

**FREDERICK THE GREAT AND THE UNITED  
STATES; A PAPER READ BEFORE THE  
PENNSYLVANIA -  
GERMAN SOCIETY AT THE FOURTEENTH  
ANNUAL MEETING HELD AT  
GERMANTOWN, OCTOBER 25, 1904**

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Frederick the Great and the United States; A paper read before the Pennsylvania - German Society at the fourteenth annual meeting held at Germantown, October 25, 1904 by J. G. Rosengarten

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**J. G. ROSENGARTEN**

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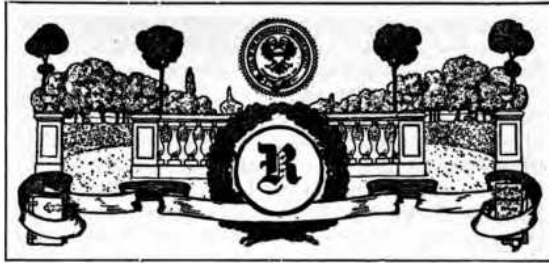


LANCASTER, PA.  
1906

FREDERICK THE GREAT AND THE UNITED STATES.



STATUE PRESENTED BY THE GERMAN KAISER WILLIAM II.  
UNVEILED AT WASHINGTON, D. C., NOVEMBER 19, 1904.



## FREDERICK THE GREAT AND THE UNITED STATES.\*



**I**N view of the presentation of a statue of Frederick the Great to the United States by the Emperor of Germany it may be of interest to refer to the contemporary sources of information as to the relation of Frederick the Great to the American Revolution.

There is much interest in seeing how that great soldier followed the course of events in America and with what kind of welcome he received the American agents sent to Europe to enlist recognition, aid and support in the struggle for independence.

\* A paper read before the Pennsylvania German Society at Germantown, October 25, 1904, by J. G. Rosengarten.

The best authority on this subject is Frederick Kapp, whose two books dealing with the subject have not been translated. One is "Frederick the Great and the United States," published in Leipsic in 1871, and the other "The Traffic in Soldiers," published in Berlin in 1874. To these may be added "The Hessians and the other Auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War," by Edward F. Lowell of Boston, published by Harpers in 1884, and the "Diplomatic Correspondence of the Revolution," edited by Sparks. Little on the subject is to be found in Carlisle's "Life of Frederick the Great," or in the latest German biography, that by Kosen, or in any of the other biographies of Frederick.

Frederick the Great was very unfriendly to the English government of Lord Bute for its failure to carry out the support promised and given him by the elder Pitt when he was at its head. When the war of American Independence broke out, Frederick was charged by the English ministry with preventing England from hiring a Russian corps to fight for it in America and with allowing Prussian officers to serve with the Americans. Both charges were groundless, but served to show England's fear of Frederick's revenge for old injuries. Neither Steuben nor DeKalb was in his service when they volunteered in the American Revolution, and the other German officers who joined them did so of their own good will, and not with his sanction. The many "King of Prussia" tavern signs attest that Frederick was popular in America. As the leader of Protestant resistance to Austrian aggression, alike in Puritan New England, among the Germans of Pennsylvania and in New York, and with the leaders of the American Revolution, he was looked on as the ablest sovereign and greatest soldier in Europe, and his heroic



struggle was pointed out as an example for America in its war for independence. Every expression of his hostility to England and his contempt for the German princes who sold their soldiers to England was published here.

Washington, Franklin, Greene, all spoke of him with admiration. Steuben was welcomed as one of his soldiers. Jefferson spoke of his death as a European disaster and an event that affected the whole world.

Frederick was guided in all he said and did by the interests of Prussia. He hoped to secure advantages by opening a trade between his ports and those of America, by exchanging his linen and iron and other wares for tobacco and other American products. His representative in Paris met Silas Deane and reported to the King his request to establish diplomatic and commercial relations, recommending a commercial treaty. The King was ready to supply arms and other munitions of war in exchange for and when the Americans could land tobacco in his ports at a reasonable rate.

A succession of American diplomatic agents went to Berlin, but the King would not recognize them officially, although his ministers said that when France recognized American independence, he would do so too. Frederick wrote to his brother to watch Washington and learn how he carried on war against Howe and Burgoyne. He granted the request of the American agent to buy arms in Prussia. He rendered, perhaps unwittingly, a still more important service by refusing permission to take German soldiers, on their way to join the English army in America, through his dominions, and thus delayed reinforcements, when Howe was waiting patiently for them, so that the Americans really were helped by him. His refusal kept these German troops idle in Germany all through the

winter of 1777-8, while Washington and his little army were suffering at Valley Forge. Frederick's course was almost as useful to Washington as an alliance or recognition, for it gave him time and helped to change the fortunes of war, while, as the King said, without a fleet or forts to protect his ports, recognition could do no good. He saw and said that the business of recruiting German soldiers to serve against America was depopulating Germany of the men needed for his army. He watched the successes of the American army and felt a personal pride in that of the German soldiers serving in it, although Riedesel had married the daughter of the Prussian Minister of War, Massow, and his imprisonment after Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga, was a source of great regret to his friends in Berlin and the Prussian army. The King wrote in October, 1777, "I never think of the present war in America without being unpleasantly affected by the greed of some German princes, who sacrifice their troops in a war that don't concern them at all. My astonishment increases when I see this violation of our Old German rule, never to spill German blood in behalf of foreign interests."

In 1778 he wrote to his minister in London: "I will never lend myself to an alliance with England. I am not like so many German princes to be gained by money." His minister wrote: "The German Princes who have hired their troops, besides having rendered themselves extremely odious, have suffered greatly by the emigration of their subjects, for fear of being forced into this service, which is excessively unpopular through all Germany"; and later, "His Majesty has refused passage to the auxiliary troops of Germany destined for America. He interests himself very much in the events of your war and wishes that your efforts may be crowned with success." Later he made a

commercial treaty with the United States on terms that were very liberal, and thus set an example that other European powers soon followed.

The legend that he presented a sword to Washington inscribed "From the oldest to the greatest General," is based on the gift of a sword with a very fulsome dedication engraved on it by a cutler in Solingen. It had a curious history, for the son of the maker brought it to Philadelphia, when Washington was living here as President, pawned it in a tavern, where it was redeemed by some unknown person, who took it to Alexandria, whence it was sent to Mount Vernon. Washington never knew who this was. His letter on the subject is printed, with a note explaining the real facts of the gift, in the eleventh volume of Sparks' "Washington," p. 169, etc. Now, however, the successor of the great Frederick has given the United States his statue as a memorial of German friendship. It may well serve to show how large a measure of influence Germans and Germany have had in the making of the United States, and the friendship of the Emperor of Germany and the German people for the Republic of the United States, and it will recall the share the great Frederick had in the success of the American Colonies in their struggle for independence and in the welcome extended to the new republic by the old King of Prussia.

In Sparks, Vol. 11, p. 169, etc.: Washington writes to John Quincy Adams, Philadelphia, 12 September, 1796: "Sometime ago, perhaps two or three months, I read in some gazette, but was so little impressed with it at the time (conceiving it to be one of those things which get into newspapers nobody knows how or why) that I cannot now recollect whether this gazette was of American or