

**The Declaration of Independence:
The first printings in English and German
By Don Heinrich Tolzmann**

Introduction

Every year when the 4th of July appears on the horizon, questions arise about the Declaration of Independence as to whether it was printed in German, and if so how this relates chronologically to its printing in English. I have often responded that historians of the German-American press have established that the first announcement of its adoption appeared in the *Pennsylvanischer Staatsbote* on the 5th of July 1776, and that several days thereafter, on the 9th, its full text was published there.

The first historian to write about this was Daniel Miller who published a monograph in 1908 in the *Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings and Addresses*, which I edited for re-publication in 2001. Miller wrote: “In 1776 the *Staatsbote* was the first paper to announce the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. It was the only paper, which appeared on Friday, and as Fourth of July fell on Thursday, this paper had the honor of first publishing the important news. In the next issue, Tuesday of the following week, the paper published the full text of the great document in German in large type upon an extra leaf. This was something of a feat in those days.”



My good friend and colleague, the late Dr. Karl J. R. Arndt, another historian of the German-American press, researched the printing history of the Declaration of Independence, and his research appeared in the journal *Pennsylvania Folklife*. He found that the full text of the Declaration was also printed as a broadside, and that this provided the basis for its publication in the *Staatsbote*. He also related these German-language printings to those that appeared in the English language.

In their book, *Flying Leaves and One-Sheets: Pennsylvania German Broadside, Fraktur, and their Printers*, Russell and Corinne Earnest provide a picture of the broadside printing of

the Declaration of Independence, as well as biographical information about the German printers responsible for its first printings in German: Heinrich Miller (1702-82), Melchior Steiner (1757?-1807), and Carl Cist (1738-1805).

Since the question about the printing of the Declaration of Independence often arises, and as the relationship between the English and German versions is not that well known, I have compiled the following chronology from the sources listed below to clarify the dates of these various printings, and have included information as to who the printers were.

English and German printings of the Declaration of Independence

4th of July: On the night of the 4th, a one-page broadside of the Declaration was printed by John Dunlap (1747-1812), a printer in Philadelphia, and distributed to the various colonial assemblies. This broadside was the first printing of the Declaration in English.

5th of July: An announcement about the Declaration appeared in the *Pennsylvanischer Staatsbote*, a German paper published by Heinrich Miller (1702-1782) in Germantown, now a part of Philadelphia. This was the first announcement of the Declaration in an American newspaper, and it appeared in German.

6th of July: The *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, an evening newspaper in Philadelphia, published the Declaration, its first printing in an English-language newspaper.

6-9th July: Some time between the 6th and 9th of July, a one-page broadside of the Declaration was printed by Melchior Steiner (1757?-1807) and Carl Cist (1738-1805), two German printers who worked for Heinrich Miller's paper. This was the first broadside of the Declaration in German.

9th July: With slight alterations, the German broadside of Steiner and Cist was published in Miller's paper, the *Pennsylvanischer Staatsbote*. A copy of the newspaper's masthead is illustrated here. This was the first publication of the Declaration in a German newspaper in America. A facsimile of this issue can be found in the work listed below by Karl J.R. Arndt and May E. Olson, and a copy of the masthead of that issue is provided here from that source. It indicates that this issue appeared in an edition of 813 copies.

The early German printings of the Declaration reflect the fact that there was a sizable German-speaking community in colonial America. So, on the 4th of July we can celebrate the Declaration of Independence, a document that is well worth reading today, and can certainly take pride in the early German printings of it, as well as the strong support German-Americans rendered on behalf of the American Revolution.

Sources

Karl J.R. Arndt, "The First German Broadsides and Newspaper Printing of the Declaration of Independence," *Pennsylvania Folklore*, 35 (1986: 98-107).

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