

William Roba

Then and Now: The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Society for German-American Studies, 1968 -2018

I

In the life of organizations memory informs, entertains, and reminds its members about their own accomplishments. The golden anniversary can be important because individual memories can be joined into a much more cohesive version of the organization's collective history. Great stories about past symposia or members met for the first time begin to be self-edited or smoothed down into a "set" recall in conversation. Earlier generations of members age, some originators of the organization may become inactive. Using some broad-brush strokes, the collective experience of the first five decades of the Society for German-American Studies can be partially recaptured at least from one person's perspective. There are many possibilities but this is written with the goal of trying to understand how things started and developed. If you were a student or teacher in the 1960s, you remember the excitement connected with change.

II

There was a need for a special interest group because those researchers who were focused on the German-American experience, or how Germans had interacted with America, provided the nucleus for a new and different academic organization. They began corresponding with each other about ways of finding interconnections between the traditional fields of German, Linguistics, and Immigration History. Robert E. Ward (1937–2017), professor of German at Youngstown State University (Ohio), began in 1968 to publish occasional newsletters about scholars experimenting with interdisciplinary

techniques different from their field of specialization. They were interested in solving problems inherent with ethnic concepts and topics. There was room for family history, as it pertained to German origin ancestors.¹ Three practical changes led to an organization useful in solving research problems.

First, the importance of an annual bibliography became apparent as researchers from both the social sciences and the humanities required a general checklist of specifically German-American articles, essays and books from many disciplines. Yearly bibliographies were needed to provide a summary of published research in an organized and reliable manner for scholars in different disciplines who were exploring brand-new research topics outside of their usual field. The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation published an annual bibliography in its *American-German Review* which was dedicated “to German culture broadly publicized in the lusciously illustrated journal *American-German Review*.”² But the editors moved away from German-American culture, dropping the bibliography completely in 1966.³ In 1968 the editors of the *AGR* announced that they were “steering away from German-American history (except for articles of very unusual interest and pertinence.)”⁴ The result was that this new group of scholars needed a checklist available annually as handouts at the first three meetings of SGAS.

Second, early practitioners defined the organization by emphasizing the concept of German-American research. This inverted the name of the Schurz journal which was entitled *American-German Review*, but also led to the realization that German-American research in the Midwest region was as important as Eastern metropolitan areas, such as Philadelphia. Cincinnati became the focal point, as a geographical mediator between the Midwest and the East Coast. Stability was enhanced when SGAS became a legally organized, non-profit organization in the state of Ohio in 1968.

Third, consensus was reached on choosing the idea of symposia where participants attended as equals, in presenting their latest research in this very new interdisciplinary field. It was not necessary to have a famous academic affiliation, professional reputation or published work in prestigious journals. Participants were encouraged to join in the discussion of various sessions, structured around the classical concept of Plato’s dialogues. Within five years, the first conference was held in 1973, in Cleveland, Ohio, and entitled “Symposium on German Culture in America and Ohio;” the second was held in 1976 in Lawrence, Kansas, and entitled “Symposium on German-American Literature and Culture.” After this meeting Erich Albrecht and J. Anthony Burzle distributed the first published collection of essays, *Germanica Americana 1976*. They wrote an introduction, edited the essays delivered, and included a panel discussion from the second conference. The third conference was held the next month in Cincinnati, with the title, “Symposium on

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Immigrant Literature and German Americans.” The idea of publishing essays from an annual symposium meeting about half-way through the spring term “caught on” with forty-two symposia to follow by 2018.

Based upon many conversations, long-term members of SGAS felt that it was a really great time in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and their participation changed the arc of their career. Most importantly, the intertwined importance of bibliographical support, attention to the Midwest and the symposia were strongly supported by the first two presidents: Robert “Bob” Ward from Ohio and LaVern Rippley from Minnesota. During the first decade, a growing membership received support for their chosen specialization by a quarterly newsletter and journal containing an annual checklist. These members were encouraged to attend the annual symposium held in different cities primarily in the Midwest and Eastern regions, but remained national in scope with members in more than forty states. Meanwhile, traditional organizations such as the American Historical Association and the Modern Language Association, splintered into warring camps over the need to have the organization officially protest the Vietnam War, and to encompass ethnic diversity in the canon of important writers. Historians had spontaneously challenged established concepts of historiography by stressing new cultural views of ethnicity. In similar fashion, the field of linguistics shared a similar upheaval with the use of new approaches.⁵ Some practitioners tried to create a synthesis, especially with the insights of anthropology, which impacted the subfields of dialectology and sociolinguistics. This was based on some linguists who collaborated in “studying disappearing and vanishing folklore” which yielded “collections of quaint speech forms and antiquarian anecdotes.”⁶ This clearly echoed the emerging concept of communal persistence in German-American Studies, which was discussed at a 1968 conference. Generative linguists explored these new applications, and projects in Texas German dialectology led to nearly three decades of transformational research by Glenn Gilbert (University of Texas at Austin) in 1972, Joe Salmons (University of Wisconsin – Madison) in 1983, and Hans Boas (University of Texas at Austin) in 2009.

III

The first benchmark of SGAS history comes from the central role played by the enhanced importance of the Annual Symposium. Analyzing different symposium programs from 1976 to 2003 shows its evolution over almost thirty years. By the 1980s, members enjoyed the location changing yearly, holding it over a three-day weekend in April, with a keynote speaker, a Thursday night cocktail party, and an awards banquet on Saturday night. The main interest has always been the content of new research. The published essays from the second conference of 8-9 October 1976 show some

recurring topics of research. First, an essay by Adolf Schroeder (University of Missouri–Columbia) emphasized the “Persistence of Ethnic Identity in Missouri German Communities” (pp. 29–41). He focused on the earliest observers (before 1828) with Henry M. Breckenridge in the Mississippi from Pennsylvania, Timothy Flint in Missouri, and Charles Sealsfield in the Mississippi River Valley. Schroeder then sampled interesting efforts at early creative writing in published or private novels, plays or songs.⁷ He concluded with a consideration of wedding customs, holidays, and celebrations with the strong tradition of the *Wurstjäger* who serenaded while collecting sausage from towns people! He also praised James Dow (Iowa State University) for his superb collection of newspapers and journals on these topics.⁸ The second example was the essay presented by Cornelius Krahn (Germans from Russia Society), who spoke on “Russo-Mennonite Literature in Canada and U.S.A.”⁹ He described in extensive detail four Mennonite writers: Bernhard Harder (1,000 poems and songs published by 1883); Peter B. Harder (short stories); Jacob H. Janzen (poems, short stories and plays); Arnold Dyck (Low German plays from the Ukrainian settlements after 1944).

Five years later, more of a prototype conference appeared as the second annual symposium of 7–8 November 1981, where eight essayists presented at York College of Pennsylvania.¹⁰ Michael Ritterson (Gettysburg College), “Waiting for Synthesis: Kurt Tucholsky Views America, 1925-1935.” Hartmut Froeschle (the only living participant, currently Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto), “German Immigration into Canada.” Peter C. Merrill, “The Classic Folk Art of the Pennsylvania Germans.” William T. Parsons (Ursinus College), “Letters and Notes from Pennsylvania Germans in the American West.” Werner Enninger, “The Old Order Amish of Kent County, Delaware.” Heinz L. Hosch (York College of Pennsylvania), “York County: An American Version of the German Palatinate.” Franz Ascher-Nash (Millersville University), “The Astounding Heritage of Pennsylvania German Folksong.” George Fenwick Jones (University of Maryland), “The Georgia Palatines.” The six plenary sessions focused on Canadian, national and regional topics which reoccurred in later symposia presentations.

Two decades later, specialization had expanded into concurrent sessions, at the 2003 Symposium, held in Baltimore, Maryland, 24–25 April, the Thirty-Fifth symposium. The number of presenters increased fourfold from 8 to 31, sharing their papers in twelve sessions (six of them concurrent): “The Early Years” (16th–17th Century), “H. L. Mencken,” “The Immigrant Experience,” “Literary Cross-Currents,” “Germans in the Washington, DC,” “Religion among the Germans in Maryland,” “Immigrants and Counter-Immigrants,” “German-American Arts and Sciences,” “German-American Life and Culture,” “Keeping the Past Alive,” “and “Baltimore, Maryland and

Eastern Settlers.” There were two plenary sessions: John T. Humphrey spoke on “Life of Eighteenth-Century Pennsylvania Germans” and Dorothy A. Boyd-Rush spoke on “An All-American Highway: The Great Philadelphia Wagon Road.” There were also three panel discussions on Directions in Pennsylvania German Studies, German-American Poetry Reading, and a Poetry Workshop.¹¹

Over the following decades, recurring SGAS concepts discussed in previous symposia led to pedagogical consideration of best teaching methods, and surveying curriculum offerings for newly created German-American college courses. In 1976, six educators wrote five essays about teaching these courses and they were published in a special issue of *Unterrichtspraxis*.¹² Patricia Herminghouse (Washington University, St. Louis) wrote “German-American Studies in a New Vein: Resources and Possibilities;” Don Heinrich Tolzmann (University of Cincinnati) wrote “Teaching German-Americana;” Barbara Bopp and William D. Keel (University of Kansas) wrote “Some Suggestions for a Course on the German Heritage of America;” LaVern J. Rippley (St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota) wrote “The German-Americans: A Course Proposal;” Joseph A. Wipf (Purdue University) wrote “Hutterite Life: The Role of the German School.” Six years later, *Monatshefte* focused again on German-American Studies by publishing two essays and a special survey.¹³ Don Heinrich Tolzmann followed up with a historical sketch, “German-American Studies: History and Development” and Eberhard and Ruth Reichmann wrote “German-American Studies: A Research Field in Search of a Classroom.” The survey of 219 colleges and universities provides data on the expansion of coursework, almost thirty years after SGAS was created. Ninety-six (44%) institutions offered coursework: five had a program/designated curriculum, thirty-four departments offered fifty-three courses specifically on German-American topics, one offered a Certificate in Ethnic Studies (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee). Some of the courses were available for double credit (literature or Ethnic Studies). In 2004, distance learning for college credit in German-American Studies was developed by the Kentucky Satellite Program; The Eastern Iowa Community College District (Bettendorf, Iowa) offered courses in Plattdüütsch for college credit; in 2005, Scott Seeger (University of Kansas) taught Adult Education classes in Low German in Washington and Marshall counties in Kansas.¹⁴

These SGAS Symposium themes received further consideration within five research developments. First, Peter Lang Publications created the series, “New German-American Studies / Neue Deutsch-Amerikanische Studien” with thirty-four monographs published between 1990 and 2011; 40% (fourteen) were written by SGAS members.¹⁵ Second, LaVern Rippley compiled the *SGAS Newsletter Topical Index, 1984-2000* (2013) containing

1,320 referenced articles. Third, the SGAS *Yearbook* has published essays on the discipline's recurring topics. A sample analysis of twenty-eight volumes, indicates that 135 essays were published with many of them expanding on symposium presentations besides 633 book reviews which suggested further research on the recurring topics. Fourth, 7,993 publication citations (including a topical index) in the twenty-eight checklists, edited by Steven and Renate Benjamin (Radford University) until 1988 and then continued by Dolores and Giles Hoyt (Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis), 1989–2010. Fifth, after 2010 an annual list of M.A./M.S. theses and Ph.D. dissertations has appeared.

Other changes have occurred. The title and format of the published journal was changed officially to *Yearbook of German-American Studies* in 1981 with volume 16. From that point on, J. Anthony Burzle (1908-98), Helmut Huelsbergen (1929-2017) and William Keel (University of Kansas) worked closely in publishing the finest essays on German-American topics. One highlight was the inclusion of beautiful full color prints illustrating a major re-interpretation of German-American interaction with the indigenous peoples of North America.¹⁶

One format change occurred in 1999 with volume 34, when the decision was made by the Executive Committee to publish the *Yearbook* with a hard cover instead of glued paper backing. Special issues have appeared occasionally such as volume 25 (1990) when the Swiss Historical Society financially assisted the volume publication and some of the symposium expenses. In 2003, Volume 38 contained essays written by the Executive Committee for the 35th anniversary of the Society. In addition, occasional reports, review essays, special documents, translations and a series on *Belles Lettres* edited by Jerry Glenn have appeared.

IV

The second benchmark of SGAS history has been the vicissitudes of membership. At the bi-yearly meetings of the Executive Committee (EC), two reports concern membership: “SGAS Membership, Spring 1990-2018” and “SGAS Membership, Fall 1984-2018.” The Spring report indicates the membership of the Society at the Annual Symposium averaged 465 members through 2004; after 2005, the average number of members over the next fifteen years had declined to 339 by 2018.¹⁷

The Fall report indicates the membership for the calendar year averaged 497 members through 2000; over the next 18 years, the average dropped 152 members to 345. The EC began discussing proactive measures after the Millennial Symposium in Bremerhaven in 2001. While the annual financial reports showed strong support for the policies and goals of SGAS; from 1991

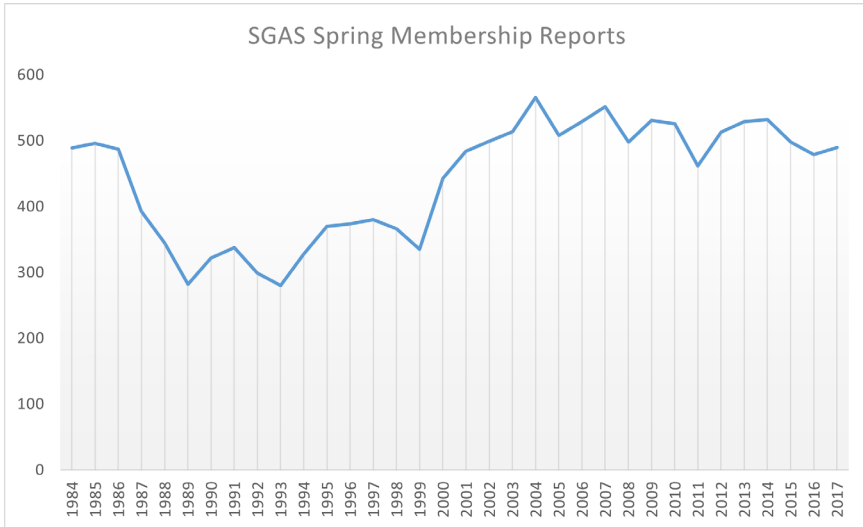


Fig. 1. SGAS Membership Reports, 1984– 2018

to 2000 the goal of \$100,000 in the Publication Fund had been reached, and continued to grow through 2018. The future seemed to be disturbing with the decline of new members, and the aging of the active members. One plausible cause was that after 1983, genealogical articles were no longer published, and members who had stronger interests in family history, moved their support into heritage groups, primarily in the Midwestern region.¹⁸ However the distinction between heritage and history was blurred in many of these groups. Seventeen specialized interest groups, which reflected historical migration from a German province or towards a region within the United States, were formally affiliated with SGAS, at different times.¹⁹

Another possible cause was political in nature. By the end of the 1980s, foreign language departments in colleges and universities began to experience enrollment declines in German language courses from the rapid reduction of graduation requirements from two years of a foreign language to 1 year or less. This accelerated with a decline in federal funding for teaching scholarships and support of German language research for graduate students because of ending of the “Cold War” after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989. The National Defense and Education Act, and later legislation decreased allocations away from support of foreign languages. At the same time private support grew as with the affiliation of foundation of twelve academic institutes or academies with SGAS. The Max Kade Foundation funded the creation of academic centers at five different locations.²⁰ With a more specialized focus, they have created sessions at Symposia and cooperated with the planning of SGAS Symposia sections for presentations. One other group appeared in

the 1970s, the German Studies Association, which has a section on German American Studies.²¹

The EC recognized there were other causes for membership decline, starting with the realization of the aging of members. By 2016, thirty-eight members had chosen the status of Life membership, and almost forty per cent had retired, which may have led to professional inactivity for some, but not all. Of course, this was not unique among voluntary groups and organizations, and the EC decided to also look for policy changes to reflect these new problems. The EC continued to have a coordinator of International Membership which stabilized European membership, developed the Albert Bernhardt Faust Research Fund, Symposium Grants for Graduate Students, and the SGAS Student Membership Fund. Most importantly, the EC provided technical assistance to the staff of the Förderverein Deutsches Auswanderermuseum in Bremen, from 1992 to 2005. Two meetings held in the city-state of Bremen resulted in a long-term plan and financial support from their local Chamber of Commerce, the city-state of Bremen and the German Federal government; SGAS assisted in the planning process and the eventual result was positive international publicity and the award-winning German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven.²²

The positive response to the Millennial Congress in 2000 (Bremerhaven, Germany) led the EC to plan eight other specialized conferences, with a special theme, to help increase membership. Two earlier ones, not specifically to gain new members, provided the basis for enhanced planning of modifications in the implementation of symposia. An early member of SGAS, Hans Trefousse (1921-2010), organized the first post-World War II conference on a German-American theme in 1979, celebrating the sesquicentennial of the birth of Carl Schurz, and edited the published essays.²³ The next major symposium was held in Philadelphia in October 1983 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the first German settlement in the English colony of Pennsylvania. Thirteen Mennonite families from Krefeld, Germany, arrived on the *Concord* and founded Germantown in 1683. SGAS co-sponsored this national symposium, and the fifty essays were published in two volumes.²⁴ SGAS returned to this approach in 1988 with its symposium celebrating the 300th anniversary of the first anti-slavery protest at Germantown, held in Millersville, Pennsylvania. In the fall of 1994, SGAS co-sponsored a specialized conference on Hans Reimer Claussen (Davenport, Iowa), early leader of the migration from the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. In the Fall of 1998, the Sesquicentennial of the 1848 Revolution in Europe was celebrated in a specialized symposium held in Indianapolis, Indiana at the Athaeneum. In 2000, the Millennial Year Congress was held in Bremerhaven, Germany in conjunction with the World's Fair in Hannover, supported by

the Föderverein Deutsches Auswanderermuseum in Bremen. In 2008 the SGAS conference commemorated the 400th anniversary of the first Germans settling near Jamestown, the forerunner of the later colony of Virginia. In 2017 the Society returned to Philadelphia with the theme of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther and the Reformation's influence upon America.

V

Equally important has been the role of individuals in supporting growth in SGAS membership. There of course are many ways to approach the first half century of the Society's history, but certainly some members stand out for their personalities or noticeable leadership as an elected officer or appointed committee head. Of the nearly eighty members who have served in either capacity, the following nine merit further mention, in this writer's opinion: Don Heinrich Tolzmann, La Vern Rippley, Dick Beam, Steve and Renate Benjamin, Giles and Dolores Hoyt, Helmut Huelsbergen, and "Kaiser" Bill Keel. These members organized symposia, served on committees and stood for election.

Don Heinrich Tolzmann was the third elected SGAS president, after the first mail-in election in the history of the organization. He received 39 votes, while Steven Benjamin received 19 (one voter couldn't decide!) of the 59 who voted.²⁵ He replaced La Vern Rippley, and served for the next twenty-three years (1983–2006.) His nearly one hundred "Messages" in the quarterly newsletters are "snap-shots" of members, emerging trends, and ideas. He held several positions in the German Department and the Blegen Library (University of Cincinnati) and wrote more than twenty books and edited nearly 100. For more than two decades he represented the Society on a national and international level, and coordinated planning with other German-American organizations. Politically active, he succeeded in getting German Day nationally recognized by the U. S. Congress in 1986. However, his legacy remains hard to define because of critical charges by some of his colleagues that he failed to carefully adhere to scholarship protocols.²⁶ He resigned from the SGAS presidency in the fall of 2006, and eventually retired from the University of Cincinnati.

La Vern Rippley (1935–2022) served as editor of the newsletter for twenty-eight years (1983–2011), and very quickly introduced a more academic and scholarly sensibility to the proceedings. He succeeded in being the "first reader" of new books in the field and later included videos, cinema and television shows pertinent to the field. He received the Outstanding Achievement Award as well as a Special Achievement Award. His last contribution was to edit in tandem with a senior German major at St. Olaf, an inclusive index for the newsletter articles. He had written a popular

introduction to German heritage, *Of German Ways* (1988), but the book he was most proud of was *Noble Women, Restless Men* (1996), which describes his own family history.

C. Richard Beam (1925-2017) created the model for future 21st-Century German-American research centers when he opened the new Center for Pennsylvania German Studies in Millersville, Pennsylvania in 1988. His linguistic work ethic was amazing in finishing the standard dictionary for Pennsylvania German dialect studies. He was the financial face of SGAS for many years and he ran a tight ship, which everyone knew from the “cut of his jib”: especially the correctness of his bow tie, at all times! He also needed no personal help in 1991 when his last official duty was negotiating with representatives of the Swiss Historical Society, who had co-sponsored the *Yearbook* that year. They insisted on paying for their share in Swiss francs, at their rate of conversion, not the U. S. market rate! His sparkling personality made financial reports interesting, and he remained the *Schatzmeister* until his final term ended in 1991.

SGAS has had only four bibliographers creating the annual bibliography (1979-2011). the first team of Stephen and Renate Benjamin shifted over to publication, instead of handouts at the symposium. In 1983, Benjamin lost the president’s election, and he resigned his membership in the society. They were followed by Giles and Dolores Hoyt (Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis) who expanded the number of committee members gathering citations from various periodicals, applied new computer applications, and assembled an annual checklist. Eventually they ended the committee’s work because of the internet. They also helped co-fund the Hoyt–Reichmann Chair in German-American Studies at I.U.P.U.I which Eberhard (1926-2009) and Ruth Reichmann initiated. Hoyt went on to edit five volumes of the “Immigrant Entrepreneurship; German American Business Biographies, 1720 to the Present,” published by the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC.

Helmut Huelsbergen and William Keel worked together as editors and close friends for over a decade after “Toni” Burzle’s departure in 1985 to insure that the *Yearbook* of the Society for German-American Studies published the finest essays on German-American topics. They successfully gained annual financial support of the Hall Center for the Humanities at the University of Kansas, and practiced transparency in all of their policy decisions. Following Huelsbergen’s retirement after the 1996 volume was published, Keel has continued on as the sole editor of our *Yearbook*.

On at least one occasion, it was “all hands-on deck.” Quietly sequestered in the meeting room of the Holiday Inn of Covington, Kentucky, the

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Executive Committee members at the fall meeting met for arduous hours of discussion, debate and argumentation over the method of binding the Yearbook! One of the deep dark secrets is that the most daunting dialectical argument the Executive Committee ever faced, led to the ultimate decision of following precedent, and like the Lessing Studies editorial board, chose to publish the SGAS *Yearbook* with a hard-cover binding instead of the paper back gluing format! The wisdom of that decision has never been regretted by anyone!

Other members are examples of the interesting members who attend symposia periodically, and add greatly to the diversity of the membership. Lester “Smoky” Seifert (1915-96) supported SGAS over a period of three decades, in several capacities. His personal life shows him to have grown up in rural Wisconsin. He received his life-long *Spitzname* for family reasons. He was considered only a moderate smoker in high school, but after his older brother graduated, his classmates bestowed the nickname on him since his brother had been a chain smoker—and it stuck!²⁷ In 1942 he was drafted into the U.S. Army, and working as a cryptanalyst, he broke the Nazi code for the intelligence section of the Signal Corps. He returned to the German Department at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he had received his Ph.D. and taught from 1946 to 1985. One of the highlights of his career happened in 1987 when he attended the annual conference of the MLA and talked to ten of his former doctoral students! Another was his receiving the SGAS Outstanding Achievement Award in that same year.

A short profile of “Smoky” starts with his pleasant image in almost any place—in the hallway, cafeteria, *Bierstube*, or conference session—the presence of “Smoky” Seifert would be quickly known, long before he came into conversational range. He always projected relaxed interest and as a true extrovert, and was always energized by talking to friends, colleagues, advisees, or sometimes complete strangers. He was also a gentleman “of the old school” who could be courtly at formal occasions, but he was also in his element when he spent many summers driving along the back roads and byways of Bucks County, interviewing and recording Pennsylvania German speakers. For fifty years he collaborated with Carroll E. Reed in using a language questionnaire which led to their linguistic mapping of the region, *Word Atlas of Pennsylvania German* (2001).

A short profile of Guy Stern (b. 1922) captures him in motion anywhere. It is hard to miss the happiest, most alive person, in the room, whether he’s speaking in a classroom, talking to friends at a restaurant, or sitting in a hotel lobby. Guy Stern draws people over to sit down and chat with him: students, hotel staff or strangers. He embodies in perfect form, the word gregarious.

In the spring of 2015, in St. Louis, he had a wonderful time with everyone he met at the annual symposium of SGAS, and ninety-five-year-old Guy was having the time of his life talking about many things.²⁸ He is courtly, with polite, European manners indelibly imprinted in his gestures: when standing to meet someone, there is a perceptible nod of his head, a smile on his face and excitement in his eyes. He appears to be in his seventies, but was actually born in Hildesheim, Germany in 1922. He recently told a reporter and conference goers, with a mischievous wink in his eyes, that he attributes his longevity to daily swimming, a balanced diet, and being married to his third wife who is 52 years young!²⁹ He was given the SGAS Outstanding Achievement Award and presented the keynote address at the 26th Annual Symposium in Amana Iowa in 2002.³⁰ In 2015 at age 93 he presented an essay which connected his German-American research with the very sad events in Ferguson, Missouri, the previous year, at the 39th Symposium.³¹ He argued that in the early 1950s, exiled European scholars had supported integration in breaking barriers of discrimination in colleges such as such as the University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa, Alabama) and Black Mountain College (Ashville, North Carolina). He offered peaceful conflict resolution in the past as something that exiled Americans used before in the Civil Rights struggle, this was a logical outcome from his involvement with the Society for Exile Studies and its association with the SGAS. It has been part of his life since he arrived in 1937 by train in Missouri. He had left his parents and younger siblings behind in the Third Reich, and moved in with an aunt and uncle in St. Louis. He worked hard as a teen-ager, starting out as a bus boy at the fabulous Park-Chase Hotel, and worked his way up to becoming a waiter at the Bismarck Café in downtown St. Louis. After graduating from high school, he continued working for Arthur Bernard Schneithorst at his downtown restaurant, while serving as a waiter in the Busch family's Bevo Mill. Stern took the trolley and he recalled a Sunday afternoon, when he arrived for work, Mr. Schneithorst pulled a sad face, stopped him and said "Go home. We are closed today." It was December 7, 1941.

His experiences in fighting for the American forces in World War II further changed his life as an exile. He was drafted and sent to the U. S. Army's famous Military Intelligence Center at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. This is where the "Ritchie Boys," an elite U. S. Intelligence unit was created, made up of mostly German Jewish émigrés.³² The war changed his life in two immediate ways. First, in 1946 he learned that his parents, brother and sister and other relatives had been murdered by the Nazis in Poland. He became committed to specialization in the area of Holocaust Studies, and currently serves as Director of the Zekelman International Institute of the Righteous

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at the Holocaust Memorial Center near Detroit, Michigan. Second, he made use of the G. I. Bill and studied Romance Languages at Columbia University. But he prudently continued his night job as a waiter to insure a steady source of money. Eventually he received his Ph.D. from New York University, and began his teaching career, in 1956 at Denison College (Granville, Ohio), and then later Stern was hired as head of the German Department at the University of Cincinnati where there may have been cross-fertilization in McMicken Hall where other colleagues in German language and literature were starting to develop SGAS. Within a few, successful years, Prof. Stern began his 23 year-long association with Wayne State University, where he formally developed the third specialization, the Society for Exile Studies, and his later writing of *Literature in Exile* (1989). Stern may be one of the last living members of the exile generation, but he remains active in his tenth decade, continuing to serve as Vice Chair for the Kurt Weill Foundation.

VI.

So the question remains, what does the future hold for SGAS? Will the membership rolls reach the 500 mark? Will more than 150 new members join and remain in SGAS by the decade of 2030s? The most important fact is that SGAS is not going anywhere soon. There is a very solid infrastructure based upon the financials. The EC has had financial stability through membership loss. In 1991, the Publication Fund totaled \$20,000. After a multi-year membership³³ drive, generous contributions and judicious investments, it reached and exceeded the goal of \$100,000 in the year 2000, at the Millennial Congress in Bremerhaven. It has continued to grow during the next two decades; it provides long-term financial security, freedom from external meddling and support for the intentional goal of publishing original research in German-American topics. This has been prudently carried out by supporting the privately endowed Albert Bernhardt Faust Research Fund and creating the Karl J. R. Arndt Publications Fund. This is one leg of the proverbial three leg chair of security.

The second requirement leads us to understanding the impact of technology on the first fifty years of SGAS. The list is impressive: mimeographs were replaced by xerox copies; data processing disappeared as computers took over the movement of knowledge and data; the production of monographs, journals and books slowly transformed itself into a process far removed from pencils and pens writing drafts of various letters, lecture notes and hand-outs. Much has changed in the activities of running an academic organization by volunteers; the unexpected pandemic of 2020-? led to unexpected outcomes in protecting one's health by having ZOOM procedures for meetings of the

EC, the SGAS Symposium and foreign contacts and friendships in Germany. Almost fifty years ago, one concept was that “high tech means there will be high touch” needs. Having had a meeting of real members in person in Iowa City in 2022 may give us hope of future tech tinkering for the good.

But the third required support for this triad lies in the leadership of elected officers and committee chairs who are nimble in their reactions and fluid in their thinking as the prospects for the future include tremendously ongoing changes in higher education, reemergence of American anti-intellectualism in many unexpected places, and the possibility of unbelievable changes from the impact of climactic change.

A careful review of the first half century of SGAS leads this writer to consider twelve “tipping point” moments which certainly reflect “their” set of assumptions and suppositions. One can glimpse the possibilities from the perspective of someone who served on the Executive Committee for twenty-four years. A careful review of the past, leads one to consider twelve “tipping point” moments in the first fifty years of SGAS which provide some sense of how careful decision-making by consensus but balanced by individual leadership has had a lasting impact on the present and may influence the future. Not necessarily a binary set of decisions because there were many possibilities, but this writer has personally observed how twelve “paths were taken,” decisions taken which have moved SGAS along different trajectories.

SGAS BENCHMARKS OF THE FIRST HALF CENTURY

- 1968: Robert E. Ward started an informal interest group, was elected president, started an occasional newsletter and helped to establish a new identity for German-American research.
- 1968: SGAS was legally organized as a non-profit organization in the State of Ohio with a constitution, established goals and objectives, and dues paying members.
- 1973: The first three conferences were held in the Midwest using a symposium format, and successfully advanced research findings on Pennsylvania German Studies, issues in the South, and German-Canadian topics.

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- 1981: The publication fund was started with a stated goal of reaching \$100,000 to insure that there would always be funds available if there was ever political suppression of the society similar to the World War I period.
- 1982: At the annual Symposium in Hays, Kansas in April, the first volume of the new *Yearbook* was distributed; it was published with the support of the University of Kansas and the Max Kade Foundation.
- 1983: Don Heinrich Tolzmann became the 3rd elected president of SGAS after a mail ballot, replacing La Vern Rippley and was the longest serving president, 1983–2006.
- 1991: At the Georgetown Symposium in Washington, DC, it was announced that the Publication Fund had received more than \$20,000 with the contribution of a major gift.
- 1992-97: The SGAS Executive Committee provided technical assistance to a consortium of Bremen organizations in the planning of a world class immigration museum in Bremerhaven.
- 2000: The SGAS Symposium in Bremerhaven was an integral part of the Millennial Congress and the World's Fair held in Hannover. The Publication Fund surpassed its goal of \$100,000.
- 2006-11: William Keel served six months as interim president until a new constitution modeled after AATG format was adopted limiting officers to 2-year terms; Keel was elected as the fourth president of SGAS in 2007.
- 2007-18: During these twelve years, SGAS met in four new locations for its annual symposium: Jamestown, Virginia; Newark, Delaware; New Orleans, Louisiana; San Antonio, Texas.

The starting point of 1968 marks the decision to become legally established, publish research aids, elect a president, make plans and accept dues. Five years later, the organization held its first conferences with members presenting papers which were expanded into published essays. Thirteen years later, the Publication Fund was started to insure independence. Fourteen years later, the first *Yearbook* was published and distributed to the members. Fifteen years later, the members elected Don Heinrich Tolzmann the third president, serving the longest, for twenty-three years. Twenty-three years after its founding, more than \$20,000 was invested for growth in the Publication Fund. Twenty-four years later, SGAS started providing technical assistance to a consortium in Bremerhaven, Germany for planning an internationally recognized immigration museum. Thirty-two years after its inception, the nearly 500 members of the society supported the annual symposium which was held as part of the Millennial Congress in Bremerhaven, by nearly half of the membership traveling to Germany. In the same year of 2000, the goal set for the Publication Fund, \$100,000 was reached. Six years later, Don Heinrich Tolzmann resigned. Memberships declined, as William Keel served as interim and elected president of SGAS. For the next eight years, the annual symposium was held in four new cities, to publicize the society and gain new members.

To summarize the situation by 2018: declining member renewals created a lowered level of support, which appeared as a noticeable “graying” of the membership; some retired members chose the Life Membership option (but many Life members remain active in SGAS!); in 2016 the Membership Chair, Karyl Rommelfanger reported that the average age of the membership was over the age of sixty-five. But there is another viewpoint in considering the ages of the membership. Over this fifty-year period of existence, at least three differing “generations” of members have belonged.”³⁴ From the late 1960s through the late 1980s, the strong academic interest in this new interdisciplinary approach came from the Greatest Generation (born from 1925-1945) which was influenced by their experience in W. W. II provided leadership for the fledgling SGAS when they were in their forties. Then from the 1990s-2010, the Baby Boomer generation (1946-1966) began to take over leadership positions, when they were in their fifties, and expanded the size and scope of SGAS with the cohort’s increased numbers. Since 2011 the Generation Xers (1966-1986) have become more active in the group and the transition will change the generational dynamic for more involvement by Generation Y (1987-2007) until the early 2030s when a younger cohort may begin to become more active in SGAS.

*Scott Community College
Bettendorf, Iowa*

Notes

¹ Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *SGAS Newsletter* 2, no. 2 (1980–1981): 1-3. In 1968 there was consensus in using the term German-American. It remains the legal name for the organization. There are some members who are opposed to using the hyphen pertaining to German emigrants or descendants; the present author wants to avoid any anachronistic revising of terminology, and retains the hyphen in this essay.

² Frank Trommler, "The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, Nazi Germany and German Americans," *YGAS* 54 (2019): 159.

³ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴ *Ibid.* "The Society for German-American Studies: The First Twenty Years," *YGAS* 23 (1988): 166.

⁵ Many thanks to Marc Pierce who reviewed an earlier draft and made some important suggestions which have been incorporated into this essay.

⁶ Marc Pierce, "Contextualizing the 1968 Symposium on the German Language in America" (April 2019).

⁷ *Germanica Americana* 1976, 35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 36-39.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 75-100.

¹⁰ Stephen M. Benjamin, "Papers from the Second Conference on German-Americana in the Eastern United States" (1984); copy furnished by LaVern J. Rippley.

¹¹ Archives, Blegen Library, University of Cincinnati.

¹² 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1976): pp. 3-35. Prof. Keel pointed the author to this source of information.

¹³ *Monatshefte*, 86, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 393-94.

¹⁴ Scott Community College, Learning Center, Archives.

¹⁵ Jacob Erhardt, Don Heinrich Tolzmann, Tim Holian, Franziska Ott Allen, Dolores Hoyt, Randall H. Donaldson, Barbel Such, and William Roba.

¹⁶ Christopher J. Wickham, "Oil and Water: The Development of the Portrayal of Native American Painters by 19th Century German Painters," *YGAS* 31(1996): 63-106.

¹⁷ The following chart shows the last decade of society membership. Spreadsheet based upon membership figures for the Spring semester, from Executive Committee reports, Cincinnati archives. In 2015, six of the top ten states in membership, were Midwestern; 43% of the total membership lived in the Midwest.

¹⁸ For example, the Germans from Russia organization, was created in 1970, and celebrated their 48th year of existence in 2018.

¹⁹ These groups included the American Schleswig-Holstein Heritage Society, Bukovina Society, Center for Pennsylvania Germans, Deutschheim Association, German-American Heritage Society of the Greater Washington, D.C. Area, German Genealogical Society of America, German-Texan Heritage Society, German from Russia Heritage Society, Glückstal Colonies Research, Indiana German Heritage Society, Kentuckiana German Heritage Society, Ohio German Heritage Society, Ostfriesen Heritage Society, Palatines to America, Pennsylvania German Society, Pommerscher Verein/Central Wisconsin, and the Society for German History in Maryland.

²⁰ These institutes or academies included Kade centers at IUPUI (Indianapolis), the University of Wisconsin (Madison), University of Kansas (Lawrence), the University of Cincinnati, and Pennsylvania State University (State College). Other groups were the Alfred Gong Gesellschaften, Institute for the Friends of the German Emigrant Museum (Bremerhaven), Society for German History in Maryland, Institute for German-American Research in Iowa, the Society of Contemporary American Literature in German, and the Society for Exile Studies.

²¹ This association of scholars considers GSA the premier research group in the study of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It was founded in 1976 and remains formally structured and three times as large as SGAS as measured by their fall conference. They have always had a paid director, and interdisciplinary networks of members specializing in 18 thematic areas. The network decides upon sessions which produce 150 presentations or three times as many as SGAS Symposia.

²² In 2018, 96% of the 210,000 visitors rated their experience as Excellent or Very Good (Trip Advisor).

²³ *Immigration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), edited by Hans L. Trefousse.

²⁴ *America and the Germans*, 2 volumes, edited by Frank Trommler and Joseph Mc Veigh; (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985).

²⁵ Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *SGAS Newsletter* 2, no. 2 (1980-1981): 2.

²⁶ See “Whatever Happened to the Plagiarism Charges Levelled Against Don Heinrich Tolzmann?” *New History Network* (23 August 2006). A University of Cincinnati panel found Tolzmann guilty of plagiarism and recommended his dismissal. In addition, Tolzmann notes: “Unfortunately, the committee ruled negatively in spite of my protestations to the contrary and the support of numerous colleagues in the field of German-American Studies Later on, the University honored me by establishing the Don Heinrich Tolzmann German-Americana Collection in the Archives and Rare Books Library. For information about the collection, see: <http://libapps.libraries.uc.edu/exhibits/tolzmann-ga/>

²⁷ For further details about Prof. Seifert’s life and career, see *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 18: pp. 3-9. See also *YGAS* 51 (2016): 3-5.

²⁸ https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/a-st-louis-patriot-comes-home/article_2201811e-8454-510d-ddGa80led350html.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Guy Stern, “Carl Schurz in Michigan,” *YGAS* 37 (2002): 1-11.

³¹ The rioting and police tanks which broke out after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by the police in the northern St. Louis suburb in 2014.

³² See Bruce Henderson, *The Ritchie Boys: The Untold Stories of Jews Who Escaped the Nazis and Returned to fight Hitler* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017). Later, Guy Stern was interviewed along with three other Ritchie Boys on the CBS show “Sixty Minutes,” aired on 8 May 2022. Many details from his war-time experience have appeared in three monographs: *Oh What a Funny? War* (2005): p. 5; *Marlene Dietrich: My Chance Encounters with a Movie Star* (2002). His undergraduate teaching was recalled in the 3rd monograph with Jerry Glenn and Maja Gracanin, *Fifty Years Before the Class* (2003), p. 3, offprints from Wayne State University. His autobiography *Invisible Ink: A Memoir* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2020) is a beautifully written book which looks backward to “then” in his life.

³³ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Points* (2000).

³⁴ I am using a modified Strauss-Howe generational theory which describes abstract groups which share characteristics and values defining twenty-year cycles.

Then and Now

Appendix

ACADEMY FOR GERMAN-AMERICAN STUDIES SERVICE

The following individual scholars are recognized for dedicating their scholarly interests to the field of German-American Studies and providing their time and effort as officers in SGAS, 1978– 2018.

Adams, Willi Paul	1996 Award for Outstanding Achievement (= Award)
Allen, Frances Ott	Secretary: 1994-2004
Anderson, Keith O.	1st Vice-President: 1979-81
Beam, C. Richard	Treasurer: 1982–91; 2006 Award
Binder-Johnson, Hildegard	1992 Award
Burzle, J. Anthony	1985 Award = Yearbook Dedication
City of New Ulm	2014 Special Award
Conzen, Kathleen	2015 Award
Cazden, Robert E.	1998 Award
Coley, Robert E.	Secretary: 1984–87
Daniel, Cary S.	Secretary: 1991–94
Doerries, Reinhard	2014 Award
Dolmetsch, Christoph	Treasurer: 1979–81
Eichhoff, Jürgen	2nd Vice-President: 1995-98
Fuhrig, Anne-Marie	1st Vice-President: 1995-97
Glenn, Jerry	1st Vice-President: 1987-91; 2004 Award; 2018: 50th Anniversary Award
Grassl, Gary	1999 Award
Helbich, Wolfgang	2017 Award
Hoffman, Ilse	2001 Special Award
Holtmann, Antonius	2006 Award
Hostetler, John A.	1990 Award
Hoyt, Dolores and Giles	2013 Award
Huelsbergen, Helmut	1997 Award
Huffines, Lois	Secretary: 1989–91; 1st Vice President: 1991–95
Kahn, Lisa	2001 Award
Kamphoefner, Walter	Vice President: 2013–15; President: 2015-17
Keel, William	President: 2006-11, 2016 Award
Kluge, Cora Lee	2nd Vice-President: 1991-95; Vice-President: 2017–19; President: 2019-21
Kopp, Achim	Treasurer, 2017-21

Luebke, Frederick C.	2010 Award
Merrill, Peter	2nd Vice-President: 1981-85
Miller, Bradford	1999 Award
Moltmann, Günther	1991 Award
Reichmann, Eberhard	2nd Vice-President: 1987-91; 1995 Award
Reichmann, Ruth	1995 Award
Rippley, La Vern J.	President: 1979–81; 1981 Award; 2011 Special Award
Ritter, Alexander	2011 Award
Roba, William	Treasurer: 1991-2011; Vice-President: 2011-13; President: 2013-15
Rowan, Steven	Vice-President: 2015-17; President: 2017-19; 2003 Award
Schach, Paul	1989 Award
Schelbert, Leo	2005 Award
Schmeisner, Volker	1st Vice-President: 1998-2000
Schmeller, Helmut J.	1st Vice-President: 1981-87; 2012 Award
Schmitt, Albert	2nd Vice-President: 1979-81
Schroeder, Adolf E.	??1981-1985
Schroeder, Dirk	2000 Special Award
Schwantes, Benjamin	Treasurer, 2014-17
Schweitzer, Christoph E.	2006 Award
Seeger, William and Mary	2005 Special Award
Seifert, Lester W. J.	1987 Award
Sinnema, John R.	Treasurer 1978-??
Stern, Guy	2002 Award
Tolzmann, Don Heinrich	Secretary, 1979-81; President: 1981-2006; 2007 Award
Trommler, Frank	2009 Award
Wagner, Maria	2nd Vice-President: 1985-87
Ward, Robert E.	President: 1978-79; 1980 and 1993 Awards
Weiss, Gerhard	2008 Award
White, Diane	Secretary: 1981-84
Yoder, Don	1988 Award