

By S. L. CULLMAN

from europe to yorktown to columbus

OF ALL THE people who came to our shores many years ago, those fondest of carnivals were the Germans. This became more and more evident to me while gathering information on the activities of the early German immigrant population in Columbus for the Franklin County Historical Society.

Columbus was incorporated February 10, 1816. The third church in the city was a German Lutheran founded in 1821. This fact alone reveals that a large part of the population for some time was to be German-born. By the mid-1850s it had reached 40 per cent.

From the beginning they displayed an enthusiasm for celebrating our Independence Day that was not shared, or understood, by their English-speaking, native-born American neighbors. To the Americans who migrated to Ohio from the eastern seaboard states, July 4th was just another day. They paid no special attention to it. To the German-born Americans it was a day to celebrate — a day on which to hold a “fest.”

The fests grew in magnitude as more and more Germans from the Palatinate area in Europe settled in Columbus and their “social” societies increased. By the late 1850s they could be called extravaganzas. At daybreak the whole city would be awakened by the cannon fire of the German Volunteer Artillery Company. By nine o'clock the parade would be marching through the city enroute to Schneider's Nursery, Stewart's Grove, Maur's Commons or some other equally suitable location.

The parades must have been a sight to behold with their volunteer Jaeger and Grenadier companies, at least one artillery company, and bands, all in uniform. The Turnverein wore special white gymnastic suits. The Sharpshooters, the Maennerchor and Liederkranz singing societies were “dressed in their Sunday best.” Uniformed volunteer fire departments pulled their machines and equipment. The English-speaking Americans, however, did not share in the enthusiasm. They either looked on as spectators or called the Germans names and shouted derision and ridicule. Sometimes they even ran along beside the paraders, hurling stones and epithets.

Upon arrival at the chosen spot the festivities would begin. Beer kegs would be tapped. Songs and hymns would be sung. Prayers of thanks offered. Patriotic speeches would be delivered in both German and English. Unfortunately none of these speeches have been preserved, to my knowledge. Among the speakers were prominent German-American lawyers and politicians, the mayor and other dignitaries.

At noon the good housewives brought out the picnic baskets and lunch was served. All through the day one could see military drills, gymnastic exercises, sharpshooting exhibitions and firefighting demonstrations as each organization put on a show calculated to impress the audience. After the Civil War this became Americana, but before the war it was German-Americana.

Repeatedly I asked the question, “Why?” Why did these people celebrate our Independence Day with so much enthusiasm? The answer would come back from historians, “They were so happy to be Americans,” or “It's the German Way.” But these answers by themselves make no sense. The Germans never considered themselves immigrants. They looked upon themselves as colonizers. They brought the best from their homeland and combined it with the best in their new land. So I continued to look for the answer to my question.

About 15 years ago I went to Germany and visited the city of Zweibrucken in which my father's family had lived before coming to America. The city clerk gave me a history of the area. You can imagine my excitement when, while thumbing through it, I found a reproduction

of Trumball's painting of Cornwallis' Surrender at Yorktown. I could hardly wait until I could sit down and translate it.

I found my answer. The Royal Deux-Ponts Regiment, which our French allies sent to America during our Revolutionary War, was the Zweibrucken Regiment. Deux-Ponts was French for Zweibrucken. The regent was the property of the Duke of Zweibrucken, who was also prince of the Palatinate. He sold its services to the king of France. Many of the early Germans who settled in Columbus were from the province ruled by the Duke of Zweibrucken.

Three of the founders of the Columbus Maennerchor were from the city of Zweibrucken as were two of the founders of what is today Scottwood Community Church. There was hardly a German society or church congregation that did not have Zweibruckeners among their founders or members.

Peter Ambos became a prominent manufacturer and banker. J.P. Bruck became “court referee” between German and native-born Americans bringing lawsuits against each other. One son became mayor of the city, and the eldest was the leader of the famous Newport band during the Civil War. A South Side street bears his family name. Haldy Avenue honors Frederick Haldy, jeweler, president of the first German target club and captain of a military company. First Lt. George Cullman gave his life in the service of his new homeland during the Mexican War. The gunsmith Charles Cullman, as foreman of the Fulton Hose Company, fought the blaze when the Old State House burned down, February 1, 1852, until a wall fell on him. Cullman Road was named for his eldest son. How many others were from the cities, towns and villages in the province of Zweibrucken will never be known at this late date.

It is no wonder they celebrated our Independence Day with so much vigor and enthusiasm. No doubt some of these families had members at Yorktown — members who helped fight and win the decisive battle of our American Revolution giving us the liberty they now enjoyed.

Zweibruckeners were not the only German-speaking troops with Rochambeau fighting on our side during our Revolutionary War. Some historians estimate about one third of the French army at Yorktown consisted of German and Swiss troops.

My grandfather Cullman insisted members of our family had fought on the side of the Americans during our Revolutionary War. I in turn had thought he was wrong because the history taught in the Columbus schools only told of German troops fighting on the side of the British. Oh, how I wish he were alive so I could apologize for my ignorance and, with hallucinations of World War I patriotism, for having argued him down. He was right, even if he did not know the details, and I was so very, very wrong.

The history given to me in Germany told how Duke Christian IV, ruler of the small German province of Zweibrucken, founded his regiment in 1757 by drafting the young peasant boys into six years of military service and supplementing them with volunteers. It told how he sold the service of his regiment to Kings Louis XV and XVI of France, and how on April 4, 1780, they boarded ships at Brest and sailed to Newport, Rhode Island, with the French fleet, arriving June 11, 1780, after 72 days at sea. They numbered more than 1,000 men and were the largest infantry regiment brought to America by the French general, Rochambeau.

The Duke of Zweibrucken married a 16-year-old French dancer named Marianne Fontenay. When Benjamin Franklin, then a widower, was sent to France as our ambassador, Marianne was a widow living in Paris. She became quite amorous with Franklin, writing him poetry and giving him gifts among which was a crab-tree walking stick with a gold