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German Emigration to North America, 1817-18: The Gagern-Fürstenwärther Mission and Report

In the year 1817, a young German aristocrat, Moritz von Fürstenwärther, arrived in the United States to undertake a special mission. Unlike his near contemporary, the high-born Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, who came to America fourteen years later to investigate prison practices while observing life in the new republic, Fürstenwärther's mission was to report on the fate of the many German emigrants arriving in America at that time.

German emigration in 1817 had markedly increased, particularly from the southwest German states. A series of poor harvests caused by unseasonably severe weather had led to high food prices and famine among the common people. Hans von Gagern, first author of the above report and native of the Palatinate located in the area of heavy emigration, wrote:

Distress, need and anxiety appeared in all European realms. Especially in Germany it took many forms. If in the past two centuries Germans had been touched by the desire to emigrate, it was this time in 1817 the desire increased in even greater measure, especially among those less well off. This phenomenon occurred in Württemberg, Swabia, and especially in the Palatinate.

A recent account of these years by Mack Walker, historian of German emigration, provides graphic documentation of the distressing circumstances.¹

Among the thousands of would-be emigrants abandoning their homes to find a better life abroad, many headed for North America. Families and individuals—farmers, laborers and artisans—sold what little they had and hit the road on foot, in wagons, or for those with some means, by riverboat down the Rhine, all traveling north to reach Dutch ports where they hoped to find westward passage.

This unregulated German crowd, joined also by Swiss Confederation neighbors to the south, became a serious burden to communities along the main Rhine valley route, and in the cities of the Netherlands, especially at the port of Amsterdam. The situation was made even worse by a counterflow of people who had exhausted slim

resources in the often weeks-long delays to secure passage. Many returnees on their homeward route had to resort to begging and theft to survive.

At the time of the emigration crisis, Hans von Gagern (1766-1852) was serving as minister-representative of the Netherlands' Court at the German Federal Diet, Frankfurt-on-Main. Of noble family in the Duchy of Orange-Nassau, one of the small states in the German Palatinate, or Pfalz, Gagern had served as minister to his native Duchy of Nassau prior to the Napoleonic invasion of Germany in 1805.² After Napoleon's defeat in 1813 at Leipzig and withdrawal of his forces to France, Gagern became minister for the Netherlands' Court now ruled by the newly crowned Orange prince, William I. Following the Congress of Vienna, 1814-15, where Gagern represented the Dutch Court, Gagern had been appointed Netherlands' ambassador to the German Federal Diet, representing the Duchy of Luxembourg, now part of the Netherlands' territory.

In May 1817, as a result of the chaotic emigrant situation in Holland, Gagern received a dispatch from the Dutch Court stating that by mid-June "emigrants shall be admitted to the royal Netherlands' territory only if inhabitants of the kingdom stand for their stopover expenses."³ Gagern was directed to bring this resolution to the attention of the Diet, make answer, and disseminate the ruling through German newspapers and every other means available.

Addressing the Diet in early June, Gagern appealed to his fellow Diet representatives on grounds of German honor and humane concern. He asked them to call on their governments to take action to advise and better control the emigrants.

Not content with whatever measures the Diet might subsequently take, Gagern's personal concern moved him to devise a plan to inform himself, as well as members of the Diet, by investigating the situation through a firsthand observer. He wanted detailed information not only on conditions emigrants faced on the way to and in Amsterdam itself, but in addition, to discover how those emigrants who finally obtained passage to North America fared on board ship and after arrival.

To answer these questions and undertake this mission, Gagern recruited a relative, his nephew Moritz von Fürstenwärther.⁴ Fürstenwärther, like Gagern, was of noble descent, but from a Palatine family of reduced means as a result of Napoleonic reforms that had deprived them of former properties and income. Gagern had become Fürstenwärther's guardian when his parents died in his youth.

According to Gagern's account, Fürstenwärther was a "restless spirit, not in accord with himself." After spending some time in Jena, probably as student at the university, Fürstenwärther took part in the Spanish War of Independence against Napoleon. When he returned to Germany, his liberal bent inspired him with the idea of going to South America to take part in insurgencies there seeking to throw off Spanish colonial rule. At this juncture, Gagern, concerned for the future of his restless ward, conceived the idea of selecting Fürstenwärther for the North American mission "to answer my questions, and while there, to test and let mature his resolve in relation to South America."⁵

No evidence suggests how old Fürstenwärther was when he agreed to undertake the assignment—probably in his twenties—or how long the expected duration of the

mission was. His final report covered a period of some nine months, of which six were in the United States. Despite his supposed restless and wayward spirit, during and after the end of his mission, he wrote perceptive letters and an informative, well-organized report on his observations and experiences.

The report published by Gagern in Germany in 1818 was titled *The German in North America*. This small volume contained an introduction, mission instructions, and an epilogue written by Gagern. Excerpts from Fürstenwärther's letters, his formal report, and various newspaper enclosures and documents sent from the United States provided the main content.⁶

There are few references to this mission and report in German-American research literature in the United States. Walker, cited above, mentions it. One writer misrepresents the mission, stating that its purpose was "to inquire into the subject of German emigration in the United States and to present as gloomy a picture as possible." Careful reading of the report hardly justifies this judgment. A more recent German account provides extensive documentation of the emigration scene in southwest Germany, 1816-17, including documents relating to the mission and excerpts from Fürstenwärther's report.⁷ The present article provides a full account of the mission and report for benefit of readers in the United States.

In his pre-trip instructions to Fürstenwärther, Gagern exhorted his nephew:

Dedicate yourself to the service of human kind and your poor countrymen.
... Everything that relates to this situation you should examine with great care and leave nothing unobserved that bears on the future for lessening the difficulties and for better management of the situation.⁸

Fürstenwärther was to begin his investigations "along the way, in the Dutch harbor and on the sea." Once in America he was to provide information on a great variety of subjects: what happened when emigrants arrived; how indenture contracts handled; how did Native Americans view the German emigrant; what was the state of the German language and that of their religious practices; what were the German settlers' attitudes toward their homeland, persistence of the German language and their religion. Gagern also had questions relating to occupations, wages, prices and ways of acquiring land.

Besides making enquiries about German settlements, Gagern wanted information about settlements of other emigrant groups that might apply to German efforts to establish colonies. Of the Spanish settlements in Florida and Louisiana Gagern noted: "Your acquaintance with the Spanish language will be of great help to you." In process of investigating French settlements, Gagern warned Fürstenwärther, a former opponent of Napoleon: "Your European partisan spirit must remain neutral." The German animus toward the French apparently still ran strong in 1817, two years after Waterloo. What follows draws selectively from Fürstenwärther's letter excerpts and report contained in *The German in North America*—observations that contribute to our understanding of the German emigrant-immigrant experience.

Fürstenwärther reached Amsterdam on the first leg of his mission 27 June 1817. His first letter to Gagern, dated 3 July, described what he saw:

I have found the suffering of most of the emigrants far greater and the situation for all lacking in guidance and assistance. . . . You must challenge the humanity and honor of the German name to seize upon the quickest means of remedy to alleviate the present evils. And in future, when further emigrations take place, [you must] find better ways for making suitable arrangements and better organization.

I encountered on the road crowds of families turning back, all of them destitute and reduced to begging. In Cologne, the government made provisions for this, cared for these returnees and provided means of transport to their homes. In Holland, however, the crowd of these unfortunates is indescribably large. All the cities are overwhelmed with them.⁹

The author went on to observe that for those with means, things generally went well. This group found ways to embark, but often after long delays. Those with little or no means "were at the mercy of the money lenders and unscrupulous ship agents who treated them in a shameless manner." Swiss emigrants, by contrast, fared better through intervention by the caring Swiss Consul in Amsterdam. In addition, the Swiss government provided money for the journey to Amsterdam—two louis d'or—and for those who turned back, money for lodging along the way. Before leaving their homeland, Swiss emigrants received "certificates of domicile" which guaranteed re-entry to their homeland. By contrast, many German emigrants—for example those from Württemberg—had to renounce their citizenship, leaving them no place to return.

Fürstenwärther's first letter included a sample contract which was supposed to be read and signed by the ship's captain and the individual emigrant before departing. The contract specified fares, food, water and other provisions for up to sixty days, which included time on board in port and the thirty some days for the sea journey, depending on weather. An adult's fare was 170 gulden (about \$68.00)¹⁰; the fare for children four years of age and older half that; those under four traveled free.

The contract listed each week's "menu" by day, e.g., a Sunday's ration included "a pound of pork with barley—two cups for five fares." A measure of water and beer was allotted per day per person so long as the beer remained drinkable. When it became too bitter to drink, an equal amount of water replaced it. The latter had to be used for cooking as well. Who did the cooking and how was not specified. Vinegar was also supplied for "cleanliness, to keep the air fresh and invigorate the people."

Despite the contract stipulations, Fürstenwärther reported frequent violations and extra-legal maneuvers by ship owners and captains. Many of the ships provided insufficient food of poor quality. To increase profits, emigrants were crowded into a smaller ship space than the law specified. If doctors accompanied the ships, they often lacked necessary medical supplies, or worse, were "ignorant men, barbers." These conditions combined to make for frequent high death rates during the voyage. For

those that survived, many arrived in America in desperate condition: ill, demoralized and seriously undernourished.

Fürstenwärther embarked for America on a U.S. ship, the brig *Ohio*, on 7 July from Helder, a port north of Amsterdam. His letter of that date reported a ship there had remained in port for five weeks with passengers on board awaiting a full complement of fares and provisions. Twenty-eight passengers had died, including "25 small and nursing children."¹¹

In his report, the author noted that ships transporting emigrants were generally of "the worst kind, old and in disrepair, the captains ignorant, inexperienced and brutal men." He emphasized: "American ships are the best. . . . They sail faster, treatment is better, and responsibility of the captains greater."¹²

Fürstenwärther's ship landed at Philadelphia where he spent most of his six-months mission. Needing time to settle in, his first letter from the United States, written 28 October, discussed, among other subjects, indenture contracts which almost all impoverished emigrants resorted to as means of paying for their passage. Fürstenwärther often returned to this topic in his later letters and report, providing information from a variety of sources relating to how contracts were made, conditions stipulated, and how individuals so "bound" fared in their subsequent service.

An able-bodied emigrant with some employable skill unable to pay his or her fare before embarking was taken on board with the understanding they would be bound by an indenture contract and would not to leave the ship until such contract was concluded. Fürstenwärther described what took place:

As soon as a ship arrives in America the captain leaves it to make it known to the newspapers. Artisans and farmers, often from distant regions, then make their appearance to look for such people they can use. They pay the captain the fare and take them into work and service. [The parties involved] conclude a special contract of indenture that binds them for a certain number of years.¹³

A representative of the Philadelphia German Society came on board to observe the contract process to make sure the conditions were fairly stated and the emigrant understood his or her obligation. A "Register" was kept listing the details of these contracts. The Society representative also enquired concerning passenger treatment during the voyage. If gross neglect was discovered, the Society carried out an investigation. In one egregious, widely-reported case, a captain was charged with "abusing" women on board. In another, 300 persons had died due to bad treatment during the voyage.

According to Fürstenwärther, there had been some 6,000 emigrant arrivals in Philadelphia so far in 1817. At the time of his letter, five ships were docked there with "some 200 persons of all sexes and ages who had not paid their fares."¹⁴ For persons not immediately "bound" on arrival, the ship's captain was required to provide care on board for thirty days. If by then some had not yet been bound, these individuals were additionally charged for their maintenance, putting them further in debt to any future

contract employer. As last resort, captains would sometimes let these detainees go for a "trifling price," or put them out on the streets.

Typically, a bound individual, or "redemptioneer," served from two to four years. Paying off a full adult fare required four years. If a redemptioneer's family included children over four years old, the time could be longer, since the latter were obligated for a half fare. Pennsylvania law stated that no one could be bound outside the state, nor could husband and wife or children be separated without consent.

A model of an indenture contract used in Philadelphia for a minor required father's consent and the minor's "own free will." The contract specified that during the time of indenture, the youth would "dutifully serve his designated master who is executor, steward and agent." The master's obligation was "to provide adequate food, drink, clothing, laundry and living quarters, and also provide six weeks of schooling in every year of his service, and at conclusion of same to provide him with two full outfits of clothing, of which one is new."¹⁵

Because being "bound" was often misunderstood in Germany, Fürstenwärther took pains to note the difference between "indenture" and "slavery," noting the former was voluntary and time-limited. However, abuses did occur "that may well cast a shadow on the German name and make it scorned." An expression used by some for those under contract was not "bind and serve," but "buy and sell." Fürstenwärther had made the acquaintance of a former compatriot from Kentucky who claimed that speculators bought up indenture contracts, transported the individuals into southern states and sold them at public auction to the highest bidder. In Kentucky, according to this informant, indentured German emigrants were referred to as "Dutch" or "white slaves."¹⁶ At the time, the Philadelphia Register of emigrants showed that among some 6,000 Germans and Swiss listed, nearly half were "bound." Farmers were in greater demand than artisans. As for artisans or mechanics, those with simple skills whose products were necessities readily found work: masons, carpenters, wheelwrights, cabinet makers, butchers, smiths, cobblers, tailors, bakers, etc. Trades that supplied luxury products were not in demand. The latter could be bought more cheaply from abroad.¹⁷

Fürstenwärther observed that the artisan employed in America on his own "lives better on a third part of his earnings than he does in Germany with it all. In this unique land, all industry and trades are independent and free from all restrictions of craft guilds and government regulation." Artisans could earn about \$1.50 per day. On the distaff side, German maids, much in demand, could earn weekly with board \$1.25 to \$1.50, with cooking and other skills up to \$2.00. As for living costs, in Philadelphia room and board ran from \$3.00 to \$6.00 per week, a pair of boots cost \$12.00-\$14.00, a dress suit—the material and making \$36.00-\$40.00. For a farmer, a horse cost about \$60.00, a head of cattle \$15.00, a sheep \$1.50.¹⁸

For farmers, several arrangements existed for acquiring land, depending on seller and location. Buying government land was the cheapest and safest way to acquire such property. Bought at a land office, an acre cost \$2.00, with 160 acres the minimum purchase. With a down payment of one-fourth the total cost, the balance could be paid off over four years. Buying land from speculators was not only more costly but risky. A French group purchased 3,000 acres on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania

from speculators and founded the colony of Gallipolis, but later lost the land because of an invalid title.¹⁹

In November 1817, Fürstenwärther traveled to Baltimore, destination for a number of emigrant ships. His visit left him with unfavorable impressions. No laws existed in Maryland, as they did in Pennsylvania, to regulate indenture contracts with the result that redemptioners were often treated badly. Fürstenwärther recommended that emigrants not able to pay their passage to America should not ship to Baltimore. At the time, no German aid society existed in Baltimore to look into abuses and petition for protective legislation.

Fürstenwärther's November letter from Baltimore reported a situation that caused a great stir among local Germans. Two German emigrant families had been indentured by free Negroes, of which a number had settled in the city. The aroused German community pooled resources and bought the German families back and "pledged to prevent further such abuses." Later Fürstenwärther commented on the relationship between Negroes and Germans:

The German does not get along with them. The German is viewed by them with envy and jealousy. . . . The Negro has his natural cunning, his greater cleverness and facility with the English language. These give him a great superiority over the artless, good-natured German farmer. The Negro regards himself as a higher being and looks down on the German.²⁰

In Fürstenwärther's view, the indenture system, despite occasional abuses by both parties in the contract, conferred important advantages. During service time, the redemptioner learned English, became familiar with local customs, acquired skills and made contacts that would facilitate eventually working on his own. In some cases, where a redemptioner chose to work for his employer beyond his required contract time, he could earn money to set himself up in a trade or buy land to begin farming.

From Baltimore, the author traveled to Washington, D.C., where he twice visited John Quincy Adams, then Secretary of State. Fürstenwärther's 28 December letter recorded his impressions of the visit with Adams: "I would have liked to avoid this formality, only it would not be practicable." Fürstenwärther had been prepared to find Adams "dull, and very cold," but, to the contrary, found him "civil and friendly toward me. He listened to me with great interest." On the author's second visit, Adams held forth on the U. S. government's view toward German emigration:

We of the government here have been of the opinion that the European states, especially the German governments, do not like to see emigration. For political reasons in order to not disturb good relationships, we avoid favoring the same, or the appearance of doing so. By the same token, if the German princes did not want to put obstacles in the way of German emigration, then we would also be inclined to favor it.²¹

Adams added that in America, "as a matter of national pride we affect a great indifference toward foreign emigration. The opinion seems to be that the people in the United States can make progress enough without them." Depending on Fürstenwärther's grasp of English after three months in the United States, his conversation with Adams could have been in English or German since Adams was fluent in the latter.²²

Through his reading, the author became aware that earlier American leaders had expressed views on German emigrants. Benjamin Franklin for one had voiced serious misgivings. He feared too great numbers of Germans would make Pennsylvania a German colony. "Instead of their Learning our Language, we must learn their's, or live as in a foreign Country."²³ Later, he used even stronger language: "Those who come here are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation." He further complained: "I suppose in a few years they will also be necessary in the Assembly, to tell one half of our Legislators what the other half say." Franklin did admit to some positive German attributes: "They have their Virtues, their industry and frugality is exemplary; They are excellent husbandmen and contribute greatly to the improvement of the Country."²⁴

Thomas Jefferson also addressed the subject. Speaking of the "inconveniences" of importing large numbers of foreigners, he expressed concern with their adapting to our "peculiar" form of government, "a composition of the freest principles of the English constitution, with others derived from natural right and reason." Jefferson feared that emigrants from absolute monarchies such as existed in the German states would bring ways of thinking foreign to democratic ways, or if they turned their back on their past "it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness, passing as usual from one extreme to another."²⁵

Fürstenwärther's observations made during his visit 1817-18 showed that for the most part Franklin's and Jefferson's fears had not been realized. Although isolated German settlements in the interior still used German exclusively, these were exceptions. The author noted: "The past ten years have shown an eclipse of the German language and a strong tendency to use English. Business was now conducted in English. In traveling one heard no other language." In his Philadelphia contacts, Fürstenwärther found that even among the most cultured and wealthy German immigrants, German speech was not pure and held in little regard. The language had "changed into a dialect mixed with English." Germans had translated family names into English equivalents. He further observed that although emigrants' children still learned German it was "but seldom completely. The youth are against everything that is German. They do not know the land of their forefathers and are ashamed of their origins. With grandchildren, the language is usually lost completely."²⁶

Among the educated there were still those who remained of "German mind." Often associated with Lutheran congregations, they chose to retain the German language in their services. For this purpose, such churches established classes for their young members to study language and religion.

As for German-American politics half-a-century after Jefferson expressed his concern, Fürstenwärther observed:

The German in America, particularly in the country, shows in one way that he does not particularly acknowledge the country of his ancestors. One can think he did not come from Germany. He is an ardent Democrat. . . . The Hessians are a good example. They served during the Revolution in the English army. Most remained in America.²⁷

Fürstenwärther added the "Hessians" were "especially democratic" while retaining German characteristics of "bluntness, crudeness and obstinacy."

Speaking of German Lutherans in the United States, the author reported that differences in regard to using German had sometimes caused problems. "Many churches, particularly in the large cities, alternate German and English preaching. In earlier years, this caused great dissension, even angry scenes in the Lutheran congregation in Philadelphia. One part went along with it and another part challenged it."²⁸ Those challenging the dual service wanted an English service only. Eventually, the two groups went their separate ways in different churches.

To Gagern's question—"Is the German esteemed in America?"—Fürstenwärther wrote that for every German the way stands open to office and preferment. He is esteemed because of his industry, thriftiness, frugality and sincerity, his calm disposition.²⁹ However, Fürstenwärther added a qualifier:

As a mass this group did not lend itself to producing a favorable opinion. The number of educated Germans who came to this country, or who settled here, was always small. . . . The abuses and misery, the impoverished condition and demoralization of many recent German arrivals had strengthened negative impressions among the native born.

How was author received during his visit to America; what were his impressions of the social and cultural scene? Not too long after his arrival in Philadelphia, Fürstenwärther wrote Gagern on 15 November:

Your assignment for me is not an easy one. The subject is large and many-sided. The sources on which I must draw are not so easily accessible as you believe. Many require continuing investigation and observation. First I have to become known. . . . Then you tell me that people here take a great interest in my mission. This lies not in the American character.³⁰

Later in the same letter Fürstenwärther mentioned that an H. Dupont, a prominent Philadelphian, had given him advice, extended invitations to visit, and provided a letter of introduction to a General Mason, an important figure in Washington, D.C. DuPont, had also introduced Fürstenwärther to M. Saughan, president of the English Society for the Support of Immigrants. Saughan was also librarian for the American Philosophical Society. The Society was a venerable institution in the city, founded 1743 by Benjamin Franklin.³¹ Among its members, according to Fürstenwärther, some

were of the "wealthiest and cultured local Germans." The author was invited to become a member, giving him free access to the library where he probably found the previously mentioned Franklin and Jefferson writings.

About the same time, Fürstenwärther became a member of the Monsheim Society, a German group, whose meetings were often devoted to discussing religious and moral questions. He reflected: "It was for me a new as well as an interesting experience to attend such a German gathering in another part of the world."

The author's impressions of a poor emigrant's prospects in coming to America were positive but also realistic. "Thousands, indeed millions of people in this blessed land could find room, success and well-being. One who comes here with only small capital, and even without it, will prosper with hard work. . . . He will certainly find success as farmer or artisan."³² But at the same time he added: "The cares and dangers of the voyage, the many obstacles and difficulties which arise from the lack of knowledge of this country and the language makes for great uncertainties up to now."

The combination of Fürstenwärther's aristocratic nature and German cultural background created a less favorable impression of America. Near the end of his final report, written late April 1818 after six months stay in the United States, he reflected:

I cannot remain silent about some of the defects and the dark sides. One has in this country no notion, indeed, no presentiment, of a higher and more refined life—at least on this earth. One misses everything that can make life on earth more beautiful and refined, every manifestation of higher pleasures and elevated conversations. Coarse materialism and interests are the leading principles of the inhabitants. Lack of sociability, disdainful pride, reserve and coarseness distinguish the masses and repel the European of culture and sensitivity.³³

Americans, the author felt, "did not acknowledge that higher spiritual freedom found only in Europe—mostly in Germany." Yet, for everything that seemed culturally missing in American life, Fürstenwärther admitted much was better: "The American's right to civic freedom, freedom of belief, of speech and press, and in social life. Of these, Americans could be proud."

Preparing Fürstenwärther's letters, report and enclosures for publication, Gagern added an epilogue, a "Final Words" chapter. He wrote: "Herr von Fürstenwärther has responded to the assignment objectively, without bias, and according to his convictions." Admonishing his German Diet colleagues, Gagern wrote:

It would be great foolishness if our governments would be jealous concerning these emigrations, or fear the appearance of disapproval in the eyes of the world. Nothing comes of that. . . . They will always come about naturally for we are overpopulated. . . . If they still take place, it is a subject for reasoning, control and charity. The princes should view those seeking another home, a haven, with patience, with a friendly and compassionate eye.³⁴

Gagern seconded the Fürstenwärther's recommendation that emigration societies be established in Germany to support and cooperate with their counterparts in America. Referring to the former, he added: "I would count it to my honor if they bore my name, or the one who undertook the difficult journey and the investigation."

What impact did Gagern's and Fürstenwärther's efforts have in improving the emigration situation in Germany? After Gagern had first read the Netherlands' Court order to the Diet, June 1817, when he urged action by the German governments affected by the emigration crisis, the subsequent discussion was directed toward restrictive and punitive measures, police actions to control the emigration.³⁵

Some of the affected states did take action. Württemberg ordered compliance to the Dutch demand requiring Netherlands' sponsorship before an emigrant could enter that country; Nassau in the Palatinate required a guarantee of embarkation; Bavaria, a pass and sufficient money to travel across the latter's territory.³⁶

After the published report became available in Germany, the Diet resolved January 1819:

That the designated publication be accepted as a valuable source for improvement of the condition of German emigrants to that part of the world; to give acknowledgement to the author and F [Freiherr] v. Fürstenwärther and hearty thanks for their concerns, and moreover to bring this situation to the immediate attention of their governments.³⁷

Writing in 1820, Fürstenwärther himself acknowledged some small gains resulting directly from his recommendations:

After my report appeared, more societies for the purpose of making emigration more systematic began to be established in Germany. However, because of lack of experience and means to disseminate information, instead of effecting good results, they had only small impact, at least in the beginning.³⁸

Soon after publication, copies of *The German in North America* appeared on this side of the Atlantic with accompanying critical notice. A Dr. Shaeffer, editor of the *Deutscher Freund*, a New York paper, took umbrage at Fürstenwärther's comments about the "dark side and defects" of the American scene. Regarding Fürstenwärther's claim that Americans lacked "nobility of spirit," the editor wrote: "God be thanked we have much here on this American earth to adorn and ennoble life. An order of nobility to be sure we have not. The little word von is not necessary to make a man noble."³⁹

Another German-language paper, the Philadelphia *Amerikanische Ansichten*, published by a Pastor Plitt provided a more sympathetic review.⁴⁰ He praised Gagern as one "in the ranks of esteemed Germans who in times of great affliction acted vigorously for their Fatherland." The editor did note some errors in Fürstenwärther's reporting relating to prices and wages. In 1817-18, the latter had reached "unheard-of highs" due to a banking crisis, and excess of paper money. For example, the dress suit

Fürstenwärther reported costing around \$40.00 cost only \$20.00 in 1820. Plitt also noted that German speech was not so endangered as Fürstenwärther portrayed. "In the coastal cities and their environs German speech will maintain itself so long as the union with the Fatherland exists."

As for Fürstenwärther's remarks on the "dark side in the character of our citizens," Plitt allowed that there was found among some German immigrants a narrow outlook especially marked among uneducated country people—people who were a "thorn in the eye" of cultured Germans living in the United States, but also to visitors of refined backgrounds such as Fürstenwärther. "No one," claimed Plitt, "would gainsay this reaction."

Fürstenwärther's previously cited 1820 letter, written in response to Plitt's review, defended his partly negative assessment of American culture. He observed his purpose in these remarks was to serve warning to "educated and well-off Germans," those who might be considering emigrating to America, "that they not be deceived." Fürstenwärther complained: "Not everything I held for the truth was spoken for the public at large and for the press"—a swipe at his uncle Gagern who apparently published the full text of the report without prior consultation.⁴¹

Later in 1820, an English-language review of the *The German in North America* appeared as lead article in the Boston-published *North American Review*. The article was attributed to editor Edward Everett.⁴² Everett, professor of Greek at Harvard, was no stranger to Germany having spent nearly five years there traveling and studying as a young man. Everett's review gave extended translated excerpts from the book, often interspersed with unflattering observations. Unlike editor Plitt, Everett seemed to entertain a particular animus toward Gagern. In his opening remarks Everett stated: "The gentleman well known to such of our readers as have taken the trouble to follow the train of proceedings at Frankfurt is one of those who must bear a full portion of the blame, which attaches to that assembly of having said much and done nothing."⁴³

According to Everett, Fürstenwärther arrived in Philadelphia "without speaking a word of the language." Given this handicap, Everett wondered how it was possible for "this worthy gentleman [to] talk of what does or does not dwell in the American character."⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Fürstenwärther provides no direct evidence to judge his ability to speak English. If he had no English to begin with, as Everett claimed, he soon must have acquired some facility since he not only communicated with Philadelphia citizens of non-German background, but also seemed able to read reports and documents in English, and occasionally used English words in his writing.

Everett complained of Fürstenwärther's "wishing and striving to keep up the German peculiarities of their countrymen in America." This criticism seems unfair since both he and Gagern accepted the inevitable loss of a German outlook and language among German settlers in America. Fürstenwärther had reflected:

To the German, when the sun sets here in the far west, it seems to him no longer a German but an American sun. He too must change from being German to be reborn again into a second life. This change does not take place quickly, but only by degrees does he become like other people.⁴⁵

In his epilogue, Gagern expressed a similar sentiment: "Our language does not prevail there, but it exists! We can give it friendly help. English is overcoming it. That is not unreasonable. English came before it. If German gives way. . . in no other way can our German families flourish."⁴⁶

Everett's review referred to an earlier article that provided a poignant eye-witness account of the plight of impoverished immigrants who, after arriving in the United States, waited on shipboard for someone to pay their fare and contract their service. Taken from a British publication, the account claimed that the "infamous traffic" in redemptioners was confined to American ships. Subsequent investigation showed the scene described below took place, not on an American ship, but on British vessel out of Amsterdam arriving Philadelphia in 1817:

As we ascended the side of this hulk, a most revolting scene of want and misery presented itself. Mr. [. . .] inquired if there were any shoemakers on board. He [the captain] called in the Dutch language for shoemakers. The poor fellows came running up with unspeakable delight, no doubt anticipating relief from their loathsome dungeon. Their cloths [*sic*], if rags deserve that denomination, actually perfumed the air. I inquired of several if they could speak English. They smiled and gabbled, "No Engly, no Engly—one Engly talk ship." The deck was filthy, The cooking, washing, and necessary department were close together.⁴⁷

Everett approvingly quoted Fürstenwärther's testimony regarding ships transporting emigrants. As cited above, Fürstenwärther had written: "It is usually Dutch, but occasionally also American, Swedish, Russian ships which transport emigrants to America. . . . The American ships are the best and deserve preference before all others."

From early on in his visit to America, Fürstenwärther apparently conceived the idea to stay in this country. After his 1817 meetings with John Quincy Adams, the two continued to correspond. In a 22 April 1819 letter, Fürstenwärther enclosed a copy of his report, and asked Adams if there was a possibility of obtaining a position in the U. S. State Department. In his 4 June response Adams stated:

I regret that it is not in my power to add the inducement . . . of an offer under the government. All places in the department in which I belong . . . are filled, nor is there any prospect of an early vacancy in any of them. Whenever such vacancies occur . . . it would seldom be possible, if it would be just, to give a preference over them [native applicants] to foreigners.⁴⁸

A later and more serious disappointment afflicted the young man. After completing his report, Fürstenwärther lingered on in the United States. His 1820 letter alluded to unresolved personal circumstances in his life that accounted for remaining here. Later, Gagern provided terse details concerning his nephew's "personal circumstances" and the resulting tragic outcome. "Impossibilities" associated with a love affair had plunged

Fürstenwärther into a disturbed mental state that, according to Gagern, "brought him to the brink of madness and shortened his life."⁴⁹ Since Gagern published the above account in 1830, Fürstenwärther must have died sometime during the 1820s.

Reading *The German in North America* informs in two ways: First, it lets us see the United States through the eyes of an outsider, a young European aristocrat, during the still formative years of the Republic. Although Fürstenwärther's remarks were sometimes unflattering, in hindsight, we perhaps can see they came closer to the mark than his contemporary U. S. critics could admit with their national pride at stake.

Second, the report illumines our historical perspective on German emigration to the United States, particularly the arduous conditions many German emigrants faced while making the journey and the range of their experiences upon arrival. For those of us with German forebears, some of whom may have been among this 1817-18 exodus from their European homeland, the report still carries a special poignancy.

Iowa City, Iowa

Notes

¹ Hans von Gagern, *Mein Antheil an der Politik*, vol. 3, *Der Bundestag* (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1830), 145-46; Mack Walker, *Germany and the Emigration 1816-1885* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 30-31.

² Sources for Gagern's early life include: *Mein Antheil*, vol. 1, *Unter Napoleons Herrschaft* (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1823); Heinrich von Treitschke, *Historische und Politische Aufsätze*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1911); Hellmuth Rossler, *Zwischen Revolution und Reaktion* (Göttingen: Munsterschmidt, 1958).

³ Gagern, *Antheil*, 3:146-48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 151-53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁶ *Der Deutsche in Nord-America* (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1818). Courtesy Josef Nadler Library, Rice University. Trans. by author. A copy of the German original and translation are on file in the Blegen Library, The German-American Collection, University of Cincinnati.

⁷ Emma Gertrude Jaeck, *Madame De Staël and the Spread of German Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1915), 17; Günter Moltmann, *Ausbruch nach Amerika: Die Auswanderungswelle von 1816/17* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989). The writer is grateful to the *Yearbook* reviewer for calling his attention to this valuable German source.

⁸ *Der Deutsche*, 3; tr. 2 (First page no. refers to original text; second to my translation.)

⁹ *Ibid.* 11-14; tr. 7-9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 15-17; tr. 10-11; Edward Everett, "Review of 'The German in North America,'" *North American Review* 28, n.s. (July 1820): 4. Everett gives dollar equivalents at the time.

¹¹ *Der Deutsche*, 18; tr. 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 34; tr. 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19; tr. 12-13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20; tr. 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42, 101; tr. 24, 54.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27-28; tr. 17. In his review of Fürstenwärther's report (see n. 10), Everett doubts the use of the term "white slave" for German redemptioners. He states: "We have observed our southern and western brethren to be very sparing of the use of 'slave,' even when applied to blacks" (7). However, this writer has a forebear who came to Maryland from England in the 17th-century and served as a redemptioner. An 1858 Maryland document reported: "Nicholas Day, a grown man, sells himself into 'slave bondage' for ship transportation to the New World."

¹⁷ *Der Deutsche*, 61; tr. 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65-67; tr. 36-37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-81; tr. 43-45. Fürstenwärther described other settlements: Swiss in Indiana, French in the Alabama Territory, and George Rapp's German colony Harmonie in Pennsylvania and later, Indiana. He mentioned no Spanish settlements. Fürstenwärther's accounts were secondhand.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 55; tr. 31.

²¹ *Ibid.* 28-29; tr. 17-18.

²² Adams spent four years as ambassador to Prussia beginning 1797. During this time he translated Wieland's poem "Oberon."

²³ Fürstenwärther reported the existence of a Franklin essay concerning emigrants, but did not include it in his enclosures. The writer was unable to find such an essay. However, two letters by Franklin referring to German emigration appear in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Larabee (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); the first is dated 20 March 1751 (4:120-21); the second is cited in n. 24.

²⁴ *Papers*, letter of 9 May 1753 (4:483-84).

²⁵ *Der Deutsche*, 99; tr. 53. The Jefferson excerpt translated into German appeared in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955; originally published 1787), 85. Whether Fürstenwärther made the English translation not indicated.

²⁶ *Der Deutsche*, 72-73; tr. 39-41.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-79; tr. 42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75; tr. 41.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 68; tr. 37-38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-23; tr. 14-15.

³¹ *Ibid.* In 1743 Benjamin Franklin proposed: "That One Society be formed of Virtuosi of ingenious Men residing in the several Colonies, to be called the American Philosophical Society. . . . That Philadelphia be the Center of the Society." See Margaret B. Korty, "American Learned Societies," in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, pt. 9, 1965 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1965), 47.

³² *Der Deutsche*, 46; tr. 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 89-90; tr. 47-48.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 122-24; tr. 57-58.

³⁵ Gagern, *Antheil*, 3:150-51.

³⁶ Walker, *Germany*, 29-30.

³⁷ Gagern, *Antheil*, 3:155.

³⁸ Fürstenwärther, M. von, "Anticritik," in *Amerikanische Ansichten*, no. 2 (Philadelphia, 1820), 15-16.

³⁹ Cited in Edward Everett, *The German*, 13 (see n. 10).

⁴⁰ Fürstenwärther, "Anticritik," 15-16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴² Everett, see n. 10, pp. 1-19.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁵ *Der Deutsche*, 22-23; tr.38.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 123; tr. 57.

⁴⁷ Everett cited an earlier article by himself (see note 10, p. 8) titled: "Mr. Welch's Appeal," that appeared in the *North American Review* 27, n.s. (April 1820): 342-43.

⁴⁸ Moltmann, *Ausbruch*, 243-46. Adam's letter provides a extensive view of official U. S. attitude toward European immigration. The letter was published in a Baltimore paper, the *Niles' Weekly Register*, 29 April 1820.

⁴⁹ Gagern, *Antheil*, 3:153.

