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Moritz von Fürstenwärther and America

Es ist mir Bedürfniß und ich sehne mich darnach unwiderstehlich den Bücherstaub abzuschütteln, hinaus in die freye Welt und Natur. . . . Enfin, ich liebe frey zu athmen, und freyer um mich zu schauen; und wenn die Freyheit auch nicht für alle Zeiten und für alle Zustände ohne Mischung paßt, so liegt doch gewiß, so wahr das Sonnenlicht leuchtet, in ihr das Wesen, die Bestimmung und das Heil der Menschheit.—Moritz von Fürstenwärther in his letter to Hans von Gagern, February 22, 1824.

Moritz von Fürstenwärther's 1817 mission to the United States has been the subject of only one scholarly investigation.¹ Since this was, however, based on insufficient research and prejudiced by the political climate of World War I, this article will present a factually more accurate although brief account of Fürstenwärther's American experiences in conjunction with previously unknown biographical data.²

Moritz Friedrich von Fürstenwärther was born on January 25, 1781, in the county of Limburg as a fourth-generation descendant of the morganatic marriage between Duke Friedrich von Zweibrücken and a commoner's daughter from Meisenheim.³ Two of Moritz's numerous cousins were Hans von Gagern (who became the guardian of the early orphaned Moritz) and Ludwig von Closen, who (like several other Fürstenwärthers) served as an officer with the Deux-Ponts regiment under the French crown. Closen and at least one other relative took part in the American campaign of this regiment (composed of Germans from Zweibrücken) which played a distinctive role at Yorktown. As aide-de-camp to General Rochambeau, Closen acted as liaison officer between the French commander and George Washington, and was awarded membership in the Society of the Cincinnati.⁴ What subjects Moritz studied while attending the University of Jena is unclear; his eventual knowledge of foreign languages included Latin, French, English,

Italian, and Spanish. Retrospectively Gagern characterized his youthful cousin as an impetuous enthusiast without a sense of single-minded purpose. During the Napoleonic wars in Spain, Moritz attained the rank of captain of the grenadiers.⁵ After unexpectedly resigning his commission, Moritz served as secretary to his guardian, who headed the Dutch legation at the Congress of Vienna. In order to prevent the unruly youth, who seems to have become somewhat of a financial and social burden, from joining the insurgents in South America—a venture that would have compromised Gagern's sensitive diplomatic position—Gagern sent his cousin on a fact-finding mission to America. Gagern took this initiative after the failure of his own recent efforts to have the German governments alleviate the plight of the ever increasing numbers of emigrants en route to North America.

According to Gagern's detailed instructions,⁶ Fürstenwärther was to examine the conditions encountered by the German and Swiss emigrants on a typical route from the Rhine via a Dutch port of embarkation to the United States, where he would investigate their reception, social integration, and reputation. Fürstenwärther responded with a series of letters and reports, which Gagern (without seeking Fürstenwärther's permission)⁷ combined into the book, *Der Deutsche in Nord-Amerika*, published under his own name by Cotta in 1818.⁸ Although Gagern now was no longer the Dutch envoy, he had the work brought to the attention of the Frankfurt Diet (July 15, 1819), where it elicited a few words of formal recognition but no concerted action.⁹ Apart from offering statistical information, advice, and specific warnings for future emigrants, Fürstenwärther documented the deplorable treatment and exploitation of German transients and emphatically denounced the prevailing trade in redemptioners that had led to labelling them "white slaves." (In a later letter, Fürstenwärther revised his condemnation of this practice and accepted indenture as a necessary evil.)¹⁰ To reduce the victimization of prospective German emigrants, *Der Deutsche in Nord-Amerika* endorsed Gagern's previous proposals to establish associations for the relief of emigrants, modelled on the German Society of Philadelphia, and to organize colonization societies for large-scale settlements abroad. Coming at a time when, as Gagern stated, the fate of Germans in North America was shrouded by obscurity,¹¹ Fürstenwärther's mission (which Gagern financed at his own considerable expense) was a novel and meritorious enterprise. The publication in 1818 of its findings may be considered the beginning of a new type of literature long before comparable books became numerous and fashionable in the 1830s and 1840s. According to Edward Everett, the German-educated Harvard professor who subjected *Der Deutsche in Nord-Amerika* to an angry and error-riddled review,¹² this book was soon serving "as a model for a new class of writers, on America."¹³ Ironically, however, Fürstenwärther's report was construed by some, particularly Germans of education and means, to encourage rather than to deter from emigration to the United States, even though Fürstenwärther had anticipated the very opposite reaction.¹⁴

The timeliness of Gagern and Fürstenwärther's appeal to establish societies for organized emigration and settlement in North America is evident from the fact that at the end of 1818 the founding of such a corporation named *Gagernsche Gesellschaft* was announced.¹⁵ Although its formal exist-

tence was short-lived, it led to two separate expeditions intended to make the necessary arrangements for organized settlements of German and Swiss emigrants abroad. An account of Ludwig Gall's overwhelmingly disappointing experiences in the eastern United States (where he arrived against Fürstenwärther's advice) is found in his book, *Meine Auswanderung nach den Vereinigten Staaten in Nord-Amerika, im Frühjahr 1819 und meine Rückkehr nach der Heimath im Winter 1820* (Trier, 1822), which includes extensive references to Gagern and Fürstenwärther.¹⁶ Gall's friend Ferdinand Ernst, who went west and eventually founded the town of Vandalia in Illinois, published his far more positive observations in *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise durch das Innere der vereinigten [sic] Staaten von Nord-Amerika im Jahre 1819* (Hildesheim, 1820), which likewise show his indebtedness to Fürstenwärther.¹⁷ Although he lent his support and advice to Gall, Fürstenwärther was from the very outset skeptical of Gall's qualifications and schemes. Furthermore, Fürstenwärther was evidently disappointed that he had not been given this assignment, and in a separate venture without Gagern's authorization, he tried unsuccessfully to arrange for organized German colonies on tracts of land owned by George Parish in New York state.¹⁸

In a letter from Philadelphia dated September 12, 1821 (on the eve of his return to Europe), Fürstenwärther asked Friedrich Rapp, somewhat naively, to let him know the "secret" of the Harmony Society's spectacular success, a knowledge which Fürstenwärther considered crucial in order to promote the welfare of future German emigrants.¹⁹ Although Fürstenwärther never visited the Society, the information he transmitted to Gagern must have helped to contribute to the latter's lack of prejudice towards the Rappists' controversial American enterprise.²⁰

Because of diminishing financial support by his cousin and the political upheavals in Central and South America, Fürstenwärther found himself unable to include these regions in his mission as had originally been planned.²¹ During his prolonged first stay in the United States, Fürstenwärther met at least twice with the then Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in late 1817 and presented to him a copy of Gagern's 1817 printed brochure on German emigration.²² From Philadelphia, Fürstenwärther conveyed to Adams on April 22, 1819, a letter by Gagern as well as a copy of *Der Deutsche in Nord-Amerika*. In his lengthy reply of June 14, Adams outlined with characteristic stylistic elegance the official American policy on emigration from Germany. (As far as I have been able to ascertain, the original version of this important historical document has never been completely and accurately published.) "The Government of the United States," Adams emphasized, "has never adopted any measure to encourage or invite emigrants from any part of Europe."²³ Although the government was continuing to admit them for the obvious benefit of the country, it would have to treat them like its own citizens, according to the constitutional principle of equality; emigrants arriving from Germany could not, therefore, expect to be granted special favors and privileges. This principle, Adams stated, applied also to Fürstenwärther's own recent request for a position in the American civil service. Fürstenwärther deemed the Adams letter so important that he forwarded the original and a copy to Gagern by two separate ships. "Sie

werden es selbst für ein halbofficielles Document ansehen. In diesem Lichte betrachtet man leider auch mich selbst," he added regretfully.²⁴

Another important personal and diplomatic contact at this time arose from Fürstenwärther's friendship with the Portuguese ambassador to the United States, Correa de Serra, who through Fürstenwärther learned of Gagern's optimistic plans for organized German emigration to Brazil and expressed a keen interest in them.²⁵ This paved the way for further semi-official negotiations by Gagern to facilitate the German exodus to Latin America, which were undoubtedly reinforced by the coolness of Adams' response. Fürstenwärther was also instrumental in Gagern's attempt to interest the Spanish government in a large-scale German and Swiss colonization in the province of Texas as early as 1819.²⁶

Upon his return to Germany in May of 1820, the impecunious Fürstenwärther sought a financial arrangement from the king of Bavaria, whose family had assumed some legal obligations stemming from the morganatic Fürstenwärther branch of the house of Zweibrücken. Fürstenwärther rejected a government office offered to him at Gagern's request and asked for a cash settlement instead; eventually he was granted a modest annuity. While the Bavarian bureaucracy was slowly processing his request, Fürstenwärther was impatiently intent on returning to the United States as soon as possible. Knowing this, Mayor Johann Smidt of Bremen suggested that the Hanseatic cities appoint Fürstenwärther their first permanent diplomatic representative in Washington. In his well-intentioned but futile recommendation of October 4, 1820, Smidt wrote:

Was über seine Sendung . . . im Druck erschienen ist, hat in Deutschland Sensation erregt, und ist mit Beyfall aufgenommen. Fürstenwärther selbst hat dadurch einen großen Namen bekommen, den er durch seine persönlichen Eigenschaften bey näherer Bekanntschaft vollkommen rechtfertigt. Er ist ein Mann von vieler Bildung, stattlichem Äußern und sehr solidem Character, er hat studirt und ist der englischen und anderer Sprachen mächtig, dabey einfach in Sitten, mäßig, arbeitsam, ernst, und ohne Ansprüche. Kurz er stellt sich ganz so dar, wie man sich einen soliden Amerikaner zu denken pflegt . . . [Herr von Fürstenwärther] versicherte mich wiederholt, daß er das mäßigste Auskommen in Amerika, einer glänzenden Anstellung in Deutschland vorziehen würde, indem ihm die dortigen politischen Ansichten und die ganze Lebensweise so sehr zugesagt, daß es ihm schwer werde, sich in die Europäischen Formen und Verhältnisse wieder behaglich zu finden.²⁷

Smidt also introduced Fürstenwärther to the wealthy Stuttgart publisher Johann Friedrich Cotta,²⁸ who was anxious to receive Fürstenwärther's future reports from America for his journals (by virtue of which, according to Moritz Mohl, Cotta rather than the Federal Diet represented Germany).²⁹ Fürstenwärther thought Philadelphia most suitable for his proposed task of surveying "Politik, Statistik, Handel, Gewerbe, Technik, Erfindungen, Natur und Kunst, Literatur, den gesellschaftlichen und moralischen Zustand," in the entire western hemisphere. "Mein Hauptzweck," Fürstenwärther professed to Cotta, "ist [,] jenen Welttheil dem unsrigen näher zu bringen und fester an ihn zu knüpfen, und [auf] alles aufmerksam zu seyn, was wie alle Beziehungen insbesondere Deutschland Vortheil und Gewinn

bringen kann."³⁰ In addition, Fürstenwärther hoped to improve the poor image of Germany and Germans abroad, particularly by acquainting Americans with the best of German literature.

While Fürstenwärther's affairs in Munich were still undecided, monies advanced by Cotta enabled him to sail for Philadelphia in early 1821. This voyage and Fürstenwärther's second stay in the United States proved a total disaster. Fürstenwärther's secretive and markedly paranoid disposition suddenly deteriorated into a temporary persecution complex that forced him to spend most of his time in the Philadelphia insane asylum. Two members of the Harmony Society, who were evidently conveying a letter from their patriarch Georg Rapp to Fürstenwärther, wrote on September 12, 1821, to Friedrich Rapp: "Mr. Von Fürstenwärther we met in the hospital as a man who has almost been robbed of his reason. No one claims to know why. Father's letter was given to him, but he said nothing about it, as he is not even capable of grasping its contents."³¹ Fürstenwärther's months of mental instability were accompanied by uncontrolled spending of monies obtained from drafts on Cotta, while none of the promised reports were forthcoming. When Fürstenwärther in late 1821 arrived in Hamburg, his paranoia had subsided, but he was hopelessly in debt to Cotta. In his letters to Gagern, Fürstenwärther subsequently revealed his hitherto futile love for an unnamed American girl in Philadelphia, which may well have been among the roots of his temporary insanity.

While trying to eke out a living as an author-compiler and language teacher in the Bonn area (where, ironically, the authorities falsely suspected him of recruiting emigrants for America), Fürstenwärther unsuccessfully renewed his petition to obtain a lump sum settlement from the Bavarian government, so that he might repay Cotta, marry the girl, and move to the Mississippi, "wo man mit wenigem Gelde . . . reich ist."³² Without any financial support from Gagern or Cotta, Fürstenwärther's final effort to return to Philadelphia (1823 or 1824) foundered in Amsterdam for lack of funds. After refusing an offer by Froriep in Weimar to work for the latter's publishing house,³³ Fürstenwärther eventually became a tutor for the sons of the Prince of Bentheim in the provincially backward Westphalian town of Rheda (near Fürstenwärther's place of birth). Persistent financial difficulties, dissatisfaction with his social status and lack of a professional career, the hopelessness of his American affair, despondency over the political despotism prevailing in the German lands, and Cotta's deliberate failure to respond to Fürstenwärther's frantic letters and manuscript submissions—all these combined to intensify his self-pitying depressions and make him hint repeatedly, in letters to Gagern, at a desperate final measure. He died by suicide; on May 1, 1826, Baron vom Stein notified his friend Gagern: "Fürstenwärther hat sich ersäuft in einem Anfall von Schwermut."³⁴

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Notes

1. Max J. Kohler, "An Important European Mission to Investigate American Immigration Conditions and John Quincy Adams' Relations Thereto (1817-1818)," *Deutsch-Amerikanische Geschichtsblätter*, 17 (1917), 393-415.

2. I am grateful to Baron von Gagern of Neuenbürg (West Germany) for granting me unlimited access to the pertinent documents of the Nachlaß von Gagern (hereafter referred to as NVG) in the Bundesarchiv, Außenstelle Frankfurt/M.

3. Joh. Keiper, "Die Freiherren von Fürstenwärther," *Mitteilungen des Historischen Vereins der Pfalz*, 36 (1916), 55. A brief biographical sketch of Moritz von Fürstenwärther is found in Hans von Gagern's *Mein Antheil an der Politik* (Stuttgart, 1823-33), III, 151-153. I have supplemented this with information from unpublished Fürstenwärther letters in NVG, Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach, and the Staatsarchiv Bremen.

4. For Closen's biography, see *The Revolutionary Journal of Baron Ludwig von Closen 1780-1783*, tr. and ed. Evelyn M. Acomb (Chapel Hill, 1958).

5. Presumably on the British side, since he later named the publisher Julius Campe in Hamburg as a reference, according to Johann Smidt's letter of October 4 to the Senate of Bremen (hereafter JS). Original in the Staatsarchiv Bremen. I am indebted to Archivdirektor Müller for making this document available to me.

Campe had likewise served in the campaigns against Napoleon. See Edda Ziegler, *Julius Campe. Der Verleger Heinrich Heines* (Hamburg, 1976), p. 62.

6. [Moritz von Fürstenwärther], *Der Deutsche in Nord-Amerika* (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1818), pp. 3-10.

7. Fürstenwärther, "Anticritik. An den Herausgeber," *Amerikanische Ansichten von dem Gottesdienst und andern Eigenheiten der Deutschen*, No. 2 (Philadelphia, Feb. 1820), p. 15.

8. Although the title page bears no author's name, the introduction is signed by Gagern, to whom Cotta's advertisements ascribed the book.

9. *Protokolle der deutschen Bundes-Versammlung*, §148.

10. Letter to Gagern from Philadelphia, August 29, 1819 (hereafter GP). Original in Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

11. *Der Deutsche in Nord-Amerika*, p. 3.

12. *North American Review*, No. 28 = NS No. 3 (1820), 1-19.

13. "Schmidt and Gall on America," *North American Review*, 17 = NS 8 (1823), 91.

14. GP.

15. *Priveligirte Liste der Börsenhalle*, No. 2058 (Hamburg, Feb. 10, 1819). Also *Neue Speyerer Zeitung*, No. 17 (Feb. 9, 1819).

16. Pp. 13-14, 23-24, et passim.

17. Pp. v-vi, 11, 111. Cf. also Gall, pp. 25, 27, 32.

18. GP.

19. *A Documentary History of the Indiana Decade of the Harmony Society 1814-1824*, comp. and ed. Karl J. R. Arndt, II (Indianapolis, 1978), 55-56.

20. Documented in NVG.

21. *Der Deutsche in Nord-Amerika*, p. 10.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

23. Quotation from the original in NVG. I am currently preparing the publication of its text and context.

24. GP.

25. GP.

26. Gagern's letter to Luis de Onís, August 1, 1819 (NVG).

27. JS.

28. Fürstenwärther's letter to Cotta, Oct. 5, 1820. Original in Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

29. *Briefe an Cotta. Vom Vormärz bis Bismarck. 1833-1863*, ed. Herbert Schiller (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1934), p. 106.

30. Letter to Cotta, Oct. 15, 1820. Original in Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

31. Ed. Arndt, II, 282.

32. Letter to Gagern, March 1, 1823 (NVG).

33. For pragmatic reasons, I have here and elsewhere consciously omitted any discussion of the important connections between Fürstenwärther, Gagern, and Goethe.

34. Freiherr vom Stein, *Briefe und amtliche Schriften*, ed. Erich Botzenhart and Walther Hubatsch (Stuttgart, n.d.), VI, 980.