

GERMAN-AMERICAN HISTORY

AMERICA'S GERMAN HERITAGE #2

In 1690, the very first American congress was called by Jacob Leisler the lieutenant governor of New York, who was hanged for his protest against British tyranny. His first American congress was followed by a number of others which culminated in the Declaration of Independence in 1776. In 1735 John Peter Zenger established the first independent American newspaper, and by his courageous stand against the British oppression established freedom of the press in America. He also printed the first arithmetic book in the colonies. The first Bible printed in America was published in the German language. Bibles were printed years later in English. One of the earliest announcements of the Declaration of Independence was published in the German language Philadelphia Staatsbote of Henry Miller on July 5, 1776.

German-Americans helped win the American Revolution and fought with outstanding distinction. On May 22, 1776 Congress ordered the creation of a German-American regiment consisting of four companies from Pennsylvania and Maryland, where many German-Americans lived. They fought at Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine and spent the terrible winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge with General Washington. The personal body-guards of Washington were German-Americans under the command of Major von Heer, an officer of Frederick the Great of Prussia. Other great German-American generals and officers in the American Revolution were: Peter Muehlenberg, Baron DeKalb, Nicholas Herkimer, Gerhard von der Wieden, Heinrich Lutterloh, Johann Schott and many others. The Continental Army was organized by General Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben. In 1778 he wrote the first army regulations manual for the United States. The role of the German-Americans was so vital in the Revolution that Washington's last letter before his resignation as commander in chief was addressed to Baron von Steuben in appreciation of his service to America.

German-Americans came to America for different reasons: religious, political, or economic. All of these twelve million German immigrants and their sixty million descendants became devoted citizens of the U.S. They helped build this nation into the mightiest land of the world and made noble contributions in every field of human endeavor. Hundreds of thousands of them died on the battlefield for American Independence, to preserve the Union and to protect American democratic institutions. Their devotion and loyalty to America, their common sense and sturdiness, their thrift, talent, business insight and their love of life have influenced American life.

It is but a mere understatement to characterize German-American contributions to the building of the American nation as significant, praiseworthy and unforgettable. These achievements and accomplishments were decisive and determinative in shaping the course of American history. But if we look over the works treating with the origin, history and achievements of the American nation, to ascertain what part the descendent's of the millions of German immigrants took in the development of the country, we rarely find more than a brief mention.

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