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# South Carolina Historical Magazine

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## MICHAEL KALTEISEN AND THE FOUNDING OF THE GERMAN FRIENDLY SOCIETY IN CHARLESTON

HELENE M. RILEY\*

On January 15, 1766, Michael Kalteisen met with fifteen other Germans at his house in Charleston and founded the German Friendly Society—"die dem Deutschtum freundlich gesinnte Gesellschaft"—meaning a society friendly to Germans.<sup>1</sup> Of all his civic and political accomplishments, he is remembered today for this action because this historical and benevolent society still meets faithfully every Wednesday and is among the oldest active organizations in the United States. Its success and longevity, its disdain for publicity, and the locked door and unanswered bell of the Society Hall on Chalmers Street have prompted the curiosity of many strangers; and while many Charlestonians may be familiar with the name, the membership of this all-male organization remains largely unknown. A similar aura of inscrutability surrounds the Society's founder, Michael Kalteisen, whose portrait, painted in 1802 by Thomas Coram, presides regularly over the members' meetings, yet whose private and public life represents a challenging enigma. This inquiry focuses on the events in Kalteisen's life leading to the founding of the German Friendly Society, the significance of this organization, and the role it played in the life of Kalteisen and the city of Charleston.

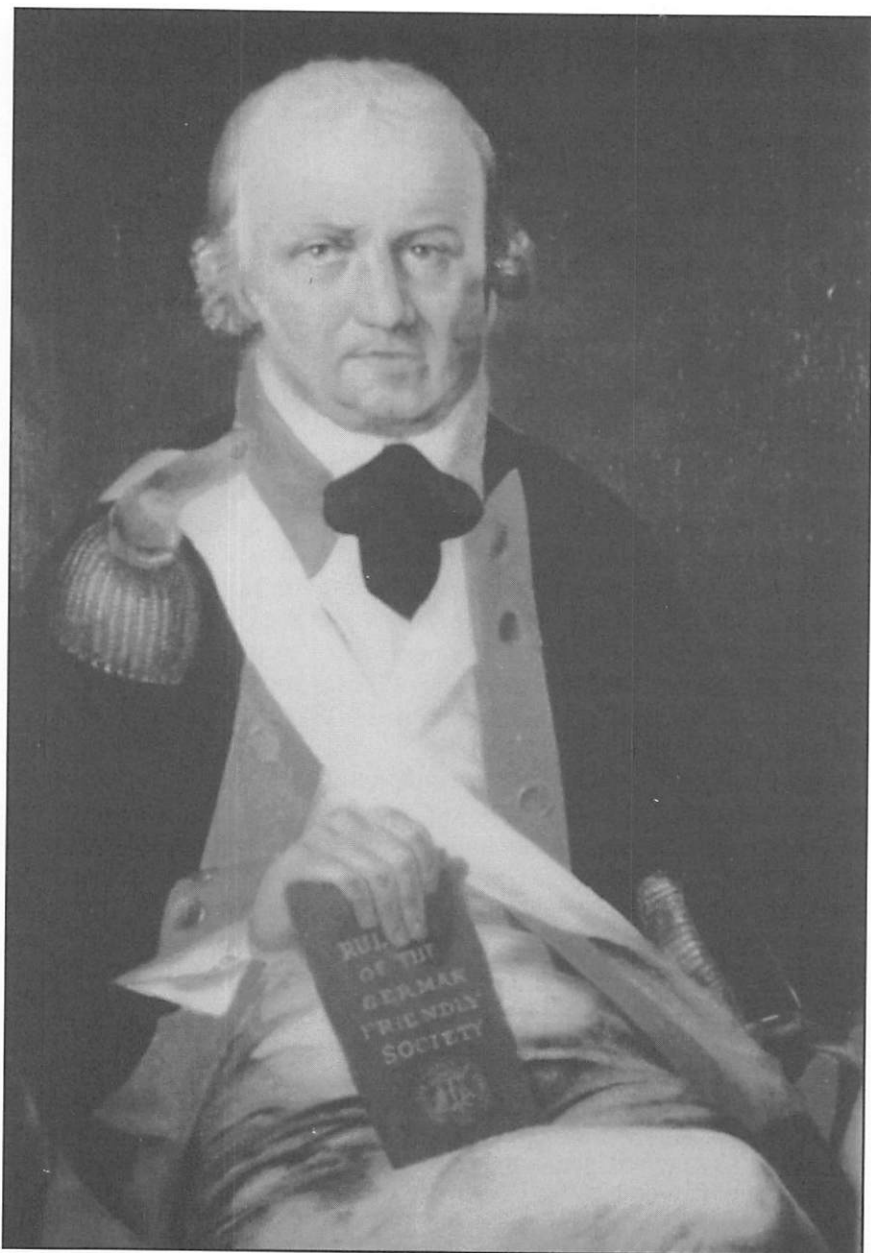
Michael Kalteisen was born on June 18, 1729, in Machtolsheim, a small village in the Duchy of Württemberg, Germany.<sup>2</sup> He was the oldest of eight children born to Paulus and Angelika Müller Kalteisen. The family was of the educated Protestant middle class in Germany's Age of Enlightenment. Kalteisen's father was Provisor (administrator) of the school in Machtolsheim and enjoyed a status similar to that of the clergy in an age when most people were illiterate. Still, the salary of Paulus Kalteisen must have been stretched to the limit as his family grew and Michael's siblings arrived in quick succession.

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The author gratefully acknowledges the painstaking research of Georg and Anna Schmid in Machtolsheim, Germany. Mrs. Schmid is the granddaughter of Anna Deschenhalm, née Kalteisen. Mr. Schmid, mayor of Machtolsheim from 1954 to 1986, kindly assisted with family documents.

<sup>1</sup>This interpretation of the Society's name is apparent in a letter by Emil H. Jahnz, German Consul in Charleston. Writing for the *Wiesensteiger Zeitung*, April 4, 1909, Jahnz notes Kalteisen as founder of the German Friendly Society and translates its name as "a society friendly towards Germans."

<sup>2</sup>Württemberg became a kingdom in 1806.



Michael Kalteisen, (1729-1807). Kalteisen helped organize several German institutions in Charleston, but is perhaps best known for organizing the German Friendly Society in 1766. The Society is still active today. This Thomas Coram painting of Kalteisen (ca. 1802) hangs in the German Friendly Society Hall. Illustration courtesy of the German Friendly Society.

Kalteisen's early life illustrates the reasons for the exodus that brought waves of Württembergers to America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The conditions in the duchy after the ravages of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) were deplorable. At the beginning of this religious conflict between Catholic and Protestant rulers, Württemberg had approximately 450,000 inhabitants, but by 1645 the population had shrunk to 121,000.<sup>3</sup> In 1738 Machtolsheim had a population of 515 people of which 103 were school children. Kalteisen was one of them. His childhood memories of the absolute power wielded by the nobility and the bondage, misery, and poverty of his village's population are reflected in his subsequent goals in America; he founded the German Friendly Society to relieve the distress of the poor and the orphaned, and with fervent American patriotism he fought for independence from Great Britain.

The inhabitants of Machtolsheim were chiefly serfs who had little freedom of movement or initiative. Since their land did not belong to them, they had to pay rent and deliver certain services for its use. One of these was the so-called "Jagdfron" (hunting socage), which obligated them to serve as beaters and helpers at the frequent hunting festivities of the counts of Helfenstein. These hunting parties often lasted for days, and even during the busy harvest time the amusement of the lords took precedence. The lords assessed the farmers severe penalties if they shot game that devastated their crops or if they hunted for food. The Machtolsheimers were even forced to deliver their grain to the mill in Blaubeuren so that additional taxes could be collected. At the same time the duke forced them to contribute to the building fund for his Ludwigsburg castle (1704-1733) and pay taxes to the abbey at Blaubeuren. "The latitude for personal initiative was marginal—permission by the authorities was demanded for almost everything," including permission to marry.<sup>4</sup>

When Michael Kalteisen was about eleven years old, the great fire of 1740 destroyed fifty-two of Machtolsheim's straw-thatched houses along with the inn and the council chambers. Thereafter, local government met in rooms at Blaubeuren, for which they had to pay rent to the abbey. The population was so impoverished that as late as 1788 ordinances forbade Machtolsheimers to go "begging in the streets," and the town constructed a poor house and orphanage.<sup>5</sup>

Although Kalteisen's family was one of the most respected in the village, young Michael clearly yearned for a less confining life. Exactly how and when he arrived in America is not known. In March 1743 he was

<sup>3</sup>Information on Machtolsheim is found in Helmut Bauer, et al., *Machtolsheim früher und heute (Machtolsheim's Past and Present)* (Merklingen: M. Fink, n.d.). All translations from German are the author's.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

confirmed by pastor Johann Christof Mohn in Machtolsheim, but by 1747 he was in South Carolina.<sup>6</sup> His beginnings in the land of liberty were humble enough. In fact, a variation of serfdom awaited him. Unable to pay for passage, he was bound out as an indentured servant to John Clark, a shoemaker at Ashley Ferry. Upon Clark's death Kalteisen's remaining time was sold to Dr. Frederick Holtzendorff, who had arrived with Purrysburgh settlers in 1733 and later was surgeon at St. Philip's hospital in Charleston. Holtzendorff discharged Kalteisen's indenture "for a consideration paid"<sup>7</sup> and Kalteisen, thereafter a free and unmarried man, received fifty acres on Indian Creek between the Broad and Saluda Rivers on July 4, 1753.<sup>8</sup> Predominantly German-speaking immigrants settled this area known as the Dutch Fork.

It quickly became clear to Kalteisen that owning property and being a planter in America provided certain enjoyments of personal freedom, power, and wealth, just as it did in Württemberg. Naturally, he sought to accumulate more land. Within a year Kalteisen had married a German woman named Elizabeth (Maria Elisabeth), who was given 150 acres on Little River on December 20, 1754, indicating that she had two children.<sup>9</sup> At the time Kalteisen was one of the roughly fifty applicants for land in the back country who had served indentures either in Charleston or elsewhere along the coast. Most of these were Germans and almost invariably indentured for their passage money from Europe to Charleston.<sup>10</sup> The land grants in the

<sup>6</sup>The Rev. John Charles (Christopher) Faber, a fellow Württemberger of Kalteisen and pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church from 1787-1800 where Kalteisen worshipped, spoke at a memorial service for Kalteisen held at the German Friendly Society on November 11, 1807. He stated that Kalteisen had arrived in the country "nearly sixty years before that date," or about 1747. John F. Ficken, *Michael Kalteisen, Captain of the United States Artillery, an Historical Address delivered on 17th January, 1909* (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans & Cogswell, 1910), 5.

<sup>7</sup>Warren B. Smith, *White Servitude in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1961), 68. On Holtzendorff's service as surgeon see Joseph I. Waring, MD, *A History of Medicine in South Carolina 1670-1825* (S.C. Medical Association: R.L. Bryan, 1964), 187, 336, 388.

<sup>8</sup>Colonial Plats, Vol. 17, 376, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C., (hereafter SCDAH). The land grant is recorded on January 9, 1755, as situated on the York between the Broad and Saluda Rivers on a branch of Indian Creek, next to land "laid out to Gilbert Guilder" and vacant on all other sides. Royal Grants, Vol. 6, 241, SCDAH.

<sup>9</sup>Colonial Plats, Vol. 6, 37, SCDAH. Her name is spelled Kalterzon, later Kalterson and similar variations. The land was surveyed in her married name on October 22, 1754, certified December 20, 1754, and recorded on Oct. 11, 1755. Royal Grants, Vol. 6, 37, SCDAH. No record of Kalteisen's marriage to Maria Elisabeth Ernst has been found.

<sup>10</sup>Robert L. Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina 1729-1765* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974), 174.

sparsely settled area of the Fork and the adjoining Congarees also reveal that between 1746 and 1752 Kalteisen was within reasonable proximity of German and Swiss-German settlers with prominent names such as Jacob and Herman Geiger, Jacob Werle (Warley), and the Reformed minister Christian Theus. He maintained contact with many of these families throughout his life. Their names are found again in the German Friendly Society roster and in the register of St. John's Lutheran Church in Charleston, which Kalteisen helped found.

Together with subsequent acquisitions Kalteisen eventually added a total of 2,190 acres to his landholdings.<sup>11</sup> Many of these parcels of land were scattered throughout the midlands and upstate, including 650 acres on the west side of Catawba River on Fishing Creek, situated right on the Catawba Indian path. During his early years in Carolina, Kalteisen earned his livelihood as a carter, transporting new settlers and their possessions from the coast to their assigned land, taking products from the interior to market, and purchasing needed supplies and implements for frontier families. Between 1748 and 1759 more than 3,700 Germans settled in the Dutch Fork, Amelia and Orangeburg Townships, the Congarees, and adjoining areas.<sup>12</sup> Kalteisen traveled the river valleys and trails of the sparsely settled inland areas and acquired a superior knowledge of the geography, settlements, Indian population, and routes of transport. He received an appointment as wagon master general during the Cherokee War (1761-1762) because of this knowledge.

In the 1750s Kalteisen and his wife made their living with a variety of small business ventures. Besides taking care of her family, Elizabeth used her home to provide refreshments and shelter for travelers. Her husband also met with his friends and business partners there. Kalteisen recognized the vital need for communication between the backcountry and the seat of government and his own need to establish himself in the community, so he Anglicized his name and capitalized on his knowledge of the roads and trails to serve as a messenger and letter carrier. For a brief time he was affiliated with the firm of Stone, Smyser, and Coldiron, which carried letters to summon members to the Commons House of Assembly.<sup>13</sup> In this capacity Kalteisen was able to establish valuable personal contacts within the political infrastructure while maintaining the many connections he had

<sup>11</sup>N. Louise Bailey, Mary L. Morgan, and Carolyn R. Taylor, eds., *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives, 1775-1790* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 390.

<sup>12</sup>Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina*, 154.

<sup>13</sup>Jacob Stone and Paul Smiser had business licenses. Terry W. Lipscomb, ed., *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 20, 1755-July 6, 1757* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 17-18. "Coldiron" is a direct translation of the name Kalteisen into English.

with German-speaking settlers in the backcountry. Following the course of his life, it is apparent that one of Kalteisen's most outstanding personal characteristics was his ability to form and continue very stable, intimate friendships with a large number of men. Many of these men received their original land grants in German or Swiss backcountry settlements. Their names appear everywhere—in his official capacities, in political actions, on legal documents, and in church and social records. These ties attest to his congeniality and faithfulness. Among these names are Paul Smiser of Stone, Smyser, and Coldiron, (who later became senior warden and president of the German Friendly Society), Werle and Geiger from the Dutch Fork, Alexander Gillon with property in Amelia Township, and Dr. John Frederick Holtzendorff and Peter Bouquet (originally Buche) from Purrysburg.<sup>14</sup>

Within a short time Kalteisen began his messenger service on his own account, for early in 1756 he began submitting bills to the Assembly in his own name.<sup>15</sup> The remuneration was meager, but he supplemented it as a bondsman both in criminal and civil matters, sharing the risk with others. The Charleston judgment roll shows that this was indeed a risky business. When John Ernest Poyas skipped bail, Kalteisen and fellow bondsman Adam Shekell were ordered to pay £131:12:6; and in 1760 his bond for John Cattell was called in, costing him and Benjamin Godfrey £352.<sup>16</sup> Still, the interest must have made it profitable, for Kalteisen continued as a bondsman throughout his productive years, filing numerous suits to recover his money.

In the spring of 1757, the Commons House of Assembly credited Kalteisen's account with £18.5 for providing food and shelter in Charleston to Cherokee Indians who had come to town to trade. This is the first documentation that he also was a small-scale innkeeper, a business for

<sup>14</sup>Henry A.M. Smith, "Purrysburg," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 10 (October 1909), 208-219, who notes the spellings "Buche, Bac, Bache, Buech, Buch," and George F. Jones, "Compilation of Lists of German-Speaking Settlers of Purrysburg," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 92 (October 1991), 259, (hereafter SCHM), who lists it as "Buck."

<sup>15</sup>March 24, 1756: "An Account of Michael Coldiron, for summoning Messrs. Hume & Wright, by Order of the House, in February last, amounting to £5; which we recommend to be provided for." Lipscomb, ed., *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 20, 1755-July 6, 1757*, 163. There are other bills in the same year, not exceeding £10 sterling, *ibid.*, 142, 282.

<sup>16</sup>John and Ernest Poyas, assignee of Provost Marshall vs. Adam Shekell and Michael Kalteison, October 26, 1757; and John Cattell vs. Benjamin Godfrey and Michael Kalteisen, July 23, 1760, South Carolina Court of Common Pleas, Judgment Rolls, SCDAH. John Ernest Poyas fled to St. Augustine. He was married to Rachel Bouquet (Bouquette, Boget), Ball family microfilm records, "A short account of the POYAS family," Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.



which Elizabeth later acquired a license.<sup>17</sup> It was a rather modest beginning, but the reimbursement shows that Kalteisen had made the important step into the great government-connected industry in Charleston. From then on, throughout the changes in provincial government, the Cherokee War, the War of Independence, and the difficult post-Revolutionary times, Kalteisen maintained close ties to the political community and obtained government positions of varying importance as a substantial part of his income.

Kalteisen also was a religious man, and he was well aware of the social, educational, and political role that the church played in the eighteenth century. Since churches tended to organize in ethnically and socially homogeneous congregations, Charleston's German community keenly felt the lack of a church of its own. Many of the new arrivals did not speak English and could not understand services in existing churches. Many belonged to the working poor and were not accustomed to English ways or the culture of their newly-chosen country. Their language, their clothing, and their habits seemed strange and foreign to Charleston's genteel families. Many Charlestonians used the word "Dutch" disparagingly to refer to all speakers of the German language, regardless of their nationality. These conditions made it difficult for the newly-arrived Germans to gain social acceptance in existing congregations.

Strangely enough, most of the backcountry townships had Lutheran or Reformed pastors long before the Charleston community, which had no formal Lutheran church organization prior to 1755.<sup>18</sup> Because a church

<sup>17</sup>For "provisions and entertainment" of Cherokee Indians. The bill was paid on May 14, 1757. The reimbursement rate per person per diem was 7s6p in 1750. Lipscomb, ed., *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly*, March 1, 1757-April 2, 1757, 358, 371, 378, 453. Elisabeth's business license is noted in Mary Bondurant Warren, *Citizens and Immigrants—South Carolina 1768* (Danielsville, GA: Heritage Papers, 1980), 321.

<sup>18</sup>This was in part because some of the settlers came in homogenous groups and brought their own pastors with them, partly because the government perceived a greater need for pastoral leadership in the wilderness. Purrysburg, first settled in 1732, had the Reformed pastors Bourgnion and the Swiss-German Tschiffeli (Chiffelle) from Bern, while just across the Savannah River the Salzburgers at Ebenezer (1734) were sheperded by the Reverends Bolzius and Gronau. Zuberbühler and Züblin were in New Windsor (1737), Orangeburg and Amelia (1735) had the two Giessendanners, while Christian Theus, whose service in the wilderness area of the back country began in 1739, had domain in the the Congarees. The subject is ably discussed in South Carolina Synod, *A History of the Lutheran Church in South Carolina* (Columbia: R.L. Bryan, 1971); Gilbert Voight, "Religious Conditions Among German-speaking settlers in South Carolina 1732-1774," *SCHM* 56 (January 1955), 59-66; Arlin C. Migliazzo, "A Tarnished Legacy Revisited: Jean Pierre Purry and the Settlement of the Southern Frontier, 1718-1736," *SCHM* 92 (October 1991), 232-252;

building lends visual substance to the existence of a congregation, defines it, and permits it to function as a social as well as a religious organization, Charleston's Lutherans keenly felt the lack of such an identification.

Kalteisen's first major contribution to Charleston's civic life was his assistance in the building of St. John's Lutheran Church. The land records involving the sale of the town lot for St. John's show how significant this effort was both for Kalteisen's future career and for his founding of the German Friendly Society in 1766. Besides Kalteisen, Dr. John Schwint, Christian Duse, Melchior Werle, Abraham Speidel, and John Lehre are listed prominently in the documents. These men became the first officers of the German Friendly Society.

The earliest German Lutheran Church record in Charleston indicates that a number of Lutherans had assembled for worship in May 1734, and that they held German-language services for a time in the French Reformed Church. The document states further that since the German congregation was numerically larger than the French, the Lutherans chose a German-speaking Evangelical Lutheran preacher from among several available, so that he could preach to the congregation in their own language and offer the holy sacraments.<sup>19</sup> When a Lutheran pastor named Johann Georg Friedrich arrived in Charleston in 1755 or 1756 destined for the same backcountry German congregations that John Gasser was attempting to make his own, the opportunity to establish a German-language Lutheran church seemed ripe.<sup>20</sup> The German congregation in Charleston, of which Kalteisen had become a member, persuaded Friedrich to stay, and under his leadership they took up a collection for a sanctuary. Pastor Friedrich was a Hanoverian, educated and ordained in Germany and of endearing character. According to the church record, he was able to establish good rapport with the English-speaking community and the public collection for a German church building yielded abundant funds "among Englishmen and Christians of all nations living here at the time."<sup>21</sup> The document lists the following members of the building committee: Melchior Werle (a butcher), Philipp Minzeng (a blacksmith), Dr. John Swindt (a surgeon), John Meck (a baker), Abraham

Albert Bernhardt Faust and Gaius Marcus Brumbaugh, *Lists of Swiss Emigrants in the Eighteenth Century to the American Colonies*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C. : National Genealogical Society, 1920).

<sup>19</sup>Microfilm of the first record in the register of St. John's Lutheran Church. The page is titled "Nachricht von der Erbauung der hiesigen Evangelischen Lutherisch genannten, oder Protestantischen Kirche der Christlichen Religion." A note was inserted "in honor of the French congregation, its elders and pastors, and in grateful commemoration by us and our progeny."

<sup>20</sup>South Carolina Synod, *A History of the Lutheran Church in South Carolina*, 73-77, 857.

<sup>21</sup>Microfilm of the first church record, St. John's Lutheran Church, Charleston.

Speidel (a tanner), Ernst Hoff (a wheelwright), Friedrich Schmoll (unknown), and John Kelly (a baker). All of these names show variant spellings in different documents.

Michael Kalteisen's determination to assist the German immigrants and his social and political connections in Charleston made him a driving force behind the building fund. The congregation elected him to the first consistory, and when the cornerstone for the first German church of Charleston was laid on December 17, 1759, he was accorded the honor of placing it.<sup>22</sup> The original edifice as Francis C. Hill depicts it, looked strikingly similar to the church in Kalteisen's home town of Machtolsheim.<sup>23</sup>

Kalteisen, in his thirties, also became increasingly active in government affairs. During the early 1760s considerable political unrest began in Charleston due to the perception of inefficiency in a city government that appeared aloof, unresponsive, and unable to handle emerging urban problems. A gradual democratization also began to kindle dissatisfaction among the contingent of tradesmen whose evergrowing number felt underrepresented among the prominent merchants and planters who retained the major role in the management of the town's affairs. Because of "the failure of immigrants from Europe to remain on their bounty land, the migration of impoverished settlers from neighboring colonies, and the plight of women and children left destitute by the French and Indian War, Charleston was confronted with a serious social problem—indigence."<sup>24</sup> Kalteisen, through experience, identified with the difficulties experienced by the working poor. The need to resolve these problems resulted in the organization in 1762 of a political action group, the Fellowship Society, which later evolved into the Mechanics Party. Edward Weyman, a German glazier and Kalteisen's friend, became the first president of the Society.<sup>25</sup> At that time Kalteisen and the German carpenter John Braund were partners in a wood merchant venture that was known as John Braund & Company.<sup>26</sup> Kalteisen, Isaac Mazyck, and Henry Laurens all were members of the Fellowship Society. At Kalteisen's "the Germans used to congregate

<sup>22</sup>*Wiesensteiger Zeitung*, April 4, 1909. This information appears in a letter of Emil H. Jahnz to the paper. Although there is no date given, the letter was written after January, 17, 1909, a date which is mentioned as the formal unveiling of Kalteisen's monument at Bethany cemetery. See also Ficken, *Michael Kalteisen*, 6.

<sup>23</sup>The oil painting is at St. John's Lutheran Church, Charleston, S.C.

<sup>24</sup>Richard Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty: A Study of the Artisans 1763-1789* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), 29.

<sup>25</sup>Weyman (Wehmann) became clerk of St. Philip's in 1766. See Johann Andreas Wagener, "Die Deutschen von Süd-Carolina, II. Michael Kalteisen," *Der deutsche Pionier*, 3, (1871), 39.

<sup>26</sup>The firm was joined by John Marley in 1768. Bailey, Morgan, and Taylor, eds., *Biogr. Dict. of the House of Representatives*, 390-92



Kalteisen was instrumental in the founding of St. John's Lutheran Church in Charleston. The Church's first building is depicted here in a painting by German-American Francis C. Hill. Courtesy of St. John's Lutheran Church, Charleston, S.C.

evenings and reminisce about the home country and scenes of their youth. Poor German travelers, for whom America threatened to become a stepmother, arrived there too, and he provided solace, encouragement, and help."<sup>27</sup>

Although the purpose of the Fellowship Society as stated in the Rules was "to afford Relief to many poor distressed persons . . . of what climate, Nation or Religion they be," and although the funds of the organization grew with the membership, the rule of the "distinguishing faculty Reason" in the society failed to materialize.<sup>28</sup> Instead, the organization became increasingly factionalized because of the diverging interests of planters, merchants, and mechanics. It also became increasingly politicized as resistance to the Stamp Act led to the crisis of 1765. Although Kalteisen continued to invest heavily in real estate, he had no interest in becoming a planter. His business ventures and his friendships show that his sympathies remained with the merchants and mechanics. While his activity as bondsman declined during the 1760s, he continued as a carter, wood merchant, and innkeeper. He was also politically ambitious. After serving the government as wagon master general during the Cherokee War—a position of some importance that required a superior knowledge of the backcountry's limited infrastructure—he held the office of "public scavenger" in 1765 and was constable of Charleston. The Fellowship Society, which had seemed a promising medium for aspiring young merchants in 1762, had deteriorated into warring factions and did not provide the appropriate ambiance for Kalteisen. Therefore, when he heard about the creation of the German Society of Philadelphia (1764), he resigned from the Fellowship Society to convene a similar organization in Charleston.

The initial meeting of the German Friendly Society, still commemorated with a splendid anniversary banquet, took place on January 15, 1766, at Kalteisen's house. Besides Kalteisen, whom the Society elected as first steward or president, the names of fifteen other founding members appear on the roster of this first meeting: Melchior Warly, Sr., and John Swint, Jr., wardens; Abraham Speidel, treasurer; John Lehre, clerk; Christ. Duse, and Charl. Gruber, constables; also: Philip Mensing, Martin Miller, Jacob Briegel, Daniel Strobel, Conrad Burckmeyer, Fred<sup>k</sup> Hoff, Eberh<sup>d</sup> Ehney, John Kelly, and Fred<sup>k</sup> Madutz.<sup>29</sup> The close connection between the membership of St.

<sup>27</sup>Wagener, "Die Deutschen von Sud-Carolina, II. Michael Kalteisen," 7.

<sup>28</sup>Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty*, 29-30. Walsh also gives an excellent and detailed analysis of the activities of the Fellowship Society and its internal struggles.

<sup>29</sup>The spelling of these names follows the spelling in the first volume of the Society's Minutes and differs from the listing in George J. Gongaware's definitive work, *The History of the German Friendly Society of Charleston, South Carolina, 1766-1916* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1935), 2. The listing of the founding members in

John's Lutheran Church and the German Friendly Society is apparent in this roster, and to the present day, a few honorary memberships in the Society are reserved for members of the clergy. The stated purpose of the Society was "To relieve the distresses of our fellow creatures, and to promote their welfare, . . . to support a falling brother—to save a sinking family from ruin—and father the helpless orphan."<sup>30</sup> It is striking how similar this wording is to the purported goal of the Fellowship Society. The Society's meticulous membership records are an invaluable asset for ethnic studies today because the rules state that "No person shall be admitted a Member of this Society, under the Age of twenty-one years, and unless he be a German, or born of a German parent or parents, or can speak the German Language intelligibly."<sup>31</sup> Kalteisen's activities in the German church, the Fellowship Society, and the German Friendly Society are all based on their charitable activities. He served the Society as president from 1766 to 1772, as vice-president in 1773, and again as president in 1774 and 1787.

Over its more than 230 years of existence, the Society has made considerable contributions to Charleston and to South Carolina in the areas of charity, education, and historical preservation, to mention a few. From the beginning members met on a weekly basis, set a limit for the number of members admitted, and established admission fees that the Society prudently invested for growth and interest. In 1772 the Society established a permanent charity with rules governing the distribution of funds.<sup>32</sup> The tailor Henry Timrod, who joined the Society in 1772, became its president in 1780, and died in 1794, was one of many whose widow and children benefited from

the Society's Rules (2nd Edition), shows variant spellings for the following names: Melchior Werly, Christian Dus, Charles Gruber, Philip Minseng, Frederick Madutz, Frederick Hoff, Eberhard Ehney, and adds John Keller to the list of founders.

<sup>30</sup>*Rules of the German Friendly Society; established at Charleston, in South-Carolina, January 15, 1766* (Charleston: William P. Young, 1789), 3.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 5. Gongaware mistakenly assumes an early abandonment of this rule. Huge areas of central Europe were German or German-speaking at that time, since the political boundaries have changed greatly since 1766. Today's French Alsace, regions in the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, the Baltic nations, as well as other western areas of the former Soviet Union were included. In addition, the German-speaking areas of the Austrian empire such as Galicia, the former Czechoslovakia, parts of Hungary and Italy, the former Yugoslavia, etc., also qualified, as did large parts of Switzerland.

<sup>32</sup>A substantial article in the Jubilee edition of Charleston's *Deutsche Zeitung*, November 22, 1913, supplements information in George Gongaware's book about the German Friendly Society and its founder. The *Deutsche Zeitung* (1853-1917) contains much valuable information on contemporary life among the German-speaking community in Charleston. It is available on microfilm at the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

the Society's charity.<sup>33</sup> By 1777 the Society's total funds consisted of £4,600 sterling, some of which it loaned to the state. Although the Revolutionary War temporarily interrupted the Society's function and prosperity, it made a remarkable comeback. After its incorporation in 1791, it increased its options considerably by passing a rule to permit investment of Society funds in real estate and changing its rules to open membership admission to descendants from the male line of a member. The Society's worth in the year 1800 was \$15,128.27 in bonds with an annual income of \$1,800.<sup>34</sup> At that point, the Society purchased a lot on Archdale Street within close proximity of St. John's Lutheran Church, and on March 11, 1801, Michael Kalteisen placed the cornerstone for the Society's new building. The Society held its first meeting in the new Hall on December 16, 1801, thus celebrating a new era.

This particular event underscores a second and very important purpose of the German Friendly Society, which, although not expressly stated, helps to explain the popularity and survival of the organization to the present. The Society was and remains a restrictive social club for men with an emphasis on exclusive fellowship and strict privacy. When sixty-four members sat down to a splendid dinner in the new, spacious fellowship hall,

a house in the neighborhood was provided for the accomodation of the widows on the bounty of the Society, in which they partook of the entertainments of the day; and to such of them, as through infirmity or sickness, could not attend, a portion was sent; so that "they who gave, and they who received," all partook of the good cheer and grateful excitement afforded by this celebration.<sup>35</sup>

A third feature of the Society was its emphasis on secrecy and decorum at meetings, concomitant with a display of the strictest moral behavior in public. Rule XX governed the deportment of members, and infractions carried penalties ranging from monetary fines to expulsion from membership. The guidelines demanded a "decent, peacable, and inoffensive behaviour" at meetings; an adherence to parliamentary-style rules for conducting discussions; a prohibition on cursing, inebriety, gaming, dancing at meetings or "after Society hours, during the same days or nights," and the

<sup>33</sup>Helene M. Riley, "German Romanticism in Old Charles Towne? Rediscovering William Henry Timrod (1792-1838), Bookbinder-Poet," *South Atlantic Review* 59 (January 1994), 675-85. The article discusses Henry Timrod and his bookbinder-poet son, William Henry Timrod, who also became a member of the Society.

<sup>34</sup>*Deutsche Zeitung*, November 22, 1913, English edition, unpaginated supplement.  
<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

dispute of controversial subjects in matters of religion or politics.

Non-members were (and are) invited to the Society's fellowship. In September 1774 the visiting Lutheran patriarch Henry Melchior Muhlenberg attended an excursion into the countryside with Kalteisen, who entertained him "with accounts of the Cherokee Indians; for some twenty years he had been acting as an envoy of the local government to the savage nations." Muhlenberg details Kalteisen's experiences with Indian tribes and their culture and customs as they relate to religion, morality, hospitality, and charity. In October Muhlenberg was invited to attend a meeting of the German Friendly Society. Afterwards he noted in his journal: "This commendable society is, so to speak, the flower and crown of the German nation in these parts." The meeting afforded him "an opportunity to become more closely acquainted with the most civilized and prominent members of the German nationality in this place than is possible in church gatherings"—an indication that even in those early years the Society was functioning as a distinctly separate organization despite its close church ties.<sup>36</sup>

In 1803 the Society opened a school in the lower, unoccupied quarters of the Hall for the purpose of economically educating the children of members and to raise funds while making an important contribution to the community. An advertisement in the *Charleston Courier*, that John C. Faber, chairman of the school committee, placed, gives some insight into the operation.<sup>37</sup> The Society wanted a properly qualified "Master for the Society School in Archdale Street" who was to work under the school committee's supervision and was to teach twenty-three children of the Society. For the instruction of these children the school's master was offered \$110 quarterly, housing on the Society's lot, and the rent-free use of one or two school rooms. There, prior to the establishment of public schools, the Society taught children of both sexes from 1803 through 1833, "and in 1815 granted a request from the Commissioners of Free (public) Schools to use the Society's rooms to hold their meetings."<sup>38</sup> Besides the school and the meeting rooms, the Society Hall also contained an extensive and valuable library and an important collection of oil paintings, including some by Thomas Coram, Thomas Sully, and Christian Mayr. Both the library and the paintings were saved when the Hall was destroyed by fire on September 17,

<sup>36</sup>Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, trans., *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, Vol. II, (Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1982), 572-573, 588. Muhlenberg (1711-1787) organized the first Lutheran synod in America.

<sup>37</sup>The Reverend Faber arrived in Charleston in 1787 from Germany, the highly-educated son of a judge who was a graduate of the Carlsschule of Stuttgart and a classmate of famed German poet Frederick Schiller.

<sup>38</sup>Letter from Kellinger R. Cotton, Jr., Secretary, The German Friendly Society, to the author, January, 26, 1996.



1864, after being severely damaged by Federal artillery shells.<sup>39</sup>

Despite its important role in the life of Charleston over two centuries, the German Friendly Society had to overcome numerous obstacles to survive. After the destruction of the Society Hall, the weekly meetings were held in the hall of the German Freundschaftsbund, a literary and musical society founded in 1832. Since membership required Germanic blood lineage, many of their members also belonged to the German Friendly Society. Major changes occurred during and after the First World War. Charleston's *Deutsche Zeitung* had to stop publication after sixty-four years. Descendants of German immigrants served in the armed forces of the United States in the war against Germany. The German language ceased to be used, and anti-German sentiment was rampant in the United States throughout the conflict. The Deutsche Freundschaftsbund changed its constitution and its name to the Arion Society after the Greek lyric poet and musician Arion of Methymna (7th c. BC). When the Arion Society was forced to sell their Hall in 1920, the German Friendly Society moved its meetings to the German Artillery Hall until 1933, when the Arion Society reacquired and remodeled its former Hall. During World War II, however, the United Services Organization required rest and recreation facilities for the armed forces and, supported by the Federal Government, "exercised its option for the purchase of the Arion Hall."<sup>40</sup> From November 1941 to October 1942, the German Friendly Society held its weekly meetings at various places from private homes to the Dock Street Theater, until they arranged the purchase and renovation of the present building at 29 Chalmers Street. Germany's declaration of war on the United States "naturally had a profound effect on the thoughts and emotions of the members,"<sup>41</sup> and on July 22, 1942, the membership voted to amend the constitution and change "the name from the German Friendly Society to the Friendly Society of Charleston. . . The Society existed under this name until 1965," when the membership voted to restore its original name.<sup>42</sup>

The objectives of the German Friendly Society have evolved over time, yet they remain remarkably faithful to the founding principles. On January 17, 1996, the Society celebrated its 230th anniversary with a dinner at the Mills House, where it has held its annual banquet for the past fifteen years. The Society always has been primarily a charitable organization. The

<sup>39</sup>Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel writes that "The hall burned on September 17, 1864, and not in the great fire of 1861, as is sometimes asserted." Beatrice St. Julian Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, 2d ed. (Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1945), 147.

<sup>40</sup>A.C. Lesemann, Jr., *The History of the German Friendly Society of Charleston, South Carolina, 1916-1966* (n.p., n.d.), 20.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.



Above: The Freundschaftsbund Hall (now the Washington Light Infantry Hall) at 287 Meeting Street. Below: The German Artillery Hall, which stood on Wentworth Street between King and Meeting Streets. Both buildings served as meeting places for the German Friendly Society following the destruction of its Hall in 1864. Top photo from the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society. Bottom photo courtesy of John Carson Hay Steele.



Society continues to designate funds for charities from membership dues of \$225 per year, and it neither engages in fund-raising promotions nor solicits money or goods from nonmembers. Its major charitable recipients have included the Lohmann Home, the Hospiz, and the Franke Home. The latter is named after Carl Daniel Franke, who left \$40,000 in his testament for the foundation of a Lutheran home for the aged.<sup>43</sup> As one of the oldest American historical organizations, the German Friendly Society continues to be fiscally healthy. It has a membership limit of 200 and there is currently a waiting list of eleven and one-half years for membership.

For its immigrant founder the German Friendly Society became a vital link in the shaping of America's future.<sup>44</sup> On May 3, 1775, two weeks after the battles of Lexington and Concord signaled the opening of the struggle for independence, a small group of patriots met at Kalteisen's house to found the German Fusiliers. Many members of the Society appear on the initial roll. Members chose Alexander Gillon as captain and Bouquet and Kalteisen as first and second lieutenants. The officers received their patents, and the militia company was legally incorporated on July 12, 1775. Kalteisen's political career began in earnest with his election to the First and Second Provincial Congresses in 1775-1776. Siding firmly against the British in the Revolutionary War, he held the office of commissary of military stores for the regular forces in 1776 and assumed once again duties as wagon master general in 1778. In 1782 he was appointed captain of marines on the frigate *South Carolina*. His constituents returned him to the Fifth (1783-1784), Sixth (1785-1786), Seventh (1787-1788), and Eighth (1789-1790) General Assembly; he was warden for Charleston's Ward Twelve in 1785, and served as delegate to the state constitutional convention in 1788. Two years later the 60-year-old Kalteisen was appointed commander of Fort Johnson on James Island in Charleston Harbor, a post which he held until his death in 1807. Kalteisen's last major appointment in the service of his country occurred on July 18, 1794, when the U.S. government named the 65-year old captain of the First Artillerists and Engineers.<sup>45</sup>

To the day of his death Kalteisen was respected and supported by the Charleston community, the church, and the members of the Society he founded, and he never failed to assist those in need. As early as 1767 records show that he provided temporary living quarters to a musician, and as late

<sup>43</sup>Franke was born in Kurnik, Posen, an area formely Prussian that is now part of Poland.

<sup>44</sup>A detailed biography of Michael Kalteisen is available in German. See, Helene M. Kastinger Riley, *Michael Kalteisen (1729-1807). Ein Deutscher in South Carolina* (Merklingen: M. Fink, 1995).

<sup>45</sup>Bailey, Morgan, and Taylor, eds., *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives*, 390-92. Ficken, *Michael Kalteisen*, 11.



Above: The German Friendly Society Hall is located at 29 Chalmers Street. Since its founding in 1766, the Society has served as a benevolent fraternal organization. The United States and German flags hang above the building's entrance only on meeting days. Plaques to the right and left of the entrance clue passersby to the building's purpose. Below: The right plaque reads simply "The German Friendly Society of Charleston, S.C. Founded 1766 A.D." Photos from the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.



as 1794 he took care of the little daughter of one of his soldiers.<sup>46</sup> After being appointed commander of Fort Johnson on March 9, 1790, his life revolved largely around taking care of those under his command. In 1793 he and his troops rebuilt Fort Johnson, which had been destroyed earlier.<sup>47</sup> They had "no commissary to supply provisions or any other necessarys for the troop, no money to purchase either nor for any purpose whatever."<sup>48</sup> It is hard to imagine the difficult living conditions on James Island at that time. There were no comforts of home, no settlement, no protection from the elements. Today only an old powder house remains among the rubble of the fortifications.

Despite his advanced age, Kalteisen remained socially active and functioned as trustee for Solomon's Lodge. He continued to serve at St. John's Lutheran Church. He presented the petition for the church's incorporation to the General Assembly, and wrote letters to Germany on behalf of the parish.<sup>49</sup> A highpoint of his life occurred on March 11, 1801, when he joined his friend Daniel Strobel, the only other surviving co-founder of the German Friendly Society, in laying the cornerstone for the new Society Hall on Archdale Street. The carefully planned edifice, constructed by John and Henry Horlbeck, became the pride of the Society and its continuous meeting place until its destruction by fire in 1864. The *Charleston Times* reported the ceremony<sup>50</sup> and festivities at which Kalteisen gave a brief public speech.<sup>51</sup>

On November 3, 1807, Michael Kalteisen died at Fort Johnson. The inventory prepared by his friend and protege, Florian Charles Mey, reveals Kalteisen's spartan existence: a few dishes, mugs, and flatware, shaving utensils, two cots, a desk, a lantern, etc., worth an estimated \$41.25.<sup>52</sup> Like so many of his fellow immigrants, he never became wealthy in his chosen

<sup>46</sup>Wylma Anne Wates, ed., "Charleston Orphans," *SCHM* 78 (October 1977), 335.

<sup>47</sup>Willis J. Keith, "Fort Johnson, An Historical Sketch, 1708-1990." Charleston, S.C., no date. Mr. Keith is Program Supervisor of the Shellfish Management Program of the South Carolina Wildlife & Marine Resources Department which is presently located at the site of the fort, and is the resident historian. The paper does not mention Kalteisen or his troops.

<sup>48</sup>Captain Michael Kalteisen to Major Joseph Howell, November 1, 1794, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

<sup>49</sup>St. John's Lutheran Church Vestry Minutes, 16-27, 43-46.

<sup>50</sup>*Charleston Times*, March 11, 1801.

<sup>51</sup>Ficken, *Michael Kalteisen*, 12.

<sup>52</sup>Mühlenberg writes in his journals that when Mey arrived in America penniless from Danzig, Kalteisen procured a position for him with the merchant Alexander Gillon, where he soon prospered. Tappert and Doberstein, trans., *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, II, 580.



**The German Friendly Society placed this monument in Bethany Cemetery to mark the grave of Michael Kalteisen in 1908. Photo from the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.**

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country, but he served it well. Kalteisen was interred on the grounds of the Society Hall and later moved to Bethany Cemetery, where his monument stands under a palmetto tree.