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**Ferdinand J. Lindheimer's *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung*:
Portrait of a German-Texan Weekly 1852-1872.¹**

German-language newspapers in America are a richly diverse repository of social history. Yet despite the historical accounts by Wittke and others and the bibliographical work, primarily by Arndt and Olson, this cultural resource has scarcely been investigated in many regional German-American studies.² In Texas, in fact, except as a source of information for scattered accounts of primarily the political habits of the German settlers, the German-language newspapers have been largely ignored by scholars and, consequently, as a traditional social institution, unassessed.³ The earliest paper, the *Galveston Zeitung*, began publication in 1846, but it lasted only a few years, and there are no extant copies.⁴ The second-oldest, however, the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* was also the longest-running, being published from 1852-1954. From the middle of the nineteenth until early in the twentieth century, approximately one hundred newspapers—most of them weeklies—came into existence in Texas. Several of them did have a life span from twenty to forty years, while the *Fredericksburger Wochenblatt* lasted for sixty-eight, and the San Antonio *Freie Presse für Texas* eighty years. But the majority of them lasted only a few years.

With respect to the regional and national American political scene, most of these papers were middle-of-the-road. but among the one hundred or so, there were bound to be a few political and journalistic oddities. The editor of the *San Antonio Zeitung*, the Forty-Eighter Dr. Adolph Douai, was so rabidly abolitionist that he translated his German editorials into English, so that the Anglo population, already disturbed by hearsay, could become even more directly enraged by his writings. On a far more pacific note, the *Bettelsack* of Comfort, Texas, a settlement with "Latin" overtones, never even made it into print. Its two editors lived together in a log cabin they forthrightly and perhaps wistfully called the "Korrektionsbude" and simply circulated the *Bettelsack* to the settlers in manuscript form.⁵ Finally, the *Deutsche Post* of Houston was edited during 1881-85 by a Charles Medlenka whose Bohemian German

was so unique, that the paper became locally famous merely because of its linguistic character.

"Die gute alte Tante" as the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* was often called, never missed an issue in its one-hundred-two-year history, although during the Civil War, when normal paper supplies were cut off, the newspaper occasionally appeared on butcher paper, tissue paper or even many-colored wallpaper. Not only the newspaper's longevity, but even more importantly the nature of the community it served and the personality of the newspaper's founding editor, the botanist Ferdinand Jakob Lindheimer, gave the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* a distinctive and commanding cultural role in the pioneer life of German Texas.

New Braunfels was founded in March 1845 by Carl, Prince of Solms-Braunfels as the *Adelsverein's* first settlement in its colonization efforts in Texas.⁶ Somewhat isolated in the Texas Hill Country and yet not too far from San Antonio, New Braunfels was the state's fourth largest city in the 1850s.⁷ Meinig, in his *Imperial Texas*, calls the "German area of the Hill Country . . . a cultural anomaly . . ." which has "persisted with little expansion or contraction, a 'cultural island' unusual in size and homogeneity."⁸ For this reason the German-American population of New Braunfels has been relatively resistant to acculturation. During its formative years, New Braunfels fostered a wide variety of German-American cultural institutions such as churches, schools and numerous literary, musical, political and recreational organizations in addition to the newspaper.

Lindheimer was the first editor of the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* and he held this position for twenty years. The details of his life fulfill unusually well the idealized view of the rural nineteenth-century German-American cultural leader. Lindheimer was a middle-class liberal and a humanist-naturalist, raised in the legacy of Goethe, Humboldt and the Romanticists, e.g., Fichte and Heine. In America, Lindheimer was more successful as a frontiersman, however, than as a mediator of this cultural legacy.⁹ Born in 1801, Lindheimer grew up in Frankfurt as the son of a prosperous merchant. Goethe was related to the family through his grandmother Textor who was a Lindheimer.¹⁰ Before completing his studies in classical philology and mathematics at Bonn and Jena, Lindheimer became a teacher in Frankfurt at the school of the radical Georg Bunsen. While not personally involved in the Frankfurt riots of 1833, Lindheimer's association with Bunsen and the ensuing rift with his family caused Lindheimer to emigrate to America. After spending some time with Bunsen in Illinois, Lindheimer traveled to Mexico where he worked at a German plantation for over a year and was able to pursue his botanical studies. At the outbreak of the Texas Revolution in 1836, Lindheimer returned to the north and joined a company of Alabama volunteers. Since his company was detained in Galveston by military orders, Lindheimer and his fellow soldiers arrived at the site of the famous battle of San Jacinto, a day after the skirmish itself.¹¹ After the war, Lindheimer farmed without great success for a time in the area of Houston. He then began to earn his living collecting plant specimens in Texas for his Frankfurt friend, the immigrant botanist Georg En-

gelmann of St. Louis and for the renowned American botanist Asa Gray of Harvard. For several years, Lindheimer must have been an unusual sight in the frontier regions of Texas. The German geologist Ferdinand Roemer, who visited Texas in 1846-47, describes Lindheimer thusly:

He bought a two-wheeled covered cart and a horse, loaded it with paper necessary to pack his plants, and a supply of the most necessary articles of food, such as flour, coffee and salt. Thereupon, he sallied forth into the wilderness armed with a gun and no other companions but his two hunting dogs. Here he busied himself with gathering and preserving plants. At times he was solely dependent upon the hunt for food, sometimes not seeing a human being for months.¹²

The Comanches, whom he occasionally encountered, understandably considered Lindheimer a medicine man and let him go his way undisturbed. In 1845, Lindheimer assisted Prince Solms in the purchase of the tract of land which became the settlement of New Braunfels. Lindheimer built a cabin on the Comal River and for several years, as the colony developed, he farmed and continued his botanical work. As a result of this latter activity and since approximately twenty species and one genus of Texas flora bear Lindheimer's name in the Latin designation, he is called the "father of Texas botany."¹³

Under Lindheimer's editorship, the format and much of the content of the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* reflected the traditional German-American weekly. An issue consisted of four pages, reduced to two during the Civil War. Except for the Civil War period, the front page always carried a piece of sentimental fiction, usually serialized, frequently together with an item about something of German interest or an account of local or state politics. Pages two and three reported local, state, national and international news, often taken from other, particularly German-American, newspapers, general informational or German-American items and, at times, humorous fillers. Page four was devoted to advertisements, legal notices and the like.¹⁴

But aside from the newspaper's rather traditional make-up, Lindheimer's personality, education and political leanings, which were augmented by the historical coincidence of his editorship with the formative years of both Texas and New Braunfels, made the paper under his twenty-year leadership also a truly unique cultural document of pioneer German Texas. Lindheimer's classical education and his botanical interests, for example, are readily apparent in his writings. Particularly in the early years, he wrote a number of articles for the paper about both the native flora of Texas and about the sorts of crops which the newly-arrived immigrants could profitably grow in the Hill Country of Texas. These articles are frequently an unusual mixture of scientific erudition, practical advice and philosophical musings. The first two issues of the paper, for example, contain a discussion of the native cypress (12 and 19 November 1852). Lindheimer begins by describing the worldwide propagation of the species in considerable botanical detail. He then offers practical instructions for making shingles from the trees, which was very necessary for the construction of the local log

cabins and a common occupation for the newly-arrived, jobless immigrant. An elegiac reverie concludes this article. Lindheimer refers to the use of the cypress in classical antiquity as a symbol of life and death, and this gives him the opportunity of expressing his own agnostic views on human immortality.

The introduction of his article, "Einige Gedanken über die Lage des Landbebauens," describes the farmer with similarly out-of-place pastoral rhetoric:

Wenn er in dem schönen Tempel der Natur ihr Wirken belauscht und ihre Tätigkeit beobachtet; wenn er ihre Gemälde zu verstehen vermag im Schatten des Abends und im glühenden Schein der Sonne . . . wenn er ihre Musik zu verstehen gelernt im Säuseln des Windes und im Rauschen des Wasserfalls, im Rollen des Donners und im Geflüster des Bächleins, im Toben des Sturmes und im Flöthen der Vögel
(28 January 1853)

Such bucolic rhetoric, which includes an obligatory quote from Horace, must have certainly bemused the pioneer farmer working the scrabbly soil of Comal County! This idyllic style does eventually cease, as Lindheimer begins to offer his readers a practical account, complete with financial yield-charts, of the comparative advantages of the production of cotton, sugar cane, wheat, tea, wine grapes and tobacco.

These echoes of Lindheimer's cultural heritage in the reports on farming in the Texas Hill Country can be understood at both the rhetorical and the psychological level as a demonstration of the immigrant journalist's often unflagging belief in the mission of German "culture" in America. Educated to an early nineteenth-century faith in *Bildung* and yet disenfranchised in Germany and not fully, if ever, culturally assimilated into America, such journalists, by way of compensation, envisioned a transplanted German culture in all its manifestations, as an indispensable tool in the development of an American civilization. By advocating so unequivocally a German cultural mission for the fledgling American nation, these journalists often gave vent to their need to comment on political questions. A desire which had been frustrated when they lived in Germany.¹⁵

In the very first issue of the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* Lindheimer describes the German cultural mission in an introductory editorial as follows: "Wie einst die in alle Welt zerstreuten Griechen Weisheit und Wissenschaft in alle Welt verbreiteten, . . . so wollen wir in aller Welt verbreiteten Germanen die Herrschaft der Vernunft und der Bruderliebe, den Kosmopolitismus in aller Welt verbreiten" (12 November 1852). In the next twenty years numerous articles, some written by Lindheimer, some by other local journalists, and some taken from other German-American newspapers proclaim German cultural supremacy again and again. In an article announcing the formation of a political club, the Protestant pastor to the German immigrants, Louis Ervendberg, writes that the Germans should not succumb to a "starren enggeschlossenen Yankeethum" but rather they should fulfill, "durch Wahrung unserer National-Eigenthümlichkeit . . . unsere Aufgabe [die]

Humanisierung dieses Landes" (12 August 1853). An article on education states baldly that "der amerikanische Pädagog in Hinsicht der Bildung tief unter dem deutschen Pädagogen [steht] (7 October 1853). Similarly, in a discussion of German singing societies, it is pointed out that the "humanisierende Wirkung" of German music can help educate Americans whose "Volks- und Kirchengesänge meist gefühlswidrige Zerbilder [sind]" and whose "Yankee Doodle" was "ursprünglich nur eine Spottmelodie auf den amerikanischen Geschmack" (7 October 1853). In one of the several articles about the other mainstay of popular German culture in America, the *Turnverein*, the writer observes that Germans by temperament and practice are healthy, while Anglo-Americans—for all their good qualities—are basically "sickly" (9 August 1872). Even during the Civil War when most of the newspaper's attention was focused on the enormity of the issue itself, this topic appears under a patriotic guise. A lengthy account, for example, editorially supporting a German regiment in the Confederate Army maintains that from Hermann to Friedrich the Great Germans have always been superior soldiers (2 May 1862). Repeatedly, as in the article expressly entitled "Über die Mission der Deutschen in Amerika," the German-American press is regarded as the most suitable vehicle for this mission (18 December 1853).

The aesthetic quality of the paper's own cultural offerings, the poetry and prose which Lindheimer published, is scarcely in keeping with this lofty German cultural mission. The "story," appearing in virtually every issue, except during the Civil War, and often serialized over two or more issues, is of the usual obligatory sort for newspapers of this period. There is one *Novelle* by Paul Heyse, a number of "American" stories by Gerstäcker, and a few examples of German-Texan literature. Otherwise, however, these works are the sentimental and exotic pulp fare of the day by authors long since forgotten. The paper also occasionally printed poetry. Lindheimer introduced the first issue with a verse dedication which begins:

Sei uns ein Bote, der mit goldnem Munde
Des Lebens Alltag seine Ode nimmt,
Der hundertohrig auf der weiten Runde
Die Saiten jeder Seelenregung stimmt . . . (12 November 1852)

Most of the poems are similarly sentimental and mediocre *Goldschnittbüchlein* efforts.

While this literature seems jarringly out of place, considering the supposed cultural mission, there may have been a therapeutic reason for its inclusion. As Wittke states:

In the first generation at least, the foreign-language press must be regarded as an emotional compensation for what the immigrant left behind him when he undertook the great adventure across the Atlantic, and it is a very satisfying compensation. The press helps cushion the shock of the transition by creating a semblance of the earlier social life

with which the immigrant was familiar, and it does so in the immigrant's mother tongue. Perhaps this is one reason why the foreign-language press frequently contains so much poetry and sentimental fiction.¹⁶

With equal probability, the exigencies of bringing out a full edition each week as well as the actual reading tastes of the newspaper's subscribers, took understandable precedence over the theoretically proclaimed cultural mission.

In the twenty years of his editorship, Lindheimer became involved in numerous local, national and German-Texan political issues.¹⁷ In local civic affairs, he was a progressive, championing concerns such as the development of public schools. Being violently anti-clerical, Lindheimer urged the separation of church, especially parochial schools, and state (6 March 1853). While Lindheimer could criticize or support criticism of American culture, on local matters he was an avid and loyal supporter of the Hill Country of Texas. In this regard, one of the most compelling statements Lindheimer made about his adopted homeland occurs in his editorial at the completion of the paper's first year. Speaking of "die schöne Umgegend von Austin, Braunfels und San Antonio," he says:

. . . das milde Clima, den heiteren Himmel, die klaren Flüsse und Bäche des Westens, die riesigen Cypressen und die schlanken Cedern und die mit Wild und Heerden belebten Prairien; so bedarf es nur einer Feder, die fähig ist, diese Dinge würdig zu beschreiben, um einen Auswanderungslustigen von den Vorzügen von Texas zu überzeugen und daß er ausrufe, wie einst vor dreihundert Jahren die nach Texas einwandernden Asteken "Techas!" *das Land der Verheißung!*

Lindheimer signed the editorial, patriotically in English, with the battle cry of the Texas War of Independence: "Texas forever!" (9 December 1853).

In state and national politics Lindheimer was a moderate. While he spoke out unobtrusively against slavery in the early issues (e.g., 25 February 1853), as Secession and the Civil War drew near, like many Germans in Texas, he viewed slavery and the growing tensions between the North and the South as American and not German-American problems. Yet he also felt, like many of his fellow immigrants, a sense of loyalty to his adopted state. In 1854, on the occasion of the second *Sängerfest* in San Antonio, local Texas-German political groups, led by the abolitionist editor Douai, formed a radical political body. This group advocated the abolition of slavery. Its activities unleashed a storm of conflict in the German-American press, including the *Neu Braunfelsener Zeitung*, and the Anglo press in Texas. A number of Anglo newspapers, encouraged by the anti-foreign sentiment of the Know-Nothings, suspected the Germans of sponsoring political anarchy through their singing societies. True to his moderate stance, Lindheimer severely criticized Douai and the political activities in San Antonio.¹⁸

During the Civil War, Lindheimer continued his politically moderate stance. As a loyal Texan, he felt that he had to support the Confederacy. Many Germans, of course, were pro-Union and on one occasion they

stormed Lindheimer's home, which was also the office of the paper, and threw the hand-press and the type into the Comal River. But his sons retrieved the equipment from the river and Lindheimer published the *Zeitung*, even during that week, without interruption.¹⁹

These political disagreements, Lindheimer's feuds with the editors of other German-language newspapers in Texas, his disagreements with the paper's stockholders and the personal financial strain of running the paper, all took their inevitable toll. In 1872, seven years before his death, Lindheimer retired, a dispirited man. In his farewell editorial, he complained that his opponents had called him "Lügenheimer" and concluded that he was happy that "ich jetzt nicht mehr als politischer Gladiator . . . meine Haut zu Markte tragen muß, daß ich nicht mehr, wie politische Candidaten nur zeitweilig, sondern, als Redacteur, fortwährend durch das Fegefeuer öffentlicher Verläumdung gejagt werde" (16 August 1872).

The *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* continued for many more years and through two world wars when the German-Texans were again politically tested. After Lindheimer, six others edited the paper. The last two editors, Georg and Frederick Oheim, father and son, edited it successively for a period of sixty-four years.²⁰ Only in the last years, when more and more of the paper was published in English, did the *Zeitung* gradually lose its German-American quality. Despite Lindheimer's pessimism upon retirement and aside from his inordinate belief in German culture, the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* began under his leadership to implement the role of an effective small-town German-language newspaper. The breadth and inquisitiveness of Lindheimer's mind and the passion of his heart, often frustrated by circumstances in his new homeland, put a unique, if not always homogeneous, stamp on "die gute alte Tante." In the early days of the *Zeitung* Lindheimer stated the purpose of a democratic newspaper in these words, using an image also particularly appropriate for a botanist: "Laßt uns nicht müde werden, die geistigen Samenkörner der Wahrheit zu streuen, und wenn auch von 100 Körnern nur eines aufginge, so kann es in seiner dritten Generation schon zu einer Million Samenkörner aufgewachsen sein" (9 December 1853). In the idealism of his youth in Germany, Lindheimer had wanted to serve truth. This he did as a much older man, finding her an uncompromising, and occasionally elusive, mistress in the Hill Country of Texas.

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Notes

¹ This article was originally presented as a paper at the Sixth Annual Symposium of the Society for German-American Studies, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas, April 16-17, 1982.

² See Carl Wittke, *The German-Language Press in America* (Louisville: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1957); Karl J. R. Arndt and May E. Olson, *German-American Newspapers and*

Periodicals, 1732-1955 (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1961); under the heading "The German-American Press" in Michael Keresztesi and Gary R. Cocozzoli, *German-American History and Life. A Guide to Information Sources* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1980).

³ There are sparse accounts in the standard reference works on the Texas-Germans, e.g., Rudolph L. Bieseles, *The History of the German Settlements in Texas, 1831-1861* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1930) and Gilbert Giddings Benjamin, *The Germans in Texas: A Study in Immigration* (1909); rpt. Austin: Jenkins, 1974). The only published account of the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* is the commemorative article by Selma Metzenthin-Raunick, "One Hundred Years *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung*," *American-German Review*, 19, 6 (August/September 1953), 15-16. (The article by Herbert T. Etzler, "German-American Newspapers in Texas" with special reference to the *Texas Volksblatt, 1877-1879*, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 57 (1954), 423-31, makes only a brief reference to the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung*.) It may be for this reason that Wittke's very brief information on the Texas newspapers and the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* (p. 101) is not entirely accurate.

⁴ This and the following information on Texas newspapers is found in Arndt and Olson, pp. 614-635.

⁵ Bieseles, p. 176.

⁶ The most complete historical examination of the German immigration to Texas under the auspices of the *Adelsverein* is presented in Bieseles.

⁷ Bieseles, p. 135.

⁸ D. W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 102-03.

⁹ For an informative account of Lindheimer's life and his activities as a botanist in Texas, see Samuel Wood Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier* (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 132-47. Lindheimer was rather reclusive, particularly in his later years. Neither he nor his family, additionally, left anything in writing of a biographical nature. For this reason, most of the information about Lindheimer's work as an editor must be derived from the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* itself.

¹⁰ Thomas Mann once made this remark about the Lindheimer lineage in the Goethe family: "I believe that the Lindheimer blood from the vicinity of the old Roman frontier, where Mediterranean and barbarian bloodstreams had mingled from time immemorial, was the best, healthiest, most decisive element in the nature of the great poet . . ." (Thomas Mann, ed., selected, introd., *The Permanent Goethe* [New York: Dial, 1948], p. xv.)

¹¹ Local oral tradition occasionally has Lindheimer participate in the battle of San Jacinto itself.

¹² Ferdinand Roemer, *Texas, with Particular Reference to German Immigration and the Physical Appearance of the Country*, tr. Oswald Mueller (San Antonio: Standard Printing Company, 1935), p. 108.

¹³ Glen E. Lich, *The German Texans* (San Antonio: The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, 1981), pp. 50-52.

¹⁴ These advertisements are also a rich source of unassessed cultural information.

¹⁵ Wittke discusses this situation, indirectly, in his chapters on "The Forty-Eighter Renaissance" (pp. 75-102) and "The Radical Press" (pp. 103-26).

¹⁶ Wittke, p. 5.

¹⁷ For an examination of Lindheimer's handling of some of these issues see Bieseles, pp. 191-207 and Benjamin, pp. 90-110.

¹⁸ See Bieseles, pp. 196-203.

¹⁹ Metzenthin-Raunick, p. 16.

²⁰ Metzenthin-Raunick, p. 16.