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Eden on the Missouri: Immigrant Women on the Western Frontier

On January 5, 1835, twenty-two year old Henriette Bruns, "Jette," as she was known to her family and friends, wrote to her brother, Heinrich Geisberg, regarding her plans to emigrate to America with her husband and young son:

> How many parents sigh as they stand beside the cradle and wonder how they can raise the little ones. . . . Probably every emigrant would have told you this . . . , and from this only, without being in need, one would still have sufficient reason to undertake such a trip; without having to seek a glittering fortune and without expecting it. I can say that my expectations are certainly not too high. If I only consider that in the first place, over there one can live almost without having to pay taxes, that one can buy land cheaply and can live on it, that the fertile soil will sufficiently provide the needs of a household, that the other necessities can be arranged as one wishes, without having to worry about one's station and one's situation. Then I find very little else to worry about. . . . I still think that with our modest wishes we cannot fare poorly.[1]

Jette was born into a large, devoutly Catholic family which belonged to what she referred to in her autobiography, written many years later, as the "so-called distinguished people"[2] of the city of Oelde. She was the daughter of the mayor and tax collector of that city, and was brought up in a family dedicated to reading and music. In Münster, where she was educated, she lived in the home of her father's brothers, an extensive establishment on the River Aa with large gardens which she was able to recall in the most exact detail in her old age in Missouri. Jette, now married to a doctor, added honestly: "When I now think of our departure . . . I have to say that since the New Year all courage has left me. . . . I am so terribly frightened, and I cannot tell Bruns this. But . . . I do not sway for a moment."

Dr. Bernhard Bruns, a native of Lohne in Oldenburg who practiced medicine in Oelde and Stromberg, had decided shortly after his marriage into the Geisberg family that America promised a better oppor-

tunity for him and a better life for his family. He had become, his wife confided to her brother, tired of "having to extort his fees."

> Bruns has a good practice and is not easily discouraged . . . but . . . if he finally gets his bills paid, he knows only too well how often the poor debtor has to suffer in order to satisfy his bill and how often he has to deprive himself of that little which formerly would have protected him.

Having to collect fees from patients who could not afford to pay them was very likely, as his wife believed, the beginning of his dissatisfaction. In addition, Dr. Bruns had suffered some embarrassment because of wide-spread gossip relating to the pregnancy of a young woman in Enniger, the daughter of the magistrate, for whom he had tried to find lodging. Although the rumors were generally conceded to be unfounded, even by the woman's parents, the situation had occasioned considerable letter writing among members of the Geisberg family and their friends before the marriage. He also seems not to have been able to win the complete confidence of the Geisberg uncles in Münster, who took an extraordinary interest in Jette's courtship and the prospects of her husband after the death of her father in 1831 had left her orphaned. There was a nagging doubt that the doctor could adequately support their brother's daughter,[3] an unvoiced disapproval of the marriage that Jette felt deeply even years afterward in America.[4] It seems equally likely, however, that Dr. Bruns's determination to seek a new life was motivated as much by the emigration fever sweeping Germany as by personal or professional problems. "It was in the air," Jette wrote in her autobiography. "Bruns kept himself well-informed and we talked a lot about it."[5]

In June of 1835 he set out for America to seek a home for his wife and son in the American West. After a brief stay in Baltimore, he proceeded to St. Louis, where by chance he met Nicholas Hesse, who had just settled with his large household on the Maries River southeast of Jefferson City.[6] Writing to Jette from St. Louis on October 3, 1835, describing the site on the Maries which he had chosen for their future home, Bruns demonstrated his thorough familiarity with Gottfried Duden's *Report*,[7] the work which was not only largely responsible for the massive nineteenth-century emigration to Missouri, but has been considered by some historians to be one of the most important pieces of literature in the history of German emigration.[8] A lawyer and civil servant from Remscheid in the Ruhr Valley, Duden had arrived in St. Louis in October of 1824 on a self-appointed mission to search for a favorable location for German emigrants. He settled on Lake Creek, in what is now Warren County, where he lived for three years as a gentleman farmer, enjoying unusually mild winters and temperate summers and writing about what he saw and experienced. His *Report*, published in several editions after his return to Germany, was intended to serve as a practical guide for prospective emigrants. Indeed, much practical advice was offered, but in spite of himself Duden, clearly enchanted by the Missouri landscape, evoked a life of limitless opportunity, in which the new settler becomes quickly established in a

benevolent environment, where crops thrive, family harmony prevails, and little cash is needed. In discussing the amazing fertility of the land, he had emphasized that the "meaning of *fertile soil* in these regions is very different from that in Germany. Good soil or first rate soil does not require fertilization during the first century."[9] Average or second rate soil in Missouri was that which would not need fertilizer to increase its yield for the first twelve to twenty years. The soil in the location which Dr. Bruns had discovered on the banks of the Maries River, in what was then Gasconade County, was first rate. He wrote of the area to which he was to bring Jette and their young son with an intermingling of lyrical descriptions of the natural surroundings and practical observations worthy of Duden himself:

> I have found the place which I like completely and which you will also like. It is . . . approximately 30 hours from St. Louis, 15 English miles from Jefferson, two miles from the Osage. Here there flows a river, the Maria River,[10] which is as big as the Ems near Warendorf and which joins the Osage two hours from here. I have liked this Maria River so much that I have resolved to make our future residence there. . . . The river has a very fertile bottom . . . so that the addition of fertilizer will not be needed to increase the yield of the harvest for the next 100 years.

In short, "the pleasantness of the place, the fertile soil which is suitable for planting all necessary things, the favorable location at the river and on the hillside. . . . [F]ire and building wood, good healthy spring water" seemed to Dr. Bruns to ensure the comfortable life which German emigrants expected to find in Missouri. Several German families were already in the area to provide company, and he assured her that he had not seen any snakes, although he had walked or ridden in the forest every day. Duden had devoted considerable time to discussions of snakes, including the report in his Fifteenth Letter that "Stories are told of snakes crawling into houses and even into beds."[11] He had conceded that the proximity of poisonous snakes in the Missouri forests had some effect on everyone, "especially on women," but had assured his readers that rattlers and other snakes caused less worry in Missouri than did mad dogs in Europe. Following Duden, most settlers who wrote of their experiences on the frontier described the various snakes they had seen and recounted snake stories they had heard. Actually, although Dr. Bruns had not run across any on his explorations into the forests, snakes were as prevalent in the Westphalia settlement as in Duden territory. Nicholas Hesse reported that while it rarely happened that a person was bitten by a poisonous snake, there was always that possibility from April until fall. "In the spring and summer of 1836 I myself killed five rattlesnakes,"[12] copperheads had been killed by his neighbors, and his daughters had been chased out of the field by an angry black snake. Nevertheless the news that her husband had not seen any snakes in Missouri was no doubt welcome to Jette Bruns, waiting impatiently in Oelde for word from America.

Just over a year after his discovery of the site on the Maries River which he liked so much, on November 2, 1836, the Bruns party,

including two of Jette's brothers, Franz and Bernhard Geisberg, Bruns's brother, David, and a maid and her daughter arrived in the "so-called Westphalia Settlement."[13] In her autobiography Jette writes: "Our shelter was in the middle of a field, a simple log cabin with two bedsteads, one table, four chairs and one bench."[14] To her brother Heinrich she wrote that the cabin had one window and was the "size of our living room at home." As winter approached the disadvantages of life in a log cabin became more apparent. "When it rains it is just too sad in these log cabins," she wrote. "I frequently think back to our comfortable living room." More depressing than the discomfort, however, was the loneliness of being separated from family and friends with little opportunity to make congenial new acquaintances. Gert Goebel, son of Professor David Goebel,[15] who had come to Missouri with the Gießen Emigration Society as a young man of eighteen, wrote of the isolated Westphalia settlement some years later:

> At a very early time, even before the founding of Hermann, we heard from time to time of a German settlement on Maries Creek, and of a certain Dr. Bernhard Bruns. The region in which this settlement was established was little known at that time, and communication with it was difficult, because approaching it from the east the Gasconade had to be crossed, and from the west the Osage.[16]

Two years before the Bruns family arrived eight to ten members of the Solingen Emigration Society, led by Friedrich Steines, which had broken up on their arrival in St. Louis in July, 1834, had settled in the Osage country.[17] The following summer two of the group visited Steines on his farm on Tavern Creek in Franklin County, some thirty miles from St. Louis. "They now live on the Osage and spoke in highest terms of that country. Still they expressed the wish that they would like to buy land here in order to have some German neighbors and be closer to St. Louis."[18] A number of the families who had come over with the Solingen Society were reported to have handsome estates in Osage County, but others had started to drift back to St. Louis or to other towns on the Missouri River. The wife of one settler was said to have insisted on living on the left bank of the Osage in order to be able to visit Jefferson City and receive visitors from there, apparently necessitating the purchase of a second farm with less desirable land at a higher price. For Jette Bruns trips to Jefferson City were infrequent, and it would be ten years before she would see the city of St. Louis again. During her fifteen years in the Westphalia settlement she was to experience the disappointments, hardships, and tragedies all too common on the frontier and find Duden's dream of a prosperous and peaceful life in Missouri more and more elusive.

Duden's critics, against whom he spent years defending himself,[19] believed with some justification that he had misled prospective emigrants by his romanticized view of pioneer life in Missouri. That many of the early settlers were disgruntled and unhappy with their lot on the frontier is indicated by observations of travelers who came to see for themselves what Duden's Eldorado on the Missouri was like. Gustav

Koerner, on a walking tour from St. Louis to Jefferson City in the fall of 1833, encountered many immigrants who denounced Duden bitterly, "for his all too rosy and often inaccurate descriptions of this part of Missouri, and for having caused so many to lose their money, their spirits, and their health by injudicious settlements."[20] Even in the Duden settlement itself, where Koerner spent the night with Mr. Haun,[21] the Pennsylvanian with whom Duden had stayed while his cabin was built, the Germans expressed their great disappointment and "blamed Duden for having exaggerated the advantages and minimized the drawbacks of this part of the State of Missouri."[22] Friedrich Gustorf, sometimes excessively eager to draw out Duden critics, found many of them on his visits to Missouri in 1835-36. He reports in his diary of October 16, 1836, that "One German gentleman from the vicinity of Hannover told me several sad stories about the suffering and hardship of several middle class German families in Missouri and Illinois."

> Their experiences are beyond imagination. With their wives, sons, daughters they live wretched lives. Imagine people from the finest German classes living in miserable huts! Previously they had lived in comfortable houses, and now they have to eat the plainest of food and do the hardest work in the fields, surrounded by black forests and cut off from society and all the conveniences of life. They live in memory of the sweet past, in contrast with the miserable present, and in contemplation of a sad future.[23]

In some cases the more prosperous of the earliest settlers, those who Duden had thought would be most successful, did manage for a time to achieve a way of life in rural Missouri which, although completely incongruous on the frontier, approximated their vision of the new Eden. Baron Wilhelm Johann von Bock and other members of the Berlin Society, who had settled near Duden's former residence and established the town of Dutzow, named for the Baron's estate in Mecklenburg, were visited by Koerner on his 1833 walking tour. He found that although there was sickness in almost every house, it being the malaria season, "their homes were comfortable, some even having brick houses. [Von Bock's] farm was well cultivated and comprised some rich bottom land. In some of their log cabins we even found some good pictures, libraries and pianos."[24] Some three years later when Gustorf visited, in August of 1836, he found the warm and hospitable welcome from Madame von Bock and her daughters which probably accounted for the stream of visitors and travelers who favored the Baron with their company. The living room of his home

> was decorated with German engravings, a piano, and a small collection of books. It was filled with young Germans from the cultured classes, and the conversation was vivacious. They talked about a ball that had taken place in the house a few weeks ago, and also about the habits and customs of the Americans, which the Germans cannot get used to. We all refreshed ourselves with a strong coffee that was served in beautiful cups. All this went on until evening, when a delicious dinner was served as well as a warm punch that put everyone in a mellow mood. We then

> sang German songs. Darkness fell on the scene of jubilant German youth in an area that had been settled only a few years. When the guests were preparing to leave, my gracious host invited me to stay for the night, which offer I readily accepted.[25]

Having stayed the night, the next morning Gustorf made the obligatory visit to Duden's neglected cabin, then occupied by a shoemaker "surrounded by ragged children." He returned to the von Bock home for lunch, where he particularly enjoyed the real German cream puffs, and spent a pleasant afternoon with the von Bock daughters and other guests. The lively conversation focused on English language and literature, and one of the young guests played the piano and sang "exquisitely."

Gert Goebel, imbued with the values of the idealistic Gießen Society noted that the members of the Berlin Society were almost all estate owners, bankers, merchants, doctors, and

> a number of them were actually of the nobility. The latter had no profession except being noble, and therefore had no substantial basis of earning a living. . . . The old Americans observed the doings of these people with dumb amazement, the Germans laughed at them, for the dignified ceremonials and the rather severe etiquette of their society contrasted strangely with the simple customs of their neighbors.[26]

Friedrich Münch, one of the leaders of the ill-fated Gießen Society, criticized the Baron because even before he built a dwelling he prepared a log club house with billiard tables and a "poorly selected library."[27] Although disapproving of the life style of the nobility who surrounded the Baron, taking advantage of his hospitality, Goebel considered von Bock himself a "thoroughly good old gentleman." His grandiose dream of making Lake Creek, the small brook made famous throughout Germany by Duden, navigable to the Missouri River and building a large fashionable hotel in Dutzow to attract the rich plantation owners and other millionaires of the South during the summer months, was not realized and could not have been realized without more of a fortune than the Baron commanded. As his good nature and generosity continued to be abused and as his farm was neglected in favor of hunting parties and other diversions, his fortunes declined, but he and Mrs. von Bock spent their old age with their married daughters, who, according to Goebel, became highly respected and capable housewives, high praise from the republican son of the former tutor of the Prince of Coburg.

Among the less wealthy immigrants, who could not afford the amenities enjoyed by the von Bock family, the wives and daughters by necessity accommodated as best they could to the hardships of the frontier. Whether they had shared their husbands' vision of a new Eden in Missouri is rarely known. Jette Bruns observed that it was her relationship to Bruns, not inclination, that brought her to America. A story by Goebel indicates that during the preparations to leave their homes, the common sense of the women sometimes prevailed in the face of even the most acute emigration fever:

> I have known German immigrants who were so fascinated by reading Duden's book that they did not want feather beds to be packed, maintaining that it would be nonsense to carry beds since they were going to a land with a Sicilian climate. Fortunately the attachment the women had for their feather beds triumphed over the illusions of their husbands, for it did not take long until the women found reason to be pleased with their sober foresight; the men kept silent, but they did like very much to climb into a warm bed.[28]

There are few such revealing insights into politics of the sexes on the frontier, however. In general the views of women reflected in the diaries, letters, and observations of travelers are fragmentary and abound in one-dimensional stereotypes, heroic in many cases, but silent and accepting of the new environment into which they had been thrust. Timothy Flint, whose descriptions of the Lutheran settlers on the White Water River in Southeast Missouri,[29] among whom he lived for more than a year in 1819-1820, provide the first detailed vignettes of domestic, religious and social life of German settlers west of the Mississippi, was in many ways a perceptive observer, and some of his anecdotes illuminate characteristics of the women in direct contrast to his generalizations regarding their attitudes. "Their wives have no taste for parties and tea," he notes. "Silent, unwearying labor and the rearing of their children are their only pursuits."[30] Yet, his landlady and advocate, "Madam Ballinger [sic]," engages the minister, "an educated man, but a notorious drunkard," in a spirited argument when he comes to her house to offer a satiric comment on Flint:

> "Well," said he, "I judge you will now get good fast, now that you have a Yankee preacher. Does he know one word of Dutch?" "Very little, I suppose," she replied, but in order to vindicate her preacher, she added, "but he knows French," etc.; and she went on giving my knowledge of various languages, according to her own fancy:—"And mein Gott, what I tinks much good, he does not trink one drop of whiskey!"[31]

In addition to being outspoken, rather than "submissive and silent" the women of the White Water River settlement seemed to take a healthy interest in their apparel. Flint reports:

> I counted forty-five female dresses hung around my sleeping room, all of cotton, raised and manufactured and colored in the family. The ladies of the city are not more inwardly gratified with the possession of the newest and most costly furniture, than those good, laborious, submissive and silent housewives are, in hanging round their best apartments fifty male and female dresses, all manufactured by their own hand.[32]

The members of the Gießen Society tended to see in their wives a saintly forbearance and dedication to duty. Goebel believed the best educated women made the best farmer's wives:

> They were the most unpretentious and modest women and never demanded of their husbands comforts and unessential conveniences to which they certainly had become accustomed, but which the financial situation of their husbands precluded. These women, who never lost sight of their genuine feminine dignity, considered it no disgrace to do

> their own washing and scrubbing, to milk the cows, in other words, to do work the like of which they had previously never been obliged to do.[33]

Doing the work the like of which they had never been obliged to do before and never imagined they might have to do was necessary and urgent on the frontier and contemporary observers agree that, without the contributions of women, progress, and perhaps even survival, would not have been possible. After the first rough cabin had been built, the men usually took on work in the neighborhood to earn extra money, Goebel reports, while the women and children cleared away underbrush in the woods. Some women even made fence rails, a task Goebel had reason to know required considerable skill,[34] and when the men spent their days off or moonlit nights building fences, their wives and children carried rails on their shoulders to help.[35] In the towns, as well, women made substantial contributions to the family income. Goebel writes of Bernhard Fricke, a harness maker from Kassel who settled in Washington early in the 1830s, commenting ambiguously that as long as he worked at it, he had a good trade.[36] The other Germans in the little town were not married and needed a place to board. Mrs. Fricke, it seems, was a model housekeeper and cook, "so she had no rest until she had resolved to take these young people in to board."[37] Soon travelers and others sought lodging there, and the little log house, in which the family had lived at first, had to be enlarged to accommodate the demand. This is all we would know of Mrs. Fricke, that she was persuaded to take in boarders and lodgers, had the Missouri River not been very low in the fall of 1853. Jessie Benton Fremont, returning from Independence, where she had seen her husband off on the privately financed expedition to locate an advantageous southern railroad route to the Pacific, left the steamboat at Washington to continue overland to St. Louis. She was alone and had been told that only Germans lived in Washington, but restless at the slow progress of the boat and declaring that "Anywhere in Missouri I felt at home," she was deposited on the bank among the crowd who had come to watch the boat stop. Asking for a hotel she was led into the "clean, ugly, comfortable town," and taken to a large house, where she was welcomed by the mistress and her daughters, who "came forward and made me as quietly welcome as though they knew me."

> Their faces, the furniture, the violins and guitar, and high pile of music books; the pretty light hair of the women, too-tightly-plaited, all were Germany itself. I pleased myself by accepting this unquestioning hospitality as it was given, and still did not give my name.[38]

It was after Jessie Fremont had been shown up to her room and had taken off her hat and gloves that the mother of the family was overcome with an overwhelming homesickness and grief for the lost past, suddenly reminded by the gloves of her former life, and convinced that her visitor was from her homeland.

"Ah, dear God! You are a lady from my country;—you are from Hesse-Cassel. The ladies in my country wear these gloves when they go hunting with the king. They have stopped in their carriages at my door, and I have carried them drink. It is twenty-four years since I have come away from my country; but I love it best . . ." and then she let the tears fall, for the lost home.[39]

When Jessie Fremont identified herself, however, the hostess, composing herself, seemed as "pleased as if I had been a lady hunting with the king," and the news made her doubly welcome in the family, whose members considered her father their senator and a friend to all the Germans. She shared in the celebration for the wedding anniversary of her hosts and enjoyed what seemed to be their habitual evening recreation:

After the early supper, they all gathered in the large room, which was positively elegant from its glistening cleanliness, and the window-seats filled with plants, and the large table in the centre, covered with music and instruments. With the same delightful simplicity and absence of consciousness which had marked everything else among them, each took his instrument and place by the table,—sons and sons-in-law,—the father and several of the younger women taking their music, and then followed piece after piece of such music as only Germans can play rightly,—occasionally all joining in a lovely song.[40]

Many of those contemplating emigration tried to plan for the changed environment they expected on the frontier. Some sent scouts to report on conditions and others made elaborate plans for the entertainment and recreation of their families. William Robyn writes of the rich gentleman in Emmerich whose intention was to buy a large tract of government land in Missouri to establish a cattle ranch. Realizing they would have no near neighbors, he decided to have his children study music so they could amuse themselves and buying a harp, violin, guitar, flute, and two horns, he engaged Robyn and another teacher to instruct the children, thereby gaining a son-in-law when one of the daughters fell in love with Robyn and announced that she would not go to America if she could not marry her music teacher.[41] In spite of such well-laid plans and of sustained efforts on the part of emigrant families to transplant their cultural and social life to the new country, however, homesickness was a constant in their lives. Jette Bruns, an articulate woman, given to examining her life and experiences, writes hauntingly of the pervasive dreams of home, "the memories of the sweet past," that accompanied her waking and sleeping moments even when she found satisfaction and happiness in her accomplishments. On December 3, 1836, she wrote Heinrich:

You cannot believe how satisfying it is to work. I probably have had very few days in which I was ever as busy as I am here, that is, having to do hard work, but I'm quite happy in doing this and like all the others I have a tremendous appetite and sleep soundly. (It is strange, but almost every night now I have been dreaming of our father, and then I am still a child with him and I spend beautiful hours in that dream.)

Struggling with her own homesickness and the often disabling depressions of her brother Bernhard, Jette found her determination to survive the hardships she encountered strengthened by the plight of her neighbor, Nicholas Hesse.

> Our first visit at Mr. Hesse's upset me very much. The lady took Bruns aside, cried and complained that she couldn't stand it here. They were the only refined family there. No doubt Mr. Hesse was to be blamed himself that he wasn't doing so well. He had brought with him a teacher, a secretary, workmen and a maid. He wanted to establish a distillery at a time when there weren't even fields there. Soon thereafter when the people began to claim American wages, that didn't work. His wife wanted to remain a lady and did not want to work. He would have liked to have seen it through and worked and become a surveyor. This was a big setback in our expectations. But as it often happens instead of making us disappointed it strengthened us and steeled us even more. We were not going to do as they had done. This was our firm resolve. The Hesses went back to Europe.[42]

Back in Germany after a journey on which his brother died in St. Louis of ague, complicated, the doctor thought, by homesickness, and his only son, an infant, died on the train between Lancaster and Philadelphia, Hesse showed sympathy and understanding for the illness which had caused the collapse of his dreams:

> The memory of relatives, friends and old acquaintances causes a longing which in many, especially tender-hearted women, creates a homesickness which often degenerates into real melancholy that cannot be cured by any medicine. The cause is not in a faulty judgment of the conditions of the old and new home, but rather the love for the original home, which is common to all people of the earth.[43]

He wrote a book for prospective emigrants to America in which he advised that "The conditions for happiness in the American woods are . . . quite different for the father of a family than for an unmarried man,"[44] pointing out some of the day-to-day frustrations the settler could expect to experience in establishing a farm.

Whether mesmerized by Duden, fired by their own noble aspirations, or frustrated and disheartened by the situation at home, most of those planning emigration seemed incapable of imagining the "conditions in the American woods." Even those who believed they were taking all necesary precautions were committed so firmly to a dream, whether it be the achievement of complete individual freedom or the establishment of a rejuvenated *Germania* in the Far West, that news of limited opportunities, hardship and suffering, even of illness and death, carried little weight with them. Friedrich Steines sent his younger brother Hermann, accompanied by a cousin, Adolph Greef, and his family, to scout the situation in Missouri before departing with his parents, his own family, and other members of the Solingen Society. Greef wrote bluntly from St. Louis in December of 1833: "America is not a place for immigrating scholars. The farmers and artisans represent the educated classes here."[45] Hermann had discovered in Baltimore that

"The interior of the country, especially the state of Missouri, is in very bad repute," and concluded that "if one is well located in his native land, he ought not to leave it lightmindedly. . . . emigration means a revolution in one's life."[46] From St. Louis he wrote in detail of the problems and dangers, citing letter and page of the appropriate cautionary advice in Duden's *Report* to reinforce his own observations. He made the pilgrimage to Duden's farm, drank from Lake Creek, and with his companion went into Duden's hut and recited some passages from the *Report;* but he decided that although he was not familiar with all aspects of farm life, as far as he did know it he hardly thought it would "arouse reveries" in him. He realized that women would have to be strong in body and buoyant in spirit to hold to the dreams of their husbands in a one-room cabin on the frontier. Yet when the moral choice had to be made between oppression in Germany and freedom in America, especially when it was clear to him that his brother intended to come whatever he said, Hermann found justification for emigration.

> There will be inconveniences for all of us to face, but if you wish to see our whole family living in the same country, a country where freedom of speech obtains, where no spies are evesdropping, where no wretched simpletons criticize your every word and seek to detect therein a venom that might endanger the life of the state, the church and the home, in short, if you wish to be really happy and independent then come here and become farmers in the United States. Here you will find a class of beings that . . . still respect the man in man. . . . here no despots are to be feared.[47]

Meanwhile Friedrich, irritated by the injustices of the military and a regimented school system, determined to join his brother in Missouri, looked forward to a happy life as a planter

> Wo noch der Mensch! ein Mensch! den Menschen achtet
> Nur Seelen-Adel gilt.
> Wo Unschuld nicht im finstern Kerker schmachtet,
> Die Brust für Freiheit schwillt.[48]

"In the still seclusion of the Missouri forests," he wrote, "where nature still reigns supreme, there it must be better. There many hearts shaken by storms will find peace."[49] He arrived in St. Louis in early July of 1834 and his family seemed to have withstood the trip well, but before the month was out his four children, his wife, and a sister-in-law had died of cholera. He retreated to the Missouri woods, built his farm on Tavern Creek in Franklin County, remarried, and after a few restless years[50] established Oakfield Academy, where the sons of St. Louis German families received rigorous training in languages and science, finally finding there, perhaps, the peace and independence he had sought in the Missouri woods.

Paul Follenius, leader with Friedrich Münch of the Gießen Society, was to see his dream of establishing a new and free Germany in the great North American republic as a "refuge . . . for all those to whom, as to ourselves, conditions have become unbearable,"[51] founder in dissension and discord. Even before the two groups, one traveling with

Münch by way of Baltimore, the other with Follenius by way of New Orleans, met in St. Louis it was clear the plan was doomed. In one of the largest, most ambitious and thoroughly planned group emigrations, the Gießen Society had sent scouts to the Arkansas Territory to locate a favorable site for settlement, believing that climatic conditions there approximated those on the Spanish plains and that their Society with its carefully selected cross section of German social and occupational groups could in fact achieve a model German state to serve as a center of culture for the Germans who were to follow. When the scouts returned and reported that no such plan could be carried out in the Arkansas Territory, the plans to emigrate were so far advanced they could no longer be cancelled, and the group set out for Missouri, launched by Münch's "Emigration Song," which, with the optimism of its genre, anticipated none of the disappointments and tragedies they were to endure in the "huts on the Missouri, where the sun of freedom shines."[52] Follenius, one of the leaders, with his brother Karl Follen, of the League of Black Brothers, the revolutionary student group at the University of Gießen, was married to Münch's younger sister, and the brothers-in-law settled with their families on adjoining property near Duden's Hill. "Of unusual height and broad shoulders, a good gymnast, a good swimmer, a good duelist," Münch wrote of his friend, "he learned to swing an axe as well as any one."[53] In spite of rising the earliest in the morning, plowing and sowing, in spite of his own determined efforts and those of his wife, he could not get ahead.

> As with many gifted people he lacked the ability of exact figuring, which is to be sure subordinate, and yet so important in practical life. In spite of tremendous effort and moderate expectations it remained impossible for him to get beyond an existence full of worries and deprivation.[54]

Shortly after returning to his farm from St. Louis in the fall of 1844, the newspaper he had tried to start having failed after only three issues,[55] he fell ill of typhoid fever and died, leaving his wife with six children, four of whom had been born in Missouri.

In the Westphalia settlement the Bruns and Geisberg families struggled to establish a foothold on the Maries and Osage rivers. A second son was born to Jette in February, 1837, and named for her father, Max. She recalled in her autobiography: ". . . the boys were a joy to us. But often in the evening, when the workmen were sitting around the only fireplace, I went to bed with the children in order to be out of the way."[56] In April of 1837 Dr. Bruns wrote to Jette's uncle, Caspar Geisberg: "In general all Germans are very satisfied and would not exchange their situation with their former life. It is indeed beautiful here. . . . The location is like a paradise. The soil cannot be worn out." Work was proceeding on the large house they had decided to build on a hill overlooking the Maries, but so slowly Jette wrote her brother in August "that the entire world is amazed." She was to regret the decision to build a German *Fachwerk* house, patterned after those she had known in Oelde and Stromberg[57] and wished many times that they

had settled for a good log house. The Maries flooded and the garden was washed away. She confided to Heinrich:

> We have had very little luck with everything we have tackled this year. . . . Now we have many people and little to eat. A great worry for the housewife. . . . Well, what else should I complain about? That I am very often vexed? That I feel doubly annoyed with all these misfortunes? That it is no fun to represent cook, nursemaid and housewife in one person?

Jette was not yet twenty-four, and sometimes her burdens and responsibilities seemed more than she could bear. Her letters report misfortune after misfortune. Little pigs floated away in the flood, and split rails for fences had to be lugged back and put into place. Her brother Bernhard grew worse, imagining thousands of voices in the air, and often unable to do anything when there was so much work to do.[58] The maid, Jenne, disappointed with America, lived in a state of outrage, attacking the children, the chickens, the animals, inanimate objects and the world at large. "It is a sad and money-poor time," she wrote to her Uncle Caspar on Christmas Day, 1837. The next year was no better, and although her husband and brothers continued to write with great pride of their farms, the land they had cleared, the money they had made, and their bright prospects, and although she sometimes wrote of the landscape and garden with playful affection, cataloguing and describing the domestic animals and reporting proudly on the progress of the children, the tragedies that occurred moved her deeply. Two Swedes who kept a store on the Osage River inexplicably locked their doors, got into boats and disappeared without a word. Someone read that a body was found later in the Missouri River near St. Charles which matched the description of one of them. The other body was swept away. A young man riding home from town at night fell from his horse and died from the injuries. A neighbor who had come on the ship with them drowned in the Maries. On March 14, 1838, Jette wrote of a young neighbor who was burned to death:

> Today young Mrs. Huber was buried. It has been almost two weeks since she rushed into the arms of her husband . . . completely enveloped in flames. She suffered tremendously. Her face, the arms and shoulders had been burned. Still affected by giving birth and by the death of her second son, she had been overcome by dizziness. . . . She could give no other reason for the outbreak of the fire. Often I have admired her heavenly patience when she was suffering those severe pains. The wounds began to heal, she could see with both eyes, but the fever became strong, the fire went inside, and she died last Monday. She was not yet twenty years old.

For Jette the serpent in paradise was not the rattler whose seventeen rattles she sent to her brother as a novelty, but the tragedies she witnessed and the fever which struck again and again, six times in the summer of 1838. Her loneliness and the homesickness for her large, closely knit and often quarrelsome family at home never abated. In June, 1840, she wrote to Heinrich:

> How lonely I am. No female being who thinks as I do, with whom now and then I can exchange my feelings when I need that kind of refreshment, when I want to forget the daily troubles and sorrows, when these could be set aside for a short time. . . .''

Two more children were born, and her pleasure in them was immense, but in 1841 three of her children, those born in America died within three weeks of each other of dysentery. The little girl, Johanna, named for Jette's sister in Germany, died September 13, Max on September 19, and the baby, Rudolph, who seemed at first to be recovering, died suddenly on October 2. The deaths of the children, for whose future she had left her home, devastated her. She wrote to Heinrich in November: ''Now all my wishes and strivings have been made quiet. I don't even care to go to Germany any more. It hurts me too much. . . . How gladly I would have said farewell to the world six weeks ago. That I had to lose little Rudolph hurt me too much.'' In December she wrote to her sister Johanna:

> My thoughts are constantly with . . . little Rudolph . . . with Johanna . . . with Max. A thousand memories remind me of them. It is always quiet and empty here now. We have suffered much while the children were sick. I cannot really imagine how I could have stood it so calmly. From one bed to the other, day and night no rest, constantly swaying between hope and doubt. Oh, these were four terrible weeks. Max was completely exhausted and finally went to sleep quietly, but Johanna and little Rudolph had their death struggle. I cannot forget it!

In the years following the deaths of her children, Jette was often, as she put it, at odds with the whole world. Left alone for long periods while Bruns kept up his widely scattered practice, for which he was often paid in IOUs, having given up all hope of ever seeing her family in Germany again, she wanted only to leave Westphalia and start anew somewhere else. ''I really don't like the farmer's life any more,'' she wrote in May, 1846. ''I would like to have some peace and quiet. There's nothing in it for me but a lot of hard work.'' She had by now spent almost ten years in the Westphalia settlement, and her oldest son, Hermann, had been sent to St. Louis to attend the Jesuit Academy. In April of 1847, in a letter to Heinrich that bore the sad news of the death by consumption of the wife of their brother, Franz, after a long and harrowing illness, she reported: ''We went to St. Louis, Bruns and I. For the first time, after ten years, I saw a city again. And yet nothing was strange to me, neither the people, nor the houses, nor all the doings and goings in the street.'' In August of that year she lost another child, a son, born prematurely, who lived only eight days. Of the eleven Bruns children, five died in childhood and two more preceded her in death. In 1851, after Bruns had given up his practice and they had moved to a large farm across the Osage at Shipley's Ferry, five-year old Albert died of sunstroke. They sold the farm a few years later and in February of 1854 moved, at Jette's insistence, to Jefferson City. Here Bruns fell into such a severe depression that she later recalled this period as the worst in her life,[59] but eventually he recovered and started a business which

seemed to thrive. In 1856 they were able to visit Germany, and she realized her dream of seeing the brothers and sisters she had left behind twenty years before and even returned to Oelde, although few of the old friends of her youth were still there.

The Civil War brought chaotic times to Missouri, and Germans were often threatened and reviled by Confederate sympathizers for their strong pro-Union stand. It was a grievous time for her. The son named for her brother Heinrich was killed in battle in Iuka, Mississippi, in 1863, two months before his twenty-first birthday, and Dr. Bruns died in 1864 while serving as mayor of Jefferson City. He left his business affairs in a shambles, and Jette found herself alone with many debts and no resources. To support her children, she opened a boarding house[60] and managed to get through the worst of her financial problems with the assistance of her brother-in-law, Hermann Bruns, and prominent friends, although it would be many years before she was free of financial worries. In 1872, when she was fifty-nine, Hermann, her oldest son, the one born in Germany, died at age thirty-eight. She lived with her other children, visiting them in Ohio, St. Louis, Seattle, and Jefferson City, suffering their griefs and disappointments, worrying about her grandchildren. It was not until the early 1890s, twenty-five years after Dr. Bruns's death, that she finally received a pension for his service as a medical officer in the Union Army and became financially independent. She spent the remainder of her life in Jefferson City, where she died November 3, 1899, sixty-three years and one day after her arrival in the Westphalia settlement. Her daughter, Ottilie Hess, writing in 1891 of her hope that her mother would bring her autobiography up to date, evoked the essence of her character:

> Naturally it is no pleasant work, for these were heavy worrisome years in which she, a woman standing by herself, had to create an existence for herself and her children. But it will be a pleasant remembrance for her descendants and an example of what will power may achieve.

Friedrich Münch, who became widely known in the Far West for his writings on German life in Missouri, recognized that since everyone had to help himself on the frontier, the old patriarchal family had been done away with. In his assessment of the contributions of the wives of the Latin farmers who came to Missouri in the 1830s and 1840s, however, the women appear as abstract, if heroic figures, always stoic in the face of hardships and disappointments, carrying out the traditional roles of the homemaker in the background while the tragedies of the men are played out center stage:

> Our wives here have an important and difficult task, but they are aware of their importance and are never plagued by boredom and are satisfied with what they acomplish for the welfare of their families. They keep their houses clean and in good order, they take care of all the cooking, baking, washing, knitting, mending, sewing, . . . take care of the children, milk the cows, make butter and cheese, dry vegetables, make soap, tend to the flower and vegetable garden, take care of the chickens,

and in spite of everything they do not cease to live as cultured human beings.[61]

The illuminating glimpses of the women on the White Water River who astounded Timothy Flint with their industry—and forty-five female dresses hanging around his room—and of Mrs. Fricke, overwhelmed with long suppressed homesickness on the evening of her anniversary, pouring out her grief to Jessie Fremont, provide a human dimension to frontier life generally missing in the early writings of settlers, visitors, and observers. Jette Bruns, often lonely and weary, often plagued by boredom, scolding her brothers and sisters at home in Germany because they would not write her of the social activities she missed so much—then helplessly envious when they did write of balls and parties—complaining of the hardships, shaken by the tragedies in the Westphalia settlement, grieving for her lost children, is no less heroic because she was not silent, not always (or even very often) satisfied with what she could accomplish for her family.

It was this vitality, willpower, and determination that transformed the frontier. Accepting full partnership in the often disastrous adventure of establishing a new home in the Missouri woods, their determination to survive strengthened by the adversities they faced, they held to their values and strong sense of family. The orphaned children of their brothers, sisters and cousins, their parents and other aging relatives were taken into their households as a matter of course. They valued education and saw that their children, girls as well as boys, had the best education possible. When the Old Order Lutherans from Saxony opened the *Gymnasium* or "Log Cabin College" which was to become Concordia Seminary in 1839, young women as well as young men were enrolled. At a time when men played the female roles in the theatrical productions of the Anglo-American Thespian societies in Missouri,[62] women and children took active part in all aspects of the theatricals and musical programs put on by the *Turner* and other German organizations. Their love for music accounted for the preservation in family groups, or later in musical societies across the state, of the old German songs which seemed their last tie to the homeland. They brought and transplanted on the frontier the concept of Christmas as a family-centered religious holiday at a time when Americans were not quite sure when it occurred or, if they knew, amused themselves by shooting, setting off dynamite, and engaging in other raucous activities to celebrate the day.[63] They refused to accommodate to the melting pot concept of American history even during times of virulent nativism when it would have been easier to do so, insisting that their children learn the German language and carry on German traditions. As a consequence, the little centers for German culture which Duden and Follenius dreamed of did in fact arise in Missouri. In Augusta and Hermann, in Washington and Westphalia, in Altenburg and Freistatt and in many other towns and communities German cultural traditions survived well into the twentieth century, handed down in the family from generation to generation. The immigrant women who came to the

frontier were largely responsible for the preservation of traditional values which have had a lasting impact on Missouri's cultural, historical, and social development.

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Notes

[1] Bruns-Geisberg correspondence, a collection of unpublished letters owned by Carla Schulz-Geisberg of Nienberge/Münster. All subsequent quotations relating to the Westphalia settlement are taken from this collection, which is currently being prepared for publication (A. E. Schroeder, trans. and ed.), unless otherwise indicated.

[2] A. E. Schroeder, trans. and ed., "The Autobiography of Henriette Bruns," unpublished TS, p. 8.

[3] In the Bruns-Geisberg correspondence there is a letter of December 14, 1831, from Heinrich Hüffer, the only brother of Jette's mother, Johanna, who had died in 1827 at the age of thirty-one after the birth of her seventh child. In it he reports to Caspar Geisberg: "B. confessed to me recently that he did not have a fortune, but that his position earns him a satisfactory income, so, for instance, last year he had been able to credit himself with 1,300 thaler. This estimate may have been somewhat high; however, one can say that he should certainly be able to reach half of this amount in the future."

[4] On November, 6, 1838, Jette, still torn from the parting with her sisters and brothers and smarting from slights by the Geisberg clan, wrote her brother, Heinrich: "Uncle . . . and Aunt have, since I am a married woman, treated us not always very kindly; it hurt, but I tried to make Bruns forget it."

[5] "Autobiography," p. 13.

[6] Nicholas Hesse, *Das westliche Nordamerika, in besonderer Beziehung auf die deutschen Einwanderer in ihren landwirtschaftlichen, Handels- und Gewerbverhältnissen* (Paderborn: Joseph Wesener, 1838), p. 56, reports that he together with six other German families settled in Westphalia in the late summer of 1835 (all translations by A. E. Schroeder).

[7] Gottfried Duden, *Bericht über eine Reise nach den westlichen Staaten Nordamerika's und einen mehrjährigen Aufenthalt am Missouri (in den Jahren 1824, 25, 26 und 1827), in Bezug auf Auswanderung und Ueberbevölkerung* (Elberfeld: Sam Lucas, 1829). For easier reference the English edition is quoted. *Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America and a Stay of Several Years Along the Missouri (During the Years 1824, 25, 26, and 1827)* (Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1980).

[8] Marcus L. Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1860* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1941), p. 149.

[9] Duden, Thirteenth Letter, p. 55.

[10] The Maries River, which the Germans called the Maria River.

[11] Duden, p. 76.

[12] Hesse, p. 91. Actually by May, 1838, Jette had apparently reconciled herself to snakes in Westphalia. She wrote her brother Heinrich that she had sent him a rattlesnake rattle with seventeen rattles.

[13] A map of the "so-called Westphalia Settlement" attached to Hesse's book shows approximately thirty German names along the Maries River indicating farms purchased by settlers 1834-37.

[14] "Autobiography," p. 17.

[15] David Goebel was a professor of mathematics at Coburg who joined the Gießen Emigration Society, arriving in St. Louis in the summer of 1834. He settled near Washington, MO.

[16] Gert Goebel, *Länger als ein Menschenleben in Missouri* (St. Louis: C. Witter, 1877), p. 50 (all translations by A. E. Schroeder).

[17] Steines reports that "Arnz, Scheulen, Kloenne, Clarenbach, Ubert, Sandfort, Muehlinghaus and Jaeger Heuer have all gone 100 miles farther west and have settled in

the neighborhood of Jefferson City." William G. Bek, "The Followers of Duden," *Missouri Historical Review,* 15 (April 1921), 536.

[18] William G. Bek, *Missouri Historical Review,* 15 (July 1921), 677.

[19] In the second and third editions of his *Report,* published in 1832 and 1834, as well as in essays and letters, Duden vigorously contested the conclusions of others and defended his own.

[20] Thomas J. McCormack, *Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1896* (Cedar Rapids, IA: The Torch Press, 1909), I, 314.

[21] Jacob Haun, one of the earliest settlers in Montgomery County, settled on Lake Creek, where seven years later Duden became his neighbor.

[22] Koerner, I, 321.

[23] Fred Gustorf, *The Uncorrupted Heart: Journal and Letters of Frederick Julius Gustorf* (Columbia, MO.: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 77.

[24] Koerner, I, 320.

[25] Gustorf, pp. 134-35.

[26] Goebel, pp. 7-8.

[27] Friedrich Münch as quoted by William G. Bek, "The Followers of Duden," *Missouri Historical Review,* 19 (October, 1924), 129.

[28] Goebel, p. 7.

[29] Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years, Passed in Occasional Residences and Journeyings, in the Valley of the Mississippi* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Co., 1826), pp. 232-38. This group crossed the Mississippi River near Ste. Genevieve on January 1, 1800, brought from North Carolina under the leadership of Major Frederick Bollinger, and settled along the White Water River.

[30] Ibid., p. 237.

[31] Ibid., pp. 235-36.

[32] Ibid., p. 236.

[33] Goebel, p. 68.

[34] Ibid., pp. 34-35, writes of the exhausting days he and a companion spent trying to split rails until an American showed them how to select the trees suitable for rails and go about the task.

[35] Ibid., p. 48.

[36] Ibid., p. 42.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Jessie Benton Fremont, *The Story of the Guard: A Chronicle of the War* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), p. 55.

[39] Ibid., pp. 56-57. Although Jessie Fremont does not identify the family with whom she stayed in Washington, historian Ralph Gregory, who has made an extensive study of early settlers of Franklin and Warren counties, believes it must have been the Bernhard Fricke family (see *Washington Missourian,* 2 May 1968).

[40] Ibid., pp. 58-59.

[41] Ernst C. Krohn, ed., "The Autobiography of William Robyn," in *Missouri Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), pp. 239-55.

[42] "Autobiography," p. 18.

[43] Hesse, p. 208.

[44] Ibid., p. 61.

[45] Bek, *Missouri Historical Review,* 14 (January 1920), 218.

[46] Bek, *Missouri Historical Review,* 14 (October 1919), 53.

[47] Bek, *Missouri Historical Review,* 14 (January 1920), 230.

[48] Friedrich Steines, "Stimmt an ein Lied, ihr Schwestern und ihr Brüder," Deutsches Volksliedarchiv Freiburg, Mappe in Gr. XIII.

[49] Bek, *Missouri Historical Review,* 15 (April 1921), 521.

[50] Bek, *Missouri Historical Review,* 16 (October 1921), 126.

[51] Friedrich Münch, *Erinnerungen aus Deutschlands trübster Zeit* (St. Louis: Conrad Witter & Neustadt a.d. Haardt, 1873), pp. 64-65, writing his recollections in 1861 refers to the pamphlet, *Aufforderung und Erklärung in Betreff einer Auswanderung im Großen aus Deutschland in die nordamerikanischen Freistaaten,* which Münch and Paul Follenius published in 1833 (all translations by A. E. Schroeder).

[52] Friedrich Münch, "Auswanderungslied," *Gesammelte Schriften* (St. Louis: C. Witter, 1902), p. 3.

[53] Ibid., p. 104.

[54] Ibid., p. 101.

[55] *Die Waage,* (St. Louis, 1844).

[56] "Autobiography," p. 20.

[57] The Bruns house is still standing in Westphalia, MO, although it has been unoccupied for a number of years.

[58] "Autobiography," p. 20.

[59] "Autobiography," p. 26.

[60] The Bruns Boarding House, across from the Capitol, came to be known as the "German Diet," because it was patronized by Münch, Goebel, and other German legislators and officials. Judge Arnold Krekel called it "the radical corner."

[61] Friedrich Münch, *Der Staat Missouri, geschildert mit besonderer Rücksicht auf teutsche Einwanderung* (New York—St. Louis: Farmers' & Vine-Growers' Society, 1859), p. 100.

[62] See Elbert R. Bowen, *Theatrical Entertainments in Rural Missouri Before the Civil War.* Univ. of Missouri Studies, 32 (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1959).

[63] The seventeen-year old son of a neighboring farmer confided to Frederick Steines that he didn't know whether Christmas came in January or not (*Missouri Historical Review,* 15, 667) and Gert Goebel reports that before the Civil War in Missouri "There was no church celebration of any sort. No presents were given and the fine German custom of decorating a Christmas tree was unknown" (Goebel, pp. 80-81).