

This Day in History... March 2, 1829

Birth of Carl Schurz

Carl Christian Schurz was born on March 2, 1829, in Liblar, in the Kingdom of Prussia, in the German Confederation. Schurz commanded forces during the Civil War, reformed the Civil Service and was a vocal proponent of forest preservation.

The son of a journalist and a schoolteacher, Schurz studied at the Jesuit Gymnasium of Cologne but had to leave early because of his family's financial problems. He later finished school and went on to attend the University of Bonn.

While at Bonn, Schurz befriended his professor, Gottfried Kinkel. Together they created a newspaper that pushed for democratic reforms following the German revolutions of 1848-49. Schurz then answered the call to take up arms to defend the new German constitution. He served in the revolutionary army and fought several battles against the Prussian Army. During that fighting, he was the adjunct officer of the commander of the artillery.



This stamp was issued for the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg.

In 1849, Schurz and the revolutionaries were defeated at the fortress of Rastatt. Schurz escaped before the Prussians began killing prisoners and fled to Zurich. He spent time in France and England, but ultimately decided to move to America in hopes of finding "a new, free world."

After spending some time in Philadelphia, Schurz settled in Watertown, Wisconsin. His wife, Margarethe, opened the first kindergarten in America. Schurz was admitted to the bar in 1858 and practiced law in Milwaukee. Surrounded by others who fled Germany in the wake of the 1848 rebellion, Schurz solidified the young idealists' support for Abraham Lincoln during the 1860 election. He was rewarded with an assignment as minister to Spain whose neutrality he assured. But Schurz had even bigger plans.

Although he had no formal military training, Schurz proposed forming a German cavalry regiment. Over the course of the next four years, nearly 177,000 German immigrants joined the Union Army. Schurz led many of them in the thickest of fighting at the battles of Second Bull Run, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg, where they died in disproportionately high numbers. Schurz continued to idolize Lincoln, naming his son after the president.

After the war, Schurz spent time in Detroit and St. Louis as editor of their newspapers. Then in 1868, he was elected to the US Senate representing Missouri. He was the first German American to serve in that body. He was well-liked and respected for his speeches. He eventually helped found the short-lived Liberal Republican Party. This party opposed the Radical Republicans' and President Grant's reconstruction policies, particularly the Enforcement Acts.

Schurz campaigned for Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876. He agreed with the future president on returning to the gold standard, reforming the Civil Service, and removing corruption from government. When Hayes took office, Schurz was appointed secretary of the Interior. The Office of Indian Affairs was in his department and he realized it was filled with corrupt workers, so it was one of the first offices that he reformed. He began testing employees for Civil Service, rather than relying on political favors. Schurz saw the need for forest preservation and became known as "Father of the Forest Reserves." Many of his ideas were not implemented at the time but became part of the 1891 Forest Reservation Act.

After leaving office in 1881, Schurz went to New York and worked for several different newspapers over the years. He remained active in politics until his death on May 14, 1906.



Stamp issued in Watertown, Wisconsin.



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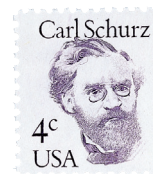
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