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Literary Journal

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FROM THE PERIODICAL ARCHIVES:

THE ENTERTAINING COMPANION:
PHILADELPHISCHES MAGAZIN, THE FIRST
GERMAN-AMERICAN LITERARY JOURNAL

Rebekah Starnes

The first German-American periodicals to be published in what would be the United States were practical in nature. They were written to inform the populace, to improve citizenship, and to provide religious and/or spiritual edification, as in the most famous examples: Benjamin Franklin's *Philadelphische Zeitung* (1732) and Christopher Saur's *Der Hoch-Deutsch Pennsylvanische Geschicht-Schreiber* (1739) and *Geistliches Magazien* (1764). According to traditional scholarship, it was not until 1824, with the publication of *Reader Magazine für Freunde der Deutschen Literatur in Amerika*, that a German-American periodical was published for entertainment purposes.¹ As Peter Fenves points out, however, there was an earlier contender—the *Philadelphisches Magazin, oder, Unterhaltender Gesellschafter, für die Deutschen in America* (the *Philadelphia Magazine, or, Entertaining Companion for the Germans in America*), published in 1798 by brothers Heinrich and Joseph Kämmerer.² Until recently, German-American literary scholars and bibliographers have only mentioned this journal in passing, possibly because only one issue was ever published (the brothers died of yellow fever after this first issue). Fenves is the only scholar to have done a substantial analysis of the magazine. His essay "What is *Aufklärung* (in Pennsylvania)," in the compilation *American Babel*, a collection of essays contributing to the new multilingual American studies is enormously important for American and German-American literary scholarship, for in recognizing this journal's place as the first German-American literary journal, he not only corrects a bibliographic mistake, but also a misconception that has plagued German-American literary scholarship regarding this time period. The early national period has long

been considered a low point for German-American language and letters in America. Robert Cazden, for example, describes these decades of German culture in America as a sort of limbo with few new immigrants to revive the flagging German-American culture. Those who did immigrate were mostly lower-class farmers, artisans, and the jobless. According to the common historical narrative, it was not until political immigration began in 1820s that this started to change.³ Perhaps the *Philadelphische Magazin* has been overlooked not only because it published one issue, but also because scholars have neglected literary production previous to the 1820s. In translating and reprinting excerpts from the *Philadelphische Magazin* here, we hope not only to continue Fenves's work in *American Babel*, but also to bring more scholarly attention to a neglected era of German-American literary and periodical history.

* * *

When the brothers Heinrich and Joseph Kämmerer published the *Philadelphisches Magazin* in 1798, they were already publishing another periodical, the *Philadelphischen Correspondenz*, and were consequently aware of the fact that they were entering uncharted territory. This magazine, they admitted, was "the first writing of this kind, which, as far as we know, has ever been published in the German language in America" (xx). Their first (and unfortunately, only) issue is thus best viewed as an experiment, as a model or proposal of what was to come rather than a finished product. The preface articulates in no uncertain terms what the editors had in mind: "news and descriptions of the most important patriots and remarkable people in Europe and America" as well as "strange events, entertaining descriptions, escapes from danger, heroic adventures, memorable performances, deliverances from death, strange histories, reports on the customs and manners of different nations, unusual examples of strength, bravery, long life, anecdotes, histories, etc." from "new and select" sources (xx). The issue necessarily includes a large number of "select" (or previously published) articles, presumably as examples for future contributors to emulate. The models given for "reports on the customs and manners of different nations," for instance—"A Short Description of the Turkish Manner of Bathing" and "The Victim: An Indian Story"—were translated and reprinted from James Capper's *Observations on the Passage to India through Egypt, and Across the Great Desert* (1783) and from the *American Preceptor* (1794), respectively.⁴ "The Murderous Midwife" is a "strange history" translated from an English language pamphlet published in London in 1673. This story (and presumably others) was not simply translated, but modified to enhance its entertainment value—much of the didactic material in the original is cut, re-

placed by almost a page of new material detailing the way in which the “murderous” midwife was executed for committing sixty-two abortions. It is clear that the editors intended to publish a substantial amount of new material as well, inviting “readers of taste and talent to honor [them] with [their] communication. All prosaic and poetical compositions,” they state, “befitting [the editors’] plan, (sent in postage free) would be gratefully accepted, and included [in the magazine] as soon as possible” (xx). By their “plan,” they presumably refer not only to the previously mentioned description of what they would like to publish, but also to the magazine as a whole, which is itself a model for issues to come. The reprintings are also part of this plan—they serve as concrete examples for future contributors to emulate. This illustrates the magazine’s dual significance: it is not simply that, as a vehicle for entertainment, it was before its time, but that as a literary journal it aimed to create a literary community—a space for *writers* (as well as readers) of German-American literature.

How the editors imagine this community also deserves further exploration. For the most part, the editors imagine the German-American community as a group of people who share a common language and a common goal of “culture” or entertainment. Perhaps the most surprising thing is the absence of national identification (as either Germans or Americans). In fact, one of the only non-narrative pieces that mentions America (other than a biography of George Washington) is the “Political Journal,” and it is centered on the economics of the nation rather than its politics, with a list of exports and a conclusion that “Perhaps no nation in the world has made such extraordinary progress in trade as the United States in the last twenty years.”⁵ Germany, moreover, is used mostly as a background for narrative pieces, and the one non-narrative piece featuring Germany, instead of focusing on its national characteristics or politics, explores “The progress” (or perhaps more accurately, the *productivity*) “of German literature.” The article essentially lists the impressive number of books produced in Germany by category.

This is not to say that there are no identity politics at all in the magazine—there is a politics of language. Germany’s literary productivity, for example, is attributed to the richness of the German language (as opposed to national or political characteristics of the land or people). Fenves notes that in describing the productivity of the German language in the same terms as they describe the economic and material productivity of the United States, the editors implicitly argue for the appropriateness of using the German language for a literary journal published in America. The magazine editors, in other words, position themselves as uniting German literary production and American economic and material production. The German language is beautiful and productive; the American nation is hard-working and productive; their project envisions a merger of the two as merely common sense.

Even their choice of type reflects their goal to merge American economic and German linguistic productivity. German and German-American printers had two kinds of lettering from which to choose: roman and blackletter. As explained by editors Peter Bain and Paul Shaw in *Blackletter: Type and National Identity*, contrasts between roman and blackletter type “stem from the ancient antagonism between Germany and Italy and the long-standing rivalry between Germany and France. Roman type was born in Renaissance Italy and rapidly embraced by 16th-century French printers... In response Germany clung ever more tightly to Gothic blackletter, especially to schwabacher and fraktur, its homegrown variations.”⁶ Although fraktur blackletter cannot be called an exclusively German typeface since it was also used outside of Germany, German printers tended to use it when printing for German audiences.⁷ When Heinrich and Joseph Kämmerer decided to print their new magazine with fraktur print, it was more than a minor decision. If type is, as Peter Bain and Paul Shaw contend, “visible language,” and fraktur “the visual embodiment of German national identity,” then the choice of type used for the *Philadelphische Magazin* is a visual representation of the editors’ linguistic politics, a visual embodiment of their German national identity.⁸ The editors firmly believe in the creative potential of the German language and even implicitly suggest that the future of American literature is German. We know, of course, that their vision of the future was never realized, but what this periodical (along with the other periodicals mentioned in this special issue) demonstrates is that the eventual (perceived) monolingualism of America and American literature and periodicals was far from inevitable. In many communities during many different points in American history, periodical publication in a language other than English was nothing more than common sense.

We here reprint the introductory (preface and table of contents) and concluding matter (“To the German Public”) in order to show what the editors had in mind: the model or blueprint for what they knew to be the first of its kind. Nonetheless, the preface shows the editors’ sincere belief that there was an audience for such entertainment, which we hope will inspire scholars of German-American literature and periodical studies not only to analyze and further research the publication history of the individual pieces listed in the table of contents in order to better understand the role that translating and reprinting had in German-American periodical history, but also to locate where, if not in literary journals, late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century German-American readers found affordable entertaining literature.⁹ The concluding matter (“To the German Public”) will be of especial interest to scholars of material print culture for its information on and rationale regarding pricing.

NOTES

Special thanks to Anouschka Bergmann for her help with this translation.

¹ See, for example, Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *German-Americana* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1975). Tolzmann calls the *Readinger Magazin* the first German-American "literary journal."

² Peter Fenves, "What is *Aufklärung* (in Pennsylvania)," in *American Babel*, ed. Marc Shell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 465–88.

³ Robert E. Cazden, *A Social History of the German Book Trade in America to the Civil War* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1984).

⁴ Fenves notes the original publication information for the piece on Turkish bathing in an endnote. He also mentions "The Victim: An Indian Story" but translates the title as "Sacrifice: An Indian Event" and doesn't attribute it to the *American Preceptor*, a book compiled by Caleb Bingham (better known for the *Columbian Orator* which was cited by Frederick Douglass in his autobiography).

⁵ This is Fenves's translation (477–8). All others are mine.

⁶ Peter Bain and Paul Shaw, Introduction to *Blackletter: Type and National Identity* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 10–15.

⁷ Gerald Newton, "Deutsche Schrift: The Demise and Rise of German Black Letter," *German Life and Letters* 50:2 (2003): 183–211.

⁸ Bain and Shaw, 13–14.

⁹ Perhaps the recent growth of interest in almanacs as periodicals will help shed some light on this issue.

Philadelphisches
M a g a z i n,
 oder
Unterhaltender Gesellschafter,
 für die Deutschen in America.

Einschliessend unter den größten Verschiedenheiten achtbarer Dinge, Nachrichten und Abschilderungen der meisten ansehnlichsten Patrioten und merkwürdigsten Personen in Europa und America.

W i e a u c h

Glaubwürdige Nachrichten von den meisten wunderbarsten Hervorbringungen, Veränderungen und Begebenheiten, die sich jemals in der Natur und Kunst zugetragen haben, von den frühesten Zeiten bis zu den gegenwärtigen Zufällen dieser Zeit, näml.

Sonderbare Begebenheiten, Unterhaltende Beschreibungen Entgehungen aus Gefahr, Heroische Abenteuer, Denkwürdige Verrichtungen, Errrettungen vom Tode, Merkwürdige Historien,	Nachrichten von den Gebräuchen und Manieren, der unterschiedlichen Nationen, Ungewöhnliche Exempel von Stärke, Herzhaftigkeit, langem Leben, &c. Anecdote, Gedichte, &c.

Sorgfältig gesammelt von den berühmtesten und berühmtesten Historien-schreiber, Reisenden, Philosophen und Naturkündiger.

Nebst neuen und auserlesenen Geographischen, Historischen, Moralischen und gelehrten Versuchen.

Philadelphia:
 Gedruckt bey H. und J. N. K ä m m e r e r, jun.
 1798.

Philadelphisches Magazin,
Oder
Unterhaltender Gesellschafter,
für die Deutschen in America

Inhalt:

1. Lebensbeschreibung des G. Waschington, Esq
[Mit einem wohlgetroffenen Kupferstich.]
2. Beschreibung von Mount Vernon
3. Beschreibung einiger merkwürdigen Quellen
4. Das Opfer. Eine Indianische Begebenheit
5. Die lustige Reisende
6. Kurze Beschreibung der Türkischen Art zu baden
7. Weibliche Heldenthat
8. Der unmenschliche Pachter
9. Wunderbare Erhaltung
10. Progreß der Deutschen Litteratur
11. Die mörderische Hebamme
12. Das unglückliche Mädchen
13. Heyraths-Ceremonie in Massachusetts
14. Daß ein jeder Geld genug in seiner Tasche habe
15. Verschiedene Arten den Tag anzufangen
16. Die Höhe verschiedener Riesen
17. Anweisung ertrunkene Personen herzustellen
18. Verbesserungen des Ackerbaus
19. Anekdoten
20. Poetische Versuche
21. Politisches Journal

Vorrede

Wir legen hiemit unsern Lesern das erste Stück von unserem versprochenen "Magazin" vor: Die erste Schrift dieser Art, die, so viel wir wissen, jemals in America in Deutscher Sprache herausgekommen. Ein jeder, der nur einigermaßen mit den Schwierigkeiten bekannt ist, die mit der Herausgabe einer solchen Schrift, vornemlich im Anfange, verknüpft sind, wird alle diejenigen kleinen Mängel und Unvollkommenheiten, die natürlicher Weise darin vorkommen müssen, gütigst verzeihen. Wir werden unterdessen uns allen Mühe geben, diesen abzuhelpen; vornemlich werden wir uns hüten den Fehler zu begehen, der beynahe allen Magazinen veorgeworfen wird, näml. das Abbrechen in der Mitte einer interessanten Erzählung oder sonstigen Abhandlung: Nach dem gewöhnlichen Gange wird der Leser bis zum höchsten Grade der Neugierde geführt und als dann die Erzählung

oder sonstige Abhandlung auf einmal abgebrochen, und die Fortsetzung im künftigen Stück versprechen. Ein jeder der je in diesem Fall gewesen ist, wird eingestehen müssen, daß nichts unangenehmer seyn kan: Er wird auf einmal in seiner Unterhaltung gestört, der Gang der Gedanken wird unterbrochen, und um ins Gleise zu kommen, muß er wiederum zum vorhergehenden Stück seine Zuflucht nehmen. Wir werden daher keine Stücke von beträchtlicher Länge einrücken, und wir werden glauben, unsern Lesern einen grössern Gefallen zu erzeugen, wenn wir andere Stücke, ob sie gleich eigentlich in unsern Plan gehören, bis zur nächsten Nummer verschieben, als wenn wir die Unterhaltung unserer Leser durch unzeitigen Abbruch auf eine höchst unangenehme Weise stören würden.

Uebrigens schmeicheln wir uns, daß unsere Bemühungen wenigstens, gütig aufgenommen werden, und daß man uns mit Nachsicht beurtheilen werde. Wir werden weder Mühe noch Kosten sparen, dieses Magazin so unterhaltend als möglich zu machen, und wir schmeicheln uns, daß die Deutschen, die doch sonst so sehr für Cultur sind, uns ihren Schutz nicht enthalten werden.

Wir ersuchen anbey unsere Leser von Geschmack und Talenten uns mit ihren Mittheilungen zu beehren: Alle prosaische und poetische Aufsätze, die sich für unsern Plan schicken, werden von uns (Postfrey eingesandt) dankbarlichst angenommen, und so bald als möglich eingerücktet werden.

Die Herausgeber.
Philadelphia, den 2ten May.

An das Deutsche Publicum.

Die Unterschriebenen, jetzige Herausgeber der Philadelphischen Correspondenz, haben das Vergnügen einem geehrten Deutschen Publico hiemit bekannt zu machen, daß sie wegen Herausgabe ihrer Zeitung, eine ganz neue Einrichtung getroffen. Ihre Verbindungen sind von der Art, daß sie sich schmeicheln, im Stande zu seyn, allezeit die neuesten Nachrichten mitzutheilen. Mit keiner Parthen verbunden, werden sie die Sachen, wie sie sind, ohne ihnen falsche Farben zu geben, treulich vorstellen; alle eingesandte Versuche und Mittheilungen, wenn sie anständig geschrieben sind, werden ohne Unterschied der Partheyen angenommen werden; allein so bald sie persönliche Anzüglichkeiten enthalten, sind sie unvermeidlich ausgeschlossen. Sie hoffen, daß ihr Fleiß, ihre Aufmerksamkeit auf ihre Geschäfte und ihre Unpartheylichkeit, ihnen die Gunst der Deutschen zusichern werden.

Da verschiedene ihrer Freunde ihnen gerathen haben, den Plan in Ansehung der Herausgabe des Werkes unter dem Titel der "Monatschrift" so zu verändern, daß die Anschaffung derselben den Subscribenten zu dieser Zeitung erleichtert werde, so sind die Herausgeber alle drey Monate ein Magazin nach einem ähnlichen Plan wie der von Monatschrift, heraus zu geben willens, wovon dieses die erste Nummer ist. Die Subscribenten zu der Zeitung, sollen dieses Magazin mit der geringen Erhöhung eines halben Thalers auf den Preis der Zeitung erhalten, nemlich für Zeitung und Magazin Zwey Thaler des Jahres, wovon ein Thaler zur Zeit der Unterschrift und ein Thaler nach Verlauf von sechs Monaten bezahlet wird. Die Zeitung allein kostet anderthalb Thaler, wovon drey Viertel Thaler zur Zeit der Subscription und die übrigen drey Viertel Thaler nach Verlauf von sechs Monaten bezahlet werden. Subscribenten zu dem Magazin allein, erhalten selbiges für einen Thaler des Jahrs. Jede Nummer von diesem Magazin soll mit einem prächtigen Kupferstich gezieret werden.

Anzeigen die nicht mehr als ein Viereck ausmachen, werden in die Zeitung zu drey Schilling und neun Pens für das erstemal und jede Fortsetzung zu ein Schilling und drey Pens eingerücket, längere Anzeigen werden Verhältnißmäßig bezahlet.

Sie ersuchen auch diejenigen Herren, so obige neue Einrichtung, (die Zeitung und das Magazin betreffen) billigen, ihre Subscriptions-Gelder einzusenden.

Henrich Kämmerer, jun.
Joseph R. Kämmerer

Philadelphia, den 1sten May, 1798

Philadelphia Magazine,
or
Entertaining Companion,
for Germans in America.
Including the largest variety of credible
matters, news and descriptions of the most
important patriots and remarkable
people in Europe and America.

In addition
believable news of the most wonderful
inventions, changes and events,
that ever occurred in nature or art,
from the earliest days to the present incidences
of today, namely

Strange events,	reports on the cus-
entertaining descriptions,	toms and manners of dif-
escapes from danger,	ferent nations,
heroic adventures,	unusual examples of
memorable performances,	strength, bravery,
deliverances from death,	long life, etc.
strange histories,	anecdotes, histories, etc.

Carefully collected from the most well-known and most
famous historians, travelers, philosophers,
and nature experts.

Together with new and select geographical, historical,
moral and scholarly attempts.

Philadelphia Magazine,
or
Entertaining Companion,
for Germans in America.

Content:

1. Biography of G. Washington, Esq.
[With a well-done copperplate likeness.]
2. Description of Mount Vernon
3. Description of some singularly interesting springs
4. The Victim. An Indian story
5. The merry traveler
6. A short description of the Turkish manner of bathing
7. Female heroism
8. The inhuman landlord
9. Marvelous preservation
10. Progress of German literature
11. The murderous midwife
12. The unfortunate maiden
13. Marriage ceremony in Massachusetts
14. May everyone have enough money in their pockets
15. Different ways to begin the day
16. The height of various giants
17. Instructions on restoring drowned people
18. Agricultural improvements
19. Anecdotes
20. Poetic attempts
21. Political Journal

Preface

We lay before our readers the first part of our promised magazine: the first writing of this kind, which, as far as we know, has ever been published in the German language in America. Everyone, who is to some extent familiar with the difficulties associated with the publication of such a writing, especially in the beginning, will kindly forgive all the little imperfections and mistakes that must naturally occur in it. We will meanwhile trouble ourselves to remedy these; in particular, take care not to make the error, of which nearly all magazines are accused, namely breaking off in the middle of an interesting story or other discourse: After the usual manner, the reader is led to the highest degrees of curiosity, and then the story or other discourse breaks off, and the continuation is promised in the next piece. Anyone who was ever in this position, must agree, that nothing is more unpleasant: he

is suddenly disturbed in his entertainment, the course of his thoughts are interrupted, and in order not to lose track, he must again resort to the preceding piece. We will therefore include no stories of considerable length, and we believe it would give our readers greater pleasure if we were to postpone a story, even though it was called for in our actual plan, until our next number, than if we were to interrupt the entertainment of our reader through untimely disruption of the most unpleasant manner.

Incidentally, we flatter ourselves that our endeavor is taken up at least good-naturedly, and that readers will judge us with indulgence. We will spare neither trouble nor cost to make this magazine as entertaining as possible, and we flatter ourselves that the Germans, who are usually so much for culture, will not withhold their protection.

We request of our readers of taste and talent to honor us with their communication: all prosaic and poetical compositions befitting our plan, (sent in postage free) would be gratefully accepted, and included [in the magazine] as soon as possible.

The Editors,
Philadelphia, May 2

To the German Public

The undersigned, current publishers of the Philadelphia Correspondence, have the pleasure herewith to announce to an esteemed German public, that in the course of the publication of their newspaper, they have made an entirely new arrangement. Their connections are of the kind that they flatter themselves to be in the position to always communicate the latest news. Connected to no parties, they will present subjects truthfully, as they really are, without giving them false colors; all submitted attempts and reports, if they are decently written, will be included without distinction of the parties; however as soon as any suggestive personal remarks are included, they are inevitably excluded. They hope that their diligence, their attention to their business and their impartiality will assure them the favor of the Germans.

Since various friends have advised them to change their plan for this publication to a "monthly," so that the acquisition of it would be facilitated for subscribers of the newspaper, the publishers are prepared to give out every three months a magazine after a similar plan as a monthly, of which this is the first issue. The subscribers to the newspaper will receive this magazine with the small increase of a half dollar on the price of the newspaper, specifically, for the newspaper and magazine two dollars a year, with a dollar due at the time of the signing and a dollar due after six months. The newspaper alone costs one-and-a-half dollars, with three quarters of a dollar due at signing

and the remaining three quarters of a dollar after six months. Subscribers to the magazine alone receive it for a dollar a year. Each issue of the magazine is to include a magnificent copperplate.

Advertising that makes up no more than one square will be inserted in the paper for three shillings and nine pence the first time and every time after for one shilling and three pence; the cost of longer advertisements is relative to the length.

They also ask those men who approve of the new mechanism (concerning the magazine and newspaper), to send their subscription funds in.

Henrich Kämmerer, jun.
Joseph R. Kämmerer

Philadelphia, May 1, 1798