

Responsible Opposing Viewpoint: Gustav Körner's
*Illumination of Gottfried Duden's Report**

by

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The Missouri River valley has been shaped by centuries of European immigration, and the efforts of European and Euro-American entrepreneurs to exploit the natural resources of that watershed. Successive waves of French, English, and ultimately German immigrants have each impressed their distinct cultural characteristics upon the terrain, and molded the society that flourishes on the river's banks with a blend of the traits that represents a unique heritage.

The arrival of Caucasian people to the lower Missouri valley in the middle of the Eighteenth Century marks a fundamental turning point in the urbanization of the Mississippi River watershed. Urbanization, in this context, must be understood in its broadest sense, as representing the influence of humans upon the terrain. The arrival of the French, in 1764, in pursuit of peltries for the European fashion market, represented a fundamental shift in the commercial economy of the region.

Pierre Laclède, the founder of St. Louis, and his entrepreneurial stepson, Auguste Chouteau, exercised a profound influence upon the Indians. Under the primary influence of Chouteau and his fellow Franco-Creole merchant-entrepreneurs, the Indians converted their hereditary hunting lands from a patrimony provided for the benefit of humanity by a benevolent Great Spirit into the raw material for a systematic, pre-Industrial manufacturing effort. It is worth noting that the Franco-Creole, and, to a lesser extent, the later Anglo-American

* Paper presented at the 51st Missouri Conference on History, Springfield, MO, 16 April 2009.

penetration of the Missouri River valley was transient. The base of operations remained in St. Louis and the area south and east of the river’s last great bend before its confluence with the Mississippi River, down the right bank of the Mississippi to modern Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

A significant element in the social and cultural development of the eastern half of the State of Missouri, particularly the Missouri River valley between Jefferson City and the confluence of the Mississippi, is the influx of German-speaking farmers and artisans to the area in the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century. For the most part, the Germans who settled in eastern Missouri and western Illinois came from the constellation of French satellite states, and Prussian dependencies along both banks of the Rhine. The area that now comprises the *Länder* of Nordrhein-Westfalen, Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz and Saarland provided the greatest numbers of emigrants to the United States.

There were, certainly, Germans in America before the economic and cultural aftershocks of the Napoleonic devastation of north-central Europe during the twenty years preceding Waterloo. Writing of the Germanic states in the first Quarter of the Seventeenth Century, Victor von Hagen observed that the Thirty Years’ War “was an event that would make the Rhineland veritably uninhabitable and begin the mass exodus to the Americas.”¹ By the end of the Eighteenth Century, the status of Germans in America is apparent in the fact that in 1789, Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, a Federalist Representative from Pennsylvania, won election as the first Speaker of the United States House of Representatives.

Two hundred years after the upheaval of the Thirty Years’ War, new winds of social, political and cultural change, the result of the collapse of the *ancien régime* in France, again acted to uproot the German-speaking peoples on both sides of the Rhine River. The French Revolution was a cataclysmic repudiation of the political consolidation of northwestern Europe

that Charles, King of the Franks, had wrought a millennium earlier. The political destabilization of France, and the efforts of reactionary coalitions to restore “order” in what had been the western European hegemon, gave rise to Napoleon Bonaparte, a Corsican shoemaker’s son who lifted himself, by a combination of flamboyant technical skill and tireless self-promotion, to the pinnacle of the new social order.

Bonaparte attempted to fill the power vacuum left by the collapse of the Bourbon monarchy, and restore French territorial integrity, by launching a campaign of aggressive war against the coalitions that had recently menaced republican France. By expanding the war beyond the immediate goal of maintaining French sovereignty into a war of territorial aggrandizement, Napoleon’s army laid waste to central Europe. Perhaps hardest hit were the Germanophone states whose political fragmentation left them vulnerable to the wrath of *la belle France*.

The tragic cycle of conquest, occupation and liberation that was the Napoleonic Wars left, after the curtain fell for good at Waterloo in 1815, an unstable political climate characterized by nascent republican ferment bubbling away in a shattered economy. Napoleon’s conversion of the republican First Consulate into an empire, with himself as Emperor, came too late to prevent the intrusion of republican concepts into the inert feudalism of the fragmented city-states along the Rhine. Rhetoric about the rights of man, and condemnation of the divine right of kings found fertile soil in the ears of Germans who had been, throughout the decline of feudalism and the rise of nationalism in the Seventeenth Century, the cat’s-paws of political powers situated to the east and, more obtrusively, to the west.

The collapse of Napoleon’s experiment in political consolidation of north-central Europe left the petty states of Germany in *status quo ante bellum*. Feudalism remained the dominant

social order, only with Prussia installed as the hegemon in place of chastised France. Prussian influence, if not its authority, were as restrictive as that of the *ancien régime* had been. The Prussians were no more liberal than the petty princelings had been, and the Rhinelanders, who had had a taste of liberalism and republicanism, soon found to their dismay that they would not be allowed to enjoy the full meal.

Complicating the political situation was the economic distress of the Rhineland. The major problem was the Rhenish people's relative lack of technological sophistication, especially in what would now be called “materials science.” The principal material deficit was in the manufacture of steel, in which Britain – specifically, England – held an apparently-insurmountable lead. The result was that Continental consumers of steel were required to import English steel, which necessitated a drain of Continental capital where there was an insufficient market for the export of Continental goods that would have balanced Continental trade, and maintained the supply of money.

For German-speaking liberals, chafing under the economic constraints of the protracted post-Napoleonic War depression, America beckoned as a place of intellectual and political freedom, as well as offering abundant opportunities for economic advancement. Roads and canals were under construction, artisans were in high demand, and the incorporation of the Louisiana Territory into the United States meant that abundant land would be available for German farmers seeking a plot of their own.

In this environment, numerous guidebooks were published, mostly in western Germany (Frankfurt am Main, then as now a major center of the publishing industry, was the principal focal point for the production and dissemination of travelogues and guidebooks), by German-speaking pioneers. The authors of these guidebooks intended not only to encourage the home

folk to undertake emigration to America, but to offer advice (of, admittedly, widely-varying quality) on how to prepare for the journey, and to brief the prospective immigrant on what to expect upon arrival in the New World. James W. Goodrich wrote, in his introduction to the Missouri Historical Society’s translation of Gottfried Duden’s *Bericht über eine Reise nach den westlichen Staaten Nordamerikas* (Report of a Journey to the Western States of North America), that

a decade before the rise of mass immigration in the 1830s, a succession of travelers crossed the Atlantic, made their observations, and wrote of their experiences. For the most part these foreigners came from England and France, but it was the German people who seemed most susceptible to promotional literature. For this reason German accounts attracted a larger readership and exerted a greater influence upon their writers’ countrymen.²

The *Report*, which is arguably the most significant of these travelogues, in terms of German emigration to the Missouri River valley, was published by Gottfried Duden, an attorney from Remscheid, in the Grand Duchy of Berg, at his own expense in 1829. Sam Lucas, a printer in Elberfeld, printed the first edition.

Over the course of the approximately 180 years since the publication of the *Report*, Duden’s travelogue, which covers the whole of his journey to America, sojourn therein, and return to Europe, has achieved near-legendary status among students of German immigration to America. Goodrich, commenting on Duden’s entire *corpus* of social and political commentary, observed that “together, these works* significantly influenced German emigration before 1860 and represented an outstanding example of one German’s attempt to heighten his countrymen’s awareness of American opportunities.”³ Goodrich concluded, “the large number of Germans who settled in the Midwest in response to Duden’s *Report* and their significant contributions to

* Goodrich enumerates these as “several editions of the *Report*; two editions of *Concerning the Significant Differences of the States and the Ambitions of Human Nature*; a two-volume work, *Europe and Germany as Viewed from North America*; *The North American Democracy and de Tocqueville’s Work*; as well as “several additional articles and pamphlets on both emigration and jurisprudence.” Goodrich, in Duden, vii.

the economic, political, social, and cultural development of the state [of Missouri] confirm that it was the most important piece of literature in the history of German emigration.”⁴

The *Report* is primarily an epistolary account of Duden’s journey to America, and his trip across country from New York City to the area near what is now Hermann, Missouri, in the spring of 1827. It consists of thirty-six letters addressed to a European acquaintance, to which Duden appended an essay, “Concerning the Nature of the North American United States” and “A Postscript for Emigrating Farmers.” The whole work is as much a survey of the political and social status of the United States in the early days of the Jacksonian Era as it is an attempt to preview the *milieu* in which immigrants from Germany would find themselves once they stepped ashore from their ocean transport.

It appears that Duden traveled to America with an agenda. “He avidly read the literature on America, “Goodrich wrote, “hoping to obtain detailed information from which to judge which American area was best suited for Germans in regard to climate” and other considerations. Yet, Goodrich continued, “Duden found the works that he consulted deficient in a variety of ways. None of them suited his desire for thoroughness and detail. None could be used as a manual instructing Germans on emigration.”⁵ Therefore, “since no literature dealt comprehensively with [the Mississippi valley], Duden could not honestly suggest that Germans settle there without first making a personal appraisal of the area.”⁶

The result, the crowning glory and greatest weakness of the *Report*, was an effusive idealization of Missouri as a near-paradise for German immigrants. Goodrich wrote,

[Duden] glorified the routine of pioneer existence, praised Missouri’s favorable geographical location, and emphasized its mild and healthy climate. He dwelt on the benevolence of its nature and the abundance of its fish and wildlife, and contrasted Germany’s poverty and hunger with America’s plenty. So overwhelmed with what he saw and experienced, Duden feared Germans would not believe him: ‘It appears,’ he wrote, ‘too strange, too fabulous.’”⁷

As it turned out, Duden need not have been too concerned that his contribution to emigrant literature would suffer from a lack of credibility. On the contrary, the distribution, and redistribution, of the *Report** exercised a profound influence upon Prussian, and other German-speaking immigrants just as the turbulent decade of the Eighteen-Thirties was opening.

It is, of course, impossible to determine, with any useful degree of exactness, how many Germans emigrated to the Missouri River valley under the influence of Duden’s idyllic description of what would become the Missouri Rhineland. What is clear is that a significant number of Germans, relative to the pre-existing populations of St. Louis and the surrounding Missouri and Illinois countryside, did make their way to the banks of the Mississippi and the Missouri. Of those who did settle in Missouri, and survived the periodic outbreaks of virulent disease, a significant portion found, to their disappointment, that Missouri was not all that Duden had advertised it as being.

One of those disillusioned survivors was a young Frankfurter, like Duden an attorney, named Gustav Philipp Körner. Unlike Duden, who had served as a civil servant, managing the administration of justice, Körner came to the United States as a fugitive from justice, having participated, with fellow student members of the *Frankfurter Burschenschaft*, in the abortive *Frankfurter Wacheputsch* uprising of April 1833. The *Frankfurter Wacheputsch* consisted of a raid on the *Hauptwache*, the main police station in Frankfurt am Main, by which the revolutionaries, mostly students, intended to strike a spark that would foment insurrection throughout the German Confederation.

* Note that Duden only published 1,500 copies of the first edition of the *Report*. The widespread influence of the book upon the population of western Prussia and the surrounding states, including the *Freie Reichstadt* Frankfurt am Main, must be attributed, at least in part, to copies of the *Report* passing from hand to hand. Perhaps Duden’s letters were read at meetings of immigration societies; it is not beyond the bounds of probability that early immigrants, having determined to go to America, left their copies of Duden behind for others who had not yet finally formed the same resolution to seek their fortune in America.

The uprising failed, although at least eight people were killed, including at least one police officer and a soldier from the regular army force sent to suppress the insurrection. Körner, who had been wounded in one arm by a soldier’s bayonet thrust during the uprising, and other leaders of the insurrection, were arrested. They were eventually released on bail, which some of them took as an opportunity to escape from Germany. The circumstances of Körner’s departure from his homeland, and his description thereof at various points in his writing, shed significant light on his attitude toward his exile from his homeland, and the sanctuary that he found in America.

It is unnecessary here to rehearse the facts of Körner’s life and career in America. His prominence in social and political affairs, including his seminal role in the founding of the modern Republican Party; his public service, both to the State of Illinois, as a judge and as lieutenant governor of the State, and to the United States of America, as minister to Spain, are tropes that every novice student of the German experience in America learns early, by rote. Körner’s writings, every bit as voluminous as Duden’s, are standard texts for the student of Illinois history and politics – with one notable exception.

One of the jurist’s earliest efforts in social commentary, itself a seminal contribution to German-language immigration literature, is unheard-of in any standard biography of Körner. To cite only one example, Körner’s page on the Illinois National Guard’s online gallery of “Famous Illinois Guardsmen” states that, “he wrote two books: *Out of Spain* (1867) and *The German Element in the United States of America* (1880).”⁸ The missing work, which is as obscure as Duden’s *Report* is celebrated, is entitled *Beleuchtung des Duden’schen Berichtes über die westlichen Staaten Nordamerikas, von Amerika aus* (Illumination of Duden’s Report on the Western States of North America from the American Side), published by Körner’s brother, Karl,

at Frankfurt am Main in 1834.

Robert E. Cazden’s authoritative *A Social History of the German Book Trade in America to the Civil War*, while it includes numerous references to both Duden and Körner, completely passes over the *Illumination*. Cazden recited all of the familiar tropes of Körner’s judicial and political career, with the possible exception of ignoring Körner’s relationship with Abraham Lincoln. He included significant insights into Körner’s connoisseurship of German Radical literature, and the jurist’s humane contribution, in an entrepreneurial sense, to the development of the book trade among German immigrants to western Illinois and eastern Missouri.

There are, for the diligent scholar, tantalizing if tangential references to the *Illumination* in scholarly literature. The only direct reference to the *Illumination* that I have found is a few pages in Paul C. Weber’s *America in Imaginative German Literature in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, which the Columbia University Press published, as part of its series of German Studies, in 1926. Theresa Mayer Hammond referred to Weber in her book, *American Paradise: German Travel Literature from Duden to Kisch*, edited by Helmut Kreuzer and published by Carl Winter-Universitätsverlag in Heidelberg in 1980. Apart from the references in Weber and Hammond, Körner’s *Beleuchtung des Duden’schen Berichtes* simply does not appear, as far as I can discover, anywhere in academic literature. That is a shame, because the *Beleuchtung* is a significant insight into the experiences of German immigrants who responded to Duden’s siren call of the wonder that, supposedly, was America.

Of the intellectual dispute between Duden and Körner, and the *sequelæ* thereof, however, Cazden is silent. His non-treatment of the process by which Körner formulated and expressed his response to Duden, constitutes a *lacuna* that is unfortunately typical of even contemporary Körner scholarship. Writing of “The Early German Book Trade in St. Louis,” Cazden observed

that “while the early Ohio migration was an internal movement of old Pennsylvania German stock, this influence was noticeably absent in Missouri Interest in Missouri was stimulated by Gottfried Duden’s celebrated *Bericht über eine Reise ...* first published in 1829.”⁹ He then gave a concise thumbnail biographical sketch of Duden*, and Duden’s influence on the various immigration societies formed in the wake of the publication of the *Report*.

Twice, in as many paragraphs, Cazden flirted with the opportunity to introduce the controversy between Duden and Körner, and twice he turned away. Cazden reported that “the most publicized group was the Giessen Emigration Society founded in 1833 by disaffected liberals including many old *Burschenschafter*.”¹⁰ (Italics in original.) Nothing more was said of the *Burschenschaft*, or the *Frankfurter Attentat*, in that paragraph, although Cazden did address the event at other places.

In the next paragraph, Cazden observed that “among the gifted and successful emigrants attracted to St. Louis and nearby St. Clair County, Illinois, were Gustav Körner, Theodor Engelmann, his cousin Dr. Georg Engelmann, Dr. Friedrich Adolph Wislizenus, and the well-to-do businessman Ernst Karl Angelrodt.”¹¹ There Cazden stopped, and wrote nothing further

* Cazden’s mini-biography of Duden is unexceptionable, except where he stated that “in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, men like Duden had become concerned with the widespread discontent in Germany and the growing pressures for emigration. Duden was especially interested in the suitability of the American West for German settlement and with that in mind embarked for a prolonged inspection of conditions in Missouri.” (Cazden, 137-8) Goodrich, on the other hand, observed that “just a [Friedrich] List, [Hans C. von] Gagern, and others had formed their opinions on emigration and Germany’s problems on the basis of their civil duties and observations, so too had ... Duden. Since his youth Duden had witnessed and had appeared troubled by the social transformation of his native region and its seemingly confused political situation. His duties as a jurist had brought him into frequent contact with Germany’s discontented masses, and his service with the Mülheim court of inquest had afforded him the opportunity to study the emigration. Deeply moved by the emigrants’ stories of hardships and paternalistically concerned about the present and the future of the German people, Duden could not remain idle. Consequently, he launched a personal investigation into their problems.” (Goodrich, in Duden, xi.) Goodrich’s analysis would tend to indicate that Duden’s service as a magistrate, responsible for the good order and well-being of society had raised his consciousness to the dire state of public health in the western regions of Germany. That area had been buffeted by more than a decade of march and counter-march by French, Prussian and Russian armies, among others, and it was still suffering the after effects of having been what William Manchester, in the context of the Thirty Years’ War, called “a bloody doormat” for contending armies. (William Manchester, *The Arms of Krupp, 1587-1968*. [Boston: Back Bay Books, an imprint of Little, Brown and Company, 1968, 2003], 26.) Furthermore, if we accept Goodrich’s biography as accurate, Duden had been aware of the dire straits of the people of western Germany since *before* the Napoleonic upheaval.

about either Duden’s, or Körner’s contributions to immigrant literature.

Körner’s grasp and appreciation of the reality of the situation on the ground in the Mississippi River valley – “disillusionment” is too strong a word, but it is clear from the *Illumination* that Körner soon realized that Duden’s description of the Missouri/Illinois borderland was overly optimistic – quickly lead him to see the need to sound a cautionary note to potential immigrants, still in Germany, who would need a responsible opposing viewpoint to provide some perspective on Duden’s description. His late-life recollection of a hike that he and a companion, Friedrich Engelman, took to Jefferson City in the summer of 1833 is replete with examples of the disgruntled German immigrants whom they encountered on the trail. Körner recounted having “reached a little apology for a town called Newport on the Missouri River, at the mouth of the River Au Boeuf [sic].”¹² At Newport the hikers gleaned valuable information from the locals, including “some Germans, . . . old residents[,]”¹³ as to the cost and quality of land, availability, suitability for farming, etc., all of which tended to militate against the newcomers setting themselves up in farming in the area.

Körner wrote,

this was the sum and substance of what we learned at Newport from intelligent Germans, one of whom was a land surveyor. And it may be here remarked that on both sides of the river these statements were affirmed by both Americans and Germans, many of the latter denouncing Mr. Duden bitterly for his all too rose and often very 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.¹⁴

The Missouri Rhineland Germans may have “denounce[ed] Mr. Duden bitterly” for, essentially, having sold them, as they saw it, a bill of goods. Körner, for his part, attempted to provide a more balanced, more nuanced appraisal of Missouri.

“Of all the many things written about emigration from Europe and settlement in the states of North America that have appeared in Germany, none has had a greater or more dramatic

impact on the educated than Duden’s ‘Report’ . . .,” Körner wrote in opening the *Illumination*.

“For many families it was everyday reading prior to their decision and an unshakeable authority.”¹⁵ The young, newly-arrived, would-be revolutionary then proceeded to shake the authority that Duden’s *Report*, then in its second edition*, had established over the previous five years.

“[H]owever large the influence that a particular narrative or report achieves, however greater the circle that receives the words or writings of any writer, all the larger is the duty to investigate the result with greater precision,” Körner wrote. “The testing and evaluation of the propositions and view expressed must be proportionately that much stricter.” Furthermore, “where one finds what is often mature judgments, results of long experience, and deep reasoning, then one has to take special care not to accept the misleading expressions of fantasy and error as truth alongside those remarks that are correct.”¹⁶ Having established Duden’s reputation and invoked the need for objectivity and healthy skepticism in evaluating the claims Duden made in his *Report*, and having committed himself to those intellectual virtues, Körner proceeded to muddy the waters surrounding the argument that he was about to make.

“This brief illumination does not arise from a desire to belittle, nor does it come from disappointed hopes or expectations,” Körner wrote. “Still less does it express the view that emigration itself is undesirable, in principle or in its particular application.” With the next dip of his pen, Körner wrote that “I am not of a decidedly different view from Duden, yet I cannot agree with many of his expressions, and I must hold his *Report* to be *an excessively bright and much too highly colored* portrayal of those places and the situation the immigrant will find.”¹⁷

(Italics in original.)

* Published in 1832 by the Swiss Emigration Society, of St. Gallen, Switzerland; a third edition, which Duden revised “in part to answer his critics,” as Goodrich put it, would be published in Bonn in 1834. The Swiss Emigration Society produced a fourth, special edition in 1835. (Goodrich, in Duden, xxiii.)

This is a case of a young advocate talking out of both sides of his mouth. Having typically said two different things in as many sentences, Körner then unburdened himself of a waffle that would sow confusion in his own mind, as well as his readers’ minds, and engender a controversy with which Körner would attempt to deal for the rest of his life. The unseasoned attorney wrote, “even with my agreement with Duden on such significant points, one might think that I would not have found it necessary to make my views public. ... Yet I hold it to be my duty to darken Duden’s image of the newly opened western states a bit, to communicate my dissenting view.”¹⁸

The problem is that Körner never really settled down to either of the tasks to which he had set himself. Having stated his intention alternately to praise and to bury Cæsar, he achieved neither burial nor praise. Writing of Duden’s apparent lack of attention to “the inconveniences and problems that the immigrant encounters,” Körner asserted that “advantage and disadvantage lie in proper proportion in opposition on the scale ... and the pointer is all too ready to turn to the positive side. This is not on purpose, and nothing is further from Duden than being misleading on purpose.” However, “without knowing it, [Duden’s] love for his new soil, the place he has chosen, permits everything to be seen in a charmed light.”¹⁹ Praise and burial follow each other characteristically in Körner’s analysis of Duden, and neither effort really exerts a dominant influence.

Some of Körner’s differences with Duden are quibbles, minor matters of semantics. On Duden’s reference to “mountains” in Ohio, Körner wrote,

he speaks of the wooded heights on the Ohio, which stand high and steep, and would be called mountains in Germany. Further, he often speaks of heights that a German would certainly call mountains. To be sure, an American does not call these heights mountains, as [Duden] knows, ... that the American is more precise in his description of the outside world. Yet I believe that many Germans in the course of narrative or light conversation would use the word ‘mountains,’ but it borders on the laughable to exaggerate these

heights, which *never* succeed the height of a few hundred feet, to a European. Every German who has seen more than the banks of the Düssel or the Spree knows full well what are real mountains and what are not, even if he occasionally does not use the term ‘mountains’ so precisely and occasionally honors even modest heights with this expression.²⁰

(Italics in original) The whole of the *Illumination* is more of the same rhetorical material; an example may suffice to illustrate the overall pattern.

All of this comes from a man who, apart from an ambiguous declaration of his intent for his work – which was realized with a notable lack of consistency – was, in addition, less than forthright in revealing to his readers the motivation behind his emigration. Of his departure from Germany, Körner wrote, “it had not been in any way my expectation to travel to America, let alone to visit the inner regions of the republic. It was more accident than choice that led me here.”²¹ As noted, Körner had showed the Rhineland his heels after the abortive *Wacheputsch* uprising in April 1833. While he could hardly dare to admit his jeopardy (which, arguably, would diminish his credibility with law-abiding, potential immigrants back home), much less place his brother, or the printers, *Herren Streng & Schneider*, at risk for publishing seditious writing, nonetheless, it is curious that Körner should have felt the need to provide any sort of *apologia* for his decision to hazard the ocean voyage to America.

Apart from young Körner’s dissembling as to the motive for his departure from his homeland, there is the marked ambiguity apparent in the elderly Körner’s recollection of the mixed emotions with which he faced the prospect of emigration. His flight from Prussia appears, at least initially, to have had a sojourn in France as its goal. Throughout his escape from Prussia, through France, Switzerland and back into France *en route* to America, Körner was all vivacity and *bonhomie*. The laceration to his left arm suffered in the uprising on 2 April 1833 appears not to have bothered him after he began to get regular medical attention and keep the wound clean.

Körner cannot be said to have been completely objective in his anticipation of what America would be like, nor even to have embraced the prospect of emigration with unalloyed pleasure. An aspect of Körner’s reticence about emigrating to America was what he perceived as the lack of collegiality, or sociability – the only really accurate word that comes to mind is *Gemüthlichkeit* – that he would find across the Atlantic Ocean. In his *Memoirs*, published in 1909, Körner wrote,

while I respected the American people, and admired their institutions, I was convinced that the social life there was not to be compared with that in Europe; that while they had superior political insight and wisdom, there was there a lack of taste and culture which would make the country individually very distasteful to me.²²

Not the least concern was whether Körner would be able to take up his profession of law in the New World. He wrote, years after the fact, that “while I had self-confidence enough to think that I could make my way in Switzerland by pursuing my profession, I doubted exceedingly that I could do so in the United States, and to change my occupation was a hazardous undertaking.”²³ In an interesting foreshadowing of his attitude toward Missouri as he found it, Körner added that “the primeval forest had no attraction for me.”²⁴

One could argue that this preconception of the “savageness” of the United States disposed Körner to have a jaundiced view of the spiritual, or intellectual (the German adjective *geistig* is more accurate than is either of the English adjectives) quality of life on the fringe of the “civilized” portion of North America. It was not merely a hesitancy to embrace America that caused Körner’s conflict; he was genuinely more attracted to Paris than to America.

Reminiscing of his brief stay in Paris, Körner wrote in his *Memoirs* that he had met a former fellow-revolutionary, then resident in the City of Light: “Savoye and other friends tried to persuade me to remain in Paris; but though I should have liked to live there better than any other place in the world, I was determined to go to Havre, even if I did not sail for the United States.”²⁵

“The garden of the Tuileries was then visited,” Körner continued, “and there I met Pulaski, who had been my guest at Heidelberg. He also remonstrated against my going to America. How I regretted that circumstances did not allow me to stay in Paris.”²⁶

Adding to Körner’s conundrum was the fact that “I considered it to be my duty to bring [Körner’s friend, Theodore Engelmann, a fellow conspirator in the *Wacheputsch*] to his family, as I had been ... the cause of their separation.”²⁷ Körner’s consideration of his own family also weighed on his mind. Late in life, he recalled, “as for going to America, I could not now definitely make up my mind, since I would be somewhat influenced by letters from home, which would reach me in Havre.”²⁸

On the other hand, the letters that Körner received from his family, once the refugees actually reached Le Havre, pressed him on toward America:

All the letters urged me in the most moving way to leave Europe with the Engelmann family, whom they held in the highest regard. They feared that I was not safe anywhere but in the United States, and, though they only alluded to it, I felt that they also feared that if I was near Germany I might engage in another rash attempt at revolution that might turn out even more fatally.²⁹

The indirect blessing from his family apparently helped Körner make up his mind. His recollection of making the decision was succinct: “It needed only this to put an end to all doubt and hesitation. Even if I had not had a strong motive already to remain with my dear friends, the wishes of my family would have determined my leaving Europe with them.”³⁰

It is difficult to judge Körner’s character from his writing. His long public career and his pursuit of an honorable profession, all mark him as a person of substance, who met, and passed, the tests which society erects – or, at least, erected in those days – to prove that those sought

* Theodore Engelmann had been *en route* to Le Havre, France with his family to emigrate to America when the plotters launched their coup. Leaving his family to continue on to France, Engelmann returned to Frankfurt to throw in his lot with Körner and the rest of the plotters. Surviving the failed coup attempt and the flight from Germany, Engelmann settled with his family near Belleville, Ill. and became involved with, among other endeavors, journalism and the newspaper business.

admission into the courts, both formal and informal, of civic power were worthy of admission.

Reading Körner’s private writings, however, one is struck by the ambiguity and uncertainty that mark the man’s approach to the liminal events of his life.

This is most evident in reading his *Memoirs*. The parallels between Körner’s language, in the *Illumination* of 1833/4 and the *Memoirs*, which were composed after 1889, are striking. In his *Memoirs*, for example, Körner wrote, “away from the [Missouri] river the want of communication made farming unprofitable, and clearing the timber and plowing the hills was most laborious work.”³¹ Sixty years previously, he had written that “what particularly compels immigrants to the proximity of lowlands and thick woods (for most of the woodlands of Missouri in particular are located along the rivers) is the advantage of navigable rivers, providing access to markets and social communication.”³² The healthfulness, or unhealthfulness, of the new country was a recurring theme in Körner’s description of the new land. In the *Memoirs*, he wrote, “as in every new country, there was a great deal of sickness.”³³ In the *Illumination*, he had written that “it has long been an accepted truth held by natives that a ‘new country,’ as they call it, is more or less unhealthy.”³⁴ It is, not, however, the jurist’s consistency, but his indecisiveness that is the most intriguing aspect of the *Memoirs*, and which sheds the most light on his thoughts.

Körner had had his whole life to decide what he thought of this or that topic. He owed no one anything, and had, apparently, no greater ambition than to live out the rest of his life in peace and go quietly to the final reward that awaits those who, in the words of St. Paul, have “fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith.” Yet, in the twilight of life, owing nothing to anyone, standing alone on stage as the star of his own show, Körner waffled. The fact is that he simply could not make up his mind about how he felt about the *Report*. He never came down foursquare behind either one assertion, or the other.

Having announced his intention to do one thing, he did something else entirely. Having stated that “I do not wish to attack Duden’s solid *prolegomena* and his solid conclusions,” he proceeded to do just that. Having sneered at Duden’s “first, second and thirds, his narrowing and expansion of questions, his shifts of disputes and his results pumped out through twenty middle terms,”³⁵ Körner proceeded to produce his own library of firsts, seconds, thirds, shifting disputes and results pumped out through middle terms. He was, after all, an educated German, and wrote in the style of his class. The only things missing are the periodic Q.E.D.s. Yet, he had the courage – or the chutzpah – to write, “I have all too much awe before a German philosophical exposition.”³⁶

Both Duden and Körner, attempting to encapsulate an entire physical and cultural environment in a few words, instead sowed uncertainty and confusion in their own minds and those of their readers. Duden, having returned to Germany before the publication of the *Report*, extensively revised his text for the 1834 edition. Körner, having published his *Illumination* barely a year after leaving Germany, would continue to wrestle, in his own mind, with the *Report*, and his response to it, to the end of his life. Despite the ambiguity and misinterpretation that have attached to both the *Report* and the *Illumination*, it is clear that Körner’s seminal contribution to German immigrant literature remains a responsible opposing viewpoint that throws the intellectual foundation of German immigration in the first third of the Nineteenth Century into sharp relief.

NOTES

¹ Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, The Germanic People in America, first edition (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 83.

² James W. Goodrich, “Editors’ Introduction,” in Gottfried Duden, Report of 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), gen ed. James W. Goodrich; George H. Kellner, Elsa Nagel, Adolf E. Schroeder, and W. M. Senner, eds. and trans. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1980), vii.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Goodrich, *op. cit.*, xxiii.

⁵ Goodrich, *op. cit.*, xii.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Goodrich, *op. cit.*, xiii.

⁸ “Gustavus Koerner,” n.d., accessed 1 Feb. 2009 at <<http://www.il.ngb.army.mil/History/famous/Koerner.htm>>.

⁹ Robert E. Cazden, A Social History of the German Book Trade in America to the Civil War (Columbia, SC: Camden House, Inc., 1984), 137. The section, “The Early German Book Trade in St. Louis,” is in the chapter entitled, “German Settlement in the Old West before the Forty-eighters.”

¹⁰ Cazden, 138.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Gustav Körner, Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1896. Life-sketches written at the suggestion of his children, ed. Thomas J. McCormack (Cedar Rapids, IA: The Torch Press, Publishers, 1909), I:314.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Gustav Körner, An Illumination of Duden’s Report on the Western States of North America from the American Side, translation by Steven W. Rowan (The University of Missouri – St. Louis, 2008), 1.

¹⁶ Körner, An Illumination, 2-3.

¹⁷ Körner, An Illumination, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Körner, An Illumination, 7.

²⁰ Körner, An Illumination, 11-12.

²¹ Körner, An Illumination, 5.

²² Körner, Memoirs, I:253.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Körner, Memoirs, I:256.

²⁶ Körner, Memoirs, I:257.

²⁷ Körner, Memoirs, I:254.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Körner, Memoirs, I:262.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Körner, Memoirs, I:314.

³² Körner, An Illumination, 25.

³³ Körner, Memoirs, I:314.

³⁴ Körner, An Illumination, 23.

³⁵ Körner, An Illumination, 55.

³⁶ *Ibid.*