

**ADDRESS TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE
GERMAN DAY PROGRAM SPONSORED BY
THE WESTERN RESERVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Delivered by
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President Colket, Mr. Pike, Mr. Grabowski, friends of the Western Reserve Historical Society, fellow German-Americans: It is with great satisfaction that I contribute my library and collection of Americana Germanica to the Ethnic Archives of the Western Reserve Historical Society.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words at this ceremony of the formal acceptance and dedication of these books, periodicals, manuscripts and other materials. As I look around the room I am greeted by the faces of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances—so many of whom have played no small role in the propagation of German cultural values and institutions in the United States. To recognize just a few of them would not be possible, since all of them deserve formal recognition and time does not permit such today. Therefore, I shall pass over reading their names in favor of a broad *Herzlichen Dank* to all of you for your support and inspiration.

As a German-American, Germanist, great grandson and grandson of German immigrants, it is fitting that I should assist this fine historical society in establishing a compendium of knowledge relating to German-American life and the influence of German cultural traditions on American society in general, and the Western Reserve in particular.

An English historian, George M. Trevelyan, has expressed

that which I find to be a constant source of inspiration and reflection, and he has done so in words I wish I had written. He says:

I take delight in history in its most prosaic details because they become political as they recede into the past. The poetry of history lies in the quasi-miraculous fact that once, on this earth, on this familiar spot of ground, other men and women as actual as we are today, thinking their own thoughts, swayed by their own passions, but now all gone, one generation vanishing after another, gone as utterly as we ourselves shall shortly be gone like ghosts at cock-crow. This is the most familiar and certain fact about life, but it is also the most poetical; and the knowledge of it has never ceased to entrance me, and to throw a halo of poetry around the dustiest record that dryasdust can bring to light.

The purpose of this collection of Americana Germanica is threefold: First, it serves as a storehouse of information that will enable present and future generations of historians and other scholars to tell the complete story of the phenomenon of ethnicity. Implicit in this task is the recording of the activities of government officials and their German-American and other cohorts who, in their quest for self-gain, betray the institutions associated with German-Americanism and turn the phenomenon of ethnicity into a negative rather than positive tool for improving the lives of all Americans, regardless of race or national origin. In addition, this storehouse of information will serve as an effective weapon against the societal forces which promote bigotry and intolerance against one of America's largest ethnic groups.

Second, this collection of Americana Germanica is an important contribution to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and thus serves to strengthen and protect the enjoyment of the fundamental rights expressed by our founding fathers in the law of our land, the Constitution.

Third, the addition of this collection pays homage to the American immigrant and his descendants who built this

country in which the personal liberty of its constituents is vigorously protected by its courts and legislators.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote the words which I see as the hallmark of the American dream:

The less government we have, the better—the fewer laws and the less confined power. The antidote to this abuse of formal government is the influence of private character, the growth of the individual.

Too much government, too many laws, too much confided power—these are the things which resulted in the failing economy, the oppression of religious and political freedom, and the censorship of the press in my ancestral homeland, and which lay at the very base of emigration from it. Here in America, the German-speaking immigrant was at last free to live his life for himself, not for others. In a system of free enterprise and laissez faire capitalism he would reap the harvest of his labor—that he should fail, in some cases, to acquire all of the material goods he desired, was no failure at all—for what could be greater reward than to be self-sufficient, creative, and free of the paternalism of the collectivistic state. The German-Americans sought an environment in which their descendants could share the same reward. It is here that they found it.

It is an important function of historical archives that they continue to serve as a storehouse of vital information—in order that we may be ever reminded that the forces which sought to destroy the personal liberty of our forefathers are perpetual—that they exist still today, and that we must fight them with equal vigor.

The German-American immigrant, like his contemporaries from other countries, was inventive and gave great knowledge to the world. He was the producer whose energies, whose works, whose strong character and integrity, molded and shaped so many fibers of American society.

It would be difficult to find any area of the arts, the sciences, of industry, the business world, or technology, in

which the German-American has not made an indelible mark. The term, *German-American*, denotes not only the German-speaking immigrant, but also his American-born descendants. Whereas some of these descendants have not expressly or consciously identified with their ethnic heritage, their successes may, in some measure, be ascribed to the character-building values, traditions, mores, and familial influences of those who carried Germanic culture to their adopted homeland.

When the Western Reserve Historical Society's capable ethnic archivist, John Grabowski, contacted me regarding the building of a collection of German-Americana, I was delighted, indeed grateful for the opportunity to participate in this noble venture. Grateful because it is not infrequently that anti-German prejudices have torn at the fibres of American society, resulting in partial or complete disenfranchisement of the German-American's *earned* right to be recognized for his incredible cultural, intellectual, educational, and socio-economical contributions to our lives and the lives of those who walked here before us.

In John Grabowski, candidate for the degree Ph.D., we German-Americans have found truly a dedicated and objective friend. His work would not have been made possible without the fine cooperation and vision of his superiors, Mr. Pike and Dr. Colket. As an academician, I recognized my professional duty to respond to their call for assistance. As a Germanist, I recognized my expertise was essential to the teamwork their project requires. As a teacher of German heritage, I was inspired by the enthusiastic response of my students, especially those who have participated in the German-American genealogical workshops I have directed. As the descendant of German-speaking immigrants, I saw a marvelous opportunity to honor my heritage by actively participating in this historical society's ethnic project. Among you there are those who can offer similar expertise and resources to this fine institution.

My modest contribution to these archives is only a start. There is much which must be added that each of you can variously offer. Only through your generous support and participation and those of your friends, acquaintances, and fellow citizens, can the Western Reserve Historical Society serve as a repository for the annals of German-America and of the various other parts of the mosaic of American society.

Thank you all for sharing this proud occasion with my family and me. And thank you, Dr. Colket, and your fine staff for providing a home for a part of the materials on German-American history, and thereby reiterating the poetic words of the Milwaukee German poet of the last century, Konrad Krez, who said so well: *Da waren Deutsche auch dabei.*



KINDERLIED

In der Sommersonne
kummerdurchflimmert
liegt mein Kind
wie ein schläfriger Faun
der auf uralten Pfeifen bläst.
Klagende Töne steigen
zum trägen Himmel auf
verlieren sich
im gellenden Blau.

Schon einmal sah ich
einen Kinderkopf
von sechs strahlenden Jahren
sacht in der Sonne schlummern—
einen der niemals
zu sieben
erwacht.

Maria Berl Lee
Forest Hills, N.Y.