

Siegmar Muehl

**The Lichtfreund Press:  
German-American Newspaper Publishing  
on the Missouri Frontier, 1843-55**

On 21 July 1843, Eduard Mühl, accompanied by his wife, baby, and brother-in-law, Karl Strehly, stepped off a Missouri River boat onto the wharf at the small frontier town of Hermann, Missouri.<sup>1</sup> The settlement, ninety miles west of St. Louis on the hilly south bank of the Missouri River, had been founded only six years earlier as a colony of the German Settlement Society of Philadelphia.<sup>2</sup> Its founders foresaw the settlement as an enclave where German language and culture might survive and flourish in the dominant English culture of the United States.

Other German settlements in the Missouri River valley west of St. Louis had preceded the founding of the Hermann colony. Areas established in 1832 near Washington and Dutzow east of Hermann became known as the "Latin Settlement" because of the educated and aristocratic backgrounds of many of the immigrants. Other groups followed in rapid succession. Of these, the group known as the Gießen Emigration Society under the leadership of Paul Follenius and Friedrich Münch is especially noteworthy since both Follenius and Münch later wrote essays that appeared in the Lichtfreund Press newspapers. A few members of the Gießen group eventually settled north of the river near Marthasville.<sup>3</sup>

Eduard Mühl, a former Lutheran pastor in Saxony, had emigrated to America in 1836 at thirty-six years of age. Prior to coming to Hermann, he had published a Cincinnati paper called the *Lichtfreund* (*Friend of Light*). This paper espoused religious rationalism, a religious ideology with roots in the German Enlightenment. Many literate and liberal-minded German immigrants had imported this view in the 1830s.

These friends of light, or freethinkers, believed in a "natural" rather than a "revealed" religion, a religion based on truths discovered by the "inner light of reason" rather than one founded on church dogma, authority, or mystical experience.

In his German homeland, Mühl had been reared in a conservative Evangelical Lutheran household—his father was pastor of a village church at Oberullersdorf in Saxony. While attending the University of Leipzig to study theology, he absorbed not only rationalist religious views but also, as a member of the German Student Association, espoused ideals of constitutional and representative government. The then autocratic rulers of the German states considered both viewpoints radical and subversive.

Like many graduates of theology at the time, Mühl spent several years as a private tutor waiting for a pastoral opening. Eventually he became his father's assistant at the Oberullersdorf church. In the course of preaching there and in neighboring churches as a vacancy pastor, he expressed his rationalist religious views. This brought him into conflict not only with his father but also with local authorities of the state-controlled church.

When his father died in 1835, Mühl temporarily filled the vacant pulpit. He failed, however, to obtain the permanent appointment. Presumably his "radical" views did not endear him to village conservatives, or to local church authorities. Without means of livelihood, he emigrated to America.<sup>4</sup>

Mühl began to pick up newspaper experience shortly after reaching the United States. During a stopover of a few months in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where he failed to find a pastorate, he apprenticed himself for several weeks in a printshop to learn typesetting.<sup>5</sup> Early in 1837, he moved to nearby Lebanon earning his living there as a music teacher, and writing a series of articles on the German immigrant experience in the United States. These appeared in Philadelphia's German newspaper, *Die alte und neue Welt*.<sup>6</sup>

During the Lebanon year he observed with discomfiture the fervent evangelical religion which accompanied trans-Appalachian settlers in the post-Revolutionary War years. On a Sunday morning, when Mühl was playing his guitar and singing old German songs to assuage his loneliness, a member of the Methodist brethren invaded his room uninvited. This officious soul threatened Mühl with legal action unless he desisted from making music on the Sabbath. Later, during an extended Presbyterian revival meeting, Mühl lost several of his female piano students because they became convinced that playing the piano was a sin against God.

Mühl recorded these encounters in his Lebanon diary. They served to feed his publishing aspirations. He noted:

I have wondered that no religious newspaper exists in America that systematically fights the excesses shown here, and portrays the unity of mankind in a rational belief above and beyond sectarian ways.<sup>7</sup>

When Mühl settled in Cincinnati in 1840, he implemented his idea of publishing a religious newspaper. Shortly after arrival, he became editor of a German paper, the *Volksblatt*. With publishing facilities now at hand, he

concurrently launched his own German-language paper, the *Lichtfreund*, in February 1840.<sup>8</sup>

In Cincinnati the *Lichtfreund* continued publication for three years on a semimonthly basis. A contemporary source reported the paper had five hundred subscribers.<sup>9</sup> Mühl secured most of these by personal canvass. In 1842, leaving the publishing of the *Lichtfreund* to his publishing partner and brother-in-law, Karl Strehly, he traveled eastward seeking subscribers. His journal reflects this trip:

In May, I undertook my great journey to collect subscribers for the *Lichtfreund*. My route took me by Phillipsburg, Pittsburgh, and from there to Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York. I returned by way of Albany to Buffalo, and then on the canal to Cincinnati. I was gone almost 13 weeks and brought back \$3.25. The future worries me. I hope it will go better later. Karl and I compose the paper ourselves which makes for a great saving.

On a similar subscription-gathering trip westward to the St. Louis area in April 1843, Mühl visited Hermann, Missouri, for the first time. He would have known about the German colony through his Philadelphia newspaper contacts, since *Die alte und neue Welt* was the official voice for the German Settlement Society.<sup>10</sup> His encounter with this "little Germany" and its beautiful Rhine-like location on the banks of the Missouri prompted the following entry in Mühl's journal: "While I was in Hermann, the thought came to me that I would like to move there. After some hesitation, I quickly made the decision to move."

Departing Cincinnati by steamboat 12 July, Mühl's little party eventually arrived in Hermann after a "tedious voyage." A description of Hermann as it looked only three years earlier in 1840 appeared in the St. Louis German newspaper, the *Anzeiger des Westens*. A brief excerpt provides a sense of the physical scene that greeted the weary travelers:

Up to the present, something over two years have passed since the first house was built in Hermann. Now almost 150 houses stand there with about 600 inhabitants. Of the land surrounding Hermann, much of it is already laid out in farms.<sup>11</sup>

Hermann had no existing newspaper at the time. Thus, Mühl and Strehly needed to bring a printing press, type and paper with them on the trip from Cincinnati. Otherwise they could not have published their first Hermann-based number of the *Lichtfreund* only a little over a month after reaching this isolated location. From later evidence, we know the publishing partners had gone half-shares and made a down payment on a Washington Hand Press and type manufactured by the Cincinnati Type Foundry in Cincinnati.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after arrival, the partners set up their printing shop in a West Second Street house that Strehly bought for his living quarters at a sheriff's sale.<sup>13</sup> From this location, they first printed the Cincinnati-transplanted *Lichtfreund* in Hermann—Wednesday, 23 August 1843. This issue was the first number of the fourth annual set of the paper's ongoing existence; it was also the first enduring German-American paper published west of St. Louis in Missouri.<sup>14</sup>

The masthead of this first Hermann number is shown below.

# Licht-Freund.

Verliet er Alles, und das Gute behielt.  
(1 Cor. 13, 1).

Welche Religion ich bekenne? Keine von allen, die Du mir nennst.—Und warum keine? Keine Religion.  
(1 Cor. 13, 1).

Es geht menschliche Herzen von oben; es ist fast immer diese Zeit.

Herausgegeben von C. Mühl und Strehly.

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**Jahrgang 4. Hermann, Mo., Mittwoch, September, 20. 1843.**

**No. 5.**

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**Erklärung.**—Diese Zeit erfährt mancherlei und bedarf daher vieler Aufklärung. Ohne Beschränkung wird kein Wort ausgespart. Jedem, welcher die Freiheit der Meinungen anerkennen will, ist die Freiheit der Meinungen gewährt. Die Meinungen werden nicht durch die Meinungen der Meinungen beschränkt.

<p><b>Von der Erbauende.</b> (Fortsetzung.)</p> <p>Du bist es aber etwas nicht weniger als ganz neue Gedanken sind, die mit hier werden die sogenannten Erbauende aufzuführen, und das man auch schon sehr frische die grenzenlosen Hibernierische fühlte, welche diese Lehre der Kirche drückt, davon giebt schon der Mensch Pelagius Zeugnis, welcher ganz vernunftig folgende Sätze aufstellte: Alles Gute und Böse in uns wird nicht mit uns geboren, sondern es geschieht von uns. Der Mensch wird, wie ohne Leben, so ohne Vater geboren.</p> <p>Der Sündenfall Adams ist nicht weiter, als die erste Sünde des ersten Menschen, ein einzelner Akt der verbotenen Willens. Diese erste Sünde kann den Sünden Adams nicht zugerechnet werden; es giebt keine Erbsünde.</p> <p>Der Tod ist ein notwendiges Ereignis der</p>	<p>Und so wurde denn diese Ansicht des Bischofs, zu Anfang des sechsten Jahrhunderts, zur christlichen Glaubenslehre gemacht, und so haben wir sie eben auch, und die Erbauenden lassen sich die Sache für sie abkürzen, wenn die Kirche hat die Ansicht des Bischofs gut gehalten und gesagt: Pelagius hat seiner vernünftigen Ansicht hat unrecht, man mußten die Leute, was sie glauben sollten. Es ist aber, daß ganz Lehrgelahrte der christlichen Dogmen aufhören. Jetzt aber wurde die vernunftvolle Meinung, so eines alten, im Bereich der Frömmigkeit und Gerechtigkeit lebenden Kirchenmannes, als einjäger anderer Glaube heilig gesprochen, und kann man natürlich alles Keuzen, was nicht hat mit unterzuzulassen. Es mehr und richtig es auch immer sein mochte. Es ist darum nicht lächerlicher und angereizter, als wenn die Leute glauben, sie hätten in ihrem Katholizismus Christus</p>	<p>auch den sogenannten Sündenfall, noch fast eine menschliche Thatsache halten können. Die wider auch ein bester Mann glauben könnten, daß Gott in 6 Tagen die Welt schuf und daß man ein menschgewordener Mensch haben mußte? Wer sollte nicht in der Schöpfung des Menschenpaars, und dessen Kindsleiden Leben im freigelebten Menschen, was Gott mit ihnen sprach, ein freigeschicktes, höchst orientalisches Bild wiedersehen, wie man bei anderen orientalischen Völkern ebenfalls vorfinden? Wer würde nicht nicht ebenfalls diese Sätze, in der Verlesungsgeschichte fortgesetzt haben? Die Erklärung, bei den Evangelisten das Bild bei sich, breitet ja den Menschen, inwiefern sie annehmen auf die goldenen, verbotenen Frucht, von denen großen und erzieherischen Nutzen sie ihnen nicht erzählt. Die Sinnlichkeit reißt sie hin.</p>
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Quotes appearing directly under the title signaled the paper's rationalist ideology. A Biblical quote reads in translation: "Test everything and hold fast to the good." Another from Schiller states: "What religion do I confess? None of those you mention.—And why none? For religious reasons."

The masthead further specified the "terms" of the paper: It would appear biweekly and cost \$1.00 per year, paid in advance; letters and remittances could be sent post-free; publishers of other German newspapers were requested to act as subscription agents. Actually, the paper came out weekly for the first six weeks to make up missing numbers caused by gaps in publishing during the move to Hermann.<sup>15</sup> A notice on page four signed by the "compositor" explained that due to a shortage of type fonts for the German letter, *ü*, "ue" would substitute until "the deficiency can be made good." The paper's physical format consisted of four pages of three columns each, with an overall dimension of fourteen by nine inches. Each number contained some six thousand hand-set words.

Mühl filled more than three pages of this first Hermann number with an editorial setting for the paper's rationalist purpose for the "German comrades in the West." It read in part:

I shall set forth the guiding principle that one may judge for himself whether to accept or reject a religious belief. One can only believe that which promotes the highest purpose of religion, namely morality, which must be reflected in our lives in word and deed. What does not meet these claims cannot be a part of religious belief, but must be rejected. The viewpoint expressed here finds its basis in the Latin word. It is called, "Rationalism," or faith in reason.

The paper's content typically included a lead essay on a religious subject from the rationalist viewpoint. Although these essays often attacked the established churches, Protestant and Catholic, extreme rationalist views also received critical attention. Friedrich Münch, fellow rationalist, journalist and grape grower, who lived in nearby Marthasville across the Missouri River from Hermann, wrote such a series directed at the *Die Fackel*, a New York paper edited by Samuel Ludvigh. Münch accused *Die Fackel* of "carrying on a war against Christianity, tearing it out of all historical development."<sup>16</sup> Letters to the editor sometimes added other voices to *Lichtfreund* columns.

Besides its editorial content, the paper often contained special serial features. One described the world's various religions. Another featured extended excerpts from David Strauss's controversial *Life of Jesus*, published in Germany in 1840. Strauss, like several other contemporary German Biblical scholars, attempted to explain the supernatural and miraculous in the Bible on naturalistic or mythical grounds. The *Lichtfreund* also served as organ for correspondence and promotion of two rationalist groups in the Missouri River Valley called *Verein Freier Männer*—one founded in Augusta in 1844, and one in Hermann in 1852.<sup>17</sup> Back pages of the paper reported religious and sometimes secular news from the United States and Europe.

Since no telegraphic connections yet existed, the *Lichtfreund* depended entirely on other newspapers for its supply of news. At various times, thirty-two different American papers and six foreign ones were cited as news sources.<sup>18</sup> The *Anzeiger des Westens* in St. Louis and the *Deutsche Schnellpost* and *Die Fackel* in New York were the most frequently cited domestic sources. The *Lichtfreund* maintained an exchange-paper relationship with several of these which also included the courtesy of accepting subscriptions in each others' offices.<sup>19</sup>

Occasionally the paper announced publications of other presses. Thus the first number of a "Complete Library of German Classics," printed in Philadelphia could be viewed in the newspaper office and subscribed to "at 10 cents per-monthly number." The Hermann publishers stated their reason for promoting this publication: "Many here would like to secure better German works if opportunity and price were not an obstacle."<sup>20</sup>

Presumably due to the *Lichtfreund's* religious orientation, no commercial ads appeared in its pages. As a result, Mühl and Strehly depended entirely on

income from subscriptions to support the paper and their own livelihood. Various notices about the business of publishing the *Lichtfreund* provide insight into problems of producing and sustaining a paper on the Missouri frontier.

A list of the paper's agents appeared regularly. Such an agent list appears below. Locations on the list give evidence of the paper's geographical reach. It also regularly published names and cash receipts for subscriptions received. A tally of these receipts suggests the approximate number of subscribers, and their locations. Receipts in the fourth and fifth annual sets, August 1843 to May 1845, showed 365 subscribers having paid in part or in full. Ohio had the largest number with 144 at 19 different locations; Missouri had 98 at 15; Pennsylvania 77 at 6. As would be expected, big cities with large German concentrations provided the most readers: Cincinnati, St. Louis,

**Agentenschaft fuer den Lichtfreund.**

St. Louis, J. A. Schneider im Aufz. d. Bestens,  
 Ruegge — Dr. Heltrix und Knander.  
 St. Charles, Mo., Dr. Behrens.  
 Hannibal, St. Charles Co., Mo., H. Kasse.  
 Jefferson City, Mo., Apotheker Flach.  
 Fulton, Mo., Herzinger.  
 Warren Co. Mo. Frdr. Wensch.  
 Belleville, Ill., L. Westermann.  
 Louisville, Ky., W. Schumetzger.  
 Cincinnati, O., Red. des Volksblattes — Selbst-  
 buchne — Republikaner und Dr. Emmert.  
 Hamilton, O., Sobn.  
 Mariamshurg, O., Endenbofer.  
 Dayton, O., Dr. Broedel.  
 Columbus, O., Eullmann.  
 Lancaster, O., J. Walter.  
 Weelina, Wa., J. Steker.  
 Indianapolis, Ia., J. Nicolai.  
 Pittsburg, Pa., Pittsburger Courier und Post  
 J. Wagner.  
 Philippsburg, Pa., Dr. Adler.  
 Harrisburg, Pa., Karl Buchler.  
 Allentown, Pa., L. Schrade.  
 Philadelphia, Red. der Alten u. Neuen Zeit.  
 Baltimore, Meig.  
 New York, Die Red. der Staatszeitung und  
 Apotheker Kange.  
 New Orleans, Red. des Deutschen Couriers.

Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia, in that order. The *Lichtfreund* also had a scattering of readers in Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, New York, Wisconsin and Mississippi. Total receipts for the fifth annual set alone, with past-due and future-year payments eliminated, indicated about 236 subscribers for that year.

One odd feature appeared in this subscription accounting: No subscribers were ever listed from Hermann itself. Since the paper occasionally published notices relating to events in Hermann, there had to be local readers. Perhaps the paper was distributed gratis locally, though this would seem doubtful, given severe money constraints constantly facing the publishers.

As reported earlier, the *Lichtfreund's* masthead stated remittances could be sent post-free. The paper regularly carried a notice to remind subscribers how to do this:

If our distant readers want to send us money, they need to go to the nearest postmaster and in his presence put the money into a letter. He then addresses it, writes his name as postmaster, and the word free on it. By this means, it will spare the printing press the postage for subscriptions.<sup>21</sup>

The publishers bore mailing costs of the paper. At the time, the newspaper rate was one cent up to one hundred miles, and one-and-one-half cents for greater distances.<sup>22</sup>

Some *Lichtfreund* notices reflected problems in getting the paper delivered. No railroad or post road as yet connected Hermann eastward with St. Louis, or any point in between. The paper traveled by riverboat. Spring flooding, low water levels in the fall, and winter freezing all made for shipping problems. Sometimes the channel would shift making it impossible for boats to land at Hermann, or else "Yankee" boat captains, acting out of "nativist spite," refused to put in at the German settlement.<sup>23</sup>

One such disruption was noted in spring 1844, when the Missouri River crested at 35.7, a record level: "Although we send the paper by steamboat, it still could be delayed, since flooding may have made nearby roads impassable."<sup>24</sup> Such a problem may have existed in the Pittsburgh area. A second notice in the same issue reported that, "no papers had been received in the Pittsburgh area for six weeks, despite their having been mailed from Hermann."

Money and/or paper constraints limited the quantity of papers printed for any given number. One notice read: "Those who do not wish to receive the 4th annual set are requested to return the numbers sent to them because we need them elsewhere."<sup>25</sup>

By spring of 1844, Mühl and Strehly felt established enough to think about bringing in some outside help to relieve them of complete responsibility for composing the paper. In April, the following notice appeared: "The *Lichtfreund* Press is seeking a boy from 12 to 16 who desires to learn the printing trade."<sup>26</sup> The ad apparently found a positive response. In a letter Mühl wrote in early June 1844 to Heinrich Rödter, a newspaper colleague in Cincinnati, he noted: "My wife has plenty to do around the house since we are six at table. There are two apprentices I train to set type."<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, from the start of the Hermann venture, the publishers had money problems, due in part to the country's economic situation at the time. In 1837, the United States Bank of Pennsylvania closed, then a number of state banks failed because of losses incurred from western land speculation. The resulting depression continued into the 1840s.

A dunning notice appeared in the very first number of the Hermann paper:

All those who owe us money are requested to pay up at this time, since with the beginning of a new business necessary commitments and unexpected expenses occur that make extra money necessary. The notes of the Indiana Bank are acceptable as currency here.<sup>28</sup>

The Indiana Bank was one of the few regulated banks that had not defaulted. In the Rödter letter mentioned earlier, written near the end of the first year of publishing in Hermann, Mühl reported:

How seldom I have money you may imagine when I tell you that I have received up to the most recent mail delivery, when my yearly books close out, not more than \$223 for the year. I have to divide this with Karl. The paper supply I need to purchase each year costs \$52. It has been five weeks since I have had any money in the house.<sup>29</sup>

Concurrent with the above letter, the following notice appeared:

The annual year of the paper is soon to end and we ask subscribers still in arrears to pay up . . . . We have in the neighborhood of \$500 outstanding. For a small business, this is an enormous sum. It points out how little in America a newspaper publisher can trust the general reading public. Had we always been promptly paid, we would not have been put into the uncomfortable position of necessity to call on our closer friends for an advance of money, which in spite of the bad times, they let us have. Thus, we must do what we have never done up to now. We will publish a black list of our truant debtors and identify them to other publishers and the public. No fair thinking person will deny us this right.<sup>30</sup>

Beginning in December 1844 these "black lists" began to appear on a regular basis. Sarcastically titled, "Honors List," one example follows:

Th. Cappel in Zanesville, O.

This deceiver has not only himself received several years of the paper, but beyond this has made orders for others who likewise have

made no payment, although he guaranteed for these persons. Perhaps he received the money and pocketed it . . .<sup>31</sup>

This method sometimes brought results. One number of the paper carried a "Recantation" stating that one M. Sondhaus whose name had appeared on the black list, ". . . has now paid up in good faith." The publishers added by way of exoneration: "We are morally certain Mr. Sondhaus did not have the intention of withholding the subscription money from us."<sup>32</sup> Even the notorious Th. Cappell made a partial remittance: "T. Cappell paid \$2, but not without writing an amusing letter with joking insults."<sup>33</sup>

Given a circulation of five hundred when the Cincinnati issues were published, the *Lichtfreund's* subscribers had declined by half during the Hermann years. Although the depression undoubtedly contributed to this decline, the paper's religious and highly intellectual content severely limited its popular appeal. Friedrich Münch himself stated: "The *Lichtfreund* contains many essays calculated primarily for the understanding of those who possess a learned education."<sup>34</sup>

Mühl confirmed this circulation problem. In a summary editorial in the final number of the fifth annual set, 21 May 1845, he stated:

Except for Baltimore, we have lost most of our subscribers in the great Eastern cities. We have made up for this loss in part by new subscribers in the small cities and the countryside. Their friendly support through letters indicates backing for our cause. This has kept our hopes alive.

This situation undoubtedly was a major factor behind the publisher's announcement in early spring 1844 of their intention to bring out a second paper, a weekly, to be called the *Hermanner Wochenblatt*. They planned this as a more conventional, secular paper, with a focus on local news and concerns, including public notices and produce prices in nearby markets. The new paper would also feature state and national news, reports from abroad, and serialized stories. With out-of-town circulation in mind, the publishers cited the need "to convey news of Hermann to distant readers who wish to keep in close contact with our settlement."<sup>35</sup> Priced at two dollars per year, the paper would appear when there were sufficient subscribers to cover costs.

Shortly after this announcement, Mühl, in his letter to Rödter, referred to this new venture with misgivings: "You will give strength to my projected weekly paper. Truly, I have little confidence in the undertaking, and if the locals do not hold to their promises, I will suffer a loss."<sup>36</sup>

In addition to diversifying the output of the *Lichtfreund* Press with the publication of the new paper, the editor announced, in March 1845, the printing of "a small publication given to us at the press which is now finished." This was Friedrich Münch's booklet in German, *Concerning Religion and*

*Christianity*. To encourage sales, the notice continued: "We trust in our distant friends to extend a hand in disseminating this publication which costs only a few cents . . ." Ever mindful of economics, the editor concluded: "Please return to us samples you are not able to sell because we must pay for them out of our own pocket since Mr. Münch printed the work at his own cost and we are answerable for payment for the samples."<sup>37</sup>

The *Hermanner Wochenblatt* finally came out in September 1845 after several months delay because the publishers could not obtain delivery of the type ordered over a year previously when they announced the paper. In September 1844, they had informed potential subscribers, "earlier or later publication of the paper depends on this delivery."<sup>38</sup> An announcement of the pending publication of the *Hermanner Wochenblatt* appeared in the St. Louis paper, *Die deutsche Tribüne*, 26 June 1845:

All those who wish to subscribe to the *Hermanner Wochenblatt* published in Hermann by Mühl and Strehly, or to the currently appearing *Lichtfreund*, will find sample issues of these papers for examination with Mr. Strehly who remains here until Sunday. Subscriptions will be honored in this office, in the bookstore of Messers Frankson and Wesselhöft, and at the *Anzeiger des Westens*.

Sixty-one numbers of the *Hermanner Wochenblatt* from its first two years of publication are preserved in the newspaper collection at the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. They have been microfilmed as part of the National Endowment for the Humanities project to preserve early United States newspapers. Arndt and Olson's *German American Newspapers and Periodicals* does not list this collection of the *Wochenblatt*. The collection contains forty-four numbers from the first two years of the paper's existence, 1845-46, beginning with the third weekly issue, 19 September 1845. Among these early numbers, the following editorial appeared on 28 August 1846:

With this number, the first year of the *Wochenblatt* comes to an end. We have not found the support we counted on . . . We expected it would be better supported by the people in the countryside to whom it gives so much. They say: "What do we need with a newspaper. In Germany we had no paper." Such talk belongs to "simple Germans" [*teutschen Micheltume*] . . .

We have come to the conclusion, that will surprise no one who considers the circumstances, not to go on with the paper for the time being . . . It is necessary that we make a stop—in part to gather new subscribers, particularly since we lost many as a result



Although the *Wochenblatt's* editorials occasionally reflected the editor's abiding commitment to rationalism and his challenges of traditional church practices, its editorials more frequently addressed secular issues. Mühl courageously took a strong antislavery stand in what was a slave state. Although there were no slaves in Hermann and only a few in surrounding Gasconade County, the 1850 census counted over one thousand in Montgomery County north across the Missouri River from Hermann.<sup>40</sup>

The paper often carried accounts of lynchings and other incidents involving inhuman treatment of slaves in southern states. Frequent editorials informed readers about politics of the slavery issue. The paper criticized the Thirty-first Congress for passing, in 1850, the so-called "Omnibus Bill" which included the controversial Fugitive Slave Law. Anticipating the 1852 presidential election, the paper supported the Free Democratic, or Free-Soil party platform which called for the abolition of the Fugitive Slave Law, and opposition to adding more slave states to the Union. In the November election, the paper reported few Hermann voters bothered to cast their ballots. The editorial explained: "They found little to support in the platforms of the Democrats or Whigs." Free Democrats did not appear on the ballot. A later December editorial emphasized the differences for its readers between the antislavery views of the Abolitionists and the Free Democrats. Abolitionists, it said, advocated unconditional abolition of slavery and granting full citizenship to the freed slaves. Free Democrats, by contrast, felt that unconditional abolition violated constitutional rights of the southern states, and that full citizenship for slaves overlooked their lack of education to appreciate the rights and duties of citizen status.<sup>41</sup>

Locally, the paper focused at various times on improving the German school in Hermann, the need for a passable, all-season post road connecting Hermann with Washington twenty miles east, the route location and building of the Pacific railroad westward from St. Louis, and particularly problems and possibilities associated with development of viticulture in the area otherwise ill-suited for other crops or industrial development due to rocky soil and hilly terrain.

Through notices in its newer paper, the Lichtfreund Press made efforts to expand its printing business beyond publishing newspapers alone. One such notice, in English, appears below.<sup>42</sup>

The appearance of this notice in English raises an interesting question. In mid-nineteenth century, and for many years to come, Hermann clung to its German speaking and reading.<sup>43</sup> What audience, then, did the "Job Work" notice address with its claim to be able "to execute printing in various branches of English?" The only English appearing in the newspaper on a regular basis occurred in various legal notices relating to estates and legal actions brought

## JOB WORK

done at this office on the most accomodating terms, with neatness and despatch. Having increased and improved our establishment, so as to anable us to execute Printing in all its various branches in the English as well as in the German language, we are now prepared to receive and fulfil orders to the entire satisfaction of our friends.

MUEHL & STREILY.

before the circuit court. For these notices, English was probably mandated by the court. That the paper did not translate such notices for Hermann readers suggests that many adults in Hermann, despite everyday use of spoken German, could read some English.

Sometime in 1847, as extra "job work," the press issued a reprint of Münch's book on Christianity in German.<sup>44</sup> Another longtime Hermann practice may have originated with the Lichtfreund Press. For years, even into present times, death notices printed on small cards and distributed by the undertaker appeared in town stores on counter tops near the cash register as a form of public obituary. Since the *Lichtfreund* or *Wochenblatt* rarely featured obituaries, printing these cards may have been part of the Lichtfreund Press's "job work" business.

Although the *Wochenblatt* continued to publish agent lists and locations (St. Louis, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York, as well as Warren and Union counties, Missouri), for a few years the new paper no longer published subscriber receipts or dunning notices. As a result, no data exist to determine the paper's circulation. In Hermann itself, the 1850 census counted 209 dwellings, most occupied by family units. This tally would suggest, at the most, the possibility of two hundred-plus local subscribers, particularly if surrounding farm settlements were counted in.

We do know the paper was delivered to some local residents. Mühl's second son, Siegmar, wrote a recollection in his adult years titled "My Big Brother." Speaking of this brother, Thuisco, he described a scene from their youth in Hermann in the year 1850:

He had a carrier's route for the paper my father published, and later when I was about 4 years old, I too was given a small route extending a few blocks from the newspaper office, while Big Brother covered all the outlying territory. It was customary to give a New Year's greeting in verse form and the patrons would give the carrier a gratuity.<sup>45</sup>

Beginning with the publication of the *Wochenblatt*, the *Lichtfreund* seemed to cease to exist. In extant issues of the *Wochenblatt* the earlier paper is never mentioned. Although all numbers of the *Lichtfreund's* fourth and fifth annual sets are extant today, not a single subsequent number has survived so far as is known. We know only through outside references that it continued.

Münc, who had written for the paper during its first two Hermann years, mentioned the paper in a November 1846-dated "Preface" to his book in English, *A Treatise on Religion and Christianity*, published in Boston, 1846. He reported: "I am living in Warren County, Missouri, being occupied at the same time as farmer, teacher, preacher, and coeditor of the German religious newspaper, the *Lichtfreund*, printed in Hermann in this State."

How long Münc served as coeditor and how extensive his responsibility was in getting out the paper is not known. Evidence does show Mühl was still active in promoting the *Lichtfreund* and the *Wochenblatt*. He made a trip to Cincinnati via St. Louis and stops in between in June 1848, seeking subscribers. Writing to his wife in German script from Louisville he mentioned: "I arrived here on the 17th and ran immediately through the streets like a hunting dog, but with little success. However, I am resolved to keep at it."<sup>46</sup> A letter on the 26 June 1848 from Cincinnati reported similar circumstances: "Because of the extreme heat, I developed a painful sore from walking. I was barely able to carry on my business. It goes so-so with the subscribers . . ." He added by way of conclusion: "When will I learn to write a letter with straight lines? Truth is, the crooked lines I involuntarily make symbolize the crazy life of a journalist."

In a last letter from St. Louis, 24 July on the homeward leg of his journey, Mühl added a footnote addressed to his publishing partner:

My dear, good Karl,

Here in St. Louis I have no great prospect. If I can get \$50 it will be enough. The trip to Cincinnati has paid for itself. I have \$50 for payment on the press and received \$40 in cash. This is everything I have except for some small change. I will go directly from here to you unless it goes so badly here that I must try my luck elsewhere. We will still get \$10 from Cincinnati if people will only pay us. With that the trip will have brought in \$100 out of which travel costs had to be paid . . . . I will take care of the paper as soon as I have money again.

Shortly after Mühl returned to Hermann, the St. Louis paper, *Der Lutheraner*, a voice of orthodoxy, reported the *Lichtfreund* had disappeared for several months for lack of money. Their 8 September 1848 article continued: "The editor has now taken on the humble business of traveling from city to city

to appeal to the generosity of all friends of light . . . . The latest number has now been received by us."

The last documented reference to the *Lichtfreund's* continuing existence appeared in the *Anzeiger des Westens*, 29 February 1851. The *Lichtfreund* was listed as a "rationalist bi-weekly."<sup>47</sup>

Even as late as 1852, evidence shows the Lichtfreund Press publishers continued to practice do-it-yourself economies in getting out their paper. In an article acknowledging receiving back copies of the *Janus*, a newspaper published by Karl Heinzen in New York, the editor remarked: "It gives us great pleasure and genuine entertainment to read through the *Janus* after completing the days work of type setting."<sup>48</sup>

The *Hermanner Wochenblatt* and the Lichtfreund Press survived until sometime early in 1855. Mühl, the editor, died in July 1854 in a cholera epidemic which ravaged the Hermann area during summer months that year. The only extant copies of the *Wochenblatt* published by Strehly after Mühl's death appeared October 1854 through January 1855. In this period, the paper shrank from its four-page format to a one-page, one-side-only sheet. Editorials ceased, replaced only by letters from readers. The balance of the sheet contained official notices. In this period, Strehly inserted sale notices that read:

The press with which the *Hermanner Wochenblatt* has been printed up to this time is herewith offered for sale. Local oral or written inquiries are invited.

29 July 1854

C. P. Strehly

Probate records on Mühl's estate, administered by Strehly, show that the Lichtfreund Press and its two papers remained a marginal business proposition to the very end. Reporting to the court in 1855, Strehly stated in his petition written in fluent English: "The personal estate of the said dec'd is insufficient to pay the debts of the Estate as will appear by the inventory and the amount of debts due the deceased."

Listed among Mühl's property was: "half part of printing press and types." Later, these were appraised at four hundred dollars. Undoubtedly, it was Strehly who owned the other "half part" of the press. Finally, in May 1858 Strehly informed the court that "the press and types had been sold to a private buyer for \$225."<sup>49</sup>

That "private buyer," unspecified in the estate sale, was Jacob Graf who had been working as a compositor for a St. Louis paper. His parents had settled in Hermann in 1848.<sup>50</sup> The source providing this information characterized the printing equipment purchased by Graf as a "Washington Hand Press and a small amount of type." With this press in hand, Graf began publishing his own newspaper called the *Hermanner Volksblatt*. None of the

early numbers of this paper survive to indicate the exact date the first number appeared. The *Volksblatt* continued as a German-language paper in Hermann until 1928 when its companion English-language paper, *The Advertiser-Courier*, succeeded it to continue the Graf-family newspaper tradition. The family finally sold the latter paper in 1981.<sup>51</sup>

Still published in Hermann today by the "Graf Printing Company," *The Advertiser-Courier* can claim almost a century-and-a-half publishing tradition which traces its beginnings to Mühl and Strehly's Lichtfreund Press founded in Hermann in the year 1843. This small press with its two pioneer newspapers provides a unique perspective on the evolution of what began as an intensely German settlement founded early in the nineteenth century on the Missouri frontier.

Although German traditions, history and contemporary culture—its literature, politics and religion—continued to appear in the viewpoints of these papers and in the reactions of their readers, gradually aspects of the American experience began to infiltrate their pages—especially the *Wochenblatt's*. Figures like Tom Paine and George Washington, documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, American holidays, particularly Washington's Birthday and the Fourth of July, set new religious, political and social models for a developing American ideology. With the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which the *Wochenblatt* serialized in a German translation, the German citizens of Hermann blended more and more into the American political, social and moral environment. At a less dramatic but vital level, the extant issues of the *Wochenblatt* reflect this frontier community's struggle to build an economic basis for survival through slow, often faltering attempts to develop a grape-growing and wine-producing industry. The Lichtfreund Press's two newspapers remain the major surviving sources which document this social and economic evolution.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Eduard Mühl, *Journal, 1828-1854*. Partially translated by the author. The original is on file at the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia.

<sup>2</sup> William G. Bek, *The German Settlement Society of Philadelphia and its Colony, Hermann, Missouri* (Philadelphia, 1907). Translated by Elmer Danuser (Hermann, MO, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Carl E. Schneider, *The German Church on the American Frontier* (St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1938), 18-24; Albert B. Faust, *The German Element in the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 1:441-42.

<sup>4</sup> H. A. Rattermann, "German-American Journalists Who Immigrated in the 1830s," *German-American Biography and Writers Album, Part Three*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 12 (Cincinnati, 1911). Courtesy of the University of Illinois Libraries, Champaign-Urbana, IL.

Relevant excerpts translated by the author, pp. 221, 261, 351-60. For more information on Mühl's life, see Siegmur Muehl, "Eduard Mühl: 1800-1854, Missouri Editor, Religious Free-Thinker and Fighter for Human Rights," *Missouri Historical Review* 81 (October 1986): 18-38; Adolph Falbisaner, *Eduard Mühl, Ein Deutsch-Amerikanischer Kämpfe für Freiheit und Menschenrechte* (Philadelphia: German-American Annals Press, 1903). Privately translated by Arpe Hacker, 1931.

<sup>5</sup> E. Mühl, *Journal*.

<sup>6</sup> Front-page articles appeared 17 June, 29 July, and 9 September 1837. Mühl wrote under the pseudonym, "Siegmur Thuisko." See n. 45 and associated text. A poem published 1 April 1837 appeared over his own name. The author is grateful to Gerd A. Petermann of St. Louis for his research efforts that uncovered this material, and his willingness to share his findings with the author.

<sup>7</sup> Mühl published his Lebanon diary in the *Lichtfreund*, 17 April, 1 May, and 15 May 1844, under the title, "From the Diary of an American Music Teacher in the Year 1837." Translated by the author. Complete annual sets for the *Lichtfreund* newspaper, 1843-44 and 1844-45, are on microfilm in the State Historical Society of Missouri Library, Columbia, MO. See also n. 18.

<sup>8</sup> E. Mühl, *Journal*.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Cist, *Cincinnati in 1841: Its Early Annals* (Cincinnati, 1841); Henry J. Groen, "A History of the German-American Newspapers of Cincinnati Before 1860," Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1944; John J. Weisert, "Eduard Mühl's *Lichtfreund*," *The American-German Review* 22 (April-May 1956): 30-31.

<sup>10</sup> Bek, *The German Settlement Society*.

<sup>11</sup> *Anzeiger des Westens*, 7 April 1840. All references to St. Louis papers are courtesy Gerd A. Petermann.

<sup>12</sup> See n. 50.

<sup>13</sup> City of Hermann tax records, Gasconade County Courthouse, Hermann, Missouri. Strehly's house on West Second Street still stands in Hermann, though considerably enlarged over the years from its original dimensions. Presently, it is one of the properties of the Deutschheim State Historical Site and is undergoing restoration. Recent correspondence with Erin Renn, the site administrator, indicates that the exact location of the printing shop is not presently known. Local tradition places it in the basement under the original part of the house.

<sup>14</sup> Karl J. R. Arndt and May E. Olson, "Missouri," *German-American Newspapers and Periodicals, 1732-1955* (New York, 1965). Arndt and Olson report that the *West Chronik*, published by Moritz Schöffler in Jefferson City, began publishing 1843 and continued for a year.

<sup>15</sup> *Lichtfreund* (LF), 30 August 1843.

<sup>16</sup> LF, 24 July, 14 December 1844; 12 February, 12 March 1845.

<sup>17</sup> Gerd A. Petermann, "Friends of Light (Lichtfreunde), Friedrich Münch, Paul Follenius, and the Rise of German-American Rationalism on the Missouri Frontier," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 23 (1988): 120; Siegmur Muehl, "Hermann's 'Free Men': 1850s German-American Religious Rationalism," *Missouri Historical Review* 85 (July 1991): 361.

<sup>18</sup> Siegmur Muehl, *The Lichtfreund Newspaper of Hermann, Missouri, 1843-1845: Brief History and Index* (by the author, 1986). A copy is on file at the State Historical Society of Missouri Library, Columbia, MO.

<sup>19</sup> Such exchanges involved, among others: *Die Wage* in St. Louis (LF, 29 May 1844); *The New York Wochenblatt* and *Die Fackel* (LF 12 February 1845); *Der Lutheraner* cited the LF, 8 September 1848.

<sup>20</sup> LF, 7 May 1845.

<sup>21</sup> LF, 6 September 1843.

<sup>22</sup> "Acts of the Eighteenth Congress of the United States, 1825," *Public Statistics at Large of the United States of America* (Boston, 1854), 4:111.

<sup>23</sup> *Die deutsche Tribüne*, 26 February 1848, "Letter to the Editor," by Behne, a Hermann citizen.

<sup>24</sup> *LF*, 29 May 1844. The flood crest of 1844 has been exceeded only once. In fall 1986, the river crested at thirty-six feet at Hermann (*The Advertiser-Courier*, 8 October 1986, p. 2).

<sup>25</sup> *LF*, 30 August 1843.

<sup>26</sup> *LF*, 17 April 1844.

<sup>27</sup> Rattermann, "German-American Journalists."

<sup>28</sup> *LF*, 23 August 1844.

<sup>29</sup> Rattermann, "German-American Journalists."

<sup>30</sup> *LF*, 15 May 1844.

<sup>31</sup> *LF*, 18 December 1844.

<sup>32</sup> *LF*, 29 January 1845.

<sup>33</sup> *LF*, 26 March 1845.

<sup>34</sup> *LF*, 20 March 1844.

<sup>35</sup> *LF*, 17 April 1844.

<sup>36</sup> Rattermann, "German-American Journalists."

<sup>37</sup> *LF*, 12 March 1845.

<sup>38</sup> *LF*, 11 September 1844.

<sup>39</sup> The *Hermann Wochenblatt* file is on microfilm in the State Historical Society of Missouri Library, Columbia, MO.

<sup>40</sup> "Statistics of Missouri," *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, DC: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 657.

<sup>41</sup> See *Hermann Wochenblatt (HWB)*, 21 March 1851; 10 September 1852; 3 December 1852.

<sup>42</sup> *HWB*, 10 July 1847.

<sup>43</sup> In the 1850 U.S. Census, Hermann's total population was 943. Of this number, 460 adults had been born in the German states in Europe, and 124 in Switzerland, probably also German speakers. Of 40 persons who came from other countries, only three—from England and Ireland—would have been native speakers of English.

<sup>44</sup> The cover of the booklet states: "Printed in the Lichtfreund Press, Hermann, Mo., 1847."

<sup>45</sup> Siegmund Mühl, "My Big Brother" (Privately printed, n.d.).

<sup>46</sup> Siegmund Mühl, *Travels of a German-American Newspaper Man: Eduard Mühl's Letters to His Wife, Pauline, 1842 and 1848* (by the author, 1977). Translated and introduced by the author. On file at the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

<sup>47</sup> Gerd Petermann's correspondence with the author cites a missionary report, 1853, by German pietist emissaries from Basel active in eastern Missouri and Illinois in the 1850s, that referred to the *LF* as an "infidel paper."

<sup>48</sup> *HWB*, 28 August 1852.

<sup>49</sup> Gasconade County Courthouse, Probate Court Records of the Estate of Eduard Mühl.

<sup>50</sup> Grace Gilmore, "Five Oldest Family Newspapers in Missouri," *Missouri Historical Review* 17 (January 1923): 172-76. Information relating to the Washington Hand Press found in two sources: Harold E. Sterne, *Catalog of Nineteenth Century Printing Presses* (Cincinnati, 1979), 185-86; J. W. Leonard, "The Centennial Review of Cincinnati: 100 Years" (Cincinnati, 1988), 124. Courtesy of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

<sup>51</sup> Dorothy H. Shrader, ed., *Hermann Sesquicentennial* (Hermann, 26 August 1986), 27; Samuel Harrison, *History of Hermann Missouri* (Hermann, MO, n.d.).