



# The “bridge character”: Carl Schurz and West German–American rapprochement

Brandon Kinney<sup>1</sup>

Accepted: 5 July 2024 / Published online: 29 July 2024  
© The Author(s) 2024

## Abstract

In 1952, West Germans and Americans held a joint, year-long observation celebrating the centennial of the arrival of German-born Carl Schurz in the USA. The collaborative, transatlantic celebration served to publicize a historical and cultural relationship between the German and American peoples through the memory of Carl Schurz. State and non-state participants publicly remembered Schurz as the quintessential German–American and a “bridge character” that transcended national borders, occupied an important ideological space, legitimized the Cold War relationship between erstwhile enemies, and perpetuated an on-going process to construct a transnational, cultural identity rooted in Western liberal-democratic political culture. For the US government, the historical character of Carl Schurz also became a means of promoting a liberal heritage in the face of on-going Soviet accusations of American imperialism, warmongering, and poor race relations.

**Keywords** Cold War · Diplomatic history · Centennial · German–American · Carl Schurz

## Introduction

In 1952, West Germans and Americans held a year-long transatlantic observation of the one-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Carl Schurz in the USA. Schurz had arrived in New York on September 17, 1852, after fleeing from central Europe in the wake of the failed German Revolution of 1848, when he had hoped to be

---

✉ Brandon Kinney  
brandon.kinney@temple.edu

<sup>1</sup> Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA



part of the movement to establish a liberal democracy in Frankfurt that would unite the German peoples under a loose collection of kingdoms known as the German Confederation.<sup>1</sup> The centennial of Schurz's arrival was a massive, cooperative effort that included officials in the State Department, the West German government, and private cultural organizations on both sides of the Atlantic. Through the centennial, its planners carefully curated the memory of Carl Schurz for its audiences through speeches, exhibitions, celebrations, historical literature, and extensive media coverage over the entire year. Even before the Second World War, Carl Schurz was widely considered one of the most prominent German–Americans in history, and the 1952 centennial served as the culmination of consistent efforts by citizens in both countries to deploy the memory of Schurz in the service of strengthening cultural ties and pursuing transatlantic rapprochement after the end of the Second World War.

Collective memories are crucial components to constructing national and cultural identities. Cultural productions—including festivals and observations—construct narratives that are saturated with parables, referents, and axioms that communicate values and help to foster a “sense of community.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, as the Schurz Centennial demonstrates, these constructed identities could also transcend national borders and be oriented toward presenting a transnational historical continuity. Transatlantic celebrations, what Elisabeth Piller called “performing ‘transatlantic friendship,’” also preceded the Second World War, such as when Germans and Americans commemorated the 100th birthday of Carl Schurz in 1929 and the 200th birthdays of Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben and George Washington in the early 1930s.<sup>3</sup> In utilizing cultural and diplomatic frameworks, this essay demonstrates the fruitful conceptual space in the overlap between diplomatic history and memory studies, and how these historical actors could conceive of a transatlantic identity in the earliest years of the Cold War, which supported the economic, political, and military integration of the Atlantic world. As Brian Etheridge has argued, “memory diplomacy” was critical for the USA in the aftermath of the Second World War, where officials enlisted journalists, works of history, monuments, and more to mobilize American public opinion in favor of inclusion of West Germany in the American sphere of influence in the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein in 1952, within the context of the Cold War, the

<sup>1</sup> For a biographical sketch of Carl Schurz, including his participation in the Revolution, his exile and arrival in America, his participation in Reconstruction, and his time as Secretary of the Interior, see Hans Louis Trefousse, *Carl Schurz: A Biography* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 41 (May 2002), 180; Liana Giorgi and Monica Sassatelli, “Introduction” in Gerard Delanty, Giorgi, and Sassatelli, eds., *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1. The power of symbolism and memory was also used to reify a “Cold War mentality” and the ideological demarcation of the Cold War. See Konrad H. Jarausch, Christian F. Ostermann, and Andreas Etges, “Rethinking, Representing, and Remembering the Cold War: Some Cultural Perspectives,” in Jarausch, Ostermann, and Etges, eds., *The Cold War: Historiography, Memory, Representation* (Berlin: De Gruyter GmbH, 2017), 11–17.

<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Piller, *Selling Weimar: German Public Diplomacy and the USA, 1918–1933* (New York: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020), 336.

<sup>4</sup> Brian C. Etheridge, *Enemies to Allies: Cold War Germany and American Memory* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 2–6.



joint centennial celebrations demonstrated how the memory and narrative around Carl Schurz were used to reinforce and justify the West German–American cultural relationship and construct a Western, transatlantic identity based in the conceptions of liberal democracy.<sup>5</sup>

## Cold war motivations

The planning and celebration of the Carl Schurz Centennial in 1952 were deeply influenced by ideological demands of the early Cold War and the state of West German–American relations. By the end of 1947, occupied Germany had de facto emerged as two distinct economic, political, and cultural units: the American, British, and French zones on the one hand and the Soviet zone in the East on the other. The prospect of deepening ideological competition with the Soviet Union and the permanent division of Germany led American officials to increasingly revise their policy in occupied Germany, moving from punitive occupation and “reeducation” in the first two years toward “reorientation,” which included cultural and public diplomacy as part of its broad democratization programs.<sup>6</sup> The division was actualized with the establishment in 1949 of the Federal Republic of Germany (May) and German Democratic Republic (October).

In the years between the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany and the 1952 centennial, West Germany’s integration into the Atlantic world accelerated along economic, political, and cultural fronts. In 1950, the Federal Republic joined the Council of Europe, which hoped to promote peace and cooperation based on the common heritage of its European members. Beginning in September 1951, the Western powers and the Federal Republic were in negotiations to revise the Occupation Statute and officially end the occupation of West Germany and establish it as a sovereign nation.<sup>7</sup> In December 1951, concurrent with the first events of the Schurz Centennial Year, the USA and West Germany began negotiating a cultural convention that would symbolize the “changing character of U.S.-German relationships” from a unilateral occupation to bilateral cooperation by encouraging the kinds of

<sup>5</sup> For the use of memory in American foreign policy goals, see Robert D. Schulzinger, “Memory and Understanding U.S. Foreign Relations,” in Michael J. Hodan and Thomas G. Patterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> For the US policies of occupation and “reeducation” and their subsequent transformation into “reorientation” and “democratization,” see James F. Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2, 12, 254–5, 311, Konrad Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 130–139, and Katharina Gerund und Heike Paul, “Einleitung,” in Gerund and Paul (eds.), *Die Amerikanische Reeducation-Politik nach 1945: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf “America’s Germany”* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015), 7–14.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis L. Bark and David R. Gress, *A History of West Germany: From Shadow to Substance, 1945–1963* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), 290.



private cultural exchanges, cooperation, and person-to-person relationships that the centennial represented.<sup>8</sup>

There were also high-level discussions of West Germany's rearmament and integration militarily with the Atlantic world, which accelerated after the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. Commentators drew obvious parallels between North and South Korea in Asia and East and West Germany in Europe, and the North Korean invasion brought firmer demands for a West German contribution to the defense of Western Europe. By late 1950, West German generals were negotiating the terms of their nation's possible contribution, including the possibility of a European Defense Community treaty.<sup>9</sup> Within less than seven years of the end of the Second World War, western Germany had moved from the object of a punitive occupation to the prospect of full Atlantic integration, and officials knew they could not take American acceptance of West German sovereignty and remilitarization for granted.<sup>10</sup> As one West German journalist noted, negative impressions of Germans and Germany were still "noticeable in the press and politics of the USA." Yet, it was hoped on both sides of the Atlantic, the memory of Carl Schurz and the participation of the American press in this transatlantic celebration might help to change this perception.<sup>11</sup>

There were few people in history that were as emblematic of a positive German–American relationship and a hallmark of idealistic liberal democracy as Carl Schurz. The details of Schurz's life became a major oft-repeated asset for the carefully coordinated propaganda campaign during the Centennial Year. After the failure of the democratic Revolution of 1848, Schurz fled to the USA, where he went onto a memorable public life which included fighting for the Union in the American Civil War, working toward abolition and civil service reform, and serving as the Secretary of the Interior under President Rutherford B. Hayes.<sup>12</sup> Officials in 1952 portrayed Schurz as a figure shared a "spiritual kinship with the Great Emancipator" (his close friend Abraham Lincoln), challenged corruption and imperialism, promoted fairer relations with Native Americans and Filipinos, and opened educational avenues to

<sup>8</sup> Henry J. Kellermann, *Cultural Relations as an Instrument of US Foreign Policy: The Educational Exchange Program Between the USA and Germany, 1945–1954* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1978), 159–162.

<sup>9</sup> David Clay Large, *Germans to the front: West German rearmament in the Adenauer era* (University of North Carolina Press: 1996), 40–6, 62–107, 111–129.

<sup>10</sup> For Western fears of German remilitarization and "renazification" in the 1950s, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *The Fourth Reich: The Specter of Nazism from World War II to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 106–136.

<sup>11</sup> "Ein Leben für die Freiheit," *Kasseler Post*, 16 September 1952.

<sup>12</sup> Trefousse, *Carl Schurz*, 131–149, 235. More recently, the historical legacy of Carl Schurz has been challenged, owing largely to his time as the Secretary of the Interior from 1877 to 1881. Historians and journalists have argued that Schurz's policies toward Native Americans, especially with regard to schooling, was brutal and assimilationist and that his support of withdrawing federal troops from the South in 1877 contributed to the subsequent restrictions on the rights of free blacks. Trefousse, "Carl Schurz and the Indians," *Great Plains Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1984), 115; Simon Moya-Smith, "Deb Haaland becoming interior secretary is a chance to fix an agency that acts with contempt," *NBC News*, 18 December 2020; Julius Wilm, "Jenseits der Legende vom guten Deutschen: Carl Schurz in den USA," *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, 24 April 2022; Dirk Kubjuweit, "Kein Held ist Perfekt," *Der Spiegel*, 15 May 2022.



newly freed black Americans. With the Cold War in the background, Schurz was remembered as a devotee of freedom, a “non-partisan” champion of “international peace, by means of arbitration” and “free trade,” elements that made him indispensable as a figure in the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>13</sup>

The year-long celebration of the Carl Schurz Centennial in the USA and West Germany was a success in large part because of the multivocality of the memory of Carl Schurz that could serve the myriad of motivations for the participants. In the words of one participant in the festivities, “the project for 1952” attempted to “extract... salients [sic] from this man’s career which have function for us today and which can be articulated,” and that “the facts of Schurz’s life are merely the foundations upon which to base our thinking.”<sup>14</sup> As an implement of cultural diplomacy, the Schurz Centennial served three major intellectual needs of its participants in the Cold War. First, as a German-born liberal who fled to the USA, the memory of Schurz highlighted a German–American relationship that was deeply rooted in history, thereby providing a cultural justification for the contemporary West German–American relationship that was becoming more intertwined on the political and military front. US officials wanted a wide American audience for the celebrations in order to garner as much public support for the Atlantic relationship, but they also wanted to impress upon West Germans that Americans “appreciate [liberal] persons like Carl Schurz, born in Germany.”<sup>15</sup> Celebrating Schurz’s struggle for freedom became a means of how the USA and Federal Republic legitimized their relationship and promoted West Germany as a keystone in the liberal-democratic world during the Cold War.

Second, Schurz’s experiences in the Revolution of 1848 personified the capacity of Germans for democratic political thought. Officials in the USA hoped that for those who had concerns about the limits of denazification and the speed with which West Germany was being reintegrated back into the community of nations, the positive, democratic political culture embodied by Carl Schurz would overwrite the memories of the recent Nazi regime and assuage the fears of the general public. On the other side of the Atlantic, for West German officials who were eager to orient their country to the West, the cultural currency of Schurz’s name and his participation in the Revolution of 1848 helped the Federal Republic stake a claim to international legitimacy and to the Western world more broadly.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Buka to L.J. White, 9 November 1951, Box 2, Folder 2, National Carl Schurz Association Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter cited as NCSA Records, HSP), 2; Carl Schurz, 3 December 1951, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter cited as NARA), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Schurz Centennial, 1852–1952, Delivered at Liederkranz, New York City, 3 March 1952, Series 1A, Group 1, Box 6, Folder 9, NCSA Records, HSP, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Howard Elkinton to Walter J. Kohler, 1 August 1952, Box 2, Folder 2, NSCA Records, HSP.

<sup>16</sup> For conceptions of “the West” in postwar West Germany, see Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, “Perceptions of the West in Twentieth-Century Germany,” in Riccardo Bavaj and Martina Steber, eds., *Germany and ‘The West’: The History of a Modern Concept* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).



Third, the carefully deployed memory of Schurz epitomized the virtues of American idealism and became shorthand for such themes as humanitarianism, peace, justice, bipartisanship, and the promise of freedom under a liberal-democratic system that US officials wanted to conflate with the image of their nation. These causes that Schurz championed during his life were a strong juxtaposition to the Kremlin's efforts to challenge the tenets of liberal democracy and amplify propaganda of American imperialism, warmongering, and poor race relations. Schurz's memory and well-documented ideals could bolster American morale and remind the American public of their Cold War mission and historical destiny in the face of anti-American propaganda. For all actors involved, whether they were private or public, West German or American, the memory and representation imbued in Carl Schurz as a historical figure was key to substantiating their geopolitical, ideological, and ethnic goals.<sup>17</sup>

Even before the Second World War, Americans and Germans alike frequently invoked Schurz's name as shorthand for the historical German–American relationship. Each nation had celebrated the centennial of his birth in 1929, with future West German President Theodor Heuss speaking on how Schurz embodied the German–American connection and German newspaper articles extolling the relationship.<sup>18</sup> In 1926, Germans founded the Carl-Schurz-Vereinigung, a cultural organization dedicated to reinforcing German–American relations, but it was corrupted by the Nazi regime immediately after Adolf Hitler's ascension. Under the Third Reich, the Vereinigung continued to trade on Schurz's name as a means to try and maintain cultural outreach with the USA (as well as attack enemies of the Nazi regime). The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation (CSMF) was founded in Philadelphia in 1930 with the similar mission of pursuing cultural relations with Germany, though it was forced to sever all ties in the mid-1930s.<sup>19</sup> After the war, Schurz's name was used for a reconstructed bridge in Baden-Württemberg in May 1947, and officials used the name of “the prototype of a great democrat” to christen a Frankfurt housing settlement in 1950. Frankfurt's mayor hailed the project as “an exemplary achievement of American and German cooperation and visible evidence of common efforts made by men of our two nations in an ideal spirit of good will.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> After the First World War, German–Americans were similarly motivated to highlight recognition for the historical achievements of Germans. Even history textbooks became a battleground for the achievement of these ethnic goals. Jonathan Zimmerman, “‘Each ‘Race’ Could Have Its Heroes Sung’: Ethnicity and the History Wars in the 1920s,” *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 1 (June 2000), 92–4, 101.

<sup>18</sup> Piller, *Selling Weimar*, 336–7; “Karl Schurz-Feier,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 3 March 1929.

<sup>19</sup> Rennie W. Brantz, “German-American Friendship: The Carl Schurz Vereinigung, 1926–1942” *The International History Review* 11, no. 2 (May 1989), 233–237; Trefousse, *Carl Schurz*, 298–300; Frank Trommler, “The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, Nazi Germany, and German Americans” *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 54 (2019), 170–1; Peter A. Horn, “Deutscher und Amerikaner,” *Deutschland Beobachter*, 14 May 1941.

<sup>20</sup> Georg Sauer, “Die ‘Carl Schurz’ Brücke vor der Verkehrsübergabe,” *The American-German Review* 13, no. 5 and 6 (June–August 1947), 12; Elkinton to Millard Langfeld, Jr., 24 June 1942, Box 7, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP; “Carl Schurz through the Lens of Time,” *The American-German Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1951), 2; HICOG Housing Project, c. 1950–1951, Box 5, Folder 8, NCSA Records, HSP, 1, 4, 12; Walter Kolb to John J. McCloy, 19 December 1950, Box 5, Folder 8, NCSA Records, HSP, 1–2.



In the USA, the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation saw postwar cultural rapprochement as especially desirable, as its membership was made up primarily of Americans of German descent that collectively felt close ethnic and familial ties with those across the Atlantic. During the war, the Foundation had been the subject of intense suspicion from the US government during the war, forcing it to significantly curb its overseas cultural activities. Instead, by 1940, the Foundation and its Trust were committing nearly three-quarters of their annual expenses for the assistance of German refugees, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jewish (including Albert Einstein).<sup>21</sup> Significantly, the Foundation also pivoted to conserving the culture of the “older [pre-Hitler] Germany of Goethe” and the 1848ers and “interpreting” it for the American public.<sup>22</sup> After the organization was cleared of any wrong-doing, its members were eager to promote the positive aspects of German culture and encourage closer cultural ties between West Germany and the USA.

Among other important endeavors, such as funding a medical mission to Germany, providing funding for the nascent Free University of Berlin and the reconstruction of Goethe’s home in Frankfurt, and sponsoring educational exchanges, the Foundation found itself in a perfect position to participate in transatlantic celebrations by transplanting the traditions of the “older Germany” that it had publicly preserved back into western Germany in a way that was authentic to the Germans themselves.<sup>23</sup> The Foundation provided spiritual support and represented the German–American cultural connection in May 1948, when the city of Frankfurt celebrated the centennial of the Revolution of 1848. In September the same year, the Foundation worked closely with Frankfurt officials and the American military government to put on a second centennial celebration, in which Schurz’s presence as the emblematic “freedom fighter” and symbol of a positive German–American relationship was the central focus.<sup>24</sup> In the narrative that surrounded both 1948 centennials, as well as the celebration of the 200th birthday of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, journalists, participants, and officials framed Germany as historically belonging to the West and having a particularly special connection with the American people.

Across the Atlantic in West Germany, a group of prominent citizens, including Frankfurt Mayor Walter Kolb, Ernst Beutler, and Theodor Heuss, used the September 1948 centennial observation as an opportunity to found a cultural organization in order to reciprocate the cultural work of the Foundation in Philadelphia. The new organization, founded in Frankfurt, took the name Carl-Schurz-Gesellschaft to shed any negative associations with the Vereinigung and was hailed as the beginning

<sup>21</sup> Trommler, “Carl Schurz,” 159–160; Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1 July 1947, Record Group 59, Box 73, Folder: From Germany Embassy Re: Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, NARA; Hanns Gramm, *The Oberlaender Trust, 1931–1953* (Philadelphia: The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1956), 64.

<sup>22</sup> Gregory J. Kupsky, “‘The True Spirit of the German People’: German-Americans and National Socialism, 1919–1955,” PhD Diss. (Ohio State University, 2010), 203–7; James Truslow Adams to Wilbur K. Thomas, 11 July 1940, Box 3, Folder 6, HSP; George Hanstein to Eric M. Warburg, 8 December 1948, Box 4, Folder 8, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>23</sup> Kupsky, “‘True Spirit,’” 228–235.

<sup>24</sup> “Ein Mann zwischen Amerika und Deutschland,” *Neue Presse*, 4 September 1948.





of a new era of cultural relations and “bridges” across the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>25</sup> The Gesellschaft quickly merged with another Frankfurt organization and rebranded itself as the Steuben-Schurz Gesellschaft in Wiesbaden. In October 1949, a new organization founded in Bremen in October of the same year took the name Carl-Schurz-Gesellschaft (or Karl-Schurz-Gesellschaft). Both of these groups worked to be a significant presence for West German cultural outreach in the postwar period by sponsoring exchanges, gatherings, exhibitions, lectures, and more to promote a cultural and economic relationship between the USA and Federal Republic.<sup>26</sup> As West German groups matured, they began to take on a larger share of the transatlantic cultural relationship, and in 1952 became an animating force behind many of the Schurz Centennial observations held in the Federal Republic.

US officials saw cultural organizations in West Germany as the key to eventually establishing a full, bilateral partnership between the two nations. Beginning in December 1951 and continuing through the Schurz Centennial Year, officials in West Germany and the USA were in negotiations (concurrent with the revision of the Occupation Statute and the proposed European Defense Community treaty) to conclude a cultural convention that would recognize that the US-West German relationship was moving from one of “unilateral intervention” to “bilateralism,” mutual cooperation, and reciprocity.<sup>27</sup> Such a cultural agreement would decrease the responsibility of government officials for conducting cultural diplomacy in favor of the private sector. In actuality, the negotiations and subsequent convention largely codified and sanctioned what had been happening in the cultural realm in practice for several years by that point. In addition to numerous transatlantic celebrations, exchange-of-persons programs were just one of the methods through which Americans and West Germans were already carrying out cultural diplomacy with and without direct government assistance. Over the course of the Schurz Centennial, West German cultural organizations such as the Steuben-Schurz-Gesellschaft shouldered a larger portion of the responsibility than at any point previously, embodying the spirit of bilateralism in the proposed cultural convention, which was eventually signed in 1953.

<sup>25</sup> Wiedergründung der Carl-Schurz-Gesellschaft, 7 June 1948, Folder: Deutsche Carl-Schurz-Gesellschaft, Series: A.41—Kulturamt, Vereine zur Förderung des Kulturaustausches, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Frankfurt (hereafter cited as ISG); Vorschläge zu einem abgeänderten Entwurf des Anrufs betr.: Deutsche Carl Schurz-Gesellschaft, c. 1948, Folder: Deutsche Carl-Schurz-Gesellschaft, Series: A.41—Kulturamt, Vereine zur Förderung des Kulturaustausches, ISG; “Brücken von jenseits des Ozeans,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 4 September 1948; “Wir bauen eine Brücke,” *Marburger Presse*, 30 September 1948. In the case of the Frankfurt society, there was significantly more cross-pollination between public and private actors than in the case of the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation.

<sup>26</sup> Satzungen der Steuben-Schurz-Gesellschaft, c. 1949, Record Group 260, Box 612, Folder: History Steuben-Schurz Gesellschaft Wiesbaden, General Records, 1946–1949, NARA; Liebe Bremer, c. 1949–1950, Record Group 466, Box 4, Folder: German American Club Activities, General Records, 1945–1952, NARA; “News and Comment...,” *The American-German Review* 17, no. 6 (August 1951), 32.

<sup>27</sup> Kellermann, *Cultural Relations*, 159.





## Preliminary plans and private–public cooperation

For US officials, one of the motivating factors behind much of their support was a Soviet propaganda offensive known as the “peace offensive.” Through this campaign, the Soviet Union took great pains to frame itself as the proper custodian of world peace while singling out the USA as unique threat to peace due to their status as an imperial and atomic power.<sup>28</sup> Just a month before the State Department began planning for the centennial in earnest in October 1951, officials circulated a memorandum to American diplomatic offices worldwide directing them to coordinate their approaches in responding to Soviet anti-American propaganda. A core piece of the coming American response was the “peace with freedom” campaign, where the State Department endeavored to portray the USA as the more responsible stewards of international peace.

The memory of Carl Schurz fit this campaign perfectly. He seemingly championed the most honorable causes of American history at a time when America’s commitment to liberal democracy was publicly questioned by the Soviet Union, and he would be the prime example not only of the best that the USA had to offer but also as America’s inheritance of “Germany’s contribution to America’s scientific and cultural progress.”<sup>29</sup> Inter-departmental fact sheets on Schurz’s life (provided by the Foundation) placed a thorough emphasis on his commitment to duty and his embodiment of freedom and liberal democracy. By November, the International Press and Publications Division (INP) was already putting together a comprehensive program to implement the project which included a potential slogan (“Born Free and Equal—*Freiheit, die ich meine*”) and a pamphlet series (“Carl Schurz Centennial—The Doom of Slavery”).<sup>30</sup>

The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation was the obvious choice of patron to publicly “carry the ball,” while official government organs provided logistical support and disseminated news as widely as it could behind the scenes. The Department assigned a member of the Public Liaison Division to reach out to the Foundation in November and probe the organization about any planned activities that government could lend its support to.<sup>31</sup> The Foundation’s executive director, Howard Elkinton, had experience working on joint celebrations during the 1848 centennials and the bicentennial of Goethe’s birth and was thrilled at the chance to raise his organization’s profile and contribute meaningfully to the reorientation of West Germans once more.<sup>32</sup> In the midst of planning the centennial events with the State Department,

<sup>28</sup> Petra Goedde, *The Politics of Peace: A Global Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 13.

<sup>29</sup> Buka to White, 9 November 1951, 1–2.

<sup>30</sup> Carl Schurz, 3 December 1951, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, NARA, 1–3.

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Carl Schurz Centennial, 21 November 1951, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, NARA; Langfeld to Morton Glatzer, 28 February 1952, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, NARA.

<sup>32</sup> Howard Johnston to Elkinton, 11 December 1951, Box 6, Folder 6, NCSA Records, HSP.



Elkinton happily wrote to the Foundation's president that "the State Department [had] fallen into the spell of Carl Schurz."<sup>33</sup>

The Foundation had initially only planned a small commemoration in its own headquarters and coordinating a small dinner in late January 1952 at the Liederkrantz Club in New York, but cooperation with the State Department would be the perfect opportunity to "alert the people of this country of the contributions which Germans have made to the USA and also to further an understanding of the people of West Germany."<sup>34</sup> The Foundation secured the cooperation of George Shuster, a friend of the Foundation who had spoken at the September 1948 centennial and served in the position of Land Commissioner of Bavaria in 1950.<sup>35</sup> With plans now in development for the centennial, the Foundation pushed the date for the Liederkrantz dinner back to early March to accommodate the State Department's plans.<sup>36</sup> The Foundation's State Department liaison, Millard Langfeld, thought that the March dinner would be an appropriate way to kick off the centennial ("our first good peg for overseas use"), but the State Department's attendance would be only as spectators, though their presence still gave official weight and authority to the proceedings.

Within the State Department itself, the project grew immensely in the first few weeks of planning. The Department of State created a committee to promote the year's festivities, and before long the committee included a wide swath of the Department's divisions, such as the Government Affairs Institute, Public Liaison Division, International Information and Education Exchange Program, International Motion Pictures Division, International Broadcasting Division, and more.<sup>37</sup> The Department's devotion of resources demonstrated its commitment to the centennial and its full-court press strategy to disseminate it widely internationally. The first major commentary came via radio in December 1951, when the International Information Administration broadcasted "Commentary on Schurz's Life" worldwide.<sup>38</sup>

By mid-January, the State Department and Foundation had developed a preliminary outline for the year. The official plan belied the Department's hope that the centennial year would "advance the public relations of the Department of State at home and to make a distinct [overseas] contribution to the Campaign of Truth," an American propaganda campaign whose core aim was having private American citizens and organizations project the ideal image of the USA abroad to combat Soviet propaganda. The celebrations and the surrounding coverage were to personify Carl

<sup>33</sup> Elkinton to George McAneny, 14 February 1952, Box 6, Folder 8, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>34</sup> Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation to William Lichtenfels, 11 February 1952, Box 6, Folder 8, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 12 February 1952, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, NARA; Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 October 1951, Box 34, Folder 4, NCSA Records, HSP, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee, 24 January 1952, Box 34, Folder 5, HSP, 3; Elkinton to George N. Shuster, 6 February 1952, Box 6, Folder 8, HSP.

<sup>37</sup> Elkinton to Louis Thun, 19 February 1952, Box 6, Folder 8, NCSA Records, HSP; Millard Langfeld, Jr. to Carl Schurz Centennial Committee, 13 March 1952, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, NARA.

<sup>38</sup> Carl Schurz Centennial Coverage, c. 1952–1953, Box 2, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP, 1.



Schurz “as the typical example of what any man, or nation, can achieve in a democratic society and under the Free World’s way of life,” especially if they possessed the “industry and ability which German settlers” like Schurz brought to the USA.

The preliminary plan combined the efforts of West Germans, the CSMF, and other “interested private organizations and interested private individuals” with the Department’s connections in media and broadcasting. One official bluntly approved of the “propaganda potential” of the centennial, believing that “its exploitation is something for which all our media should be mobilized.” The Department envisioned utilizing media as broadly as possible, including radio, television, magazines (specifically the Foundation’s periodical, *American-German Review*, which had notable circulation among information centers in West Germany), pamphlets, motion pictures, and school programs. It also directed officials to organize a letter-writing campaign to Germany for the occasion, because “the propaganda value of such letters, when used by [*Voice of America*], and by the Press and Publication Branches... will be obvious.” Officials believed total saturation of the observations would bolster the wider American propaganda effort abroad.<sup>39</sup>

There were also “special implications for the German–American relations.” Carl Schurz was “an almost perfect symbol of the contribution to American civilization made by liberal European immigrants generally. The officials agreed that Schurz was a “highly useful ‘peg’” for our present emphasis upon ‘peace with freedom’ and subsequent related emphases, in the worldwide Campaign of Truth.” To this end, the International Press and Publications Division worked with the Foundation to compile materials about Schurz that the State Department thought would satisfy the themes of “Freedom,” “Strength,” and “Progress,” among others.

Schurz played numerous roles in his life: newspaper editor, “educator, diplomat, brigadier-general and promoter of democratization of officer-soldier relationships, special commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau, senator and cabinet-member.” Based on this full, admirable life, it would not be difficult for materials aimed at “media exploitation” to frame Schurz in such a way that would bolster the American (and German) position in the Cold War by “underlin[ing] the importance of Carl Schurz as a historical figure of great significance for Germany and the United States.” In support of this goal, Department officials should make overtures to various magazines, German language newspapers, the German Diplomatic Mission in Washington, and perhaps even to a group representing American Indians to write on “developments in Indian welfare.”<sup>40</sup> Department officials believed that they could count on journalists to take up interest in Schurz, as he was “an eminent member of that profession.”

By February, the Department circulated its operational plan widely to its own officials as well as to the Foundation. The aim of the centennial year was

<sup>39</sup> Duncan MacBryde to Various Divisions re: Carl Schurz Centennial, 24 January 1952, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, NARA, 1–4; Proposed Plan: Carl Schurz Centennial Observance, 16 January 1952, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, NARA, 1–7.

<sup>40</sup> MacBryde to Various Divisions, NARA, 1–4. Emphasis in the original; Hanstein to Werner Lutz, 21 March 1952, Box 6, Folder 9, NCSA Records, HSP.



to use the dramatic story of Carl Schurz to epitomize the vast scope of opportunity available to any individual within the framework of a democratic society such as exists in America; to strengthen the bond of friendship between the United States and other nations, with particular emphasis on Germany, by discreet exploitation of Schurz' German origin and stress on the worldwide implications of the Schurz story.

In order to help shape the transnational narrative around the celebrations, officials also issued guidance for coverage of the events and memory of Schurz. Reportage should utilize.

1. A chronology of German–American achievements...
3. Liberal use of Schurz' letters, speeches, and essays, with emphasis on Americana as applied to German–Americana
5. Stress on Schurz' role as a non-partisan reformer who did much to better the American way of life, i.e.: Champion of abolition, of rehabilitation of the Indians, of fair treatment for the Filipinos, and of free trade and international peace...
6. The link between the German movement of 1848 and modern Germany's struggle toward democracy, with especial emphasis on Schurz' role therein...
7. Use of quotations from Schurz and Lincoln, showing Schurz' spiritual kinship with the Great Emancipator...
8. The U.S. heritage of Carl Schurz, with emphasis on Germany's contribution to America's scientific and cultural heritage...
10. The history of German immigration to America, with Carl Schurz personalizing the contributions made by these immigrants to the over-all development of the United States...

Over the entirety of the coming year, the Department hoped that the various exhibitions, speeches, and other events would highlight these most favorable attributes of Schurz (which would, by extension, exemplify the most favorable attributes of the USA and Germany). It largely fell to the Howard Elkinton and the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation to drive the plans in the forward publicly and work with West Germans across the Atlantic.<sup>41</sup> The Foundation distributed relevant information on Schurz's life and the year-long celebrations to domestic and international media, the State Department's press services, libraries, speakers, local and state officials, *Voice of America*, and beyond that highlighted the core themes and attributes of the year.<sup>42</sup> The Foundation transmitted news from Germany and furnished information to newspapers and publications such as the High Commissioner for Germany (HICOG)'s *Information Bulletin*, *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, *New York Times*, *Philadelphia*

<sup>41</sup> Operational Plan—Carl Schurz Centennial Observance, c. January–February 1952, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, NARA, 1, 3–4.

<sup>42</sup> Langfeld to Elkinton, 28 February 1952, Box 6, Folder 8, NCSA Records, HSP.



*Gazette-Democrat*, a local Philadelphia radio station, and even publications in West Germany, such as *Die Welt*, *Neue Zeitung*, and *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*.<sup>43</sup>

Elkinton also suggested using a future Foundation dinner planned for 5 May in Philadelphia for the centennial. The organization wanted Langfeld and the State Department to lock in a prominent speaker, with Elkinton hoping for General Lucius Clay. Ultimately, Elkinton suggested a number of other projects that could bolster the public profile of the centennial, including the possibility of co-sponsoring American pilgrimages to Germany. It was a project that the Department wanted to avoid specifically, as they did not want to be seen as wrapped up in a commercial tourism project, though they hoped privately it could be a very good project that “should be encouraged.” Langfeld suggested that the Foundation look to Germany—including the nascent Carl Schurz Gesellschaft in Bremen—for a transatlantic partner to complete this.<sup>44</sup> It was an echo of the US and West German governments’ on-going negotiations for a cultural convention that would cede the responsibilities of cultural contacts to private actors.

## The Carl Schurz Centennial in the USA

The Liederkranz dinner on 3 March served as the “opening gun” for the festivities in the USA. There were two main speakers for the Liederkranz meeting on 3 March: Dr. Arthur D. Graeff, a local historian and member of the Foundation, and Dr. George Shuster. Graeff began his brief remarks (and the official American centennial festivities) by hailing Schurz as a symbol and finding it “proper” that the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation should be leading the charge of the American observance in New York, where Schurz landed in the USA. Spirit and idealistic dreams were not enough without “a sponsor, a caretaker” to put those plans into action as the Foundation was presently doing in Philadelphia and the Federal Republic. The life, career, and services of Carl Schurz “have function for us today” during the Cold War and formed “the foundations upon which to base our thinking” at home and abroad.<sup>45</sup> Shuster spoke next, highlighting the present circumstances surrounding American cultural relations with Germany. He spoke at length on the proposed cultural convention between West Germany and the USA, which would inaugurate a new era of cultural relations and serve to strengthen West German–American cultural ties at a point when economic, political, and military ties were deepening. For this new era, private organizations such as the Foundation would play an increasingly significant role as HICOG’s role lessened.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation Reports, 1945–1952, Box 1, Folder 4, NCSA Records, HSP, 7; Articles in Periodicals, April 1952–January 1953, Box 1, Folder 5, NCSA Records, HSP, 1–2.

<sup>44</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, c. February 1952, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, NARA, 1–2.

<sup>45</sup> Carl Schurz Centennial, HSP, 1–7.

<sup>46</sup> “Dr. Shuster auf Schurzfeier über D.A. Kulturaustausch,” *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 5 March 1952; “Die Bedeutung der Schurz-Feier zum Zentennial seiner US-Einwanderung,” *Sonntagsblatt Staats-Zeitung und Herold*; Elkinton to Thun, 19 February 1952, Box 6, Folder 8, NCSA Records, HSP.



The dinner received strong coverage locally and abroad. The Department of State's International Press Service, International Motion Picture Service, and *Voice of America* were on hand to give the meeting "complete publicity throughout Germany" as well as "other appropriate areas of the world." International broadcasts included excerpts of both speeches as well as a description of the planned observances for the entire year. As with the overseas broadcasts that would follow throughout much of the year, members of the State Department's press team ensured that the coverage of the Schurz Centennial were broadcasted through four local radio networks in the American zone as well as by radio in the American sector (RIAS) of Berlin, who transmitted the news into the Soviet Zone as well. Elkinton and members of the State Department were pleased with the extent of the coverage. Elkinton later noted how German visitors to the Foundation spoke positively about Shuster's speech after hearing it in West Germany.<sup>47</sup>

Shortly after the Liederkrantz dinner, Henry J. Kellermann, the Director of the Office of German Public Affairs in the State Department, reached out about speaking at the Foundation's annual meeting on 5 May, as General Lucius Clay was unable to attend. Kellermann, a native of Berlin who served as a propaganda and research analysis for the American federal government during the Second World War, had been serving as the Acting Chief of the Division of German Information and Reorientation Affairs since November 1949 and was currently a central part of the US-West German cultural convention negotiations. He was exactly the high-profile speaker that the Foundation had been hoping for, and his forthcoming speech ("Germany—Today and Tomorrow") promised to bring a lot of attention to the affairs. Elkinton took this as evidence that the centennial's opening ceremonies had pleased the State Department, joking that it was "a little diverting how suddenly [US officials] find Schurz as an ideal character for their purposes."<sup>48</sup> Elkinton and officials also secured the participation of Heinz L. Krekeler, the Chargé d'Affaires of the Diplomatic Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany, who represented the West German half of the cultural convention negotiations.<sup>49</sup>

The 5 May dinner took place at the Foundation's headquarters in Philadelphia. Krekeler spoke first, declaring that West Germans should follow in Schurz's footsteps by "fight[ing] for freedom and human dignity." Krekeler warned of the dangers of communism and the pressures coming from Soviet expansionism. The Chargé d'Affaires tied American and German history together by invoking the intellectual legacy of Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence, the "pursuit of happiness," and the premise of "checks and balances" that would help West Germans strive for a "democratic Germany," even if the work was still on-going. The German diplomat concluded his remarks by emphasizing "the precious goods of peace

<sup>47</sup> Langfeld to Elkinton, 25 February 1952, Box 6, Folder 8, NCSA Records, HSP; Carl Schurz Centennial Coverage, 1–2; Elkinton to Wilbur K. Thomas, 14 March 1952, Box 6, Folder 9, NCSA Records, HSP, 1; Elkinton to Langfeld, 3 July 1952, Box 7, Folder 3, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>48</sup> Elkinton to Thomas, 14 March 1952, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Heinz L. Krekeler to Elkinton, 20 March 1952, Box 6, Folder 9, NCSA Records, HSP; Langfeld to Begg, 9 April 1952, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files, 1948–1953, NARA; Kellermann, *Cultural Relations*, 160.



and freedom” had to be developed organically, fostered by a transatlantic US-West German relationship.<sup>50</sup> Henry Kellermann, the keynote speaker, echoed many of the same themes in his lengthy speech by telling his audience that the spirit of Carl Schurz, part of both the “finest heritage” of the USA and Germany, could create a “true and lasting union” between the two nations. If Germany continued to pursue his principles, it would result in “true partnership and lasting peace.” Kellerman highlighted the negotiations of the cultural convention, which would “encourage and facilitate the initiation of joint projects designed to promote the very principles” that the two nations were pledged to support.<sup>51</sup> As with the other events, the State Department saw to it that the Krekeler and Kellermann speeches reached as wide an international audience as possible while the Foundation furnished a local radio station with Kellermann’s speech for rebroadcast.<sup>52</sup> In the USA, text copies of Kellermann’s speech in particular were in high demand.

During the evening’s festivities, the Foundation donated to Krekeler and the German Diplomatic Mission offices (and soon-to-be German embassy) a portrait of Carl Schurz that had been hanging in their Board Room along with six volumes of Carl Schurz’s political papers, speeches, and correspondence to be kept at the Diplomatic Mission’s library.<sup>53</sup> Dr. Krekeler accepted these gifts by privately assuring Elkinton of their value.

“not only as a gesture of friendliness toward Germany but also as an expression on the part of your Foundation and the American citizens it presents that the ideals for which Carl Schurz has lived and fought, both in Germany and in America, are considered as the best guarantee for increasingly friendly relations between our two peoples.”<sup>54</sup>

In the middle of the centennial year, the prospects of West Germany’s full reintegration into Western Europe as a sovereign nation looked as bright as ever. As a result of the negotiations to revise the Occupation Statute, West Germany, France, Great Britain, and the USA signed a General Treaty at Bonn on 26 May to end the Allied occupation, and the delegates signed a treaty establishing the European Defense Community (EDC) in Paris the next day. Both the General Treaty and European Defense Community Treaty, however, had difficult passages through the West German and French legislatures. The EDC Treaty ultimately failed, and the General Treaty languished for a few years before it was officially ratified in October 1954, officially ending Western occupation of the Federal Republic of Germany the

<sup>50</sup> German Consulates and Missions, c. March 1952, Box 6, Folder 9, NCSA Records, HSP, 1–23.

<sup>51</sup> Henry J. Kellermann to Elkinton, 13 May 1952, Box 7, Folder 1, NCSA Records, HSP; Germany: Today and Tomorrow, 5 May 1952, Series 1A, Group 1, Box 2, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP, 1–45.

<sup>52</sup> Carl Schurz Centennial Coverage, 1; Broadcasts, May 1952–April 1954, nd, Box 1, Folder 5, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>53</sup> At a Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Carl Schurz Foundation, 5 May 1952, Box 7, Folder 1, NCSA Records, HSP; Elkinton to Krekeler, 8 May 1952, Box 7, Folder 1, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>54</sup> Krekeler to Elkinton, 17 May 1952, Box 7, Folder 7, NCSA Records, HSP.





following year.<sup>55</sup> In May 1952, HICOG officials and Howard Elkinton alike hailed the agreement as a demarcating moment in history that only served to reinforce the importance of the German–American centennial celebrations (unbeknownst to the difficulties the agreement would face in Paris and Bonn). Elkinton foresaw the nations entering “a new era” of political and cultural relations, reinforced by the anticipation of the likely arrival of a cultural convention. Once the responsibilities of HICOG receded, it would leave the Foundation “as a working nucleus” to help promote closer ties with the West German government and their civil society that was now beginning to bloom.<sup>56</sup>

As part of the centennial, the Foundation also reached out to mayors and governors across the USA in cities and states where Schurz played a profound historical role and there was a large German–American population.<sup>57</sup> The resulting public proclamations were often very close echoes of the keywords and themes developed by the Foundation and State Department. Mayor Vincent Impelletterri of New York City hailed Schurz as a great and progressive American and a “staunch champion of honesty in government and foe of discrimination” who worked for “Civil Service reform, just treatment of Indians, education of Negroes, and... social reforms.”<sup>58</sup> Proclamations from New York State, South Dakota, and elsewhere echoed these sentiments, calling Schurz a vanguard of liberal democracy and emblematic of immigrants “of the finest quality and character to come to our shore and become Americans.” The state proclamations of Pennsylvania and New York also emphasized the current-day importance of the German–American relationship, emphasizing that the interests of West Germans were “so closely bound to ours,” and that the 1952 Centennial was “appropriate” to demonstrate the investment of Americans in “the success of the West German Republic.”<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the rest of the summer and into September, the Foundation assisted in putting on a number of Schurz-related celebrations. On 24 August, as citizens of Syracuse celebrated German Day, Karl Koenig of Colgate University delivered an address on the life of Carl Schurz. The next day, the State Department distributed a documentary, *Schurz, the Reformer*, to its circulation desks to be transmitted via radio. The usage of this documentary spanned as far as Vietnam and Yugoslavia. On 12 and 13 September, Bard College held a conference on “Carl Schurz and Liberalism Today.” The conference itself was the product of Bard Professor Felix Hirsch, who had been in contact with the State Department to offer his support for

<sup>55</sup> Bark and Gress, *History of West German*, 290; Gerhart Binder, *Deutschland seit 1945: Eine Dokumentierte Gesamtdeutsche Geschichte in der Zeit der Teilung* (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1969), 316–318.

<sup>56</sup> The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation Address by H.W. Elkinton at Byndenwood, 31 May 1952, Box 2, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP, 1–2, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Governors, c. 1952, Box 2, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP, 1–2; Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee, 19 June 1942, Box 34, Folder 5, NCSA Records, HSP, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Proclamation, City of New York, c. August–September 1952, Box 2, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>59</sup> Statement, State of New York, 14 August 1952, Box 2, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP; Proclamation, State of South Dakota, 8 September 1952, Box 2, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP; Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Governor’s Office, 3 September 1952, Box 2, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP.



the “worthy enterprise” of celebrating the Schurz centennial and connecting its importance to the present day.<sup>60</sup> The same day that the conference ended, the State Department’s German radio service and *Voice of America* broadcasted a half-hour dramatization of the life story of Schurz and his symbolism of “unshakable political integrity and passionate dedication to social reform” courtesy of material supplied by the Foundation.<sup>61</sup> Before 17 September, the National Maritime and Aeronautical Association paid its respects to Schurz in New York City by laying a wreath in Carl Schurz Park.

The year’s ceremonies peaked on 17 September, the day that Schurz and his wife arrived in New York in 1852. Members of the Foundation, accompanied by German and US officials, arrived in Morningside Heights in New York to participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at a statue of Carl Schurz. Representatives of the German Consulate General in New York also participated, laying their own wreath as well.<sup>62</sup> A luncheon followed the ceremony, where Foundation member Robert H. Fife gave a speech on Carl Schurz as “Immigrant and Patriot,” once more positioning Schurz as an important historical and contemporary “diplomatic bridge” between the two countries. Fife ended his remarks with perhaps a perfect encapsulation of how the State Department would have wanted to wield Schurz’s name against Soviet propaganda, emphasizing that Schurz’s “principles of racial freedom and individual liberty... belong to our most sacred political heritage.”<sup>63</sup>

## The Carl Schurz Centennial in the Federal Republic of Germany

While the Liederkrantz dinner on 3 March, the date of Schurz’s birth, served as the “opening gun” of the American observations, the Carl-Schurz-Gesellschaft in Bremen held their first major observation of the centennial almost a month earlier on 7 February. To lend its authority to the affairs, the American Consul General and the US Land Commissioner of Bremen, Admiral Charles R. Jeffs’ office suggested that all members of their staff should attend the ceremony if they were able to do so. In the old Bremen town hall, the Gesellschaft celebrated the centennial with opening speeches by Bremen Senator Hermann Apelt and Admiral Jeffs.<sup>64</sup> Federal Republic President Theodor Heuss gave the keynote address in which he attested to the importance of the memory of Carl Schurz, “the patron saint of the German–American

<sup>60</sup> Annual Report, 1952–1953, HSP, 3; Carl Schurz Centennial Coverage, 1–2; Felix E. Hirsch to Langfeld, 23 February 1952, Record Group 59, Box 29, Folder: Carl Schurz Centennial, Subject Files: 1948–1953, NARA.

<sup>61</sup> “Briefs,” c. 1952, Record Group 59, Box 7, Folder, Voice of America (VOA) Historical Files, NARA; Elkinton to Vaughn DeLong, 15 September 1952, Box 7, Folder 5, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>62</sup> Elkinton to Shuster, 9 September 1952, Box 1, Folder 4, NCSA Records, HSP; Annual Report, 1952–1953, HSP, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee, 17 September 1952, Box 34, Folder 5, NCSA Records, HSP, 2; Carl Schurz: Immigrant and Patriot, September 1952, Box 2, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP, 4–7.

<sup>64</sup> Information Office, Public Affairs Section to All American Staff Members, 22 January 1952, Record Group 466, Box 18, Folder: 040 Entertainment, Ceremonies, General Records, 1949–1952, NARA.



relationship.” Heuss believed that Germans should look on Schurz as “a moving force” whose timeless “memory should move us, too.”<sup>65</sup> Two months later, in April, Heuss continued the centennial observances when he presented the Foundation with an essay book from Carl Schurz’s days as a student in Cologne.<sup>66</sup>

In late June, Secretary Acheson made an official trip to West Berlin, the “Western wedge” behind the Iron Curtain, where he helped to mark the construction of the American Memorial Library.<sup>67</sup> There, Acheson presented Mayor Ernst Reuter with a volume containing exchanged letters between Carl Schurz, “a liberal of German birth,” and Abraham Lincoln, which had been prepared for the occasion by the Library of Congress. With the centennial year in mind, Acheson noted that Schurz brought the “fine heritage of 1848” to the USA, including “humanitarian principles and [devotion] to the democratic concept that all men are created equal.” The Memorial Library served as a tribute to this culture in Germany and Berlin, to which the USA owed much of its cultural heritage. With the State Department’s official contribution, an “expression of friendship and understanding,” Acheson wished that the “ideals of Carl Schurz and Abraham Lincoln” would continue to inspire those who would defend freedom “in Berlin as in America.”

The following day, Secretary Acheson spoke at a cornerstone-laying event for the library. He hailed the “Old World” as the “basis of our cultural heritage,” and the library was a symbol of the desire of the USA to reextend knowledge back to “the common man” in Berlin, East and West. In a thinly veiled attack on the Soviet world’s propaganda offensive worldwide, Acheson claimed that the “freedom to learn” for all—“to study, to seek the truth,” was the “essence of a free society.” “Truth and freedom” were “inseparably joined,” as tyrants always sought “to throw up barricades against the truth.” Now, governments behind the Iron Curtain were “deathly afraid of this freedom.” Unfettered access to the knowledge of libraries and “open shelves” were a death knell to tyrannical regimes. Where the Acheson claimed the USA promoted doors open-wide, “so that the truth may guide us,” other regimes bound their people “behind barbed wire.” As West Germany took its place among the community of nations and regained the powers of self-government, Berlin, too, would benefit from this arrangement even if it did not apply to the city behind the Iron Curtain. Acheson wished the best to the people of West Berlin and hailed the “Germans of the Soviet zone” who “have kept burning in their hearts the flame of liberty, truth, and the rule of law,” waiting eagerly for the day “when they may rejoin the free world in a Germany united in peace and honor.”<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Theodore Heuss, “Parallels and Contrasts,” *Information Bulletin* (March 1952), 23–25; “Hundertjahrfeier der Einwanderung von Carl Schurz hier und im Reich,” *New York Staats-Zeitung und Herald*, 2 March 1952. For the full German text of the speech, see Vortrag von Bundespraesident Professor Heuss vor der Carl-Schurz-Gesellschaft zu Bremen, 7 February 1952, Record Group 466, Box 18, Folder: 040 Entertainment, Ceremonies, General Records, 1949–1952, NARA.

<sup>66</sup> Report of the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, c. 1954, Box 1, Folder 5, NCSA Records, HSP, 14.

<sup>67</sup> Eric Barnes to Elkinton, 23 January 1952, Box 6, Folder 7, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>68</sup> Carl Schurz Centennial Year 1952, c. 1952–1953, Box 2, Folder 2, NSCA Records, HSP; “Laying the Cornerstone of the American Memorial Library at Berlin, Remarks by Secretary Acheson,” *The Department of State Bulletin* 27, no. 680 (July 1952), 3–6.



In the USA, the Foundation included Acheson's remarks in its August edition of *American-German Review*, the entirety of which was dedicated to the history and relevance of Carl Schurz. Elkinton penned the opening article on "the virtue of [Schurz's] life," expounding on "our government's interest in Schurz" due to his application to the post-World War II and Cold War world. The State Department's interest, Elkinton wrote, stemmed from the end of the war, when Americans became more acutely aware of "the struggle for political freedom and the liberty of the individual" which had been present in Europe in 1848. Schurz, as exemplified by the US government's efforts over the better part of a year, was "particularly important today when men and women in West Germany are struggling to make ideals come true, where liberty and freedom have again to struggle with the forces of reaction." Due to the pressures facing West Germans from within and from behind the Iron Curtain, Schurz was the man of "unusual significance for middle Europe in 1952."<sup>69</sup>

The Steuben-Schurz-Gesellschaft, in order to properly publicize "the memory of a man who should mean more to us today than ever before" and to "revitalize [Schurz's memory] in broader [public] circles, took on the lion's share of the responsibility for Schurz Centennial events in the summer and fall."<sup>70</sup> In June, the society sponsored a spring festival where Americans and West Germans could mingle informally and celebrate their transatlantic relationship. Echoing the sentiments of the cultural convention currently being negotiated, the surest way to reform relations on a national level was to first engage in person-to-person relationships on an individual level.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the organization was also looking toward the culminating day of the year, 17 September by planning a traveling exhibition on the life and times of Carl Schurz and their lessons for West Germans in the present day. In cooperation with the Smithsonian Institute (at the behest of the State Department), the organization began to accumulate "Schurziana"—engravings, letters, speeches, images, articles, and even an original flag from the 1848 revolution from archives and museums in Germany as well as from the USA via HICOG and private citizens.<sup>72</sup>

On the centennial day, West Germans marked the occasion with a Frankfurt ceremony sponsored by the Steuben-Schurz Gesellschaft at St. Paul's Church. The church was a fitting place for the commemoration: in 1848, the church was the site where revolutionaries gathered a National Assembly with the hopes of declaring a new German republic, and St. Paul's Church had served as the backdrop for the

<sup>69</sup> Elkinton, "Carl Schurz—The Virtues of His Life," *The American-German Review* 18, no. 6 (August 1952), 3–4.

<sup>70</sup> An unsere Mitglieder, Freunde, und Förderer, 15 September 1952, Folder: Amerikanische Besatzung in Frankfurt, Series: S6b-38, Gliederung, ISG.

<sup>71</sup> Frühlingfest der Steuben-Schurz-Gesellschaft, *Die Neue Zeitung*, 16 June 1952.

<sup>72</sup> Elkinton to Max Kraus, 11 June 1952, Box 7, Folder 2, NCSA Records, HSP; "Deutsch-amerikanische Ehrung für Carl Schurz," *Die Neue Zeitung*, 22 August 1952; Albert Rapp to F. Rademacher, 5 June 1952, Folder: Ausstellung 1948–1952, Series: A.45.02—Historisches, Wechsausstellungen, ISG; Carl-Schurz-Wanderausstellung, 29 August 1952, Folder: Ausstellung 1948–1952, A.45.02—Historisches, Wechsausstellungen ISG; Albert Rapp to Dr. Breitenbach, c. 1952, Folder: Ausstellung 1948–1952, Series: A.45.02—Historisches, Wechsausstellungen, ISG; Carl Schurz Exhibit, c. 1952, Box 7, Folder 5, NCSA Records, HSP, 1–5.



centennials in May and September 1948. Its historical and cultural symbolism were impossible to miss and made all the more important after the church was reconstructed after being damaged during the war—it served as an emblem for West Germany’s physical and spiritual revival and its international legitimacy.<sup>73</sup> In a show of transatlantic cooperation with their counterparts in the Frankfurt Gesellschaft, members of the Foundation participated in the affair.

The new High Commissioner for Germany, Walter J. Donnelly, spoke in his first public appearance since replacing John J. McCloy as High Commissioner in early August.<sup>74</sup> Donnelly’s appointment had been welcomed by many in the Federal Republic, because it appeared, in the aftermath of the initial signing of the General Treaty in May 1952, to signal that American officials were fully preparing to transition “from occupation status to sovereignty.”<sup>75</sup> Donnelly’s speech, widely reprinted in West German newspapers in part or in whole, reiterated that many of the lessons to be found for West Germans in 1952 could be found in the liberal and defiant spirit of Carl Schurz. Schurz would surely have recognized the threats coming from Communism and Nazism, “the twin children of totalitarianism.” Thanks to his “firm grasp of history and... love of freedom,” he would have dedicated his life in West Germany to protecting his now-democratic homeland from these ideologies. The “legacy” of Schurz was that his ideas and idealism had “won him immortality,” and that Germans and Americans alike should reflect on the democratic inheritance that he handed down.<sup>76</sup> Following Donnelly’s speech, the High Commissioner joined the Steuben-Schurz Gesellschaft for a dinner. The meeting included a number of dignitaries, including German and American officials as well as members of the Foundation from Philadelphia, and provided an intimate setting in which the participants could further offer their collective hopes at a fruitful West German–American cultural relationship moving forward.<sup>77</sup>

Publicly, the speech inaugurated a broad campaign across West Germany to memorialize Schurz’s historical contribution to the USA, German–American relations, and peaceful, democratic governance. The Steuben-Schurz Society worked closely with cultural ministries in Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen to distribute over 160,000 posters, 500,000 brochures, and other materials to nearly every one of the 33,000 schools in the Federal Republic. One such poster depicted various events in Schurz’s life: fighting in the streets during the Revolution of 1848, his “escape to freedom” in the USA, his time in the American Civil War, his friendship with

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Demshuk, *Three Cities After Hitler: Redemptive Reconstruction Across Cold War Borders* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), 3, 52.

<sup>74</sup> Peter Müller to Alfred Bauer, 19 August 1952, Box 7, Folder 4, NCSA Records, HSP; “Schurz Anniversary,” *Information Bulletin* (September 1952), 25.

<sup>75</sup> Current Informational Report: Mr. Donnelly’s Arrival in Germany (German Press Re-Action), c. 1952, Box 7, Folder 4, NCSA Records, HSP.

<sup>76</sup> Walter J. Donnelly, “The Legacy of Carl Schurz,” *Information Bulletin* (October 1952), 7–8, 12.

<sup>77</sup> German Journey, 1952, Alice H. Finckh, c. 1952–1953, Box 7, Folder 5, NCSA Records, HSP, 9; Carl Schurz Exhibit, 1–5.



Lincoln, and his negotiations with freed slaves and Native Americans.<sup>78</sup> For those schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, the Steuben-Schurz Gesellschaft convinced the ministry to encourage all schools to celebrate Schurz on 17 September. The organization even managed to convince the Federal Republic Post Office to issue a commemorative stamp celebrating Schurz.<sup>79</sup>

Donnelly's speech also kicked off the traveling exhibit of Schurziana, officially entitled "Carl Schurz and the 1848 Movement." The exhibition chronicled Schurz's youth and his participation in the 1848 Revolution, but the majority of its emphases were on Schurz's adventures "as reformer," his ability to "ris[e] above party," his work as an abolitionist and friend of Native Americans, and his advocacy for peace through strength, even co-opting the Bible verse "they shall beat their swords into plowshares" for Schurz. Once transmitted to the Federal Republic, the exhibit became part of the first major cooperative effort between the Carl Schurz Gesellschaft in Bremen and Steuben-Schurz Gesellschaft in Frankfurt to promote closer German–American relations.<sup>80</sup>

After stints in Frankfurt am Main and Stuttgart, the exhibit reached Bremen, where the Gesellschaft merged the exhibit with a celebration of United Nations Day on 24 October at a local *Amerika Haus*. The exhibition, attended by members of the Bremen Senate, American officials, and members of the Steuben-Schurz Gesellschaft, aimed not only at cementing good relations between Schurz' native and adoptive homelands but to "also show men of good will that the desired [democratic] world order can be attained through cooperative effort." As a preamble for Carl Schurz, the celebration opened with speeches and an exhibition on the good work of the United Nations in the realms of refugees, prisoners-of-war, and human rights more broadly. These activities, one speaker noted, would have "received Schurz' hearty endorsement." This conflation of the UN's work with that of Schurz (and, in turn, that of the USA) was perhaps the most fitting ending celebration to the Carl Schurz centennial, and it spoke to the international importance that officials and private citizens alike put on the memory of Carl Schurz and its implications for world peace. Schurz had worked "on a binational scale" toward universal humanitarian goals, and since Schurz now stood as a metaphor for both the USA and West German–American relations, so, too, was the USA striving toward these same goals of humanitarianism and international cooperation.<sup>81</sup> In early November, the exhibition left Bremen and made stops of about two weeks each in Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, Liblar (the site of Schurz's birth), and Düsseldorf before ending up in Essen from early-to-mid-June, 1953. Those who participated in the exhibition had much to be happy about, and they considered it a "great success" with visitors ranging from 2 to 3000 in both Liblar and Berlin.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Carl Schurz: Ein Leben für die Freiheit, c. 1950–2, Folder: Carl Schurz: Ein Leben für die Freiheit, Series: Hessen, Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Wiesbaden.

<sup>79</sup> To Our Members, Friends, and Sponsors, 15 August 1952, Box 7, Folder 4, NSCA Records, HSP.

<sup>80</sup> "Schurz Anniversary," 25.

<sup>81</sup> "Carl Schurz Exhibition," *Information Bulletin* (January 1953), 9.

<sup>82</sup> Carl-Schurz-Wanderausstellung, c. 1953, Folder: Ausstellung 1948–1952, Series: A.45.02—Historisches, Wechselausstellungen, ISG.



Overall, the September festivities and the Schuziana exhibition received glowing coverage throughout West German print. As might be expected, the accounts often utilized similar language, whether it was from Schuziana materials, guidance papers, or High Commissioner Donnelly's speech in order to highlight Schurz as a man whose German heritage and actions during the Revolution of 1848 played as significant a role as his actions in the USA. The headlines alone, remembering Schurz as an "unflinching rebel of freedom," a man who lived "a life for freedom," and a "revolutionary and statesman" were indicative of the value the memory of Carl Schurz had to legitimizing West Germany's cultural and democratic rebirth.<sup>83</sup> Most newspapers, of course, emphasized that the "German–American" served as an eternal bond between the two nations. One Swiss journalist noted that with a foot in "two worlds," Schurz had fully embodied the German–American relationship that was once more beginning to blossom after years of war and occupation.<sup>84</sup> Such a sentiment succinctly captured the multivocality that the memory of Schurz had demonstrated over the entire year: being molded as a stalwart example of the good German, the idealistic American, and the bridge between them as they face the Cold War in 1952.

## Conclusion

An examination of the Carl Schurz Centennial holds historical and methodological implications for scholars, as it reveals an instance in how actors across a number of axes—public and private, West German and American, audience and organizer—make public memory and cultural narratives a constitutive and on-going process. The distillation of a clear and cohesive narrative of the historical memory of Carl Schurz reveals the inner-workings of a collective effort to construct a transnational cultural identity and pursue cultural rapprochement between erstwhile enemies at a time when diplomatic officials for each nation were working to finalize a cultural convention that reified that relationship that had been developing in practice in the years since 1948. Though there were a number of hands and a myriad of motivating factors that impelled the organizers to carry out the Carl Schurz Centennial throughout 1952, the multivocality of Schurz's symbolism satisfied the major objectives of its participants. For US officials, Schurz's notable public life helped portray the USA in a positive manner during an onslaught of Kremlin propaganda campaigns. For West German officials, Schurz's participation in the Revolution of 1848 branded him as a figure driven by his love of "freedom"—an oft-repeated sentiment in West German press that belied a country looking to emerge from the shadow of

<sup>83</sup> "Unbeirrbarer Rebelle der Freiheit," *Deutscher Kurier*, 20 September 1952; "Carl Schurz: Unbeirrbarer Rebelle der Freiheit," *Frankfurter Weststadt-Anzeiger*, 18 September 1952; "17. September 1852: Ein Rebelle der Freiheit," *Mannheimer Morgen*, 17 September 1952; "Ein Leben für die Freiheit," *Main-Echo*, 16 September 1952; "Das Leben eines Revolutionärs," *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 17 September 1952; "Gegen das Unrecht und für die Freiheit," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 18 September 1952; "Revolutionär und Staatsmann," *Die Welt*, 18 September 1952.

<sup>84</sup> "Rückkehr der Söhne," *Die Tat*, 23 September 1952.





the Third Reich and access the Western community. For the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, Schurz was a prodigious vehicle for mainstreaming German culture that had come under major suspicion through the first half of the century. Even among these ostensibly diverging goals, there was the common through-line: the narrative emphasized the importance, legitimacy, and desirability of a transatlantic, German–American cultural connection in the early Cold War period. Ultimately, the memory of Carl Schurz reinforced a long, historical relationship between two peoples, from which closer economic and political ties in the twentieth century might flourish.

**Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

**Brandon Kinney** is a PhD candidate at Temple University studying American foreign relations and West German–American cultural rapprochement after the Second World War. Brandon was the 2019–2020 recipient of the Thomas Davis Fellowship in Diplomacy and Foreign Relations at the Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy at Temple University and a 2020 History Education Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

