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BENDIGO'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN LIBRARY

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IT IS HARDLY SURPRISING that Australia's German-speaking community offers the greatest scope outside the Anglophone majority for study of the impact of print culture in the colonial period. From its beginnings in 1848 till the traumatic interruption of the First World War the German press had a substance unmatched by that of any other group from outside the British Empire.¹ Monographs by John Fletcher² and Joyce Graetz³ in particular have provided careful documentation of some facets of an influence that was both technological and religious. Even if we cannot expect anything as ambitious as Robert E. Cazden's *A Social History of the German Book Trade in America to the Civil War*,⁴ there is certainly room for a synthesis pulling together diverse strands from most Australian States and from all the decades following the 1830s.

Among the topics that will need meticulous investigation is the organization of libraries of German books and periodicals for settlers and colonists. In this respect the survival of two catalogues of an important collection in Bendigo offers the opportunity to reflect on the reading of a large but necessarily varied and quite sophisticated goldfield population drawn from a wide range of German provinces, unlike the more homogeneously constituted townships and districts of the Barossa Valley, the Victorian Western District and even Queensland.

The State Library of Victoria holds, as was pointed out nearly three decades ago,⁵ a copy of *Bendigo Deutscher Verein und Lesehalle. Catalog der Bibliothek. Verfasst von H.C. Weibgen* (Sandhurst, im Juni, 1874. Printed at C. Jones & Co's Gas Engine Print Works, Bull Street, Sandhurst, 16* + 74pp. - with pp.1*-2* missing). This little book was bound into a volume of virtually uncatalogued bibliographical pamphlets⁶ and thus lost from sight. It was presented to the Library by the Bendigo Deutscher Verein on 21 August 1874.

The bibliography of German Australiana compiled by Leslie Bodi, Stephen Jeffries and Susan Radvansky has an entry for an 1866 catalogue of the same library.⁷ However, this has to be a misprint for 1886, as is confirmed by an item in an earlier list by Stephen Jeffries.⁸ The only copy known to me is in the Mitchell Library: *Bendigo Deutscher Verein, und Lesehalle. Catalog der Bibliothek* (Sandhurst, im June, 1886. J. Brockley, Bookseller, Stationer, Printer and Bookbinder, Mitchell Street, Sandhurst, 73pp. + 3 inserted additional advertisement leaves, between pp.12 & 13, 48 & 49 and 56 & 57).⁹

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A report on the society in the *Australische Deutsche Zeitung* of 16 September 1870¹⁰ makes it clear that operations began a year earlier. The progress of the library is noted:

Die Bibliothek enthält bereits 372 Bände, von denen im Monate durchschnittlich 189 gelesen wurden.

The 1874 and 1886 catalogues, with numbers above 2000 and 3500 respectively,¹¹ bear witness to quite rapid growth in the Verein's first two decades. What is less obvious at present is how it all ended. Nonetheless the survival of volumes bearing the stamp of 'BENDIGO DEUTSCHER VEREIN SANDHURST' in the collection of the restored German Club Tivoli suggests that the 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 World Wars were responsible for the dispersal and limited regrouping of the book holdings of German individuals and institutions in the first half of this century.¹² To tell this story will be one of the tasks of the Society for the Recording of the German Contribution to Bendigo founded in 1988.¹³

For the moment we have to be content with the catalogues themselves in trying to gauge the reading tastes of Bendigo's Germans. The enterprise is a delicate one; it is too easy to fall into the trap of making confident assertions about people one could categorize as 'readers/borrowers of the mind'.¹⁴ The few early circulating-library registers that have come down to us anywhere in the world - and that of the Walches in Hobart in the late 1840s is an outstanding example - show that customers rush and queue up for new titles, whereas they ignore old ones. This lesson of common sense is not always to the forefront in the elaborate analyses of printed catalogues that have been done in Germany and Austria in the last generation.¹⁵ Which is not to say that the student of the Bendigo material should disregard what has been written about the commercial libraries of German-speaking countries or about similar collections for Germans elsewhere.¹⁶

Both catalogues have an abundance of advertisements for local businesses, not infrequently in German, whether or not that was the language of the proprietors. To that extent one can see the German community as well integrated into Bendigo society. The 1874 catalogue even includes an advertisement in German for the Sandhurst Mechanics' Institute and its library of 6,000 volumes.¹⁷ Yet the only indication that there is reading matter for non-English speakers is a mention of foreign newspapers. Predictably the printers' own grasp of German orthography is tenuous, so that these productions are not altogether convincing in their foreignness.

The divisions of the library remain constant from 1874 to 1886: 'A Romane und Novellen', 'B Geographie und Weltgeschichte', 'C Naturgeschichte und Wissenschaft', 'D Dramatische Schriften und Gedichte', 'E Religiöse Schriften' and 'F Zeit und lehrreiche Schriften'. The first includes some works of high literature, but it is essentially the fiction section most readers preferred in the commercial libraries of the time. That it is

overwhelmingly predominant in bulk is quite consistent with this. Reference was without doubt a secondary purpose of the library.

Between 1874 and 1886 very few items disappeared from the catalogue: to be precise 18, including one novel by Bulwer Lytton, six by James Fenimore Cooper and two by Sir Walter Scott. In other words, the main guide to the taste of the later year as compared to the earlier one is in the added, and therefore recent, titles. When inertia rather than ruthless culling is the rule, it is even more important to know what was being borrowed as opposed to staying constantly on the shelves.

Books in English were not absent from the library, but they were few in number and then mostly of Australian origin. One finds them exclusively in the later, non-fiction sections. Such titles as James Fenton's *A History of Tasmania* of 1884 (Ferguson 9580) are typical of a manifest attentiveness to the ambient colonial society. Section F, in particular, with runs of the *Victoria Government Gazette*, *Acts of Parliament of Victoria*, *Victoria Year Book* and *Melbourne Review*, underlines this trend.

Most English writers were read in German, and the fiction section has a strong representation of Harrison Ainsworth, Wilkie Collins, Dickens, G.P.R. James, Charles Lever, Lytton, Captain Marryat, Scott and Thackeray, amongst others. J.F. Cooper is the principal American, and the French are there in force with Alexandre Dumas, Paul Féval, Paul de Kock, George Sand and Eugène Sue. German authors are essentially from the nineteenth century, although Wieland is a reminder of an earlier period. Even in the poetry and drama section Byron, Camoens and Shakespeare figure alongside Goethe and Schiller.

How characteristic is this tendency of overseas German libraries in the second half of the nineteenth century? Apart from the obvious North American point of reference, it is necessary to search for further Australian examples. The provenances attested in the collection of the German Club Tivoli demonstrate how much remains to be done. From the 'Brisbane Deutscher Turn-Verein' and the 'Deutscher Verein "Concordia"' in Sydney to the 'Deutscher Turn-Verein Melbourne', the 'Deutscher Verein Victoria' and even the 'Socialistischer Verein Vorwärts Melbourne' the possibilities are fascinatingly extensive. Prudent confrontation of all of this with the exhaustive research results reported for Germany itself should lead us to some modest conclusions about the cultural practices and aspirations of Australia's German-speaking settlers.

Melbourne

NOTES

1. See Miriam Gilson and Jerzy Zubrzycki, *The Foreign-language Press in Australia 1848-1964* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1967), pp.188-95.
2. See, for example, *John Degotardi. Printer, publisher and photographer* (Sydney: Book Collectors' Society of Australia, 1984).
3. *An Open Book. The Story of the Distribution and Production of Christian Literature by Lutherans in Australia* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1988).
4. (Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1984).
5. See Wallace Kirsop, *Towards a History of the Australian Book Trade* (Sydney: Wentworth Books, 1969), pp.12, 28.
6. Call number: sf 010.4 / B47 / vol.92, n°4. This collection of unique Australian ephemera has now been transferred to the La Trobe Library Rare Book Collection.
7. *Image of a Continent. A Bibliography of German Australiana from the Beginnings to 1975 / Bild eines Kontinents. Eine Bibliographie deutscher Australiana von den Anfängen bis 1975* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990), p.108, n°1479.
8. 'Checklist of German-Australiana with particular reference to Victoria', in Leslie Bodi and Stephen Jeffries, eds, *The German Connection. Sesquicentenary Essays on German-Victorian Crosscurrents 1835-1985* (Clayton: Department of German, Monash University, 1985), pp.111-46, esp. p.122.
9. I am grateful to the State Library of New South Wales for permitting me to have a photocopy of this document and to John Fletcher for arranging it several years ago. This copy is, of course, noted by Ferguson as his 6913a.
10. P.196. My thanks go to Tom Darragh for providing me with this reference.
11. On pp.35 and 57 of the 1886 catalogue are a few apparently aberrant higher numbers.
12. The Club was kind enough to allow Tom Darragh and me to inspect its library when it still occupied premises in Victoria Street, Richmond. Since the move to Dandenong Road, Windsor, the books have been in storage and therefore inaccessible.
13. See an article in the *Bendigo Advertiser*, 11 May 1988, p.9 (cutting kindly supplied by Valda Pinder via David Garrioch).
14. This point will be developed in the printed version of a paper on 'The Acclimatization of the Circulating Library in Nineteenth-Century Australia' given at the HRC/CBTS Conference on the History of Books in September 1986.
15. A substantial literature is summed up in Alberto Martino's monumental *Die deutsche Leihbibliothek: Geschichte einer literarischen Institution (1756-1914). Mit einem zusammen mit Georg Jäger erstellten Verzeichnis der erhaltenen Leihbibliothekskataloge* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990).
16. See, for example, Larry E. Sullivan, 'The Reading Habits of the Nineteenth-Century Baltimore Bourgeoisie: A Cross-Cultural Analysis', *Journal of Library History*, 16(1981), 227-40, and Graham Jefcoate, 'The Deutsche Lese-Bibliothek and the Distribution of German Books in London, 1794-1800', *The Library*, 6th series, 9(1987), 347-64.
17. P.4*.