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### Friedrich Hedde: Grand Island's Forty-Eighter, Pioneer and Leader

In the Grand Island, Nebraska, cemetery stands a large, imposing grave marker inscribed with the words, "Friedrich Hedde, Pioneer and Leader." This inscription is not an example of exaggerated familial pride. It is a fitting epitaph for a German immigrant, a "forty-eighter," who played a major role in the development of Grand Island.

Friedrich August Peter Hedde was born September 11, 1818, in the town of Rendsburg, Holstein, the son of First Lieutenant Nicolaus Hedde, who had fought as a volunteer against Napoleon, and Charlotte Hedde (née Scherneckau), the daughter of a prosperous building contractor. His upbringing was typical for his parents' social class. He attended both public and private schools until the age of ten when he entered the local gymnasium. Graduation from this institution led to the study of jurisprudence at the Christian Albrecht University of Kiel where he finished "mit sehr rühmlichen Auszeichnungen" in the fall of 1841. With his formal education behind him, he immediately set himself up in Kiel as a lawyer (Andersen 102).

Hedde quickly made his mark in this famous seaport town. The Kieler Turnverein, the first society of its type in Holstein and Schleswig, was founded in 1844 and consisted mainly of students from Kiel University. There was some opposition from the government toward the organization of this group; for example, only after several attempts did the *Turnverein* secure a hall where classes in physical culture could be held. Hedde was the main driving force behind the formation of the *Turnverein*. All of the club's official documents and letters from this period are in Hedde's handwriting, and it is thought that he drafted the constitution of the organization. Hedde was also a member of the original board of directors (Struve 14).

In 1848 during the uprising in Schleswig-Holstein against the Danish government and crown (a movement which started in Kiel), this *Turnverein* converted itself into a military organization and went to war. Fifty years after the founding of the *Turnverein*, Hedde, who was then

living in Grand Island, Nebraska, received a cablegram from this Kiel organization asking him as "the only living organizer of that famous society" to come to Germany in order to participate in its semi-centennial celebration (*Grand Island Daily Independent*, 29 June 1894).

Since there were no military academies in Schleswig-Holstein at that time, most high ranking officers in the army were Danish. With the advent of hostilities men of the upper class had to be recruited and trained for military service. For this reason "Bürgerwehren" were established in all major cities in Holstein and Schleswig. In the spring of 1848 the Kieler Bürgerwehr was set up and Hedde was probably the organizer of this town militia. During this time Hedde was also co-editor, with the famous Theodor Olshausen, of the *Kieler Correspondenzblatt*. He wrote several articles critical of Danish rule in which he urged the residents of Schleswig-Holstein to press for their rights and liberties. In July 1848, just after an armistice agreement between Prussia and Denmark had been reached (Fock 133)—before the Malmö Treaty was signed in August of that year—Hedde published a sharply worded leaflet with the title, *Kein schimpflicher Vertrag mit Dänemark*, denouncing both the cease-fire and its consequences for Schleswig-Holstein. He pointed out:

In der That, man muß das Äußerste befürchten; denn eine Bestimmung des Waffenstillstandes soll ja die Einsetzungen einer neuen provisorischen Regierung an die Stelle der jetzigen sein.

Könnte es eine unverschämtere Verletzung des deutschen Volks und des schleswig-holsteinischen Volks geben? Dem deutschen Volk steht es zu, die deutsche Gesamtverfassung und die wesentlichen Rechte des deutschen Volks, die in jedem Einzelstaat gelten müssen, zu begründen; dem schleswig-holsteinischen Volk, sich seine besondere Staatsform zu geben und Schutz für dieselbe vom ganzen Deutschland zu fordern.

Aus dem einstimmigen Willen unseres Volks, aus dem größten Vertrauen desselben ist unsere provisorische Regierung hervorgegangen. Sie stützt sich nicht auf formelles historisches Recht, sondern auf das Recht der Revolution, welches ein bis Innerstes gekränktes Volk stets geltend gemacht hat und stets geltend machen wird. (Hedde 6, 7)

On the night of March 23-24, 1848, the proclamation forming the provisional government was read to the burghers of Kiel who had assembled *en masse* at the city hall. It was received with cool silence. At this point Friedrich Hedde stepped forward and declared that the proclamation was unsatisfactory to the people of Holstein and Schleswig. After a long debate, however, the conservatives prevailed and the original document was accepted (Fock 75). On the fiftieth anniversary of this special night Hedde received a letter from the editor of the newspaper, the *Kieler Gazette*, which said in part, "Today you are mentioned often and with great respect" (*Grand Island Independent*, 4 April 1898).

After the failure of the Revolution of 1848 in Holstein, Hedde found it more and more difficult to work in his chosen field. Restrictions imposed on newspapers in Holstein by the Danish authorities made it impossible for him to express his views freely. In the early 1850s Hedde

successfully defended the leader of the Holstein agricultural labor movement, Marcus Mester, who had been brought to trial. A member of the Schleswig-Holstein Landesversammlung, Mester was an outspoken advocate of the rights of the agricultural laborers. In fact Mester had been accused of "democratisch-communistische Aufwiegelung" among these workers (Schlechte 322). This trial and Hedde's connection with the Holstein labor movement may have prompted the government to revoke his license, a license which he needed in order to practice law. He was not exiled by the Danish king as were so many of his friends and associates who had similar ideals and views. In 1854, however, he decided to emigrate.

Hedde's arrival in America was noted by the *New Yorker Criminal-Zeitung*:

Wir wurden in diesen Tagen durch den Besuch des Herrn Friedrich Hedde aus Kiel überrascht. Vielen unserer Leser wird der Name desselben bekannt sein. Viele werden ihm ein Andenken der innigsten Freundschaft bewahrt haben. Ein energischer Gegner des engherzigen schleswig-holsteinischen Particularismus, gehörte er zu den besten Kräften Schleswig-Holsteins, und wir nehmen keinen Anstand, zu behaupten, daß in ihm der kräftigste und tüchtigste Patriot, welcher jenem unglücklichen Lande noch geblieben, dasselbe verlassen hat. Einst an der Seite Theodor Olshausen, später allein Redakteur des Kieler Correspondenzblattes, gehörte er zu den Neu-Holsteinern, zu der Partei, welche den nördlichsten Theil Deutschlands frei, nicht einer Augustenburgischen Dynastie übergeben wissen wollte, welcher nicht das Pergament von 1450, sondern der Volkswille die Basis ihres Strebens war. In der constituirenden, wie in der gesetzgebenden Landesversammlung, stand er auf Seiten der entschiedensten Linken, bekannte sich offen zur Republik, stimmte noch im letzten Moment für die energische Durchführung der Revolution and ergriff selbst die Muskete, als die Österreicher und Preußen sich den Grenzen näherten. Seine durchdringende Intelligenz lenkte in mehr als einer Frage den Sieg auf Seiten des Volkes, und in den politischen Processen, welche von der Statthalterschaft anhängig gemacht wurden, war er ein energischer und siegreicher Vertheidiger der Verfolgten. Durch die Reaction ist er seiner Stellung in der Heimath beraubt worden. Wir bedauern, daß er dem Vaterlande für's Erste verloren gegangen, freuen uns aber zugleich, ihn in unserer Mitte zu sehen, und sind überzeugt, daß er dem deutschen Elemente der Union zur Zierde gereichen wird. Herr Hedde verdient das wärmste Entgegenkommen. Möge es ihm werden.

From New York he went to Davenport, Iowa, where he found a town with a large German population, many of whom came from Schleswig and Holstein. He must have been reunited with many friends and acquaintances, among whom was Theodor Olshausen, who in Holstein had been co-editor with Hedde of the *Kieler Correspondenzblatt*. Olshausen was now the publisher of Davenport's weekly German newspaper *Der Demokrat*. Hedde was also involved with the Sozialistischer Turnverein in Davenport. He is listed as a speaker in the society's educational program (Binder-Johnson 3).

According to the *Davenport City Directory* for 1856-57 Fred Hedde and W. Schirach operated a real estate business. (In 1844 members of the Kieler Turnverein had petitioned the city authorities for a larger place for their exercise sessions. W. Schirach was one of those who signed the petition.) Hedde as a lawyer drew up contracts and other legal documents and signed papers as a notary public. It may have been through this business that Hedde came in contact with Davenport businessmen who wanted to start a town in central Nebraska along the Platte River. This speculative scheme was based on discussions in Congress before the Civil War concerning the construction of a transcontinental railroad through the Platte River valley. It was expected that branch railroads would join the main road somewhere west of the Missouri River. And at this location a major city was certain to develop (*Grand Island Independent*, 1 January 1898).

The Davenport businessmen formed a town company with the clear intention of building a town at that site and to make money. The Germans and Americans who in early 1857 had signed up to settle in Nebraska agreed to assign one half of their claims to the town company. In return the town company agreed to supply the settlers with the necessities for the first year (repayable in one year) and to pay for the land as soon as it came on the market (Manley 17). In 1882 Hedde still had the account books in which he recorded the distribution of supplies during these first months.

Hedde must have been convinced of the great opportunity this very interesting adventure offered. The Stuhr Museum possesses a contract drawn up between the town company and a prospective settler, in this case Heinrich Egge, an immigrant from Holstein. Heinrich Egge made this entry in his diary, April 23, 1857: ". . . und ging deshalb später nach dem Advokaten Hedde, der unser Anführer werden sollte, wo ich auch Stolley traf. Dort besprach ich noch einmal alles mit ihnen und ging den Kontrakt ein. Noch am selbigen Abend hatten wir eine Zusammenkunft bei Hedde, um der Kompanie unsere Bedingungen zu stellen. . . ."

Hedde's legal education, his knowledge of the English language, his understanding of American land laws and his age—Hedde was almost forty years, older than any other member of the group—made him a natural leader and ideal for acting as a go-between for the Americans and the Germans. At the end of May 1857 Hedde left for the Platte River valley with five American surveyors. The main group consisting of thirty Germans followed a few days later. After entering Nebraska Territory, Hedde became the leader of the main party. During the 1857 depression the town company went under and the support for the settlers was withdrawn. They had to give up the idea of building a town but they retained their courage and their land claims. Census data show that out of the thirty-one German settlers who came in 1857 with the first group twenty-five were still living in Hall County in 1860 (Robbins 49). They spread out along the river on the Military Road, each taking up a claim. The gold rush to Colorado helped the settlers to survive during the first years. Hedde, for example, who had set up a road ranche on his claim traded with the travelers. One traveler, passing along the trail in 1862, described the colony:

At Grand Island we found a small settlement, mostly of Germans. Koenig and Wiebe, from Omaha, had established a general outfitting post and store. There was also a blacksmith shop, a cobbler shop, and a small home bakery, all prepared to care for the travelers. Mr. Fred Hedde, who in after years was so well and favorably known throughout Nebraska as a successful farmer, politician and newspaper man, was located on a homestead contiguous to this small village. During fifty years Mr. Hedde was closely identified with the upbuilding of Grand Island and Hall county. (Anderson 193)

In 1858 Hedde was appointed by the governor of the Nebraska Territory to the position of county commissioner. He later held elected posts of county judge, representative in the Nebraska Territorial Legislature and councilman after the organization of the government of the city of Grand Island.

In 1866 the Nebraska Legislature established the State Board of Immigration. But the board was not very active until after its reorganization in 1870. This state board selected four agents who were to promote immigration into Nebraska from other parts of the United States and from Europe.

An article appeared in the *Omaha Republican*, entitled "The German Immigrant Agent," which endorsed the idea of appointing Fred Hedde to this position (*Platte Valley Independent*, 4 March 1871). The essay suggested that the German emigration movement would recommence soon after the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War and that, with the aid of an immigrant agent, a sizeable number of the immigrants could be induced to settle in Nebraska. Since the aristocracy and authorities in much of Germany were at that time opposed to emigration—they were expecting a labor shortage to develop—the article went on to point out that the situation demanded a learned and tactful agent whose essays and pamphlets would be well received by German readers. Happily, the newspaper concluded, Nebraska had just the person, Fred Hedde, who possessed these qualifications. Hedde was appointed to the post on March 15, 1871.

The Nebraska State Board of Immigration asked counties to set up their own immigration boards. These boards were to give aid to immigrants arriving in Nebraska. Fred Hedde was actively involved in establishing the Hall County Immigration Board in Grand Island, the first of these local groups to begin operation in the state.

Official German records give us information concerning his arrival in Europe on June 23, 1871. His profession is given as "Literat und Einwanderungs-Comissär des Staates Nebraska" (Letter from Staatsarchiv Hamburg). A good summary of his work in Germany is found in his report made to the state immigration board on his return (*Omaha Republican*, 4 February 1873). In this report he pointed out that certain classes in Germany were opposed to emigration. It was difficult to overcome this opposition, Hedde said, especially since most newspapers did not want to print articles favorable to the American cause. One had to look long and hard to find "liberal minded" editors willing to print articles about Nebraska.

Hedde did discover, however, one effective way to reach the German people. The German steamer companies had a net of agents in all parts of Germany which reached into the small villages. Since it was in the interest of these agents to convince the population to emigrate to the United States, one could easily approach them with informative material about Nebraska. The agents then distributed this information to a great number of Germans. Hedde very soon after his arrival recognized this opportunity and set about using this network of agents. Since all promotional materials were printed in Nebraska they were delayed in reaching Hamburg. This certainly was a disadvantage for Nebraska. Hedde urged the board to have these materials printed in Germany as the immigration boards of other states were doing in order to avoid high U.S. printing costs as well as shipping charges.

Hedde complained also about the fact that the advertising material often did not answer the questions which the prospective German immigrant had. Again and again he pointed out that there was a great need for an accurate description of the United States land laws, especially the homestead law, which German readers could easily understand. Another technique of advertising that was open to Hedde was suggested by the Nebraska state board. Letters written by farmers and businessmen who had made this state their new home could be distributed by the agent in Germany in the area of the writers' former homes. It was thought that if such letters were written in an informative but plain and spontaneous style, they might induce emigration from Germany to the plains of Nebraska (*Platte Valley Independent*, 27 January 1872).

M. N. Spencer in his dissertation said that Hedde functioned as a land agent for the Union Pacific Railroad and the Burlington Missouri Railroad in 1873 in Germany and that his salary and expenses were covered by these railroads (Spencer 206). However, Hedde's work as an agent and his involvement with the railroads is not clear. There is no evidence in the Union Pacific Railroad records that Hedde was connected with that railroad. According to the records in Hamburg Hedde returned to the United States in fall of 1872 and he was back in Grand Island in spring of 1874 to start his business career.

In May 1874 Hedde opened a general store in Grand Island. *The Platte Valley Independent*, 2 May 1874, printed the following charming note:

Elsewhere in this issue observe the advertisement of Fred Hedde, who has just opened up a large and complete stock of general merchandise comprising dry goods, clothing, hats, caps, boots, shoes, notions, groceries, provisions, and in fact almost every article that you can call for, or that human heart can desire. Mr. Hedde having been one of the very first settlers of this country and having been well known here as a good, active honorable business man, cannot fail to receive a liberal share of the public patronage. Go and see his stock and examine his prices before making purchases elsewhere. Corner of Third and Spruce streets.

This business grew over the years to a large concern. Hedde operated several lumberyards, a farm implement store and a grain business.

During those early years freight rates, which could help to determine the growth or decline of a town, were set by railroad owners insensitive to the economic needs of new towns. Business men in Grand Island formed an association which attempted to secure lower freight rates. Hedde, who was very active in organizing this local merchant club, became its first president.

In 1882 he started the newspaper, *The Anti-Monopolist*, which gave him an opportunity to publicize his ideas. A short time later he bought the *Platte Valley Independent*. Under Hedde's direction the newspaper endorsed a liberal republican, anti-monopolist program. In 1884 he published the first daily newspaper in this town and remained its owner until 1900. His editorials supported political and economic reforms and promoted the economic development of Grand Island.

All of Hedde's achievements in Germany and America which have been briefly sketched above portray a man with a strong and lasting desire for influence within the community in which he lived. Indeed, the fact that he died without a large estate and that he used the money from his business successes to subsidize his newspapers suggests that, at least in the Nebraska context, money was for him simply a means for gaining the kind of benign social influence usually associated with liberal German thinkers in the period surrounding the 1848 Revolution. If this is true, it would also seem that Hedde was quite flexible in developing a strategy to achieve his goal. In Kiel, he was a lawyer, an educated man, and a liberal politician; in Nebraska, except for a short time as an elected probate judge during the territorial period, he avoided the law in favor of a more business-oriented approach to achievement and influence, the business career coupled with the ownership of a newspaper. It would be interesting to know how many of the forty-eighters from Germany successfully made this switch and how many simply tried to live the old German model of the educated man without business ties after their arrival in America.

*Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer*  
Grand Island, Nebraska

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