emigrated to the United States in the century before World War I. Based on these demographic realities, German speakers needed a public voice, and the GSP tried hard to constitute that voice and to overcome long-standing regional, religious, and social distinctions among German immigrants.
An effort to “re-Germanize” the GSP began in the late 1850s when several middle-class “Forty-Eighters” joined the society. Oswald Seidensticker, a professor of German at the University of Pennsylvania, played an especially important part. He became involved in the society during the Civil War, and it was on his initiative that the GSP added an archive to its library. It was also under Seidensticker’s leadership that the society instituted a lecture series in 1867. Most of the speakers were local ministers and academics, and they usually either lectured on German culture or gave accounts of their travels or GSP benevolent activities.

The library, the archive, the scholarships, and lectures sponsored and organized by the GSP gave the society an elite air. Most of the organization’s members and leaders were, however, mostly of middling social status. This dichotomy between elite aspirations and middle-class foundations would characterize the GSP throughout its 240-year history. During the colonial era, Philadelphia families of German descent who were well-connected with the Anglo-American elite—the Shoemaker and Rittenhouse clans, for instance—generally had little to do with the society. Philadelphia’s important German-American Revolutionary War heroes such as Peter Muhlenberg and his brother Frederick led the society more in name than deed due to their frequent absences. The GSP attracted members of the up-and-coming middle class, a group eager to distinguish itself through its commitment to education, its connections to social elites, and its money. Money was an important source of power because the GSP’s board members kept tight control over the financial assistance offered to those who turned to the society for help.

The GSP’s membership was also characterized early on by a lack of continuity across generations. Two decades after the society’s founding, most of its leaders were older men, and few of their sons and grandsons had become members. This pattern was not unique to the Germans of Pennsylvania. In his study of ethnic historical societies in the U.S., John Higham notes that “it is almost inevitable that successive generations will feel less and less new to the place they inhabit.” Comparatively few members of generations beyond the first are moved to active participation by the “memory of common descent” that ethnic societies preserve and cultivate.

Providing Relief to Strangers

The story of the German Society of Pennsylvania’s founding on December 26, 1764, at Philadelphia’s Lutheran Schoolhouse on Cherry Street has been told many times by society members and historians of the German-American experience (Figure 1). The November 19, 1764, edition of Henrich Miller’s Der Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote (The Weekly
Philadelphia State Courier) carried a letter describing the miserable circumstances of a group of recently arrived German immigrants who were hovering near death. In response, Philadelphia German speakers quickly donated money and supplies to help. Prominent Germans in the city decided soon thereafter to found an association to engage in more con-
certed efforts on behalf of their newly arriving brethren. The result was the founding of the German Society of Pennsylvania. The first action taken by the 65 members of the new society was to elect Heinrich Keppele its president. They also elected a vice-president, two secretaries, a treasurer, a lawyer, and six overseers, each of whom would be responsible for supervising the society’s poor relief efforts for two months every year.\textsuperscript{16}

Heinrich (Henry) Keppele was not a surprising choice to lead an association dedicated to assisting newly arrived German immigrants. A native of the village of Treschklingen in Baden, Keppele left Germany at the age of 22 in 1738. He sailed for Philadelphia from Rotterdam aboard the \textit{Charming Nancy}, and the experience marked him for life.\textsuperscript{17} Of the \textit{Charming Nancy}'s 312 passengers, only 62 survived a deadly on-board fever epidemic. Despite the traumatic beginning of his New World venture, Keppele established himself quickly in Philadelphia. Within three years of his arrival, he had become an elder at St. Michael’s Lutheran Church and well-enough situated to marry. His bride, Anna Catharina Barbara Bauer, was 16 at the time of their wedding; during the thirty-three years of their marriage, Anna Keppele gave birth to fifteen children, nine of whom survived to adulthood. Keppele had started out as an innkeeper and butcher, and before long he had established himself as a prominent merchant dealing in most everything from linseed oil and rum to writing paper and nails. He also invested in real estate; he was to buy and sell dozens of properties in the Philadelphia area and Lancaster County over the course of a half century. During the French and Indian War, Keppele was chosen as the lieutenant for the North Ward. He did not, however, see any actual fighting. By the end of the war, Keppele was an established leader of German-speaking Lutherans in the city. He was in charge of purchasing real estate for the growing congregation, and he donated a substantial sum toward the construction costs of the Lutheran Schoolhouse on Cherry Street. It was not by coincidence that the Lutheran Schoolhouse served as the newly founded Germany Society’s temporary headquarters.

Having been elected to a one-year term in Pennsylvania’s Assembly in 1764, Keppele was in a position to support the German Society’s first legislative initiative, a law aimed at protecting immigrants from the worst of the abuses they commonly had to endure.\textsuperscript{18} The new law added a height requirement for the minimum space allotted to each passenger; an earlier act of the assembly had specified only the length and width.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, it required ship captains to furnish medical assistance to sick passengers, prohibited them from making more than 50 percent profit from the sale of wine, spirits, and other provisions, required the regular cleaning of passenger quarters, and mandated the presence of a translator upon arrival to read and explain passengers’ rights.\textsuperscript{20} The 1765 law also
regulated the sale of labor to pay for passage. Up until that time, any relative of a passenger who died at sea could be held liable for the dead person’s passage; the 1765 law limited liability to the children of the deceased. The law also stipulated that husbands and wives who had to sell their labor could not be separated without their consent.

The new legislation protecting German immigrants was not without benefits to ship owners. Health and provisioning regulations promised fewer onboard deaths and thus higher profits. Regulating the fares for Atlantic crossings and ensuring the orderly sale of indentures was also advantageous for ship owners and merchants—among them Henry Keppele. Keppele and his son-in-law John Steinmetz owned twelve ships, 5 percent of the vessels involved in bringing immigrants to Philadelphia between 1752 and 1775. The estimated 2,258 immigrants transported on ships Keppele and Steinmetz owned must have brought them considerable profit.21

Conditions on board immigrant ships had been notoriously bad for decades. Gottlieb Mittelberger, whose account of his experiences in the New World was published to discourage German speakers from emigrating, did not exaggerate when he described the journey as long, expensive, and dangerous. His words vividly capture most Germans’ experiences:

[D]uring the voyage there is on board of these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of seasickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth-rot, and the like all of which come from old and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water, so that many die miserably.22

To maximize their profits, ruthless captains frequently crammed as many passengers onto their vessels as possible and did not supply their charges with even the bare minimum for subsistence. Arriving immigrants often seemed more dead than alive.

The situation deteriorated further after about 1750 as the demographic profile of the German immigrants changed. In the early decades of the century, it was primarily families who headed to Pennsylvania. From mid-century on, by contrast, unmarried young men made up an increasing share of the colony’s German immigrants. Generally poor, about half of these German newcomers arrived as “redemptioners” who had to sell their labor to the highest bidder to pay for their passage.23 Many entered into their indentures without completely understanding the terms, leaving them vulnerable to all sorts of abuse.24 The GSP would deal with many such cases in the years to come.

Providing money, food, lodging, medical care, and legal counsel to “poor, sick and otherwise needy” newly arrived Germans was among the
most important activities of the GSP in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The society’s officers carefully evaluated each application for help, noting when the petitioner had arrived in Pennsylvania. Generally, anyone who had been in the New World for more than a year was no longer considered a newcomer and was thus ineligible for GSP assistance. While the society acted quickly to help those in immediate need, there was also a limit to how long the officers were willing to lend their support. On September 13, 1770, for example, they agreed to house and feed the passengers of a ship owned by James Pemberton that had just arrived from London. At their next meeting nine days later, they resolved that “it must be made known to these people that they should settle in this land so that they are no longer a burden” on the GSP. The society wanted to protect newly arriving Germans from abuse but did not intend to serve as a permanent almshouse. GSP members were convinced that hardworking, pious Germans would succeed in Pennsylvania. After all, they themselves had been able to attain considerable wealth and prestige in their new homeland.

This confidence was expressed in the seal the GSP chose in 1766. It bore the simple Latin slogan Religion, Industria et Fortitudine Germana Proles Florebit – By religion, industry, and courage will the German progeny flourish. The image on the seal depicted an eagle over a Bible, a plow, and a sword—items of everyday life for German-born men of modest circumstances. GSP charter members such as Henry Keppele expected that, armed with these simple tools, German speakers would follow the example they had set and establish themselves as respectable Pennsylvania Germans.

German immigrants who suffered misfortunes during the transatlantic voyage or immediately upon arrival were usually eligible for GSP assistance. Simply being of German birth or descent and in need of help did not necessarily make a person eligible for GSP support. This became quite clear to John Andrews, who asked the GSP to assist a German-born doctor in Yorktown. The doctor, Andrews had reported, suffered from “a great and universal Tremor of his nerves” and was unable to work. In describing the doctor’s worthiness, Andrews highlighted his intellectual accomplishments, which had included an appearance at the Philosophical Society. But despite Andrews’s lengthy explanation of his needy friend’s medical condition, the GSP denied the request for financial assistance. Henry Kammerer, the society’s vice-president, noted that “according to our fundamental Articles, the German Newcomers only come under [our] Notice,” and thus his hands were tied.

When it came to offering help in legal matters, the GSP was more generous in its definition of who qualified as a “newcomer.” Judging by the large number of cases it took on, the society clearly had a particular
interest in immigrants who were unable to pay for their passage. Any German-born redemptioner who had been wronged, physically abused, or persuaded to sign an indenture that was not in accordance with customary practice in Pennsylvania could apply to the GSP for help and be assured that it would do everything in its power to secure him or her redress. Depending on circumstances, the society might try to resolve such conflicts informally or would pursue action in the courts.

It was through arbitration that the GSP helped resolve the first dispute over an indenture in which it was asked to intervene. Johann Zimmermann and his wife sought the society’s assistance after Matthias Kopplin denied Mrs. Zimmermann’s customary freedom suit, i.e. a set of new clothing. Sometime between January 6, 1770, when the complaint was first discussed within the society, and February 17, 1770, when the GSP’s officers formally accepted the arbitration results, Kopplin was persuaded to pay his former servant five pounds Pennsylvania currency and to free the couple’s child. Since indentured servitude could last anywhere from one to seven years, it is obvious that Zimmermann’s wife was no longer a newcomer when she and her husband petitioned the GSP. Their vulnerability as servants, however, made them eligible for society assistance. The society’s action on behalf of the Zimmermann family indicates that it did not regard periods of servitude as the start of immigrants’ road to success. Only upon gaining freedom and being in possession of the basic necessities such as clothing and some money did immigrants begin the process of becoming Pennsylvania Germans.

Some ship captains tried to raise the price of passage from Europe upon arrival in Pennsylvania. Women, especially women whose husbands had died during the transatlantic voyage, were particularly vulnerable to this form of abuse. The GSP must have seemed like a godsend to the widow Mary Christina Martin, who arrived in Philadelphia with her six children on the Minerva in the fall of 1772. Martin reported to the society’s officers that her husband had agreed to pay “Nine Guineas a Freight” and had paid “40 Guilders Hollandish” up front. Martin’s husband died en route. The captain subsequently sold the services of three of her sons for 30 pounds Pennsylvania currency each, and Martin’s brother-in-law paid 10 pounds Pennsylvania currency to cover the passage of the two youngest children. Despite having received 100 pounds (Pennsylvania), the captain also sold the 46-year-old widow’s service for a term of five years for 22 pounds (Pennsylvania). Although it is now difficult to calculate a meaningful conversion rate between the Dutch guilder and the British and Pennsylvania pound, the GSP’s officers recognized that Mary Christina Martin had been overcharged. They sent Christoph Ludwig to the ship’s owners “to desire to know of them whether the Facts alledged by the said Woman are true, And whether the
Gentlemen would be pleased to favour us with a Copy of the Amount of
that Woman as it stands in their Books.”

Ludwig was an ideal candidate for this mission; he had the necessary language skills and the worldly
know-how to talk to just about anyone. Working variously as a soldier, sailor, and baker, Ludwig had traveled the world and lived in London
before settling in Philadelphia and establishing himself as a successful
baker there. Ludwig and the lawyer Ludwig Weiß met several times with
the Minerva’s owners and were eventually able to resolve the dispute.
That Mary Christina Martin, a poor widow only newly arrived in Phila-
delphia, sought the GSP’s help suggests that the society had become very
well known within the city.

The GSP stepped in again in the fall of 1785 when immigrants who
had just arrived upon the Lydia found themselves at odds with its captain.
The captain had pledged to charge only half the usual fare if the voyage
from Holland to Philadelphia lasted less than five weeks. Apparently,
several passengers counted on the prospect and sought the assistance of
the society when the captain insisted on the full fare for what turned out
to be an eleven-week journey. Although the captain may have been
within his rights in insisting upon the full fare, the GSP’s officers prom-
ised to help the now desperate immigrants “with advice and deed.”

German immigrants working as indentured servants who suffered
violence at the hands of their masters could turn to the GSP for assistance.
In August 1785, for example, Johannes Öttinger complained that his mas-
ter Friedrich Kistelman (or Kesselmann) had “treated him barbarically
[by] hitting him with the thick end of a whip, smashing a shovel on his
head resulting in blood flowing from his ears” and had also threatened
further physical abuse. Öttinger suffered from “lameness in the hip,” but
he did not know if that was the result of the beatings he had endured or
from having fallen. Three GSP officers formed a committee to ask Chief
Justice McKean what might be done. The committee was also authorized
to hire an attorney if necessary. A fourth GSP board member was in
charge of taking care of the injured man and advancing money to cover
whatever costs necessary.

Three weeks after receiving Öttinger’s petition, the board approved an agreement whereby Öttinger would be trans-
ferred from a local inn to a hospital at his master’s expense. He was to be
discharged from the hospital only after GSP president Christoph Weng-
man had been notified. The minutes of a meeting three weeks later
indicate that the board expected that Öttinger would soon be released
from the hospital; if his master did not voluntarily pay his hospital fees,
the board would take the master to court. Since there is no further men-
tion of the case in the society’s records, Kistelman (Kesselmann) most
likely paid.

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Ottinger’s experience was not typical, but nor was it unique. Barbara Ham arrived in Philadelphia in the fall of 1792 and entered into an indenture with Nathan Eyre. Seven months into her term of service, Ham sought refuge with her local alderman on the grounds that her master had treated her “inhumanly.” The alderman took Ham to a physician and may well have helped her when she filed charges against Eyre. The court, ruling in Ham’s favor, imposed fines that came to nearly 4 pounds Pennsylvania currency and ordered him to post 10 pounds security for his good behavior. But it also ordered Ham to return to Eyre’s service. It was at this point, in March 1793, that the GSP stepped in and resolved to help get Ham released from her indenture. Shortly after first taking up the case, the GSP board decided to extend Ham a loan of 5 pounds so that she could pay off her obligation to her master and get free of him. Eyre, however, apparently wanted much more than 5 pounds; only after another man, John Barkley, paid Eyre 20 pounds for Ham’s indenture was she finally free of her violent master. The records suggest that the GSP might have played a role in bringing Ham into contact with Barkley. They also note that Henry Kammerer, the society’s lawyer, submitted a sworn statement that he would not pursue any further legal action on behalf of Barbara Ham, either acting on his own or for the society.

The GSP did not necessarily side with indentured servants as a matter of course. In 1795, GSP lawyer Michael Keppele, the grandson of Henry Keppele, looked into the complaint of an unnamed German servant girl. The young woman had entered into an indenture with a Mr. Billmeyer upon her arrival in Philadelphia from Europe. Soon thereafter, she fled her master and was subsequently imprisoned. She thereupon complained that “a fraud was exercised upon her” and that “her Master made her work unnecessarily Service.” At the heart of the dispute was the question of her term of service. Although her indenture specified that she was to work for Billmeyer for two years and nine months, she claimed that her term of servitude should be only eighteen months. Investigating the matter, Keppele found that the bilingual city registrar who had recorded the indenture—and who was an active leader of the GSP—had taken pains to explain the terms of the indenture to the girl. He thus concluded that “the Interference of the Society” in the case would be “unnecessary and improper.”

Indentured servitude was on the decline by the 1790s. As Aaron Fogleman has shown, the proportion of European immigrants who sold their labor to the highest bidder upon arrival in the New World decreased dramatically after 1776. In the years 1700–1775, more than 40 percent of the estimated 255,000 European immigrants to British North America came as indentured servants. The combination of wartime social disruptions and the Revolutionary ideology of freedom and equality helped
bring about a rapid change: between 1776 and 1809, only 8 percent of voluntary immigrants from Europe, 18,300 out of 253,900, entered into indentured servitude. The percentage was cut in half again between 1810 and 1819, after which the practice of indentured servitude essentially ended for white Europeans. In Philadelphia, 255 indentures were registered in 1819. The number fell to 35 the next year, and the total for the years 1821–31 was 34. Although the demise of unfree white labor in Pennsylvania can be attributed in part to economic change, historians also emphasize that the erosion of established hierarchies after the Revolution made the idea of whites in bondage “anomalous and anachronistic.”

The GSP and the American Revolution

The American Revolution also affected the GSP as an organization. The war and the British occupation of Philadelphia disrupted the society’s meetings, charitable activities, and construction plans. Intending from the outset to build a home of its own, the GSP had purchased a lot on Seventh and Market Streets in 1765 for 125 pounds Pennsylvania currency. Fundraising difficulties and indecision delayed further action until 1776, when a property adjacent to the GSP’s lot was acquired for 200 pounds. By June of that year, lumber and stones had been purchased and workmen hired. The Revolutionary War changed everything. Due to “the dangerousness of the time,” the GSP decided to postpone the building project. During the occupation of Philadelphia from September 1777 until the fall of 1778, British authorities used the GSP’s building materials to erect a stable. But even after the British withdrawal from the city and the American victory five years later, the GSP did not immediately resume its building plans. It rented its lot until 1806 when, after much discussion, it finally began constructing a two-story building that was completed in April 1807 at a cost of nearly $7,000.

Not much is known about the GSP during the eight years of the Revolutionary War except that its members did not meet between the summer of 1776 and September 1778. Like many civilians, GSP president Keppele followed the Pennsylvania Assembly and the Continental Congress in moving to Lancaster during the British occupation of Philadelphia. He lived there with his daughter Barbara and her husband Henry Helmuth, a local Lutheran pastor. Given his age and loss of hearing, Keppele’s revolutionary activities were limited to investing in the newly chartered Bank of Pennsylvania. This institution was “less a bank than a patriotic fund-raiser with its primary goal to provide funds to supply American troops.” Many of Keppele’s ethnic brethren were not quite as enthusiastic as he was about the American cause, at least initially. While the GSP today

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points out proudly that the first printed version of the Declaration of Independence came from the press of German printer Henry Miller on July 5, 1776, scholars have shown that German speakers in Pennsylvania were rather reluctant supporters of the Revolution. The Pennsylvania Germans understood liberty primarily as negative freedom, namely, freedom from oppression. Many Germans were not familiar with English conceptions of liberty and did not see British imperial policies as reason to revolt. To Lutherans in particular, “the possibility that liberty and property could justify rebellion against legitimate authority seemed utterly preposterous.”

Philadelphia’s Germans did not on the whole play prominent parts as either Patriots or Loyalists. Some did, of course, take sides. The Pietist Germantown printer Christopher Sower (Saur), for instance, was arrested as a Loyalist and his press confiscated.

The leaders of the GSP, by contrast, supported the Revolution. Perhaps as a result of their long residence in Philadelphia and participation in the city’s commercial life, they understood the Patriots’ conception of liberty and aided the American cause. GSP founding member Christoph Ludwig, whom George Washington described as his “honest friend,” supplied the Continental Army with bread.

Ludwig Weiß, the GSP’s second president, regularly wrote newspaper articles in support of independence for the German printer Henry Miller. Ludwig Farmer, the society’s third president, gave up innkeeping for soldiering and endured the terrible winter of 1777 at Valley Forge. He later oversaw the army’s provisions.

Heinrich Kämmerer, who briefly held the GSP presidency several years after the war, served as a captain during the Revolution.

The most dramatic show of support for the Revolutionary cause came from Peter Muhlenberg. The son of Lutheran leader Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the younger Muhlenberg had followed in his father’s footsteps and become a minister. When the war began, he gave a farewell sermon that was to become famous. There was, Muhlenberg told his congregation, a time to pray and a time to fight, and as he declared that the time to fight had arrived, he took off his robe, revealing his military uniform. Together with his brother Frederick, who became the first Speaker of the House of Representatives, Peter Muhlenberg led the society in 1788 and again from 1790 to 1797. Both men’s involvement in the everyday affairs of the organization was limited, however, especially on account of Frederick’s responsibilities in Congress during the early 1790s.

The GSP had its work cut out for itself in trying to resume its activities during the war. After the British left in the fall of 1778, GSP leaders scrambled to assemble their members, collect dues, and launch a citywide relief drive for poor Germans. Within a few weeks, the society had raised over 670 pounds Pennsylvania currency. The ministers at Philadelphia’s three German churches, who had been instrumental in collecting dona-
tions, were requested to announce to the poor that the GSP would distribute money to needy Germans at the Lutheran church. This initiative could not have been more timely. Prices had risen by more than 150 percent over the course of the preceding year. Philadelphians had taken to the street to protest the all-time high prices being charged for flour and other staples, and Pennsylvania’s Executive Council had tried to curb profiteering. In January 1779, the GSP decided to give poor German families cash handouts of 4 to 8 dollars, depending on their size. Generous as these gifts were, they did not go very far at a time of high inflation when the cost of a week of lodging at a comfortable inn had risen temporarily from 4 dollars in 1776 to 100 dollars five years later.

This one-time relief measure was financed by the GSP’s members and Philadelphia’s German community as a whole. All of the society’s other activities, by contrast, were paid for by membership dues. Even before the currency crisis touched off by the Revolution, belonging to the GSP was not inexpensive. The initial membership fee of twenty shillings and quarterly dues of five shillings the GSP originally imposed were beyond the means of most of Philadelphia’s German speakers. Moreover, members had to pay fines of up to ten shillings for missing meetings. Before 1776, a day laborer earned about two shillings a day, and an annual newspaper subscription to Der Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote cost three shillings. In 1781, the GSP’s membership fee stood at 200 Continental Dollars. In the early nineteenth century, after the country’s currency had stabilized, the membership fee was $5 and quarterly dues $1. That was, however, still too much for working-class Germans.

Money, Honor, and Culture

The members of the GSP were financially astute and kept careful track of membership dues and expenses. As the society slowly resumed its activities after 1779, questions arose about the way Henry Keppele, Jr., GSP treasurer since 1766, had been handling the society’s money. Keppele had acted as a bank for the GSP, and he was expected to pay interest on the funds entrusted to him. When the newly elected treasurer Georg Reinhold asked him to turn over the society’s funds and financial records, Keppele could produce neither. During the war, Keppele had handed over the GSP’s records to his father, who, like many Philadelphians, had moved to the interior of Pennsylvania during the British occupation of the city. An embarrassed delegation from the GSP approached the senior Keppele, who was able to turn over the documents but not the funds. It is not clear whether the younger Keppele, a merchant who supported the Patriot cause, had embezzled the GSP’s money or simply lost track of it. In the end, Keppele’s brother-in-law John Steinmetz vouched for him and...
paid the GSP 390 pounds, 8 shillings and 3 pence. Three months later, Henry Kepple, Jr., died, but his death was not mentioned in the society’s minutes. That was unusual, as the deaths of board members were usually noted. The potential scandal of the younger Kepple’s mismanagement or possible embezzlement was ultimately defused by his father’s prominence in the GSP and Steinmetz’s generosity. Steinmetz’s intervention was prompted not only by family obligation but also by late eighteenth-century notions of honor. Honor was an important concept that middle-class men who aspired to climb the social ladder took very seriously.

It was not only individuals who adhered to notions of honor: the GSP was sensitive to affronts to its standing in society. During the 1790s, the GSP worked hard to demonstrate its own importance and the prominence of Philadelphia’s German community. Member’s funerals were an important opportunity for public display on the part of the society, and it barred no expense or effort to seek redress when it felt its honor insulted during a funeral. In 1795, for example, a coach drove through the funeral procession along Arch Street for George Biegler, who had joined the GSP only two years earlier. The society’s president convened a special meeting of the officers, and the incident was denounced as “a most agregious [sic] and daring Insult which had [sic] offered to the Society.” GSP lawyer Michael Kepple was authorized to seek advice from the best legal minds of the city “to persue [sic] all legal Means to bring the person who was guilty of this Outrage to Punishment such as the Laws prescribe.” After consulting city Attorney General Jared Ingersoll, Kepple reported that “as to the Indignity which had been offered to the Society in particular and to the Citizens of Philadelphia in general was such, as not only to justify but to require a legal Prosecution.” Kepple promised that the “Prosecution Will be entered as soon as the Name of the Offender is known.” Six weeks later, the case was resolved when the coachman Nathaniel Sweet offered a written apology. Ingersoll received $20 from the GSP for his advice. It is likely that Kepple had approached Ingersoll—who had served in the Constitutional Convention a few years earlier and was the legal advisor to many of Philadelphia’s most affluent and influential—more for the prestige he could lend to the German Society’s pursuit of satisfaction for the insult it had suffered than for the substance of his legal advice.

As part of its ongoing effort to secure its standing as the voice of Germans in the Mid-Atlantic region and to preserve the German language in Pennsylvania, the GSP began sponsoring deserving male students at the University of Pennsylvania in 1781. The university had earlier created a professorship for instruction in the classical languages “through the medium of the German tongue.” The first two holders of the position—Johann Christoph Kunze and Justus Heinrich Christian Helmuth—
were both Lutheran clergymen and GSP members. They were also the driving forces behind the GSP’s decision to sponsor students at the university. Lamenting that “only crafts and commerce find fertile grounds” in the United States, Kunze argued “we must begin to turn the poor into scholars.” Under the plan adopted by the GSP, the fathers of the young men sponsored by the society had to promise to keep their sons in school “for as long as it is deemed necessary and good.” In 1786, the committee appointed to keep track of students’ progress reported proudly that the seven young men receiving financial assistance from the society were all making good progress. Not all of the GSP-sponsored students, however, ended up completing their studies. Jacob Hoffman, for example, was expelled from the university in his third year because of bad behavior and laziness. Johannes Bausch, who seemed to be doing well during his first year, eventually asked to be released from his studies so that he could pursue a trade. The GSP’s officers made sure that Bausch’s father reimbursed the society for the tuition already paid.

Little ultimately came of the GSP’s attempt to create an educated German-American elite. By 1810, the GSP was sponsoring only one or two students at a time, and some years it had none. Stipend recipients in the early nineteenth century were exclusively students of theology, which suggests the GSP and leading German ministers were eager to ensure the supply of German-speaking clergymen. The GSP stopped sponsoring students after 1833. At that point, the so-called German department at the university was essentially defunct, and the GSP itself was experiencing a decline in membership as a result of the fall in German immigration. Likewise, nothing came of plans to conduct an annual essay contest on the theme “how best to preserve and expand the German language in Pennsylvania.”

The GSP’s faltering support of German-language education in the early nineteenth century perhaps reflected its members increasing preference for English over German. In 1818, the society made English its official language. That decision was partially reversed in 1842, when members voted that “all the records and proceedings of this society shall be kept and conducted in the English [sic] Language excepting the minutes of the society which may be kept in the English [sic] and German Languages.” The GSP thereupon recorded its minutes in German for the next three years; both English and German were used between 1845 and 1848, and after that English predominated. It was not until the 1860s, after recent immigrants had come to play a leading role in the GSP, that German was again used consistently for record-keeping.

Ironically, as the GSP was wavering in its attachment to the German language and in its efforts to foster a German-American elite, it finally
decided to take action on a long-standing pledge to create a German library. A special committee reported in 1817 that

the high standing which German literature has justly acquired in modern times and which is very little known here, rendered in the opinion of your committee highly eligible to make the beginning of such a library as contemplated in the charter without loss of time. Your committee beg leave to suggest that no good Books in any language should be excluded but, as the investments must be to a limited amount that particular attention should be paid in the first place to forming a collection of works in the German language this city being unprovided with them, whereas of English and even books in the dead languages there are so many public and private collections that hardly any individual can fail to have access to them if he wishes.71

Three months later, the library committee proudly announced that it had purchased $200 worth of books in Hamburg and that the library would be open to members on Saturdays from 3 to 5 p.m.72 In 1819, the library committee, “understanding it to be the wish of a large number of the members of the Society that a part of the Library should consist of works written in the English language,” began to purchase books in English as well.73 According to the minutes of a March 1823 meeting, “members of this society have observed with regret the comparative smallness of the English part of the library.”74 An effort was therefore made to expand the library’s English-language holdings. Before long, there were more titles in English than German: in 1826, the library contained 853 English and 798 German books.75 By 1842, the collection had grown to 2,355 books in German and 3,369 in English.76 The GSP would continue to add more books in English than in German to its collection—and its members would continue to borrow English works more often than German—until recently arrived immigrants came to dominate the GSP in the 1860s.77 Works in German then began to account for an ever larger share of the more than 10,000 loans the GSP’s library recorded annually in the decades after the Civil War.78 The decline in the number of English books GSP members borrowed was especially marked after 1894, when the Free Library of Philadelphia opened its doors to the general public. Given the expansion of the city’s public library system at end of the nineteenth century, which broadened access to works in English, the change in members’ use of the GSP library should not be seen as a sign of increased ethnic identification but merely as a shift in where they went to read books in the two languages.79
Nineteenth-Century Revival

The recent immigrants who began to assume leadership positions in the GSP in the 1850s and 1860s were exasperated by the society’s lack of “Germanness,” and they largely failed to recognize the distinctly German-American culture that had emerged in Philadelphia by then. The newcomers reinstated German as the GSP’s official language and tried to revive the organization as a promoter of German culture. The centenary of Schiller’s birth in 1859, for instance, provided occasion to celebrate a German literature hero. The so-called Pennsylvania Dutch traditions that had developed by the mid-nineteenth century were, by contrast, generally looked upon with disdain by the Forty-Eighters. They saw the dialect of the Pennsylvania Dutch and their adherence to traditional ways of life and farming as perhaps quaint but refused to recognize them as authentically “German.” The two groups by and large stayed far apart. When the Pennsylvania German Society was founded in 1891, it limited its membership to those of Pennsylvania German ancestry and denied admission to anyone born in Germany. While the organization shared a few members with the GSP, most notably Pennsylvania Governor Samuel Pennypacker, the two groups remained distinct from and politely distant toward one another.

The nineteenth century saw a steady increase in the number of Germans immigrating to the United States. Although only a small percentage arrived in Philadelphia and fewer still chose to settle in the city, the demand for the GSP’s services grew. In response to the establishment of the Deutsche Einwanderungs-Gesellschaft (German Immigration Society), which employed a manager who took care of needy German immigrants, in 1843, the GSP hired an agent of its own in 1846. It actually hired away Lorentz Herbert from the rival organization. Besides administering poor relief, Herbert was in charge of providing information and advice to newly arrived immigrants, ensuring that the ill received medical care, and referring those with legal problems to the society’s attorneys. The influx of German immigrants continued to grow in the decades following the Civil War. Anywhere from 20 to 71 steamships brought as many as 10,000 immigrants to Philadelphia every year, and between 17 to 50 percent of them were German speakers. After the Red Star Line steamship company began to offer service between Antwerp and Philadelphia in 1873, German immigrant traffic increased so much that the GSP appointed an immigration committee.

The most interesting innovation in the GSP’s efforts to aid immigrants was the employment agency it created in response to the mid-century revival of German immigration. Ever since the disappearance of indentured servitude, newly arrived immigrants often required assis-
tance in finding ways to make a living. The number of job referrals the GSP’s employment agency made fluctuated widely over the years, ranging from 1,302 in 1847 to 117 in 1855. On average, it placed about 450 immigrants in jobs each year through the end of the century. Despite the success of this initiative, the GSP’s agents often had a rather cynical view of job-seekers. Joseph Bernt, for instance, explained in an 1897 report that there were three sorts of people who sought assistance from the GSP’s employment agency. The first were “people who can work but do not want to work”; the second consisted of those “who want to work but cannot work”; and the third group was made up of “people who want to and can work” but who were hindered by their inability to speak English and their lack of job skills.

Society members often used the employment agency. Bernt noted, for example, that, due to the chronically short supply of female domestic servants in the city, society members had first choice of maid referrals. Considering that most GSP members were successful businessmen, it is perhaps not surprising that the society’s employment agency displayed little sympathy for organized labor or strikers, the prominence of German workmen in the labor movement notwithstanding. The Verein Deutscher Gewerkschaften (Association of German Unions) complained to the GSP in 1887 that the agency had “sent people to businesses whose workers were on strike.” The board of directors simply ignored the complaint. At the same time, though, the GSP was not insensitive to the situation of working-class immigrants. From the late nineteenth century well into the 1920s, workers’ compensation claims for on-the-job injuries figured prominently among the cases taken on by GSP-hired lawyers. GSP leaders were moved to help workers who fell victim to the all too frequent industrial accidents of the Gilded era, but they apparently could not bring themselves to support workers’ efforts to change dangerous conditions and other grievances through collective bargaining or strikes.

The GSP not only expanded its immigrant aid efforts but it also stepped up its charitable work in the course of the nineteenth century. In 1854, it revised its policy and began offering assistance to needy individuals and families who had been in the United States for over a year. With this change, the number of people seeking the GSP’s help rose. In 1871, the society doubled the number of directors engaged in overseeing poor relief from six to twelve. Each director served for one month. During his month of service, the director, assisted by the GSP’s agent, would spend weekday afternoons listening to requests for help. To ensure that aid reached the most needy, preference was generally given to requests from married men with children. Thirteen large leather-bound volumes survive today that record the names and circumstances of every person who turned to the GSP for assistance between 1869 and 1914. These
registers also record the society’s responses. Typically, the society preferred to hand out goods (clothing and shoes) or vouchers (for meals, accommodation, or train tickets) rather than cash. In the rare cases where the GSP gave money, the sums were usually quite modest, ranging from 25 cents to a few dollars. The agent also kept an elaborate registry of names that directors used to cross-reference applications for assistance and to weed out fraudulent requests. The agent also went to great lengths to protect the GSP from tricksters and professional beggars. For example, he kept a list of all passenger ships arriving in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York. If an applicant for assistance could not name the ship he or she had sailed upon and its arrival, his/her request would usually be denied.

As the number of German immigrants increased, so, too, did the number of those seeking the GSP’s assistance. The records of the society’s poor relief efforts make clear that the dream of America as the land of opportunity often turned into a nightmare. New and recent immigrants were vulnerable to shifts in Philadelphia’s economy. During the economic crisis of 1873, for example, 1,380 men and women turned to the GSP for help; the year before, the figure had been 838. In the absence of government welfare programs, private charitable initiatives like the GSP’s were the only source of aid to America’s poor. Many immigrants must have found it embarrassing to ask the GSP’s help and to undergo its scrutiny.

The growing number of newly arrived German speakers in Philadelphia also stood behind a program that contributed substantially to a change in the character of the GSP. In 1867, the society began operating a night school that offered courses in English. Thousands of immigrants, mostly but not exclusively men, took advantage of the school. This renewed involvement in education was notably different from the GSP’s earlier support of a few talented students at the University of Pennsylvania. Instead of trying to foster a homegrown German-American elite, the society now concentrated on uplifting the huddled German masses. Its school committee noted with satisfaction that the students would “give honor to the German name” as they overcame not only their lack of English-language skills but their more general educational deficiencies as well.

Although the GSP’s English classes usually had a few adult students who had been living in Pennsylvania for a decade or longer, newcomers who had been in the country less than a year typically accounted for as much as half of each class. In 1871, for example, 192 students enrolled in the GSP’s classes, of whom 91 had been in the U.S. for less than one year, 51 for less than 2 years, and 31 for less than 3 years. That same year, the city of Philadelphia began to fund the GSP’s school, which allowed the
society to begin offering German language courses. The enrollment in the German courses was low, however, and the program did not survive long. Demand for instruction in English remained strong, and total enrollment reached over 1,000 students annually. Most were skilled workers ranging in age from 13 to 30. Women generally made up less than 10 percent of the students. As German immigration declined in the late nineteenth century, enrollment decreased accordingly. In 1915, the GSP converted its English language courses into naturalization classes for German immigrants.

The revival of German immigration in the mid- and late nineteenth century transformed not only the GSP’s activities but also Philadelphia’s German-American communities. The new arrivals founded a variety of social clubs and associations that reinforced German regional identities. In contrast to the GSP, organizations like the Cannstatter Volksfest Verein (founded 1873) and the Bayerischer Volksfest Verein (1875) made no attempt to reach beyond the popular interests of their middle-class constituencies. Concentrating on socializing, singing, dancing, and, of course, beer-drinking, some Vereine soon surpassed the GSP in membership. It is ironic that just when their German fatherland was being united as a nation-state, Germans abroad deliberately cultivated the regional and religious distinctions that had divided them in the Old World.

The original charter of the German Society promised to help “those arriving who stood in danger of being oppressed due to lack of knowledge of language and laws.” People such as the Uleckinger boys benefited from the society’s founders’ commitment to their newly arriving brethren and received much-needed assistance in the eighteenth century. When the organization briefly became involved in efforts to preserve the German language and to raise a German-American educated elite after the American Revolution, the attempt soon failed. Due to decreasing German immigration in the early nineteenth century, the society’s immigrant aid activities declined. With the influx of more Germans after 1850, the GSP was revived, both through new members and needy ethnic brethren.

Since 1817, the organization has put much time, money, and effort into creating a library that today has become the largest privately owned collection of German-American history and literature in the country and perhaps the world. In large part built and utilized by post-1850 German immigrants, the library became the centerpiece of GSP leaders’ commitment to their German heritage. The same generation of leaders and members also revitalized the organization’s dedication to helping newly arriving Germans. By hiring a paid agent for its poor relief program,
instituting an employment agency, an immigration committee, as well as an English language evening school, the GSP became an important benevolent association for Philadelphia’s German Americans in the second half of the nineteenth century. Waning German immigration, regional, religious, and class differences among German Americans, and the emergence of other German-American organizations, however, created a less unified ethnic community than the GSP would have liked. The First World War of the next century would test the resilience of the society and German Americans in general.

Notes


2 GSP Minutes, November 1, 1773.

3 Seidensticker, 40.


A contemporary German almanac attributed Germans’ preference for Pennsylvania to the great religious and civil freedoms in Pennsylvania, and the quality of the soil and the climate, all of which were best suited for German agricultural practices. See *Neu-Eingerichteter Americanischer Geschäfts-Calender, Auf das Jahr 1750*.


For a detailed list of lecture topics and lecturers, see Seidensticker, 212–214.

Heinrich Keppele is a notable exception. His son-in-law John Steinmetz, his son Henry, and his grandson Michael were leading members of the society into the 1790s.


For a list of the offices and officeholders from 1764 until 1917, see Seidensticker, “Mitglieder des Verwaltungsraths,” 439–456.

It is not clear what motivated Keppele to emigrate. Much later in life he prayed to be forgiven for “the sins and transgressions of [his] youth” — which might be seen as an indication of personal troubles Keppele had before leaving Germany. Scholars of German speakers in America often emphasize economic factors, and most explain the push and pull factors by pointing to the devastation of southwestern Germany as a result of the War of Palatine Succession and the War of Spanish Succession, increased feudal obligations, and crop failures. “Neulanders” were also instrumental in advertising American freedom and opportunity in letters or personally. For the most relevant studies, see A.G. Roeber, Palatines, Liberty and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Fogelman, Hopeful Journeys; Wokeck, Trade in Strangers.

All information based on Heinrich Keppele, “Geburtstagsregister meiner und meiner gantzen Familie, wie auch Geburtstage und Seufzer in Unterschietlichen Zeiten,” German Society of Pennsylvania and Laurie Wolfe’s unpublished “Notes on Heinrich Keppele” as part of the project on Pennsylvania Lawmakers.

This law had been passed in 1750.

It was not until after the Revolutionary War that a law was passed that required the presence of a translator when passengers negotiated their indentures.

For a list of Philadelphia merchants who owned ships involved in the immigrant trade, see Wokeck, Trade in Strangers, 71.


Wokeck, Trade in Strangers, 45–50. Wokeck finds that “after the 1750s at least half of all immigrants had to rely on the indenture system as the only realistic option open for defraying their passage debts . . . .” Trade in Strangers, 233.

Redemptioners were in a different situation than indentured servants. While indentured servants knew before embarking on the journey how long they would have to serve, re-
demptioners agreed on the fare for the ocean passage. Only upon arriving in the New World could they negotiate a service term with a potential master to pay for their voyage.

25 GSP Minutes, September 13, 1770, September 22, 1770.

26 These paragraphs are part of chapter one of my dissertation, “Between Subject and Citizen: German-speakers in Eighteenth-century Pennsylvania” (PhD diss., University of California Irvine, 2003).

27 The seal still exists and is also depicted on the top of the entrance gate to the small garden adjacent to the society.

28 GSP Minutes, December 18, 1788. See also the original rules of the GSP that state “No one should receive money from our treasury but those poor German people who arrived here this last fall from Germany and those who will arrive here in similar fashion in the future.” Qtd. in Seidensticker, Geschichte, 141.

29 Wokeck even argues that the GSP was “chartered and organized primarily as a legal aid society.” Wokeck, Trade in Strangers, 148.

30 Judging from the master’s name, he was most likely at least German by descent if not by birth. It is not clear, however, whether his ethnic bonds, the affinity of his social status to GSP members, or perhaps simply his acknowledgment that he had been wrong in denying his former servant her freedom dues motivated Kopplin to settle the dispute with GSP officers without involving Pennsylvania’s legal system.

31 Guineas were often used by European immigrants upon arrival in the New World. Pennsylvania pounds were gradually phased out after 1796 as the availability of the U.S. dollar grew. In 1800, $5 were equal to 20 guineas. 5 pounds Pennsylvania currency were equal to $70 in 1804. However, no complete currency conversion table exists for all three currencies for this time period. For a discussion of currency issues in the late eighteenth century, see Farley Grubb, “The Constitutional Creation of a Common Currency in the U.S., 1748–1811: Monetary Stabilization Versus Merchant Rent Seeking,” Working Paper Series, Department of Economics, Alfred Lerner College of Business & Economics University of Delaware, Working Paper No. 2004–07.

32 GSP Minutes, October 24, 1772.

33 GSP Minutes, November 5, 1785.

34 GSP Minutes, August 10, 1785.

35 GSP Minutes, September 2, 1785.

36 GSP Minutes, September 21, 1785.

37 GSP Minutes, March 23, 1793.

38 GSP Minutes, March 28, 1793.


40 GSP Minutes, December 5, 1795. Michael Keppele’s report was submitted in English. Since GSP leader Kammerer had been the official who recorded the indenture, it would have been embarrassing for the GSP to have reached a different conclusion.

41 Aaron Fogleman, “From Slaves, Convicts and Servants to Free Passengers: The Transformation of Immigration in the Era of the American Revolution,” JAH (June 1998): 43–76, Table 1, p. 44.

42 Numbers according to Seidensticker, 93. Thanks in large part to the GSP’s lobbying, indentures in Philadelphia had to be registered by bilingual officials starting in 1785.


44 In 1773, the GSP received the legislature’s permission to conduct a lottery to raise money for building material. This generally popular way to generate financial support especially for church building projects and other community or benevolent causes produced 800

RELIEF AGENCY AND CULTURAL BROKER 27
pounds Pennsylvania currency for the society. See the image of the lottery announcement, LCP. For a discussion of the process, see Seidensticker, 71–2.

45 GSP Minutes, June 5, 1776.

46 For years after the Revolution, the GSP sought compensation for the building material from Congress in vain.


48 Laurie Wolfe’s unpublished “Notes on Heinrich Keppele” as part of the project on Pennsylvania Lawmakers.

49 Roeber, Palatines, Liberty and Property, 284.

50 Seidensticker, 525–530.

51 Seidensticker, 586–7.

52 Seidensticker, 478.

53 Seidensticker, 501.


55 GSP Minutes, January 20, 1779.

56 Bezanson, Prices and Inflation During the American Revolution, 42.

57 Seidensticker, 41–2.


59 The new GSP treasurer first requested money in January 1779. More than a year later, Christoph Ludwig, a prominent society leader, was appointed to inquire about the fund. Six months later the board became impatient and demanded the documents from the senior Keppele and from the junior Keppele’s wife. By March 1782, five months before the death of the younger Henry Keppele, the GSP passed a resolution to get the money from the older Keppele and threatened legal action if he did not comply. But the organization quickly rescinded its threat due to the honorable character of the older Keppele and in light of everything he had done for the society. About six weeks later, John Steinmetz, who had vouched for the younger Keppele, settled his debt. GSP Minutes, January 20, 1779, April 28, 1781, October 12, 1781, March 20, 1782, March 25, 1782, May 9, 1782.

60 For a discussion about eighteenth-century notions of honor, see Richard L. Bushman, The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities (New York: Knopf, 1992); and David Shields,
Starting January 30, 1860, society minutes were written in German. This lasted for over a century when in 1958, without any discussion, the recording secretary kept the minutes in English. The board debated the issue of language already four years earlier in 1954 but decided not to switch to English at that time. GSP Minutes, May 3, 1954. When GSP secretary Max Pohl resigned for health reasons, his successor Mr. Schlegel recorded the minutes in English without discussion. GSP Minutes, October 27, 1958.

In December 1862, the library committee reported that the society owned 5,812 German and 5,574 English books. That year 210 readers, of whom 196 were GSP members, borrowed 2,341 German and 1,791 English books. GSP Minutes, December 26, 1862. By 1875, the gap between English and German books had grown when the society owned 8,929 German but only 6,935 English books. Numbers based on Seidensticker, 204.

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In 1895, GSP readers borrowed 3943 English language books. Three years later, that number was down to 1489. See Appendix. Charles Hexamer, chair of the library committee in 1896, reported that “the purchase of English works, especially English novels, has been

limited this year; also because the creation of free public libraries in all parts of the city has made the need for such books superfluous. GSP Annual Report 1896. In 1902 Hexamer, now GSP president, reported that negotiations were under way to make the library into a “städtische Freibibliothek [free city library].” GSP Minutes, April 17, 1902. Nothing ever came of the plan. Neither William Pepper, the founder of the Free Library of Philadelphia, nor George Pepper, William’s uncle, whose money financed the project, ever joined the GSP.


For a general history of German Forty-Eighters as immigrants to the United States, see Bruce Levine, The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict and the Coming of the Civil War (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

The Pennsylvania German Society changed its membership rules in 1966. There were individuals who were active in both the GSP and the Pennsylvania German Society, notably Governor Samuel Pennypacker (1843–1916; term of office, 1903–1907).

Unfortunately nothing else is known about the short-lived rival organization.

GSP Minutes, March 25, 1847.

See Appendix 2 for more specific numbers.

Numbers based on Seidensticker, 164. The number of job referrals in the twentieth century was much lower. See chapter 2.


GSP Minutes, March 17, 1887.

While workers’ compensation claims dominated the legal assistance provided by the GSP, domestic disputes, both marital issues and problems between parents and children, were the next largest group of case types. See GSP annual reports, 1890–1930.

GSP Minutes, December 26, 1854.

For a brief survey of the thirteen volumes, see Manfred Zimmermann, “Quellen,” 133–140.


Zimmermann highlights this aspect of the thirteen volumes. Zimmermann, “Quellen zur deutschen Einwanderungsgeschichte in der Bibliothek der German Society of Pennsylvania.”

Seidensticker, 140.

GSP Minutes, September 21, 1871.

GSP Minutes, September 21, 1871.

GSP Minutes, March 19, 1874.

For example, 402 male and only 39 female students made up the spring classes in 1881 while of the 733 students only 52 were female during the fall classes that year. GSP Minutes, December 15, 1881.

GSP Annual Report 1915.

GSP Charter, 1764.