The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation: 
The First Twenty-Five Years

Arthur R. Hogue*

The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation celebrates in 1955 the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding. A quarter-century of sustained effort to promote American-German relations and cultural exchange provides sufficient evidence for an appraisal of its work, even though the foundation operates in the area of intangibles.

Ultimately such a foundation must depend upon the deep, possibly obscure, emotions and attitudes of those who support it. In the United States citizens of German birth or descent have often felt a need for an understanding of their inherited culture. This may seem strange at first glance, because approximately six million Germans came to the United States between 1820 and 1945. Exceeding the immigration from any other European country, by weight of numbers alone the German stock might be expected to make its way easily in America. But this has not always been true.

Certainly no serious student of American history can long overlook the impress on life in the United States made by citizens of German origin. Their contributions to music and to the arts stand out as clearly as their energy and good sense in business. German skill in agriculture is proverbial. Germans also leave their mark in public life, as the career of Carl Schurz abundantly illustrates. It is their own tragedy, however, that three times, at least, since the middle of the nineteenth century the German citizens have been thrown in upon themselves and have been put on the defensive about their origins: first, by a nativist movement of the 1850's expressed in the Know Nothing party; again, seriously, during World War I; and finally, in a different way, during World War II. Today, paradoxically, only a few years after a war with Germany, the United States enjoys the most cordial relations with West Germany and the door is open wide to a friendly understanding of Germans wherever they live. The present situation is precisely what the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation seeks to encourage through a cultural, non-political approach to the problems of American-German

*Arthur R. Hogue is associate professor of history at Indiana University.
understanding. Even a brief glance at the specific projects of the foundation during the past twenty-five years reveals its guiding policies in action.

On June 12, 1930, in New York, seven men filed the certificate of incorporation of the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation with the intent of developing American-German friendship and promoting cultural exchange between the two nations. The organization grew out of enthusiasm and funds supplied by more than one hundred men whose thoughts were turned toward a memorial by the centenary celebration of the birth of Carl Schurz, 1829-1906.

Leadership and large gifts came from such men as Ferdinand Thun, industrialist, and his associates, Gustav Oberlaender and Henry Janssen; George McAneny, attorney and political figure; Stephen Duggan, of the Institute of International Education; and Paul M. Warburg, banker. A continuing element in the character of the foundation emerges from an unofficial connection with the Society of Friends. Wilbur K. Thomas brought to the direction of the foundation his experience in war relief with the American Friends Service Committee. His successor as the foundation's executive director, the late Howard W. Elkinton, also represented the Quaker approach to problems of international understanding. The Quaker influence has meant that the foundation would act in a direct, personal way.

The organization weathered the catastrophes of a great depression and a world war. This speaks well for its strength and the character of its direction. If it had not been strong the depression would have wiped it out; if it had indulged in chauvinism or irresponsible action the war with Germany would have closed its doors. Although the depression, the rise of the Nazis, and the world war all impaired it functions, the foundation went steadily forward.

From the outset the foundation administered several distinct funds. Notable among these were the Oberlaender Trust of approximately a million dollars, the Henry Janssen Foundation, and the Thun Foundation. These resources have been strengthened, of course, by additional gifts and subscriptions.

As a beginning the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation subsidized the trans-Atlantic exchange of students and established scholars. Books as well as people crossed the
Atlantic with foundation grants: for example, in 1936 sixty American libraries received German books purchased out of foundation funds and ten German libraries were supplied with American scientific journals and literary works.

The American-German Review, published bimonthly since 1938, first appeared in September, 1934, as a quarterly presenting the work of the foundation to the public. Richly illustrated, particularly in the field of art, it has always carried something in the German language as well as articles in English. An important feature of this journal is the annual publication of bibliography of Americana Germanica which began in 1941 under the guidance of A. E. Zucker, as research director. At its home in the Old Customs House near Independence Hall in Philadelphia the foundation maintains a catalogue of more than 75,000 items for the assistance of scholars working in American-German studies. The annual bibliography in the Review serves to keep this catalogue up-to-date.

By exhibits at the Old Customs House or on tour, the foundation has endeavored to present German art to the American public; perhaps the most comprehensive survey of German painting ever shown in this country was brought to the United States in 1936 illustrating the range of German art from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Transplanted German culture has also received attention. During World War II, when relations with Germany had broken down, the foundation supported such projects as the Landis Valley Museum near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where Pennsylvania-Dutch art and furniture have been collected and exhibited.

Since the study of the German language had come under a frowning hostility in American schools and colleges after 1917, the foundation sought to change this attitude. Encouraging the study of German literature and the Muttersprache has been a steady aim to the foundation, which has often made available to American libraries such works as the collected writings of Goethe.

Not all of the foundation's projects have been so academic. Its grants have helped doctors, social workers, city-planners, chemists, foresters, and many other people whose specialties could be advanced by a period of residence and travel in Germany. Gustav Oberlaender particularly favored
grants which would lead Americans to become better acquainted with work being done by Germans of similar interests. Occasionally, therefore, German specialists have been brought to the United States: for example, Franz Heske, an authority on forestry. His book, *German Forestry*, and the volume of Karl Dannecker, *Forest Manager*, were both translated into English and published with subsidies from the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation.¹

As much as a fourth of the foundation's expenditures assisted refugees from the Nazi régime. Many of these people came to the United States, where the foundations helped them to become established. Money and encouragement have also gone into Germany since the end of the war, when conditions entirely new confronted American-German relations. If heretofore the foundation had been primarily interested in cultural exchange, it now began to meet some of the needs of a stunned and apathetic people. The American medical missions to Germany and the Free University of Berlin are only two of many postwar projects partially subsidized. Assistance with the restoration of the Goethe Haus rebuilt a national shrine in Frankfurt. A visiting artist program brought American musicians to a music-loving people. An exhibit of American art showed the Germans what American painters were doing. As Ambassador James B. Conant has pointed out, the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation could select objectives and move with speed, unencumbered by the restrictions which often surround governmental action. The implications of assistance rendered by private organization are worth noting; acting on its own initiative, an American organization treated the Germans, recently enemies of the United States, as a civilized people with their own cultural institutions and monuments, and as a people fully capable of reciprocity in a cultural exchange. Ten years of practice have made the wisdom of this policy quite apparent, for the Germans have responded warmly to American interest.

While reviewing the first quarter-century of the operations of the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, it is difficult to point out large, serious mistakes in policies or action.

One is reduced to petty criticisms. It is a very minor defect that material in the American-German Review is sometimes uneven in quality; the Review serves in a lively way the aims of its publishers without indulging in political bias, hysterical excitement, or pedantry. By scrupulously avoiding the discussion of political issues, foundation publications might be charged with indifference toward them; however, the very substantial assistance of half a million dollars given to refugees from the Nazi government does not look like indifference on the part of the foundation. And certainly the foundation cannot be charged with a lack of policy in the area of international relations. To say that its work is simple and direct and personal, that it touches individual Germans and Americans, that it promotes cultural exchange—this does not rob it of significance. After the expenditure of far less money than the cost of one large bomber the foundation can point to an imposing list of activities which have done nothing to harm, and most certainly have helped to create good relations with Germans in Europe and a friendly awareness of German achievement within the United States.