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## **The Official Word vs. the Horse's Mouth: Descriptions of Wisconsin for the German Emigrant in the 1850s**

In 1852, Wisconsin created the Office of State Commissioner of Emigration. Its main purpose was to lure as many European, especially German, settlers as possible to its rich but largely unpopulated lands. Despite the continued flow of German emigrants to the shores of the United States throughout the second half of the century, the office was allowed to operate for only three years, to be reopened again in 1868.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for the office's early demise in 1855—mostly political in nature—are discussed elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> while a more sweeping account on the office's fate throughout the century is provided by La Vern J. Rippley.<sup>3</sup> Focusing exclusively on official American promotion efforts to encourage emigration from Germany, Ingrid Schöberl has painstakingly traced advertisements by the Wisconsin commissioners of emigration in German periodicals, but bases most of her other information regarding that office on secondary sources that have not always proven reliable.<sup>4</sup> After a brief general introduction, the present study focuses on the principal publication issued by Wisconsin's first emigration office: a pamphlet describing Wisconsin which was translated into several languages. The information contained in this document will then be compared to other publications by German emigrants which, like the pamphlet, were designed to offer advice to fellow Germans regarding Wisconsin as a desirable place for settlement. The conclusion constitutes an attempt to determine which of the mentioned sources was best suited to provide, and indeed did provide, crucial information and assistance to the German emigrant. The findings—combined with what we otherwise know about the office's operation—may enable us to assess the impact of the emigration office. In other words, did it really, for the short time it existed in the 1850s, influence and stimulate the flow of German emigrants to Wisconsin?

### **The Charge by the Legislature**

By way of introduction, let us first consider the office's official mission and the scope of its responsibilities. Just four years after statehood, the Wisconsin legislature took a historic step when it adopted Chapter 432 of the Laws of 1852 in which it created the Office of the Commissioner of Emigration.<sup>5</sup> It was a very simple law,

whose first paragraph spells out the mission in which the office was to be involved: A commissioner to be appointed by the governor whose office was to be located in New York City for a term beginning on 1 May 1852 and ending 30 April 1853, whose duties were to include:

- being present at his office during the "usual business hours"
- giving to emigrants information regarding the soil and climate of Wisconsin, together with information on the state and lines of business (occupations) which might be pursued there "with advantage"
- advising emigrants about the "cheapest and most expeditious" route by which to reach Wisconsin
- giving such further information as will protect emigrants against "the impositions often practiced upon them"
- reporting to the governor as often as required and in the manner prescribed by him
- reporting the number of emigrants seen by the office, their nationalities and the occupations they intended to pursue in the state; and
- to employ "such assistance" in the office as is approved of by the governor.

The other four paragraphs of the act regulate the office's direct responsibility to the Governor, requiring an annual report, budget and salary for the commissioner, and the date on which it was to take effect: 9 June 1852.

According to the act, the commissioner of emigration had a number of responsibilities. However, the main charge was threefold: (1) advise emigrants about the attractions of Wisconsin as a place where to resettle; (2) advise the emigrants about the best, least expensive and swiftest means of traveling to Wisconsin; and (3) attempt to protect the emigrant from fraud and deception during their passage.

These assignments were carried out by the first commissioner, Gysbert Van Steenwijk, through his offices in the heart of New York's dock district, where the emigrants disembarked from their ships and began to filter into the city, oftentimes being steered into taverns, hotels and boarding houses. Large signs, advertising the office's services both in German and English, were posted in the area. Likewise, advertisements, editorial articles and other announcements were placed in New York as well as in a number of European newspapers. Moreover, pamphlets written in several languages were distributed in New York and Europe directly to emigrants or through shipping houses, private persons traveling to Europe, and in the office's correspondence.

Herman Haertel, Van Steenwijk's successor in 1853, continued in the same pattern. The last commissioner, Frederick W. Horn, retained his predecessor's practices in New York, but also appointed a sub-agent who was deployed to Quebec.

Each of the three commissioners, Van Steenwijk, Haertel and Horn, compiled reports to the governor on their respective activities. These reports appeared to have consisted of periodic letters (for several of them remain in existence) as well as of annual reports. While the annual reports for 1852 (authored by Van Steenwijk) and



for 1853 (by Haertel) are to be found in bound volumes, Commissioner Horn's annual report for 1854 was never printed nor finalized. To this day it only exists in handwritten manuscript form, edited by the author but never formally submitted to the governor.<sup>6</sup>

## The Pamphlet and Its Sources

Through advertisements, articles and editorial comments in newspapers and circulars, as well as through personal contacts with emigrants, the commissioners sought to achieve their objective of disseminating information on the attractions of Wisconsin as a place of settlement. The most important communication, however, consisted of pamphlets which were prepared in English, German, Norwegian, Dutch, and perhaps other languages, as well.<sup>7</sup> Their text was patterned after a single article whose source has been variously attributed to either Increase A. Lapham, state geographer, or John H. Lathrop, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin. One source states that authorship of the seminal pamphlet is to be attributed to both of these well known Wisconsinites but speculates that the sole author was, in fact, Lathrop.<sup>8</sup> This seems plausible when one considers the size of each source. Lathrop's article occupies eight narrowly printed pages, compared to Lapham's book of 208 pages. While Lathrop's piece could have been transferred to a sixteen-page pamphlet (bound or folded from four sheets) without changes, Lapham's book would have required extensive editing and cutting. However, nowhere is there mention of such an effort nor of an editor who would have undertaken this task. Moreover, in a time when data and statistics about a developing state community were subject to rapid change, a source published seven years earlier would hardly have been reliable where it concerned human activities. This, too, must have been on Van Steenwijk's mind when he recommended in his annual report of 1853 that Lapham should be commissioned to publish a new edition of his 1846 book on Wisconsin, "adapted to [its] present condition . . . with all the resources of our beautiful and rich country."<sup>9</sup>

Extant copies of the pamphlet, in any of the languages mentioned, could not be found. Fortunately, however, both Lapham's and Lathrop's texts are still accessible. In order to provide the modern reader with a clearer understanding of the way the young state of Wisconsin was viewed by two of its most astute observers, both works will be briefly discussed and summarized.

## Lathrop's Article

J. H. Lathrop's original article describing Wisconsin was published in 1853 in the periodical, *De Bouws Review*, appearing in two parts.<sup>10</sup> Assuming that this text served as a source for the commissioners' pamphlets, it must previously have been available to the first commissioner in other form, possibly as manuscript.<sup>11</sup>

The article contains a wealth of information on Wisconsin. First it describes its location in the United States and its situation on two of the Great Lakes, as well as referring to its many rivers and lakes. A brief review of its population is presented together with prospects for rail and water transportation. The author continues with

a statistical listing of the "imports and exports" of the several port cities in the state for 1851-52 as well as for the state as a whole in 1852 (26).

After this general overview, Lathrop provides a brief history of Wisconsin and a detailed account of the migration of settlers to the state to that date, followed by a description of the state's physical geography and geology together with particularly interesting features (such as the portage between the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers). He continues with an assessment of the state's forest resources, its educational facilities, and mining opportunities (234). Lumbering is given a great degree of prominence in the article. Speaking of the forest, the author states that "[t]hat of the Upper Wisconsin and its tributaries is the most extensive and distinguished still more for the fine quality than the inexhaustible quantities of lumber" (235).

The article goes on to describe the bright future of agriculture in the state. All types of farming "suitable to the latitude" are deemed possible in Wisconsin. And, of added benefit to the person wanting to own the land that he farms, he advises that there remains much good farmland for sale at the government price of \$1.25 per acre. He even observes that the California gold rush has placed improved land on the market at reduced prices (236).

From agriculture, Lathrop's focus shifts to manufacturing in Wisconsin. "The artisan will find a fair field of labor, and for the employment of capital in Wisconsin." Builders and millwrights are reputed to be in high demand. The flour and timber industries are both in need of workers and capital for development, and woolen, cotton and flax mills "must soon become fixed facts in Wisconsin." The Lake Michigan shoreline lends itself to the marine industry and soon Wisconsin will, in the author's opinion, no longer be dependent upon eastern factories for its steam engines (236).

For both manufacturing and trade, Lathrop underscores Wisconsin's prime situation on the Great Lakes. Milwaukee, in particular, is touted as a commercial center "unexampled in the history of American cities," having grown in population to 25,000 in the seventeen years since its founding in 1836 (236).

Because of the importance of transportation routes for bringing produce to market and finished goods back, Lathrop places emphasis upon the development of "internal improvements," the rivers, canals, actual and proposed railroads, and major roads. He projects that there would soon be a canal linking the Great Lakes with the Mississippi, and that improvements would also soon be made to the link between the Erie Canal and the Hudson River. Already, the author notes, the telegraph has connected Milwaukee with Chicago and the outside world, and it would not be long before a network of telegraph lines would crisscross the interior of the state (238).

Lathrop concludes his narrative with this optimistic outlook for the settler on Wisconsin's near future:

Indeed, looking at the fact that nature has prepared the soil of Wisconsin for the plow and its herbage for the immediate sustenance of domestic animals—contemplating the appliances of civilization, which art brings to the very doors of his cabin—[the immigrant] will not doubt—as in truth he need not—that twenty years will do for Wisconsin what fifty years have



barely sufficed to do for Ohio; that in all that goes to constitute a healthy and refined civilization, Wisconsin is destined to a more rapid development and an earlier maturity than has heretofore marked the history of states under the most favorable of conditions.

These views are not extravagant. They are conclusions fully warranted by the premises. The predictions of today will be sober history in 1872. (238)

With the "immigrant," Lathrop apparently had mostly Germans, Irish, and Scandinavians in mind. At one point he writes:

There is a Germany in America which is destined to be greater than the German's fatherland. Ireland is already cisatlantic and regenerate. The Scandinavian with his remarkable power of assimilation, touches our shores, and is American in thought, feeling and language. (231)<sup>12</sup>

To the extent that the pamphlets about Wisconsin distributed by the commissioner in New York, New England, and in Europe consisted of part or all of Lathrop's article, what the prospective emigrant would have learned about Wisconsin was by and large general in nature. With the exception of the building trade, it did not tell the emigrant precisely what jobs or occupations were in need of workers nor what specific crops a farmer could raise, what wages might be expected or what costs might be anticipated to start up a farm. On the other hand, it did advise the emigrant about the general environment of the place called Wisconsin and of the fact that opportunities abounded, for the farmer, the artisan, the "mechanic," and the capitalist alike.

The article is relatively free of boosterism. Even the conclusion cited above has some merit. Wisconsin, with its untapped natural resources and its unsettled lands could, perhaps not as early as 1872 but thereafter, become a leader among the United States, for it was then indeed situated at a strategic location for transportation to and from markets, and it possessed, from the vantage point of the 1850s, a seemingly "inexhaustible" supply of timber, prime farmland, plentiful water resources, and a wealth of minerals.

## Lapham's Book

As already mentioned, Commissioner Van Steenwijk called upon the legislature to subscribe to a new edition of Lapham's book, *Wisconsin—Its Geography and Topography, History, Geology and Mineralogy*, which had first appeared in 1846.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Lathrop's article, Lapham's book is extremely detailed and, considering that the territory was insufficiently explored and sparsely settled at the time, provides a fairly complete portrayal of the state's features.

The wide range of topics includes a history of the territory, with an explanation of the origin of its boundaries, as well as a description of its topography, lakes, rivers, and prehistoric occupants, followed by a portrayal of its modern day native tribes (9-

28). In describing the territory's government, Lapham gives a full account of the means by which public lands were surveyed and delineated (28-36). He also provides information on the territory's university and secondary schools (36-38). A separate section deals with Wisconsin's phenomenal growth in population, its production statistics, and its internal improvements. At the time, these consisted of roads and piers, but Lapham envisions the completion of canal projects and railways as well (38-48). It follows a list of altitudes, latitudes and longitudes of various sites and communities, and a description of four geological zones (the northern, "primitive" zone, the central sandstone zone, the southwestern "mineral" zone, and the southeastern limestone zone), complete with an exhaustive list of minerals, including proven and suspected reserves of lead, copper, zinc, and iron ore (48-70). Ever the student of botany and biology, Lapham identifies trees and animals, and even provides a detailed list of plants recently discovered in Wisconsin, both native and introduced (70-75). He also describes the territory's climate, including weather statistics, and growing seasons from north to south (75-80).

The next, most extensive, section of the book features descriptions of each county in the territory, including location, topography, rivers (with proven or potential water power sites), notable lakes, soils, vegetation, population, crops and animal husbandry, towns (as administrative units), municipalities and post offices. Special attention is given to the Lakes Superior and Michigan and the Fox, Rock, and Mississippi Rivers (81-202).

Considering the paucity of firsthand information available to Lapham, his achievement is indeed most remarkable, both in its accuracy and its wealth of information. For the commissioners, Lapham's book would have far surpassed Lathrop's article in value to the prospective settler. Lathrop concentrates upon the state's economic activity, present and future. Lapham's book is a multi-disciplined overview of Wisconsin's attributes with an emphasis on natural history (and prospects for agricultural exploitation), both in general and by specific county, including an assessment of settlement and remaining available land in each. While Lathrop's article may have enticed people to settle in Wisconsin for economic reasons, pointing out as it did the abundant opportunities for the infusion of both labor and capital, Lapham's book offers a wealth of information on the physical appearance of Wisconsin and its degree of social development.

Along with other source materials (books, letters, pamphlets, and word-of-mouth descriptions), the insights provided in Lapham's book could have directed the emigrant of the time to the state and, although no particular locality was promoted, perhaps to specific areas, giving him enough information in the process to know what weather to anticipate, what soils or minerals he would find, the location of post offices (the primary means of communication on the frontier) and, in light of the described resources, what types of enterprise might be successful in a given community.

After reviewing Lapham's work and comparing its physical observations with modern references, as well as considering the practical information offered by the author, it becomes evident just how valuable a source of information this book must have been, and it comes as no surprise that Van Steenwijk would recommend this



work as a helpful compendium for emigrants even seven years after its first publication. Because of its volume, it seems unlikely, however, that Lapham's work would have served as blueprint for a general picture of Wisconsin to be offered potential settlers as a first impression.

Measuring both Lathrop's and Lapham's work with what we know about the state today, one cannot help being impressed with the general accuracy and completeness of the information provided. For example, both authors correctly—though in the terminology available at the time—outlined the geological formations of the region. Lapham's description of the state's vegetation and fauna still stands as an example of scientific observation. On top of this, Lapham provides a natural and population history of the state that remains unchallenged today. The geographical and meteorological statistics submitted by Lapham, although sparse, have been confirmed by modern data. Both authors saw the great agricultural potential of Wisconsin as well as the promising prospects for the exploitation of the state's forests. They foresaw the rapidly growing need for workers and capital in all branches of business associated with a mushrooming economy revolving around agriculture, lumber and transportation. For this, both pinpointed Wisconsin's strategic location between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi. However, in predicting improved rivers and new canals for navigation, Lathrop did not anticipate the railroads to the degree in which they would supersede river and canal traffic. Regarding the apparently infinite supply of lumber, both authors failed to foresee the advances in technology that helped to accelerate its depletion. Still, these developments did not adversely affect the emigrants of the 1850s in significant ways. The building of railroads only speeded up their travel from the seacoast across the land, and the clearcutting of ever larger tracts of land only meant an exponential rise in the availability of farmland, a welcome trend for the many emigrants who had been farmers in the Old World, as well, and who continued their exodus throughout the nineteenth century.

## Reaching the Emigrant

The pamphlet "Wisconsin," fashioned after Lathrop and/or Lapham, likely constituted the agency's principal vehicle for carrying its message to the targeted audience. In retrospect, it may be surmised that the commissioners attempted to provide information similar to that disseminated by their successors in 1867.<sup>14</sup> If so, then the farmer could have learned from the office staff that crops such as wheat, oats, corn, potatoes, rye, barley, buckwheat, tobacco, and hay were successful in Wisconsin. He could also have garnered the market prices for those crops at the time, allowing him to predict potential profits or losses. He would have been able to find out which specialty crops, e.g., apples, peas and beans, clover, flax, hemp, sorghum, and grapes could be grown, and that there was a market for butter, cheese, and maple syrup. He might have learned where land was available in the state, the condition of the soils, and to what extent he would have to exert labor to clear the land and place it into production. He might also have inquired about the average wages for laborers in order to calculate how many man hours he could afford while establishing his farm

in Wisconsin. The laborer, tradesman, or artisan could have found out what trades and occupations were in demand, and where. If interested, the emigrant might also have learned about Wisconsin's legal climate—the right to vote after but one year's residence,<sup>15</sup> its laws of inheritance and taxation, its governmental structure and its school system.

Apparently the commissioners did indeed provide specific information about Wisconsin's climate and geography, its cities and routes of transportation. The first commissioner, Van Steenwijk, noted in his "Annual Report" for 1852 that he

had long known and appreciated Wisconsin's great advantages in regard to healthy situation, moderate temperature, richness of soil and easy access to the best markets of the United States, its liberal political institutions, richly endowed and excellent schools, the true progressive spirit of its American and European population and the rapid growth of fine internal improvements. (4)

This led him to the belief that he could well contribute to the advancement of the state in advising the emigrants to relocate here. He also recommended in his report that to facilitate this objective, the state should authorize the employment of a delegate

with the necessary instructions, recommendations and introductions [who] should go to the principal ports and starting points in England, Scotland and Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Sweden and Norway, and perhaps Switzerland. (13)

Accordingly, he had 20,000 pamphlets printed in German, 5,000 in Norwegian and 4,000 in Dutch<sup>16</sup> that were distributed "on vessels . . . , in hotels and in taverns, mostly to the immigrants personally; by sending them across the Atlantic for distribution among emigrants leaving port" (5-6). He felt that information on Wisconsin should, additionally, be made available not only in New York but in New Orleans, Quebec, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.

In his "Report," Haertel indicated that he had as his chief aim the presentation of information on Wisconsin "in general; its advantages above other states, descriptions of particular localities; its commerce; the wealth of its mineral, timber and agricultural districts; its climate, public institutions, political privileges, means of education, &c." He noted that he had distributed 30,000 of the pamphlets, one half of which in Europe, and that he has "seldom failed to give descriptions of Wisconsin, even to those who were influenced by relatives and friends to settle in other States," observing that a number of those to whom he had spoken changed their minds and went to Wisconsin, writing to him, expressing their appreciation for his advice (7). No figures on pamphlets issued are available from the last commissioner, Horn.

It has already been observed that the efforts of the commissioner of emigration were, among all ethnic groups, primarily aimed at attracting and assisting Germans—not because Germans necessarily were the most desirable of the European immigrants,



or the best-educated, and not because they necessarily possessed the skills needed in the frontier state, or that they brought with them more capital than other immigrants. Instead, the commissioners simply had realized that the majority of emigrants landing on Wisconsin's shores were of German origin.

A review of the 1850 census for the state supports this observation. Of the 305,538 Wisconsin residents counted for that year, 40,348, or 13.2%, reported German states as their country of origin. Beginning in the late 1840s, Wisconsin had become a favored destination among German emigrants who were pouring into the state in unprecedented numbers. In their reports, the three commissioners recognized this trend. Van Steenwijk commented that the German immigration to Wisconsin in 1853 was "most considerable," and that most of the emigrants who visited his office were German. The majority of newspapers to which he contributed articles, editorials, and advertisements overseas were German, and when he had the act of legislature that created his office translated, his target language of choice was German.<sup>17</sup> Haertel similarly noted a predominance of German visitors to his office, and a substantial amount of his foreign correspondence was with German newspapers. He estimated that the number of German emigrants who had settled in Wisconsin during the year of 1853 was approximately 16,000 to 18,000, with the next highest group, the Irish, at a distant 4,000 to 5,000. He also remarked that 50 million people in Europe speak German, a huge reservoir of potential emigrants to Wisconsin.<sup>18</sup> Frederick Horn noted that it was the middle class of Germany that was on the move, driven by high taxes and the chaos of war. He added that, in 1854, during the months of May through July, 67,048 Germans passed through New York harbor while all other ethnic groups totaled 48,084, and that roughly 16,000 of the Germans in question were headed toward Wisconsin.<sup>19</sup> No wonder that Rudolph Puchner, a German settler of New Holstein, mused that, at this particular time period, Wisconsin was "the mecca of immigrants."<sup>20</sup>

Under the circumstances it may be concluded that the pamphlet, deemed by the commissioners to play such an important role in their efforts to reach out to the emigrants, was carefully translated for maximum impact. Whether this document was akin to the Lathrop article of 1853 or more like Lapham's Wisconsin pamphlet of 1867, it is evident upon review of each of these masterful descriptions that the purpose was to provide an objective overview of the state and its resources while at the same time promoting it as a place of abundant opportunity. Since Wisconsin had already experienced a large German influx and since the current social and political situation in Europe was unlikely to reduce the exodus of Germans, the importance of the pamphlet in its German version, even at a reduced circulation due to the limited number of copies, should not be underestimated.

### **Information on Wisconsin Offered Through Private Sources**

For the period under observation, the Wisconsin Office of Commissioner of Emigration was not the only provider of information about the process of emigrating and resettling in Wisconsin. A plethora of other contemporary sources was available

to the prospective emigrant, several of which will, in the following, be compared with the advice given by the commissioners. The selection of materials is limited to those books, letters, and articles which are contemporaneous to the period of the office's existence between 1852 and 1855 and which pertain to the emigrant in general and Wisconsin in particular.

***Nordamerika Wisconsin, Calumet: Winke für Auswanderer* by Carl de Haas, "Farmer in Wisconsin"**

Rudolph Puchner, who was just mentioned, observed that reading de Haas's book not only induced him to emigrate to this state but, additionally, to relocate in de Haas's community of Calumet. It may be assumed that the two volumes of de Haas's book<sup>21</sup> were widely distributed and read among the German emigrant community.

The subtitle of the book implies that it was aimed primarily at the prospective farmer.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the author offers plenty of useful statistical information for the farmer. However, being more than a farmer's almanac about Wisconsin, the book also includes practical information, concerning currency and exchange rates, weights, measures and distances, as well as an autobiographical sketch, describing the author's own motivation to emigrate and the trip from his hometown in the Rhineland to the seacoast and the journey across the ocean. This account, clearly emphasizing the practical, contains ample advice on what to expect in terms of provisions and accommodations, what to bring along to make the passage more bearable, what the ships looked like, and what was charged for passage.<sup>23</sup>

De Haas goes to great lengths to acquaint his reader with New York as it would appear to the newcomer who just crossed the ocean. He gives advice about agents, steamboats on the Hudson River and connections from Albany westward to Wisconsin. This is followed by a detailed description of Milwaukee (43-45). For the emigrant who ventures inland from that point, de Haas has a list of supplies and materials to be purchased in that city, including the cost for oxen and wagon with which to haul his belongings (44-48). He describes the lands surrounding Milwaukee and other localities before focusing on his own selected community of Calumet on the shores of Lake Winnebago (49-52). At this point, the reader is given an account of the author's initial land-taking experience (52-58), together with more statistical information (including temperatures for 1847 and 1848) and descriptions of the soil types present in the area (64-72). To end the first volume of his book, de Haas introduces the reader to the three main vegetation patterns in southeast Wisconsin, distinguishing between prairie, oak opening, and forest lands, and describes the labor necessary to put land into production (72-82).

The second volume contains an even more thorough description of Wisconsin, its land and climate and other information primarily of interest to the prospective farmer (17-40). However, de Haas's detailed summary of the geography of the state as well as his exhaustive descriptions of not just Calumet but a number of counties in the state worthy of settlement—including Milwaukee—must also have appealed to emigrants of all professions. De Haas concludes his narrative with a brief account of



the Territory of Minnesota along with a history of Wisconsin and immigration to the state (116-40) followed by a list of prices for the year 1849, both of goods, supplies and materials and of the bids received by farmers for their harvest products and animals.

De Haas calculated the cost of emigrating from the city of Leipzig to Wisconsin, buying land, raising a cabin and putting the land into production at \$670 (124). He did not forget to list the yields which one might expect to coax from the soil, extolling the prospect of farmers for succeeding in their own right (128). For the emigrant without means, de Haas demonstrated the availability of jobs and noted the wages then being paid. In his opinion, America, when compared to Germany, was a paradise for the poor man (130).

Simply because of its complexity and breadth of information, de Haas's account stands out among most other contemporary publications on the subject. While it was primarily aimed at the farmer, while it encouraged emigration to Wisconsin exclusively and, within Wisconsin, to the vicinity of his farm in Calumet, it is exemplary as a testimony to the benefits of emigration. That it must have been well known among German speaking emigrants is indirectly proven by the fact that the book was widely advertised (and critiqued) in newspapers of the time that catered to the emigrant readership.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, de Haas's account would become quickly dated, its information stale after only a few years. During the time of the Wisconsin Office of Commissioner of Emigration, its popularity may already have been in decline but, as with other texts, it likely formed a basis upon which the emigrant could formulate requests for more detailed information from the commissioner.

In comparison with what was available through the commissioner's office, de Haas's text could therefore be termed a thorough introduction to the adventure of emigration, upon which the information given by the commissioner could be built. The commissioner could thus confirm or modify what the emigrant had learned from the book and update him on the latest status of available land and jobs in the areas of Wisconsin described by de Haas. Without a question, it was a matter of a few years before all of the "Congress land" in Calumet had been taken and de Haas's readers would have to look farther afield in this part of the state, if not in more distant locations, to find similarly priced land to buy. What the commissioner could do and that de Haas's book could not was to facilitate a safe sojourn in New York and either recommend agents through whom passage to Wisconsin could be obtained or make those arrangements himself for the emigrants.

The mission of de Haas's book, then, was both to provide background information to the reader about the emigration experience and to encourage him to gravitate toward an area within Wisconsin which de Haas himself had found to be attractive and economically enticing. There is no doubt that de Haas accomplished these goals. It is altogether likely that untold numbers of German emigrants decided upon Wisconsin, in general, and the area surrounding Lake Winnebago, in particular, after reading his book.

## *Der nordamerikanische Freistaat Wisconsin* by Theodor Wettstein

This book appeared in the same Bädeler series devoted to "the latest information on foreign countries with special emphasis on German emigration and colonization" that featured de Haas.<sup>25</sup> With over 600 pages, it appears to be the most comprehensive compendium the emigrant could buy at the time. The backbone of the work consists of two reports by Wettstein, the first a travelogue following Wettstein's passage from Barmen in the German Ruhr area to Milwaukee, the second a detailed description of Wisconsin. Sandwiched between the two are four extraneous but nevertheless relevant texts: advice on avoiding being swindled (by C. T. Voß), an annual report by the German Folk Society of New York for the year 1847-48, a reprint of the laws and regulations for emigration by the Senate of Bremen as well as excerpts from the acts of U.S. Congress regarding immigration (in German translation), the conditions for passage from Bremen to the U.S. issued by a shipping agent, and a postscript by Wettstein. Wettstein's second report<sup>26</sup> is followed by a separate, thorough portrayal of Milwaukee, through which he aims to address the city dweller who is not in the position to buy land and start a farm. By this he explicitly intended to fill a gap, since most other emigrant guide books address a more rural audience, focusing on land acquisition and agriculture (cf. part 2, 157).

Wettstein obviously had a gift for coordinating and organizing the trip to America, not only in order to ensure its safe and smooth execution but also to lower the cost for him and his large family. Possibly tipped off by de Haas's recommendation, he contacted the reputed booking agent Traub who invited him to round up the passengers for a chartered passage on the still new steamship *George Washington*.<sup>27</sup> Wettstein managed to enlist 156 persons willing to emigrate from his area and satisfying his requirements of "cleanliness and enterprising spirit" (part 1, 7), at a handsome provision that allowed him and his family to travel—cabin, not steerage—virtually for free (1, 9). For the transfer from the hinterland to Bremerhaven, he negotiated the fare with the train companies and had some 50,000 pounds of luggage shipped separately by a freight forwarder, thus avoiding excessive damage by repeated transfers between train lines (1, 9-10).

Wettstein's observations and recommendations regarding the ocean crossing are both sobering and helpful, from the gradual acceptance of rats on board by the resigned passengers (1, 20) to the admonition not to use one's own bedlinen to line the bunks but rather to buy a primitive but inexpensive straw mattress in Bremerhaven which, soiled and damaged, could be discarded after passage (1, 24). However, when he notes that the rare and small portions of butter given out by the crew only serve to protect the passengers from seasickness caused by the consumption of fat (1, 23), one wonders whether the reader (and future passenger) may not be the victim of a conflict of interest pitting Wettstein's better knowledge against his good relations with the captain and the shipping agent.

The most thorough and helpful sections of the book concern Wisconsin and Milwaukee, in Wettstein's opinion the destinations preferred by German emigrants (2, 156). Before describing any specific features, he goes to great pains to dispel the



common notion in Europe that all the thirty-three American states and territories are alike in terms of climate and vegetation (2, 157). He points out that Wisconsin's climate, although not ideal, is healthier than most, which is confirmed by the rapid increase of the state's population (2, 190). At the same time, he is honest enough to cite the two most frequent diseases in Wisconsin—"cold fever" (erroneously ascribed by him to the emissions of decaying plant material after clearing the land) and "summer complaints" (most likely dysentery contracted by contaminated water)—but compares their occurrence favorably with that in southern states (2, 225-27).

Wettstein must have read most other accounts on the subject, especially Lapham and Goldmann (see below), to whom he refers explicitly but also implicitly. For example, when describing the geographical location of the state and its borders, he almost literally uses Lapham's vocabulary (apart from quoting from the state's constitution) and even apologizes for the "crude" terminology to which the European reader may be unaccustomed (2, 161). He follows Lapham in citing the most important lakes, rivers, and canals. Of the latter he predicts a boom in the near future, enhancing Wisconsin's transportation system to a point where it can compete with the best in the country (2, 172).

In regards to vegetation, crops and soils, Wettstein not only gives expert advice based on his own experience but also relies on de Haas and Goldmann (see below). He explains the American system of marking townships using the grid system, again referring to de Haas (2, 185-87). When he lists and briefly describes each county (2, 187-88), he basically provides an abstract of Lapham's exhaustive account. However, in his thoughtful explanation of the factors that contribute to the growth of communities on the frontier (2, 194-97)—with the saw and grist mills as the catalysts around which the other institutions crystallize and grow—he offers original insights that cannot be found elsewhere. Wettstein concludes his description of the state with a list of the cities and the existing railroads. In the latter regard he corrects the assumption passed as fact in other German literature that the railroad line between Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi and Milwaukee was already in operation. Rather, it was still in the planning stages, money being the major obstacle. It would be deplorable indeed, Wettstein exclaims, if emigrants were traveling up the Mississippi River planning to board the train in Prairie du Chien to take them to the interior of the state, only to be faced with impenetrable wilderness (2, 198).

In a separate chapter, Wettstein describes the process of settling in Wisconsin, beginning with an explanation of the social forces that build a community—from commerce and transportation to education to religion to entertainment (2, 205)—and a county-by-county list of population growth and another list (probably borrowed from Lapham) of available land and its worth in each county, including land taxes and land office revenue (2, 237). He describes the major routes of transportation, again exhorting Wisconsin's great potential for outperforming every other state (2, 211), but also mentions the disadvantage of freezing weather that paralyzes most water routes during an extended period of the year (2, 219).

In excerpting and commenting on the constitution of Wisconsin, Wettstein offers his own view on the granting of suffrage after only one year of residency. In his eyes,

the liberal requirement only leads to uninformed decisions on the part of newcomers, who still are more concerned with building an existence in the wilderness than with party politics, and tempts party vote hunters to manipulate the result with votes that had been bought off with a glass of beer or like incentives (2, 247). He lists the three major parties (Whigs, Democrats, Free Soilers) and describes the state's political (2, 258-63) and social institutions, including a free press, something to be noted by the subjects of an absolutist monarchy (2, 264). When discussing religion, Wettstein points out the separation between church and state which, contrary to expectation, has not resulted in depraved manners and morals but rather the opposite (2, 277). He also describes the state's education system and its funding by property taxes, making sure to stress that although taxes must be paid they are much lower than in the old country (2, 293).

Notwithstanding Wettstein's claim that he possesses no specific knowledge in agriculture, he inserts a brief section on farming but mostly refers to others who have written exhaustively on the subject, especially de Haas, Wilhelm Dames (see below), and C. Fleischmann, the United States' consul in Stuttgart.<sup>28</sup> He adds his own cost calculation for raising a farm in the woods and warns the inexperienced settler against claiming land that he may not be able to develop within a year (2, 299-313).

The last part of the book is devoted to Milwaukee. Here, Wettstein recounts the development of the city, ward by ward, offers statistics on production and trade (perhaps borrowed from Lathrop) and pronounces Milwaukee's great potential to become the foremost city in the west. His individual numbers of and comments on businesses in each profession and trade are particularly helpful for the non-farming emigrant.

Generally, Wettstein's observations, besides those borrowed from other sources, are unique in their frankness and originality. His is clearly a concern for the misled, naive and overly romantic emigrant. In describing the qualities required for a successful settler (well-informed, physically fit, independent, enterprising, modest), he doesn't mince words. Too common, he believes, is the romantic idea of a blissful, careless life at the bosom of nature:

Hinter dem Glase daheim, und in heiterer Unterhaltung der angehenden Auswanderer werden mit ungeheurer Leichtigkeit die Bäume des Urwaldes umgehauen und verbrannt, ein Blockhaus steigt auf, das Land wird urbar gemacht, und man zaubert sich in ein idyllisches Schäferleben hinein, wo die Wonne kein Ende nimmt. (2, 319)

It is for this reason that, in his introduction, Wettstein assumes almost personal responsibility for giving it to the reader straight: "Leid, herzlich leid würde es mir sein, wenn auch nur Einer durch meine Berichte veranlaßt würde, die Heimath zu verlassen, und es ihm später nicht gut gehen sollte" (1, 2).

In a whimsical aside Wettstein chastises European rulers for their reluctance to let emigrants go and protect them appropriately. Almost as soon as he begins this tirade he aborts it, for fear, as he coyly admits, of getting in trouble with the re-



established censorship office in the German states (after the failed Revolution of 1848). Interestingly, an inserted editorial note just as gamefully reassures the author not to worry since remarks as sensible as his certainly would not offend any authority these days. It is left up to the reader to interpret this exchange as a skilfull strategy for averting the censor's eye.

In his treatment of starting a new existence in Wisconsin, especially as non-farmer, Wettstein provides an invaluable service to his readers. After studying his book (especially also the additional sections not authored by Wettstein, such as the warnings by Voß on the numerous dangers awaiting the traveler, or the excerpts from the Wisconsin Constitution), there is little left that the German settler in Wisconsin might have wanted to know. Still, whatever may be lacking in Wettstein's account (e.g., labor costs and wages, as well as information on establishing a farm) is furnished by de Haas, making the two books quite complementary. Armed with the works of de Haas and Wettstein, the settler could confidently embark on his voyage and orient himself in the new land. The only component missing would be the latest, up-to-date, information on shipping lines, fares, accommodations in New York, and land available. He also might have welcomed maps of the United States, as developed by mid-century, and of Wisconsin.

### ***Wie sieht es in Wisconsin aus?* by Wilhelm Dames**

Wilhelm Dames, of whom we know very little otherwise, recounts his voyage in this booklet<sup>29</sup> day by day, from the valley of the Ruhr to Wisconsin. Dames provides his reader with extremely practical advice, including tips on packing one's possessions and on the laws regulating what food stuffs passengers are allowed aboard ship. His graphic account of the ocean crossing reveals both the hardships (foremost among them seasickness) and the monotony of the trip. Dames then describes his stay in New York, indicating the person he contacted for advice and information. In this respect, Dames seemed to stress more the importance of seeking out good advisors than giving specific advice himself.

Dames's booklet is filled with information—the cost of tickets, routes of travel and the like. Since it is written in the form of a diary it is relatively easy for the reader to follow his progress and plan for the length of the journey to Wisconsin. Once arrived in Milwaukee he continues with a travelogue of his wanderings through southern Wisconsin in search of a home. He finally takes out papers for land located in the vicinity of Rush Lake in Winnebago County. He concludes his daily account by acquainting the farmer with the opportunities awaiting him and advises those readers not interested in farming about the trades in which they may find work.

In his factual approach to the subject, Dames serves the reader interested in useful information well, although it can't be said that he advises them, either as to particular aspects of the journey or where to settle once Wisconsin is reached. Most of all, however, it is his journal style that gives the reader a distinct sense of perspective. Absent of photography, his scenic tour of south central Wisconsin offers an almost visual impression of the new land. Unlike de Haas, Dames does not advocate a

particular area for settlement nor does he give any specifics about the economic, political or social circumstances to be found in Wisconsin. On the other hand, whereas authentic diary entries frequently tend to get lost in mundane details and observations, Dames, obviously with an eye toward a wider audience, represents a successful balancing act between providing essential information and painting a large canvas.

### ***Der nordamerikanische Freistaat Wisconsin* by Gustav Richter**

Richter's tiny book of fifteen pages<sup>30</sup> reads like a Fodor pocket guide, only not for the casual tourist but for the person who desires to settle in Wisconsin. A short section also explains how, and at what cost, to get there from New York, after obtaining advice at the German Union at 95 Greenwich Street. Probably the most valuable asset of this booklet, however (apart from a compressed wealth of information on the natural and economical qualities of the state), is the complete text of the constitution of the state of Wisconsin in German, including, of course, the clause that entitles emigrants to vote after only one year of residency. Another attractive feature is a detailed fold-out map of Wisconsin, with a square mile grid of the federally surveyed portions at the time of the book's publication (about one-third of the entire state).

There is no question that the broad range of information available through the commissioner of emigration would have been of greater value to the emigrant than Richter's text. One of the real problems with booklets such as Richter's is that the information they contain becomes stale; for instance, the German Union in New York soon moved from 95 Greenwich Street to another location, land is taken and no longer available, and even more general advice is subject to changing conditions. The inherent flexibility of the commissioner, whose information was periodically brought up to date, was an advantage that was hard to beat. Neither does Richter alert the emigrant to the attendant problems and dangers during the emigrant's journey (he touches upon the routes and expenses of travel but leaves it at that), nor, despite his presentation of statistical data and other information on the state, does he provide specific hints where within the state emigrants might consider resettling. His is a general text only. Its greatest value lies in its map, its cursory information and in furnishing the complete state constitution in the emigrant's native language. Without additional information, especially on the perils of traveling through the port of New York, the reader and emigrant would have been left dangerously exposed to all sorts of exploitation along the way.

### ***Briefe von Wisconsin* by Freimund Goldmann**

An intrepid adventurer who ended up in Wisconsin's lead mining district, Goldmann wrote letters home to his father which were published for the benefit of emigrants to the United States.<sup>31</sup> His parents reluctantly allowed him to seek his fortune overseas since, as his father comments in an introduction to the text, "Old Europe has nothing to offer. The New World has everything to give" (1).



Goldmann's letters begin with the journey across the Atlantic Ocean, including an exacting description of all aspects of the voyage, down to the meals eaten, the cabins offered (to those of sufficient means to avoid steerage), and the cost of the trip. From the reading of these letters, the emigrant would come away with an appreciation for the nature of the ocean voyage. Goldmann next briefly describes his interlude in New York and then engages in an account of the trip from the seacoast to Milwaukee. Like his description of the sea voyage, it is presented in great detail, together with alarm at the cost of travel and the danger of being "swindled" (9).

After mentioning Milwaukee he sets out upon his journey of discovery, walking westward through southern Wisconsin. His account reads like a travelogue, giving a picture of the scenery and the people he encountered. Goldmann ended up in the vicinity of Mineral Point, southwest of Madison, where he decided to stay. From this point on his letters provide a narrative of his life on the frontier, including a detailed description of a house being built and of his daily routine. He takes the time to mention his American neighbors, commenting on their characters and mannerisms.

At one point Goldmann provides advice to the prospective emigrant, recommending that he be aware of lurking dangers and that he prepare in advance for both the journey and settling down in the new land. He speaks to the planting of crops and how one copes with life and the expenses incurred, together with the earnings realized by one's farming efforts. In recommending emigration, he goes so far as to advise his followers also to settle in Wisconsin, noting its advantages over other developing areas in the United States (24).

Goldmann's is an engaging account, not professionally edited for a prospective readership but, as is alluded to by his father, straightforward and honest, containing folk wisdom and observations which might assist fellow emigrants in easing the transition from the Old World to the New. A person thinking about emigrating might consider this to be a starting point in his reading, providing food for thought about the nature of the journey and expectations to develop about the place of settlement. It would have been of greatest value to the farmer on the frontier. Even at that, its statistical information would soon have been dated. Once again, the currency of advice and information available through the commissioner's office would have been of greater benefit, not to speak of the specific up-to-date information on land purchases.

***Friendly Adviser for All Who Would Emigrate to America and Particularly Wisconsin* by Christian Traugott Ficker**

This book, translated into English by Joseph Schafer of the Wisconsin State Historical Society,<sup>32</sup> is a rather involved autobiographical sketch which sets forth in great detail the experience of an emigrant of this time period, including the trials and tribulations of the voyage from Europe to New York. In contrast to the sources previously described, Ficker does relate advice as to what the emigrant was to expect in New York and from whom to seek advice and counsel there, including the Wisconsin Office of Commissioner of Emigration on Greenwich Street,<sup>33</sup> before he embarks

on a thorough description of his passage from New York to Wisconsin.

Perhaps speaking from experience, Ficker comments on the lines of trade that were in demand in the new home for farmers, laborers, tradesmen and professionals, alerting the emigrant that, at least in the beginning, he might not be able to practice the trade or profession he had learned. He also reminds the reader, somewhat obliquely, that it would be of value for the emigrant to acquaint himself with the American ways.

An account follows of starting up a farm, including the building of a house and barn in Mequon (Ozaukee, later Washington County; 231-33). Moving from the specific to the general, Ficker provides a geographical sketch of the state, a description of its political structure, the availability of churches, schools and social organizations and societies, and then concludes with his own appraisal of what kind of person should consider emigrating. In this regard, Ficker concludes that those who are capable of caring for themselves might consider the prospect, together with those who live under political or religious oppression (471f.).

In its combination of detailed description, some information, and advice, Ficker's work is more akin to the book written by de Haas than any of the other sources mentioned here, although his implicit recommendations for settling in Wisconsin are more general in nature than de Haas's specific invitation to Calumet County. An emigrant who had read Ficker's advice and, heeding it, had turned to the Wisconsin commissioner's office in New York, would have been served rather well indeed, given the complementary nature of the book and the commissioner's services.

### Articles from Contemporary Periodicals

At a time when journalism was not yet imbued with the mantra of separating factual reporting from editorial comment, articles appearing in European and American newspapers of the 1840 and 1850s helped promote emigration. Generally widely read, these might, from a modern standpoint, be regarded as "informercials." They were usually written and submitted by emigrants themselves who made use of a paper's regional circulation to "spread the word" about emigration. Editors, who did not depend on wire services for obtaining news to print and to reserve space for them, normally welcomed such contributions. Since the articles—sometimes printed serially over a number of subsequent issues—were signed off with the contributor's name, the reader was aware of their potentially subjective nature and no doubt valued them as such.

The following examples stem from two weekly publications, one aimed at the general public, the other at emigrants. They are symptomatic for literally thousands of contributions on emigration not only to the United States but to Latin America and Australia, as well. Just as immigration became a ubiquitous staple in the public discourse of nineteenth-century United States, emigration had become a topic of daily conversation among a majority of Germans who had read the latest news. Indeed, it may be argued that the widely available and eagerly read press of Europe in the



nineteenth century contributed significantly to the ground swell that led to one of the greatest migrations in history.

### Wilhelm Ostenfeldt in the *Itzeboer Wochenblatt*

In a series of two articles that appeared in the *Itzeboer Wochenblatt* (of the same town in Holstein) in the autumn of 1847,<sup>34</sup> one Wilhelm Ostenfeldt encouraged readers to join the wave of emigrants departing the old country for the United States. Ostenfeldt was a native of Kiel, who had emigrated to the United States a few years earlier and settled in the vicinity of Calumet, de Haas's new found home. He became the representative of a wealthy entrepreneur, Benjamin Field of Beloit, Wisconsin, who had purchased forested lands to the east of Calumet and sought to sell them, at a profit, to pioneering farmers. Ostenfeldt returned to the land of his birth in 1847 to drum up interest in the lands owned by his principal. As a result, he assembled a large group of Holsteiners, individuals and families, who would form the nucleus of the community of New Holstein in Wisconsin.<sup>35</sup>

In his articles, Ostenfeldt attempted to demonstrate the attractiveness of emigration, whether for reasons of political freedom, the availability of land or for other purposes. After setting the stage in this fashion he asks the question: To which state should the emigrant travel who wishes to purchase land journey? He proceeds to compare briefly a number of prominent destinations for emigrants of this time period—Texas, Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin, reserving, as is to be expected, his most favorable judgment for the latter. He then offers his reasons for this choice: the low price of available land, the productiveness of the soil, the general state of health of its inhabitants and its accessibility from the seacoast. He recommends that the reader avail himself of the services of particular booking agents and travel from Hamburg to New York by sail or steamship. Practical advice about costs and routes of travel to the interior of the country is also provided. Ostenfeldt does not specifically mention his intent to sell land but does make himself available to answer questions which might be posed to him by the readers. Clearly, his articles are teasers that are not all too different from promotional literature mailed to households in our days, promising the bliss of vacationing or retiring inexpensively on your own piece of property in the region of your dreams. They offer just enough information to whet the readers' appetite and to express the author's personal opinion, presumably based on experience, as to how to undertake the emigration process and to which state to emigrate. Ostenfeldt is less site specific than some of the other authors mentioned here and seems to raise more questions than furnish answers. Admittedly, being first and foremost a salesman, that must have been his objective, for it would not have been through the reading of his articles that persons would have simply traveled somewhere to Wisconsin in order to buy land (unlike through de Haas's very detailed description of Calumet). Only through subsequent personal contacts with Ostenfeldt would the reader have been encouraged to join in the settlement of a wilderness territory in far off Wisconsin.

The services available through the commissioner's office were obviously more

complete and probably more concise than what an agent like Ostenfeldt had to offer. For one thing, his ulterior motive was to sell land, and he certainly was not going to steer potential customers elsewhere, even, arguably, if it had been in their best interest to do so. Secondly, Ostenfeldt exhibits a rather general, if not superficial, knowledge of Wisconsin, his primary attention being reserved for the specific land area that he was empowered to sell. Thirdly, his major thrust was not to sell his product through these articles but to dissuade their readers from going elsewhere or buying other land. (In the latter respect, he discourages his readers from purchasing lands already titled in a previous settler's name, for these were times when liens and encumbrances unknown to the unsuspecting purchaser were common.) The commissioner, on the other hand, would have been able to provide broad, unbiased information on the entire state of Wisconsin, its resources and available lands without pressuring the emigrant into making a purchase. Apart from promoting Wisconsin in general as a desirable state for resettlement, the commissioner's approach would by and large have been neutral relative to the need for advice and the interests of the emigrant. Luckily for those who took him up on his offer, Ostenfeldt turned out to be an honest broker who went far beyond his commercial interests by accompanying the emigrants on their journey—thus protecting them from countless inconveniences and exploitations—and by helping them find their land and establish the settlement of New Holstein.<sup>36</sup>

### *Der deutsche Auswanderer*

In the mid-nineteenth century, specialized newspapers were aimed exclusively at the prospective German emigrant. Apart from providing editorial content, they served as a vehicle for advertising booking agencies, passages on particular ships, rail lines, places of lodging, and more. Topical articles were devoted to places where to relocate (including other countries and continents besides the United States), travel descriptions, statistical information on the number of emigrants leaving for America or other destinations, and the reprinting of legal regulations, both in German lands and abroad. Furthermore, these papers often reprinted letters from emigrants and discussed recently published books on emigration, among them de Haas's, as we have seen.<sup>37</sup> One of these weekly newspapers was the *Allgemeine Auswanderungs-Zeitung*, published in Rudolstadt (in the Saxon principality of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, today part of Thuringia) Bremen and New York, another *Der deutsche Auswanderer*, published in Darmstadt, in the grand duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt (located south of the confluence of the Main and Rhine Rivers, it was a strategic location for many emigrants from the southern and southwestern German states). Several letters printed in this publication in 1848, one in the form of an extended "letter" from an emigrant to Wisconsin, are representative for the type of information about the state made available through this and similar sources.



**"Amerika: Das Gebiet Wisconsin und die deutsche Einwanderung dahin" by Carl Tuckermann**

In his report,<sup>38</sup> Tuckermann emphasizes that for several years Wisconsin has been the most significant destination for German emigrants in the United States. Known for its fertile soils, healthy climate and abundant resources, Wisconsin has become well known amongst Germans as a place for resettlement. He names the counties where much land has already been claimed by settlers (Milwaukee, Washington, Racine, Kenosha, Iowa and Grant) and generally describes the landscape, dividing it into prairies to the west of Milwaukee, and the deep forest to its north and along Lake Michigan. Not dissimilar to Lathrop's treatise of 1853, Tuckermann's article covers a lot of ground, providing sketchy details on the state's history, climate, geography, agricultural potential and its location convenient for marketing agricultural products (noting the connection via the Great Lakes to eastern markets, soon to be supplemented, as he erroneously believed, by a canal in Illinois to the Mississippi River, giving Wisconsin farmers access to southern markets, as well). He also extols the virtues of Wisconsin's constitution and the ability of foreigners to vote after one year of residency. Although he promotes the state in general, Tuckermann places special emphasis on Sheboygan County and, to a lesser extent, on its neighbors, Fond du Lac, Calumet and Manitowoc Counties, each of which was then heavily forested and largely unpopulated. In this context, he observes that ample government land was still available at \$1.25 per acre or \$800 per square mile. He concludes by dissuading the reader from considering immigration to Texas, for the heat is oppressive and the crops are foreign to Germans (as opposed to those that can be raised in Wisconsin). Moreover, the laborer would find himself competing against cheap slave labor and there would be Indian problems, not to speak of the fact that the state was filled with murderers, robbers and outcasts from the remainder of the United States.<sup>39</sup>

Tuckermann's article certainly was of the type which would have triggered interest in a reader even casually thinking about heading for Wisconsin. It is short on details and long on promotion, although promotion of a relatively neutral nature, since Tuckermann does not appear to represent the interests of a particular enterprise, nor is he attempting to secure settlers for a particular community. Themes common to many of the books, pamphlets, articles and letters of the time devoted to Wisconsin run through Tuckermann's exposé: Wisconsin is a healthy place, a land not unlike Germany where one may farm in the same manner as in the homeland. Wisconsin has prospects of a great future as an agricultural district and, although a fair amount of land has already been taken in the vicinity of Milwaukee, much remains to be claimed to its north and west at low prices. The reader also may detect the subtle yet obvious attempt to encourage immigration to a state where there already is a sizable German community. Thus, Tuckermann's article would have planted the seed, giving the German emigrant reason to think more seriously about Wisconsin, but no more.

## **"Amerikanische Briefe-Auszüge aus Auswandererbriefen-Empfehlung von Wisconsin"**

The author, L. W. Ranis, begins his letter to Germany<sup>40</sup> by noting that he was writing it from 7,000 miles away at the edge of civilization. He waxes optimistic about the opportunities for success in Wisconsin, observing that the farmer could even plant crops of wheat or corn in the same spot, year after year, still obtaining great yields. He also expresses amazement at the prairie where the grasses are so tall they conceal the largest of men. The climate, he avers, may be compared to that of Sicily. According to him, there are "alligators," two shoes in length, in the Rock River near Watertown that one must be careful to avoid. (He may have meant snapping turtles.)

Confronted with this type of enthusiasm and sensationalism, the modern, if not contemporary, reader must ponder the question whether Ranis was simply naive about his new home or wanted to gloss over any shortcomings in order to impress. And this is but one example of many letters that were far too short and scattered in their approach to the subject matter to have been of significant value to the emigrant other than the fact that a fellow German citizen has been there before him and has found Wisconsin an attractive place to settle in. The frequency and apparent sincerity of this type of communication, however, likely did not fail to have their effect on readers who knew not where to go in the new land but looked with eagerness to reports from people like themselves. Although some stories might more aptly be called tall tales, it can well be imagined that some desperate Germans, for want of better, more objective information, may have clung to such letters, if only to nurse their dream of a new life that would lift them out of their misery back home. There can be no doubt that any reader who solely relied on such form of communication would be easy prey for the dangers and deprivations that lurked in the path.

## **"Reise von New York nach Calumet (Wisconsin)"**

In this rather lengthy article,<sup>41</sup> published anonymously, a thorough description is given of the trip from New York to Wisconsin. Before embarking on the actual account, the author promotes the state as the main focus of German emigration to the United States and provides a list of more specific sources of information on Wisconsin.

The travel description contains such information as the cost for off-loading luggage in various places and the amount of time needed for respective portions of the trip (e.g., 1/2 day from New York to Albany, 2 days by train, or 12 days by canal boat, from Albany to Buffalo, and 4-6 days on the Great Lakes to Wisconsin). The cost of traveling these distances is discussed, as well as the need for steerage passengers to buy supplies for the journey across the lakes.

Once in Milwaukee, the author recommends a number of accommodations and the types of provisions, supplies and material that one should purchase before setting out for the interior where these items would be more expensive. (In this respect, he



lists as indispensable, among other, a yoke of oxen and a wagon, a hay rake, several barrels, chairs and a table, rice and dried apples, coffee, sugar and salt, and a stove.)

Then the reader may follow the author in a one-day journey by coach from Milwaukee to Fond du Lac followed by a day-long trip on foot to Calumet. He notes in detail the countryside through which he passes, including the native prairies and woods and the crops in the fields of those farms that had already been wrested from the wilderness. He also speaks of the port of Sheboygan and observes that from Milwaukee to Sheboygan it takes but 8 hours by boat while by ox and wagon it is an arduous 4 to 5 day journey.

This article could be of benefit only to the emigrant who had already decided on Wisconsin as a new home (and, in particular, in the Calumet area, which by then was already known to readers of de Haas, Ostenfeldt or Tuckermann), because it supplies specific advice on a given route and a given place to settle. Contrary to the simplifications or exaggerations of Ranis or similar letter writers, the reader of this sober account (as those of Tuckermann or Ostenfeldt) will likely seek more information from sources such as the commissioner of emigration, on the more general features of the state, and on the latest developments in regards to land availability and travel advice.

### **“Das deutsche Element in Milwaukee im Staate Wisconsin”**

This newspaper review, one in a series of pieces on recently published literature on travel and emigration,<sup>42</sup> scrutinizes a book by Alexander Ziegler that apparently contains an overview over the brief history of Milwaukee and much information on the city's development. In noting the author's emphasis on the prevalence of the city's German traits, he exclaims: “Deutsche Sprache, deutsche Sitten und Gebräuche, sowie deutscher Einfluss auf die politischen Verhältnisse sind daher hier vorherrschend.” After listing Milwaukee's German businesses, casinos, singing groups, schools, book publishers and newspapers, the reviewer reiterates the author's observation that Germans from all walks of life—professionals and day laborers alike—will find work here. German is so dominant in Milwaukee, according to Ziegler, that American businessmen must learn the language or risk losing the trade of the large German population. The newspaper reviewer recommends this book to the reader as a true travelogue, in this case focused upon the virtues of resettlement in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

While it is difficult to gather from a review such as this the value of the information offered in the book itself (except from the biased perspective of the reviewer who, on his part, is speculating on the needs of his emigrant readership), it does show that there was a very active press at this time, printing all sorts of accounts by those who successfully crossed the ocean and one third of the North American continent, raised a new home and still were left with enough time and energy to write about the experience. It was left up to the reader to separate the wheat from the chaff, to view letters by emigrants as individual vignettes that can't be relied upon exclusively. Then again, announcements, book reviews, and even advertisements had their place in the

prospective emigrant's arduous education process. In that sense, newspapers could be seen as signposts pointing to the places where more information could be had.

## Conclusion

The examples cited are evidence that at a time when German emigration to the U.S. had reached its first peak, numerous printed sources of advice and information catered to those who were considering the adventure of starting a new life overseas. While each private publication was valuable in one or several aspects (preparation, sea voyage, New York, passage across the United States, land taking, farm raising, trades, etc.), their scope was necessarily limited. Where they did excel was in the area of personal travel experience, especially the ship voyage for which the commissioner had to rely on second-hand accounts. However, while the authors frequently admonished their readers to beware of criminal elements, only the commissioners had a representative view on the vast range of fraudulent behavior vis-a-vis the emigrants. Most of all, though, none of the German authors knew Wisconsin as Lathrop or Lapham did. (It is telling that at least one of the more thorough writers, Wettstein, must have borrowed extensively from Lapham.) By drawing on one or both of these eminent pioneers, the commissioners provided an invaluable service to those who had the opportunity to read the office's pamphlet describing the state. Ideally, of course, the curious German emigrant considering Wisconsin would have consulted both, some private sources to gain a feel for the actual voyage, and the official publications by the commissioner to develop an understanding of the state's natural and economic resources. The available data (popularity and availability of private publications, numbers and places of circulation for the commissioner's pamphlet, as well as references to both kinds of information in German emigration weeklies) suggest that many emigrants did just that. Their curiosity must have been fed by individual accounts acquired already in Europe and by the official publication from the Wisconsin Office of Commissioner of Emigration, possibly obtained as late as upon arrival in New York. In its incremental and, at the same time, quite varied actions, the office undoubtedly contributed to the emigrant's success.

However, as the emigrants responded both to the push out of Europe and to the pull towards America, the question at hand is not only which information, official or private, was more adequate, but also, whether the Wisconsin emigration office, through its direct interactions with German (and other) emigrants, and through its printed publications—especially the pamphlet—did indeed make a noticeable difference.

While the available sources do not allow a clearcut answer, it appears that the office's success was anything but overwhelming: (1) The numbers of emigrants who contacted the office are impressive when seen by themselves but very modest when compared to the total numbers of emigrants passing through New York.<sup>43</sup> (2) The fact that German emigration to the United States after 1855 dropped off temporarily (to pick up again after the Civil War), certainly was not the reason that caused the Wisconsin legislature to abolish the office; the decision was taken prior to this decline.<sup>44</sup>



Whether the diminishing German emigration numbers after the office's demise are an indicator of the office's previous success is doubtful because, on one hand, the actual statistical numbers on emigrants served, as argued above, are small, and, on the other, because overreaching sociopolitical reasons account for fluctuations in German emigration throughout the nineteenth century. (3) The office had very limited resources that were no match for the competition of ticket agents, runners, tricksters and other profiteers of the emigration industry. (4) New York's dock district at the time (prior to Castle Garden and Ellis Island) must have been chaotic, discouraging any organized and concerted effort by the Commissioner of Emigration to find a targeted "audience." (5) Even at the "source," in Europe, the office was competing with fraudulent schemes by agents to enlist emigrants before they could find out that they had been tricked.

Still, even if the available data does not support what might be called a "success story," I believe that the mere existence of the Wisconsin Office of Commissioner of Emigration was historically significant for the following reasons: (1) Wisconsin was the first frontier state to create a public institution with the charge to encourage and oversee the flow of emigrants to its lands. (2) The office evidently also had a humanitarian effect on the emigration process. Although, in the absence of any criminal law directed against the exploiters of this historic migration, the commissioners had very limited recourse, one of them did seek legal redress at least on two occasions to help defrauded emigrants.<sup>45</sup> (3) By targeting predominantly Germans—for whatever reason—the office may indeed have slightly increased the German ethnic share in the population of Wisconsin. (4) After all, and most important, the Wisconsin Office of Commissioner of Emigration—for the short period it first existed—represented a public effort not only to influence the existing process of emigration but also to shape and increase a state population, an effort that might, in our times, be labeled as social engineering.

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## Notes

The state government documents cited in this study are held in the Archives of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison. They have been identified by the following abbreviations:

VSAR	Van Steenwijk, Gysbert. "First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Emigration for the State of Wisconsin" (23 December, 1852). <i>The Journal of the Senate of the State of Wisconsin</i> , 1853. Madison, 1853. Appendix L.
HHAR	Haertel, Herman. "Report. To His Excellency William A. Barstow, Governor of the State of Wisconsin" (30 December, 1853). Madison, 1853.
FHQR	Horn, Frederick W. "Extracts from Quarterly Report. Office of the Commissioner of Emigration, Frederick Horn, Aug. 20, 1854, to His Excellency, William A. Barstow." Unpublished.

<sup>1</sup> Under the title of Board of Immigration (to 1871), then Commissioner of Immigration (to 1875). The last Wisconsin Board of Immigration opened in 1879, to close again in 1886. (See also note 4.)

<sup>2</sup> See J. Strohschänk and William G. Thiel, "The Wisconsin Commissioner of Emigration 1852-1855:

An Experiment in Social and Economic Engineering and its Impact upon German Emigration to Wisconsin," (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> "Official Action by Wisconsin to Recruit Immigrants, 1850-1890," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 18 (1983): 185-95.

<sup>4</sup> *Amerikanische Einwandererwerbung in Deutschland 1845-1914* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990), esp. 25-33.

<sup>5</sup> While to modern observers the term "immigration" may appear more suitable for naming the office, rather than "emigration," it must be noted that, in the 1850s, the latter was far more widely used to describe the process of leaving one's homeland and traveling—mostly across water—to a new, unsettled area. Arguably, the focus of the agency's attention was primarily Europe, from where the migration, preferably to Wisconsin, began. Once the places of destination have become almost as densely populated as the places of origin, forcing newcomers to immerse themselves in an existing, clearly defined culture and infrastructure, the former term gains prominence (cf. the same agency's name in 1868, "Wisconsin Office of Commissioner of Immigration"). In general, the terms "emigrant" and "immigrant" have largely been used indiscriminately in the literature. In the absence of clearer definitions, I will call the migrant *in transit* "emigrant," while the foreign *settler* who has succeeded in carving out an existence in the new environment will be referred to as "immigrant."

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Theodore C. Blegen, "The Competition of the Northwestern States for Immigrants," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 3 (Sept. 1919): 3-29; 8.

<sup>7</sup> Whether a number of pamphlets were printed also in Czech could not be ascertained, although Czechs, who at the time were living within the borders of the Habsburg empire, were attracted to and settled in Wisconsin, as well (cf. Blegen, 5, and Karel D. Bicha, "The Czechs in Wisconsin History," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 53 [Spring, 1970]: 194-203). Most Czechs read and spoke German as their second language.

<sup>8</sup> See Richard N. Current, *The History of Wisconsin, Vol. II: The Civil War Era 1848-1873* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976), 45, note 5. Notwithstanding the speculation about Lapham's (joint or sole) authorship of the pamphlet distributed to the emigrants, it is certain that he wrote a similar pamphlet in 1867, published by the reinstated office in two editions, under the title, *Statistics, Exhibiting the History, Climate and Productions of the State of Wisconsin* (Madison, 1867).

<sup>9</sup> VSAR, 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> Vol. 14 (Jan. & Mar., 1853). Parts entitled, "Wisconsin. Population, Resources and Statistics" (24-28) and, "Wisconsin and the Growth of the Northwest" (230-38), respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Van Steenwijk obliquely refers to the pamphlet as having been "prepared under the direction of your Excellency [the governor]" (VSAR, 5).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas J. Townsend, the state-appointed traveler between Wisconsin and New York, to whom Rippley attributes these lines ("official action," 187), must have quoted from Lathrop. Lathrop's observation is remarkable also for the distinction between a "Germany in America" and fully assimilated Irish and Scandinavian settlers. While it is true that German immigrants tended to preserve their language longer than the two other ethnic immigrant groups, they did eventually integrate themselves fully, putting to rest certain fears by Anglo-Saxons that the German culture and language might subvert American traditions.

<sup>13</sup> *Together with Brief Sketches of Its Antiquities, Natural History, Soil, Productions, Population; and Government*, 2d ed. (Milwaukee, 1846).

<sup>14</sup> See note 7.

<sup>15</sup> Rippley's account of the introduction of the residency requirement for voting ("official action," 185f.) is at least misleading when he speaks of an attempt to shrink the requirement from twelve to six months and then continues, "In the end, the liberals prevailed and the short residency provision remained in effect in Wisconsin until 1912." Indeed, it was the twelve months' requirement that ruled during that period (cf. Current, 47).

<sup>16</sup> While these proportions might show "a pro-German bias" (Rippley, 186), they may as well simply reflect the general population differences between those ethnic groups in Europe.

<sup>17</sup> VSAR, 11, 12, 5.

<sup>18</sup> HHAR, 13, 5, 9. See also note 16 above.

<sup>19</sup> See FHQR.

<sup>20</sup> Rudolph Puchner, *Memories of the First Years of the Settlement of New Holstein*, trans. from the German and supplemented by William G. Thiel (Eau Claire, WI: William G. Thiel, 1994), 15.



<sup>21</sup> Two vols. (Elberfeld: Jahns Bädeler, 1848-49).

<sup>22</sup> This is remarkable inasmuch as Puchner himself was a teacher in the humanities who took to farming only after emigrating. This would qualify him as a so-called Latin Farmer, although Puchner proved to be more adept and persistent than most other academics who took to the plow.

<sup>23</sup> It is of interest to note that de Haas announces in his book that in the beginning of August (1848?) the first Bremer steamship, the *George Washington* would be in operation. Perhaps Theodor Wettstein as well as Freund Goldmann (see below) read this account for they both mention that the ship they took across the Atlantic Ocean was the *Washington* (1, 8, and 3, respectively). It may at least be speculated that books and pamphlets on the emigration experience changed hands at will and were widely distributed for the benefit of their "up to the minute" advice.

<sup>24</sup> The book was repeatedly advertised in the German weekly for emigrants, *Allgemeine Auswanderungs-Zeitung* (Rudolstadt, Bremen, New York), e.g., in the issue of 19 June 1848, p. 160.

<sup>25</sup> *Der nordamerikanische Freistaat Wisconsin in seiner physischen, sozialen und politischen Gestalt: Zur Belehrung und Warnung für deutsche Auswanderer; Nebst einer ausführlichen Darstellung aller Gewerbe, Fabrik-, Industrie- und Handelszweige* (von Th. W. aus Milwaukee) Neueste Länderkunde mit besonderer Beziehung auf deutsche Auswanderung und Colonisation, Nr. 4. (Elberfeld und Iserlohn: Jahns Bädeler, 1851).

<sup>26</sup> Repaginated from page 1, as are all other parts.

<sup>27</sup> See note 23 above.

<sup>28</sup> *Der nordamerikanische Landwirt: Ein Handbuch für Ansiedler in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Frankfurt/M., n.d.).

<sup>29</sup> (Cerasco, WI, 1849).

<sup>30</sup> (Wesel, 1849).

<sup>31</sup> (Leipzig, 1849).

<sup>32</sup> *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 25 (Dec. 1941): 217-30; 26 (March 1942): 331-55; (June 1942): 456-75. German original published in Leipzig, 1853.

<sup>33</sup> Ficker recommends to those readers interested in Wisconsin to turn to the "responsible agent from Wisconsin (this year he is Mr. H. Haertel)" (225). At the minimum this demonstrates a perception on the part of the author that his book is only a general guide, but the reference also establishes a tie between Ficker's reportorial account of the emigration experience and the up-to-date factual advice available through official channels which he felt obviously could be trusted.

<sup>34</sup> 28 Oct. and 9 Dec. .

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Thiel.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See note 21.

<sup>38</sup> *Der deutsche Auswanderer*, 22 Jan. 1848.

<sup>39</sup> This advice was timely, as Texas appeared to have a draw on Germans at the time. (See, e.g., the warning printed in the *Allgemeine Auswanderungs-Zeitung* of 19 June 1848, where a poetic eulogy of the "paradise" of Texas is contrasted with the tragic fate of the Adelsverein in New Braunfels).

<sup>40</sup> Complete title: "Amerikanische Briefe. Auszüge aus Auswandererbriefen. Empfehlung von Wisconsin. Cleveland. Dr. Meyer. Reise nach Watertown. Yankees entfernt. Beschreibung des Landes. Senator Meyer. Mr. Breket. Fieber und Ruhr. Steigen der Preise des Bodens. Deutsche und amerikanische Frauen. Urbarmachung. Das Klima und die Natur. Deutsche in der Gegend von Watertown. Dienstboten." Watertown, Wisconsin, 23 July 1847 (18 March 1848).

<sup>41</sup> *Der deutsche Auswanderer*, 1 July 1848.

<sup>42</sup> *Der deutsche Auswanderer*, 9 Dec. 1848. Complete title: "Interessante Mittheilungen und Auszüge aus der Literatur der Auswanderung und Reisen—Das deutsche Element in Milwaukee im Staate Wisconsin (Aus Alexander Ziegler's Skizzen einer Reise durch Nordamerika und Westindien. Erster Theil)."

<sup>43</sup> Van Steenwijk claims to have been contacted by 436 persons, "of whom the majority represented also their friends and families, many of them companies of 20, 30 or even more persons" (VSAR, 10). Haertel reported being first visited by some 300 persons ("mostly Germans"), then by 600. He also mentioned receiving in excess of 3,000 written inquiries (IHAR, 5). Between 1840 and 1859 an average of 157,000 immigrants per year came ashore in New York. 1854 alone saw New York receiving 428,000 immigrants (cf. *Annual Reports of the Commissioners of New York State, 1847-1860* [New York, 1861]). Of those, Germans averaged some 37% (see Roger Daniels, *Coming to America* [New York: Harper Perennial, 1990], 146). By comparison, in 1855 the entire population of Wisconsin was 522,109 (cf. Current, 76).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Strohschänk and Thiel. In this, I disagree with Rippley's assertion that "Wisconsin, *therefore* [i.e., because of political pressures at home *as well as* improving economic conditions abroad; emphases mine], ceased to recruit immigrants" (188).

<sup>45</sup> In his letter of 21 June 1853, Commissioner Haertel advised Governor Farwell that he then had "two suits pending" on behalf of emigrants for fraud. He appears to have justified this gambit upon the basis that although first and foremost it was the emigrant whose money and goods were at stake, it was Wisconsin that, too, would suffer in the end, for the defrauded emigrant, although willing to settle in this state, certainly would not have the means to make it there unless he recouped his losses.