
Matthias Bartgis, Pioneer Printer at Frederick

an apprentice.³ According to family tradition he was a soldier during the early years of the Revolution and was an officer at the Battle of Germantown. He married a Miss Veronica, a Canadian, and moved to Frederick. The date of his arrival is not certainly known but it was probably in the fall of 1776.

The earliest imprint from his press that has been located is *The Maryland Almanac, For the year of Our Lord 1778*.⁴ Because of the ephemeral character of almanacs it was customary to print them during the preceding year and have them on sale before the first of January, so Bartgis was probably printing in Frederick in 1777. It is possible that he set up his press in the Fall of 1776 so that he might publish the first of his series of German almanacs. The earliest known example of them was for 1780, which contains the statement that it was "zum vierten mal herausgegeben."⁵ The advertisement in the *Maryland Chronicle* on February 1, 1786, shows that by the year 1778 he had enough business to have acquired some debtors.

"Notice is hereby given, to all persons indebted to the Printer hereof, from the Year 1778 to the present time, on Bond, Note or open Account, to make immediate Payment, or they may depend on being treated with as the law directs."

Although no items printed by him from 1779 to 1783 have been located, he was probably doing job work such as printing blank legal forms and bills as well as publishing almanacs. Unfortunately, the product of the Frederick printing trade has not been as well preserved as that of Annapolis and Baltimore and for this reason copies of his almanacs rarely find their way into the book market. The series of German almanacs which was begun in 1777 continued as late as 1784 and, according to Seidensticker, until the end of the century.⁶

The imprints of his press for 1785 which have survived show that his readers had a decided interest in the gruesome details of murder and bloodshed. In this one year he printed two broadsides in German which contain a poetical account of the murder of a woman and four children by her husband.⁷ He also printed the *Horror of Murder, Blasphemy, and Sacrilege*, the description of the murder of an Irish Catholic priest

³ J. T. Scharf, *History of Western Maryland*. Vol. I, p. 527.

⁴ See Bibliography of Imprints, No. 17.

⁵ See Bibliography of Imprints, No. 81.

⁶ See Bibliography of Imprints, No. 81 and 105. Also O. Seidensticker, *The First Century of German Printing in America, 1728-1830*.

⁷ See Bibliography of Imprints, No. 383 and 384.