Romantic Wanderlusts: German Travelers to the United States, 1822-1852

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HISTORY

Romantic Wanderlusts: German Travelers to the United States, 1822-1852

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Thesis under the direction of Professor Lauren Clay

This paper examines the travel diaries and sketches of four Germans who traveled to the United States in the nineteenth century: Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Württemberg (1822-1824); Frederick Julius Gustorf (1835-1836); Albert C. Koch (1844-1846); and Rudolph Friedrich Kurz (1846-1852). Each man observed the peoples, particularly Native Americans, and the natural landscape of America with the ultimate aim of presenting the results of their studies to the general German public in the form of published travel narratives. Many historians overlook German efforts to explore the "New World," instead focusing their energy on nations with formal colonies in the Americas, such as France, England, and Spain. Analysis of these four travel narratives, however, demonstrates that this trend is unwarranted in the larger historiography of exploration and expansion into the Americas. These four Germans were actively involved in exploring the North American continent, even if they did not formally possess colonies or hope to establish a "New Germany" in North America. The absence of formal colonial possessions does not preclude a nation from participating in a broader discourse on exploration or scientific discoveries.

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Introduction

Between 1822 and 1852, four Germans traveled to the United States to simultaneously behold and study the primeval nature that the "new" land offered: Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Württemberg (1822-1824); Frederick Julius Gustorf (1835-1836); Albert C. Koch (1844-1846); and Rudolph Friedrich Kurz (1846-1852). Each man observed the peoples and natural landscape of America with the ultimate aim of presenting the results of their studies to the general German public in the form of published travel narratives. Each presented their observations in different ways, according to the individual's personal interests and ambitions. In addition to his published travel narrative, Kurz sketched scenes from Native American life in order to educate Europeans on the proper way to live, while Koch intently studied the natural geological formations of the land. Gustorf and Paul Wilhelm offered general comments on American culture and American peoples, with Gustorf concluding that most Americans were lazy drunkards and Paul Wilhelm praising Americans for their ingenuity and hardiness. By traveling to North America and recording observations on the natural environment and the nation's various inhabitants, these men actively participated in a burgeoning discourse on global exploration.

Kurz, a native German speaker, was born in Switzerland to a German father in 1818 and extensively chronicled his travels and encounters with Native Americans in his journal. Before journeying to the United States in 1846, he studied portraits and ethnographies of Native Americans in anticipation of fulfilling his ultimate goal: to complete a series of sketches of Native Americans and turn them into paintings upon his return to Europe. He hoped to open an art gallery and use his paintings to teach Europeans on the proper way to live and, along the way, establish his reputation as a serious artist.

German paleontologist Koch hoped to gain fame in Europe not through artistic endeavors, but through scientific discoveries. While traveling throughout North America, he studied and collected fossils, rocks, and other geological specimens and sent them to Germany for further analysis. He hoped to become the foremost European expert on North American geognosy not only among scientists but also among popular audiences; he published his travel narrative to bring scientific knowledge of North America to a broader European audience.

Gustorf made multiple trips to America from Germany, working as a private German instructor at Harvard and Yale from 1819 to 1824, when he returned to Frankfurt. He returned to the United States in 1834, beginning a journal in 1835 to document his travels west and to eventually publish for the German public. Despite his avowed distaste for America and its residents, he married Harriet Benson in 1837. While he expressed distaste for American civilization, he often marveled at the beauty of America's landscape.

Finally, Paul Wilhelm was born in 1797 to the House of Württemberg, and his noble status enabled him to pursue one of his greatest passions: to travel to the Americas and study the landscape and the native inhabitants who lived there. Before his death in 1860, he made several trips to the Americas, making the first in 1822 and visiting a German family who lived in Texas as late as the 1850s. On his first visit to North America from 1822 to 1824, he recorded his encounters with Native Americans, Americans as a people, and his observations on the country's landscape. In addition, he was reputed to have discovered the sources of the Missouri River.

These men explored North America and eventually published their journals, but this does not mean that they had colonial ambitions for Germany. They were fully aware that this portion of the North American continent belonged to the United States government, even if they disagreed with American values or American treatment of Native Americans. Kurz offered his

opinions on the subject of colonialism, arguing that contemporary colonists had to forget their homelands in favor of their new residences. But the Swiss simply were not capable of forgetting Switzerland: "Citizens of Switzerland they wish ever to remain, supported by their native country. They do not care to transfer their loyalty to a new fatherland."[1] Many historians overlook German efforts to explore the "New World," instead focusing their energy on nations with formal colonies, such as France, England, and Spain. Analysis of these four travel narratives, however, demonstrates that this trend is unwarranted in the larger historiography of exploration and expansion into the Americas. These four Germans were actively involved in exploring the North American continent, even if they did not formally possess colonies or hope to establish a "New Germany" in North America. The absence of formal colonial possessions does not preclude a nation from participating in a broader discourse on exploration or scientific discoveries.

Scholars have recently argued that engagement in discourses of global exploration can exist without colonial ambitions. In 2002, Penny argued in *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* that the late nineteenth-century rise of ethnographic museums' popularity in Imperial Germany cannot be explained through colonial ambition, but rather through a tradition of civic pride and a passion for liberal humanism, established by Alexander von Humboldt's ethnographic projects in South America. The museums "grew out of a strong liberal-humanist tradition in the German cultural sciences and a more general desire among many Germans to connect with the non-European world…[Germans] sought global explanations in their studies of the natural and human sciences, and they shared a

[1] Rudolph Friederich Kurz, Myrtis Jarrell, and J.N.B. Hewitt, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz: An Account of His Experiences Among Fur Traders and American Indians on the Mississippi and the Upper Missouri Rivers During the Years 1846 to 1852* (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1937), 348.

desire for comprehensive descriptions of the universe."[2] Intensely interested in the customs and peoples of other places and believers that specific phenomenon could only be explained through global explanations, Germans thirsted for information on foreign peoples such as Native Americans.[3]

A significant amount of scholarship exists on German travelers to the Americas, but most of it focuses on a single explorer: Alexander von Humboldt. Prolific in his learning, writing, and traveling, Humboldt was a tour de force in Romantic European travelers, a status which certainly merits plentiful scholarly attention. What most of these historians and biographers fail to do, though, is situate Humboldt in a broader phenomenon of German travelers to the Americas. Humboldt is taken to represent all German Romantic travelers to any part of the Americas, a conflation that does much disservice to transnational understandings of German history. In her 1992 book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation,* Mary Louise Pratt contrasts Europeans who colonized South America in the wake of Spanish collapse in the 1820s and "disciples" of the humanistic Humboldt. Europeans seeking to colonize South America traveled solely to reach the preordained destinations listed by travel guides, not to seek a universal understanding of the globe. Humboldt and his followers, meanwhile, sought to discover new areas and new peoples to understand the world. This trend may have been true for Europeans in South America, but it was not necessarily the case in North America. The lack of scholarly works on Germans in North America means that historians researching travelers to North America must rely on scholarship like Pratt's to complete their work.

[2] H. Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2.
[3] Two works that argue that Germans had colonial ambitions before the 1870s are Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) and Jens-Uwe Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism, and the United States, 1776-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). These works will be discussed later in the paper.

Another strand of historiography on Germans in North America focuses on the numerous Germans who immigrated to America over the course of the nineteenth century in search of prosperity. This historiography, though, is less than refined, with books primarily published by local societies dedicated to the preservation of German heritage, not major academic presses. These historians explore how Germans participated in the American expansion into the West and how they struggled to preserve German traditions in the face of American cultural imperialism. Jon Gjerde, for example, examines disdain Germans and German-Americans showed toward American labor traditions, particularly for farmers' reluctance to allow their wives and children to labor in fields. In response to Americans who defended this taboo as a sign of cultural enlightenment, German Americans saw it as a sign of "degeneracy" and argued that labor was "a means of maintaining discipline and structure within the home."[4] These differences in labor practices were ultimately used by Germans to "warn against the dangers of life in the United States, to show the need for remaining true to invented patterns of labor among country people, and ultimately to defend their group against diffusion from the outside."[5] Among this paper's select group of travelers, Gustorf fits in with this assessment, as he frequently critiques Americans and their poor work ethic, but his own opinion as a traveler probably differed from German American settlers and farmers who could not sail back to Germany after two or three

[4] Jon Gjerde, "Prescriptions and Perceptions of Labor and Family Among Ethnic Groups in the Nineteenth-Century American West," *German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Wolfgang Helbich and Walter D. Kamphoefner (Madison: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 2004): 128. For more on German immigrants to America, see Thomas Adam and Ruth Gross, eds., *Traveling Between Worlds: German-American Encounters* (College Station: University of Texas at Arlington, 2006); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed., *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *The German American Experience* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000); Douglas Hale, W*anderers Between Two Worlds: German Rebels in the American West, 1830-1860* (Philadelphia: Xlibris Corp, 2005); Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States* Vol. 1 and 2 (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969).
[5] Ibid., 121.

years. The relatively brief nature of these travelers' forays into America should be treated separately from lifelong settlers.

A significant amount of scholarship also centers on German perceptions of Native Americans, a historiography which is considerably more developed than that of German-American settlers. One of the most important books in the field is Harry Liebersohn's *Aristocratic Encounters: European Travelers and North American Indians*, which explores French and German fascination with Native Americans in the nineteenth century. Using travel narratives of aristocratic men, Liebersohn argues that these Europeans felt a deep affinity with Native Americans. Both populations were displaced and lost their aristocratic status: Europeans by the recent wave of revolutions and political reforms, Native Americans by American Manifest Destiny. German and French aristocrats "turned the journey to America into a symbolic quest to test their own wild qualities through contact with the nature and natives of an untamed continent."[6]

While this may have been true for Paul Wilhelm, a German aristocrat, the same was probably not the case for the three other travelers. Kurz did interact extensively with Native Americans and praised their noble qualities, but he wished to teach the European public to ignore the confines of fashion and return to the human nature exemplified by Native Americans. This desire implies a fundamental difference between Europeans and Native Americans. Gustorf and Koch, on the other hand, were not particularly preoccupied with Native Americans and only mentioned them when they had brief encounters with tribes. Not all travelers to America were aristocrats, and by ignoring a large segment of German travelers, Liebersohn significantly limits his argument.

[6] Harry Liebersohn, *Aristocratic Encounters: European Travelers and North American Indians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 133. See also H. Glenn Penny, "The Quest for the Authentic Indian in German Public Culture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 48, no. 4 (2006): 798-819.

This paper aims to overcome the gaps in these three historiographies by examining four travel narratives written within twenty years of one another by German men from varying social classes. A span of two decades demonstrates that the trends exhibited in these diaries were not episodic. In addition, while these travelers were probably unaware of one another, their narratives have a common thread because, at some point in their travels, they journeyed to roughly the same region of the United States, specifically the areas around the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri Rivers. While these do not represent the entirety of German travelers at this time period, the sample is nonetheless indicative of larger trends among travelers in this time period. These men did not aim to build a German colony in America. Rather, they traveled to the continent to study Native Americans, American society, and American geology. This is not to imply that there was nothing imperialistic about their studies on America and its peoples; after all, which each drawing Kurz sketched and with each of Gustorf's critique of American industrialism, they judged American society and culture with implicit comparison to that of Germany.[7] But explicit colonial ambitions in a continent already settled by whites did not exist in these narratives. Analyzing the reasons why these travelers studied America with such passion will bring Germans into the broader historiography of European interactions with the Atlantic World.

Romantic Admiration of Nature

One of the most important things that united each of these travelers was their Romantic appreciation for nature's beauty, sublimity, and ability to nurture and inspire the soul. Each author meditated on the beauty of the natural surroundings around them, finding an inner peace they could not experience in American industrial centers or German towns. But while these men

[7] For mapping and politics, see Jeremy Black, *Maps and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

thought they were getting closer to the state of nature with each step they took into the American interior, they actually enjoyed a tamed nature, one in which civilization and natural landscapes coexisted. In this sense, these men can be placed in the same category as Romantics such as Wordsworth, who praised the natural and wild beauty of England's Lake District, an area that had been inhabited for centuries.[8]

Kurz's belief in nature's ability to inspire the soul can be seen in his sketches of the landscapes surrounding the Missouri River and his lengthy meditations on nature's power to transform the individual. When riding horses with a group of friends, he felt rejuvenated by the nature that surrounded him: "What a difference it makes in one's feelings! When provided with an excellent mount, the blood courses more rapidly through one's veins, one's heart leaps for joy; Nature seems entrancing!"[9] When confronted with a beautiful natural scene, such as the forests that surrounded the city of St. Louis, he could not help but forget "everything else in my wonder at the loveliness of that display."[10]

According to literary scholar Jeanne Riou, German Romantics challenged "the reductions of modern science without reversing its insights," rejecting its negative effects such as pollution and praising its positive effects on the nature surrounding it.[11] While Kurz admired the woods around St. Louis, Koch found peace during his swims in the Ohio River: "The Ohio Falls afforded a magnificent view in the moonlight, and the hundreds of lights in Louisville, lying opposite, added much to heighten my enjoyment. The stillness of this beautiful summer night

[8] For more on German Romanticism, see Jefferson Dillman, "Imaging North America: Nineteenth Century German Travel Writers and Cultural Transfer," *Traversa* 1 (2011): 13-25; Brad Prager, *Aesthetic Vision and German Romanticism: Writing Images* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007); Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Jeanne Riou, *Imagination in German Romanticism: Re-Thinking the Self and Its Environment* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).
[9] Kurz, *Journal,* 139.
[10] Ibid., 9.
[11] Riou, *Imagining in German Romanticism*, 9.

was only interrupted by the noise of the falls sounding like faraway thunder."[12] He made similar comments when viewing the city of Vicksburg which "l[ay] on a high hill which, where there are no houses, is covered with luxuriant grass. On the grass were grazing horses and cows, and, to make the sight even more romantic, a flock of more than 100 dappled goats frolicked there."[13] In both of these instances, Koch praised the pleasing balance of civilization, whether it be city lights or signs of farming and cultivation, and nature, showing his adherence to Romantic views of nature. He was not alone in this admiration; as Paul Wilhelm ascended the Ohio River, he noted that "The ever increasing cultivation of the soil and the denser population contribute much toward providing a pleasing and inviting aspect to a region already richly blessed by nature."[14]

This balance between civilization and country could easily cross the line between picturesque and polluted, though. For example, Gustorf admired the small town of Mifflintown's location in the Tuscarora Mountains, which was "located most picturesquely on the slope above a bridge over the Juniata."[15] But much of America's natural beauty, particularly on the East Coast, was "spoiled by cutting and burning of the trees, which are scattered everywhere, too heavy to be moved."[16] He also castigated industrialists living in Pittsburgh for spoiling the natural beauty of the city's location:

> Everything around here seems to be in perpetual motion through the spirit and activity of the people. A heavy black smoke and steam rises from all sides of the hill and from the distant valleys. Flames appear from large black chimneys. In the distance we can see a coal mine burning, the flames illuminating the sky and surrounding objects. This mine has been burning for years. Water on and water under the bridge. The rage and the terrific groaning of the many steam engines; the knocking, pounding, and other noises of the various machines give you the impression of being in a different world, until you wake

[12] Albert C. Koch, *Journey Through a Part of the United States of North America in the Years 1844 to 1846*, trans. Ernst A. Stadler (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 44.
[13] Ibid., 87.
[14] Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Württemberg, *Travels in North America 1822-1824*, trans. W. Robert Nitske, ed. Savoie Lottinville (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 155.
[15] Frederick Julius Gustorf, *The Uncorrupted Heart: Journal and Letters of Frederick Julius Gustorf, 1800*-1845, trans. Fred Gustorf and Gisela Gustorf, ed. Fred Gustorf (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 13.
[16] Ibid., 14.

> up from the dream and find yourself in Pittsburgh…The houses are black from the soot, poorly built, and undescribably dirty. You see many miserable shacks all over town; but the setting is highly romantic. The Allegheny and Monongahela rivers unite here and flow together to become the Ohio River…On the banks of both rivers are several smaller towns, which are also blackened by coal dust and soot from the furnaces.[17]

Based on a close reading of these travel narratives, the men appear to have reached a consensus independently of one another. For a setting to be "Romantic," it had to walk a very fine line between civilization and wildness, with the two opposites balancing each other well enough so there appeared to be human manipulation of the land but at a minimal level. Extraction of natural resources could occur, but only if the side effects remained invisible and did not cover the town or city in black soot and grey smoke.

Small differences existed within this consensus, particularly over whether or not this Romantic beauty had divine origins. Paul Wilhelm in particular firmly believed that a "Creator" had formed the land and could be viewed and experienced by meditating on his creation. When viewing a stream and the trees that abounded on its banks, he directly experienced "that majestic character with which the Creator impresses His stamp of boundless concern on great and small forms."[18] Similarly, he called the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers the "pride of creation" and "was filled with deep emotion and gratitude to the almighty Creator of the universe, who had blessed man with the beautiful gift of receptivity for great and exalted things."[19] He never used the term "God," but given his German nationality, he was probably a Protestant or Catholic. Even if he had some sort of vague spirituality, though, he clearly believed that some "Creator" built a majestic earth to be enjoyed by all men.

In contrast to Paul Wilhelm's spirituality, Kurz ardently believed that there was no God and humans were illogical for believing in a higher power. Nevertheless, he was still steeped in

[17] Ibid., 16.
[18] Paul Wilhelm, *Travels*, 144.
[19] Ibid., 148.

Christian religious myths and traditions, calling Native Americans "Adams and Eves." Koch is unclear about his religious leanings, but whether or not he was a Christian, atheist, or somewhere in between, he also referred to Christian myths, particularly that of Noah's flood. When traveling through Martha's Vineyard, he stopped at Gay Head "because here is to be found irrefutable proof that Noah's flood, or the deluge, as it is called in the Holy Scriptures, also flooded America." Religious opinions differed greatly among these men, but Christian myths united even the avowed believer and the atheist. Even further than these Christian myths, though, Romanticism united these men under a common worldview and purpose for traveling. They traveled to know and experience the relationship, whether successful or unsuccessful, between American nature and American civilization, not to scope potential sites for German settlements or colonies.

Scientific Beauty

Science and admiration of nature were not mutually exclusive in traditions of Romanticism. Romantics admired nature that was blended with signs of civilization and technological progress, including scientific achievements, and it was also a place to retreat to study scientific objects such as rocks, geological formations, and plants. Splitting admiration of nature and admiration of scientific objects into two separate sections does not mean that the two were treated separately by Romantics, as the two were often linked in Romantics' minds. However, Koch emphasized scientific discoveries much more than the other travelers. Geologists traveled to America to study geological formations that had yet to be examined or discovered; a trip to America became a way to establish one's reputation in the scientific community. This was the case for Koch, who traveled throughout northeastern America and on

the Missouri River to study geological formations, fossils, and rocks. While united with his fellow travelers through his Romantic musings, his scientific studies and extensive comments on American geology make him distinctive among this group of travelers.

Koch undertook his 1844 to 1846 journey "in the cause of widening the knowledge of the geognosy of North America…I had…the good fortune during my stay to make some not unimportant and interest-provoking discoveries for the science of geognosy, and I therefore allow myself the hope that the following simple description of my travel adventures will meet with some approval."[20] By introducing his findings to the greater public, he wished to spread knowledge of American geognosy to the wider European scientific community. Indeed, he took particular pride in his scientific abilities, bragging in his narrative that his friend Professor Silliman told him, " 'Dr. Koch, you have thrown more light on Gay Head than all the others who have been there before."[21] With his help, the ancient geology of America could be discovered and eventually widely disseminated. He also desired to spread general scientific and ethnological knowledge to Americans, opening a museum in St. Louis which held a variety of foreign objects, including an Egyptian mummy and a Native American "mummy" found in a cave in Kentucky.[22] His efforts to instruct Americans and Europeans alike demonstrate that he traveled to America to not only discover ancient geological formations, but also to spread his findings to a wider public.

Koch used the language of Romanticism to record his thoughts on certain rocks or fossils that he found particularly striking or beautiful. One of the primary objectives of his journey was to find pleasure in the ancient objects he discovered; after viewing a collection of bones from Missouri in a museum, he expressed disappointment that there was "almost nothing of scientific

[20] Koch, *Journey*, 1.
[21] Ibid., 31-2.
[22] Ibid., xix.

interest among them, and everything was so damaged that one could not find much pleasure in the collection."[23] This pleasure was based not only on the novelty of the subject, but also on the beauty of the object. In the area around Martha's Vineyard, he discovered a piece of sugar cane which "for the greatest part had been consumed by fire but which still had a special value for me because, in the still wholly preserved cells, crystals have formed which, although small are of great beauty."[24] When looking at these objects, he also felt as if the past was alive: "My expectations concerning the local fossils I found quite satisfied, if not surpassed. The shells and corals are frequently so beautiful and perfect, as if the animals whom they once served as houses and covering still lived in them."[25] When describing his discoveries, he used Romantic language which was similar to the words he used to depict his swim in the Ohio River under the lights of Louisville.

His primary interest, though, was not in discovering beautiful, new objects but in uncovering remnants thousands of years old so he could prove that America was as ancient as the other continents. According to Anthony Padgen's 1993 *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism,* eighteenth-century Europeans saw no discernible history in the Americas, leading them to reconsider their own conceptions of time and the Christian view of creation. If America was not as ancient as Europe, then God must have created it at a different time than he created Europe. In contrast, Koch seemed determined to prove that America was on the same geological time scale as Europeans. He consistently used words such as "primeval," "primordial," and "antediluvian" to describe fossils and rocks he studied.

The word "antediluvian" is particularly interesting, given his belief that the biblical flood Noah and his arc survived occurred in America. As mentioned above, while traveling through

[23] Ibid., 32.
[24] Ibid., 27.
[25] Ibid., 40.

Gay's Head in Martha's Vineyard, he specifically wished to view the place that held proof of Noah's flood:

> For a long time I had cherished the wish to see this place and its environs because here is to be found irrefutable proof that Noah's flood, or the deluge, as it is called in the Holy Scriptures, also flooded America—something which has often been questioned by critics and which is still considered doubtful. Yet, even more one finds here near Circleville one of the best proofs that America was inhabited by human beings at that time of terror, because from this diluvium were unearthed human remains which have been preserved until our time, to appear as witnesses in our criticizing age. Although I had mentioned this fact in my evidence for the habitation of America before and during the time of the flooding on our earth, I was very gratified to have found the opportunity to have seen this region myself.[26]

By using scientific evidence to prove that the flood occurred in America, Koch followed the mindset of scholars writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries about the centrality of the flood to human history. These scholars "placed the disaster at the centre of their cosmogonies; all reasoned within the framework of a restricted temporality; and all believed that the histories of mankind and the Earth were one and the same, composed as they were of simultaneous episodes."[27] By proving that the flood occurred at the same time both in America and in Europe, Koch could fit American and European history into one piece. America did have an extensive history, one just as ancient as that of Europe.

Koch was not the only traveler out of this group to acknowledge the long history America possessed. While Paul Wilhelm was not a scientist and thus did not make any scientific studies, he did note that geologists could discover much in the country: "The traces of bones of prehistoric mammals are said to have disappeared from these caves. However, there can be no doubt that more careful investigation and excavation would bring many of them to light."[28] As more Europeans, including Germans, traveled to North America, they became increasingly aware

[26] Ibid., 38.
[27] Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 5.
[28] Paul Wilhelm, *Travels*, 155.

that the country had an ancient history that was practically begging to be discovered and documented. Scientists such as Koch explored America to make scientific discoveries to bring information to Europeans unable to see America for themselves, thereby building a reputation for themselves among both European laypersons and scientists. These were not voyages of exploration, to map land and determine possible sites of settlement, but voyages in pursuit of knowledge, self-improvement, and career improvement.

Native American Culture and Removal

Kurz also focused on America's ancient past, not through studying geology and geognosy, but through making artistic studies of Native Americans in their natural state: wearing traditional clothing, using traditional tools, and riding their horses. Kurz sketched a very noble picture of Indians, usually portraying individuals, tall and muscular, looking off into the distance or looking down on Europeans.[29] He even referred to Native Americans as "my Adam and Eve" and "the living models of the antique"--the only humans on earth that were close to the original state of nature.[30] For Kurz, this was a good thing; he wished to transfer his best sketches into drawings, open a museum in Switzerland, and educate Europeans on the proper way to behave. He critiqued European men and women for being fashion obsessed because accessories like stiff sleeves distracted from the natural beauty of the human body, a beauty that was most apparent in noble, unadulterated Native Americans.

While Kurz paid close attention to small differences in tribal dress and traditions, he largely sketched Indians as he imagined they should look: pure and unadulterated by Europeans. But in this time period, Indians married Europeans, used European guns and ammunition, and

[29] See Figure 1.
[30] Kurz, *Journal*, 90, 82.

used European goods in their everyday life. This is not to say that they were totally assimilated into European culture, but they were not untouched by European contact and American conquest. In almost all of Kurz's sketches, though, he draws Indians using their own goods and weapons; the only European objects that made a frequent appearance in the sketches were saddles. As an artist, Kurz felt that his task was "to improve nature's forms, make perfect her imperfections, strive not only to emulate but to excel her in the creation of beauty. Nature achieves nothing in ideal perfection, but the artist's mind can conceive of ideal beauty and clothe his ideas with correspondingly lovely forms, i.e. idealize them."[31] His mental picture of "ideal beauty" "combined lofty intelligence, noble mind, and ardent feeling," a combination that made its way into his pictures of Native Americans.

Faced with the reality of European and Native American contact, Kurz based his sketches on European stereotypes of Native Americans, stereotypes formed through travel books and paintings. According to Alain Corbin, French Romantic travelers' purpose was to "fulfill an individual dream inaugurated by premonition. The trip is filled with ceaseless shifts from the world of reality to the imagined world arising from the confrontation of things seen and things dreamed."[32] Upon arriving in America, Kurz had to confront the fact that his idealized image of Native Americans, formed in his imagination by years of studying them from afar, did not correspond to reality. Given his determination to use art to inspire the soul, not to use art to portray reality, he ultimately chose to reflect his imagined picture of Native Americans in his sketches. When back in Switzerland, "Without the distraction of messy real people, Kurz could finally paint his idealized vision of the West and its Natives."[33]

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[31] Ibid., 189.
[32] Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, 181-2.
[33] Anne Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 416.

While Kurz eschewed signs of European influence on the Native Americans he sketched, he still portrayed them as a civilized people. In his sketches, they appear orderly, participating in simple tasks or staring at some object off in the distance. Paul Wilhelm similarly believed that Native Americans could reach a degree of civilization independently of Europeans: "At the time of discovery and conquest of the New World stronger states existed among the Indians, leaving no doubt that in far remote periods of which we have no historical data there must have existed powerful states with a high degree of civilization."[34] Paul Wilhelm's and Kurz's belief that Native Americans could be civilized without European contact differed markedly from Koch, who portrayed Native Americans as civilized only when they adapted European material culture into their own native cultures. When visiting Gay Head in Martha's Vineyard, Koch described a Native American's dwelling: "I was now led from the kitchen, where I had been received, into a very decent room in which a large genuine American double bed played the leading role. It was quite well furnished in the customary manner, even to papered walls…I mention this only to show the degree of civilization the local Indians have reached."[35] Even though the travelers had differing opinions on whether or not Native Americans were civilized before European contact, they all agreed that Indians had an ancient history, one either marked by civilization or older, more "savage" traditions.

The travelers, no matter their ideas of civilization, also believed that Indian traditions should be preserved as Europeans encroached further into native territory. Paul Wilhelm mourned the loss of pre-European contact native traditions and paid particular attention to surviving traditions, such as religious beliefs and superstitions. The traditions he observed "point[ed] to long vanished but greater epochs of this race which, lost in the night of eras, have

[34] Paul Wilhelm, *Travels*, 174.
[35] Koch, *Journey*, 15-6.

left only insufficient fragmentary conceptions and mythical allusions among their cruder successors."[36] Contemporary Native Americans were in fact "cruder" than their ancestors, demonstrating that for Paul Wilhelm, Native Americans were better civilized before Europeans traveled to America. Even Koch, who praised European influences on Native American settlements, lamented that among the Gay Head Indians, "Only two of them are still living who can speak their mother tongue; all the rest speak only English. With these two, then, the language of the Piequatto will be lost."[37] This, coupled with his description of "poor Indians" who had their land usurped by Europeans, demonstrate that Koch respected tribal traditions such as language, as long as they were blended with signs of European civilization, such as papered walls and decent furnishings.

These travelers were also united in their critiques of Americans who encroached on Native American land and thereby destroyed ancient Native American customs. Paul Wilhelm described the terrible state the Delawares lived in at this time: "Here a pitiable remnant of this once powerful nation…barely ekes out a wretched existence near their oppressors, and they will soon be given over to certain ruin. The sight of this deeply sunken aborigine, in whose veins still flowed the blood of his brace ancestors, awoke a feeling of sadness in me, a feeling which no doubt everyone who knows the history of these people will share with me."[38] Gustorf also commiserated with the plight of the Native Americans when observing the land of the then-gone Mingoes, asking himself the question, "Oh, pitiful definition of human beings, what is immortality?"[39] Kurz also asserted that "Indian blood is purer than that of thousands of native-born Americans as well as of naturalized immigrants. The Indian, as the real natives of the land,

[36] Paul Wilhelm, *Travels,* 174.
[37] Koch, *Journals*, 23.
[38] Paul Wilhelm, *Travels*, 175-6.
[39] Gustorf, *The Uncorrupted Heart*, 21.

would have a more ardent attachment to the soil, a deeper love for the nation, than, for instance, the Irishman who never surrenders his loyalty to the Emerald Isle."[40] By commenting on the state of contemporary Native American affairs, these travelers showed their ability to interact with and offer their opinions on international affairs. Indeed, they even critiqued the effects of American and, by extension, European colonialism on the native peoples of the Americas. While civilization may have been brought to Native Americans, the colonizers were destroying the livelihoods, even lives, of the colonized.

This argument works against that of Liebersohn's *Aristocratic Encounters,* in which he posits that aristocratic German travelers felt an affinity with Native Americans because both populations were dispossessed of their land, money, and power in the nineteenth century. Aristocratic Germans contended with major economic and political changes, such as an increase in population, a decline in artisanal production, and German migration overseas. Believing that aristocracy was "the natural condition of man before the turmoil and decay of historical time," German aristocrats commiserated with the noble Native American who losing his land to greedy American settlers. Liebersohn fits Paul Wilhelm into this category, but the other travelers in this group do not fit this argument quite so neatly. Not all were from the nobility; Koch had to find employment in America to support the expenses of his travels, even working for the Chouteau trading company on the Missouri River. These men did not think of themselves as similar to Native Americans. In fact, Kurz placed Europeans and Native Americans in entirely different categories, claiming that the noble Native American could teach Europeans about modest living and the proper way to behave. Non-aristocratic travelers had a different relationship with Native Americans, a relationship Liebersohn does not acknowledge.

[40] Kurz, *Journal*, 45-6.

This group also does not follow the trends outlined by the most recent scholarship addressing Germans' relationship with Native Americans. In his 2012 book *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States*, Jens-Uwe Guettel argues that at the end of the eighteenth century, Germans believed that obtaining colonial possessions in the Americas would bring domestic political change and improved economics to the German states. For this reason, many Germans supported the displacement of Native Americans, not only because a superior people emerged victorious, but also because it freed more land in the American West for German colonies.[41] While this may have been true of some political groups, Kurz and his fellow travelers made no references to building colonies in America, and they clearly disapproved of Native American displacement. In contrast to the pro-colonialists Guettel describes, this group of travelers believed that Native Americans had an ancient history, one irrevocably changed by the "discovery" of America and American settlement. They could separate themselves from colonial endeavors, critiquing the Americans who strove to colonize the continent's native peoples in the name of civilization and Manifest Destiny. The presence of both pro-colonialists and anti-colonialists in Germany demonstrates that Germans actively debated American politics and Native American removal, even though they did not have formal colonial possessions in the Americas.

The Nascent American Civilization

While these travelers agreed that America was ancient, as ancient as Europe, they also agreed that Anglo-American civilization was nascent compared to the civilizations of Europe. But opinions varied on whether or not American civilization was fundamentally good or bad. Gustorf, for example, spent time in Pittsburgh, where he came to hate the signs of industrial life,

[41] Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States*, 71.

and Koch spent much of his time in the countryside or rural areas where he could experience nature more fully than he could in a large city like Pittsburgh. Such a wide set of opinions demonstrates the variety of German opinions on American life and culture and the intense debate that could occur around the subject.

Koch praised Americans for being "enterprising and diligent," specifically appreciating their ability to solve problems in creative and practical ways.[42] While visiting Gay Head, he noted that the town's lighthouse "has started to sink because the ground is giving way. To remedy this defect one makes use of a method which our German officials no doubt would hardly have hit upon, and which seemed to me indeed very peculiar, but nevertheless proved practical."[43] Paul Wilhelm also praised American diligence and ingenuity, but specified that they still had a long way to go before meeting the standards of European civilization. He thought that "the valley of the Mississippi will one day be the center of flourishing states," but only when the area fully realized its potential and strove to fulfill it.[44] He believed that "in America, where civilization has accomplished so much during the last fifty years, there may come an epoch in the history of the human race so exalted as to leave our age-worn Europe far in the background."[45] This praise for American diligence is a bit more cautious than Koch's praise because Paul Wilhelm stipulates that Americans must continue on their current track to achieve their full potential.

Gustorf totally departed from Koch's and Paul Wilhelm's positive evaluations of American diligence and practicality. He seemed determined to convince Europeans who idealized the American West that "new frontier towns attract the excrement from the older cities

[42] Koch, *Journey*, 21.
[43] Ibid., 20.
[44] Paul Wilhelm, *Travels*, 149.
[45] Ibid., 149.

of the East."[46] He in fact found most Americans to be completely "repulsive" and asserted that it was better to "live in the wilderness, far from the American civilization."[47] He believed American goods to be crude and unfinished, and the hotels were full of vermin that made it impossible for him to sleep or even live as a decent human being. Finally, all Americans were drunkards: "Yet the people of the West are not without their pleasures or sprees, as they call them; but what cultivated European wants any part of this atmosphere? These sprees take at elections, general musters, court days, and the Fourth of July. Brandy and whisky have to do their best. They start drinking until they are completely intoxicated."[48] Koch shared similar sentiments over some American cities, describing the streets of New Orleans as "filled with thick, evil-smelling atmosphere, which is due in large part to the filthiness prevailing there."[49] Gustorf's critique, though, was for nearly all Americans, with the possible exception of those living in almost total seclusion from American towns and cities.

For Gustorf, these new American settlements and peoples simply could not compare to German towns and peoples. Germans enjoyed playing music and having robust conversations, not drinking into a stupor; German physicians were better trained than their American counterparts; and the German people were superior in every way to the "rotten riffraff" that populated America.[50] Even worse, any German immigrant to America was negatively impacted by the crude and immoral Americans. Gustorf spoke with many German immigrants about the terrible conditions they lived in. He found it hard to believe that such industrious people could be so negatively impacted by American civilization: "Imagine people from the finest German classes living in miserable huts!...They live in memory of the sweet past, in contrast with the

[46] Gustorf, *The Uncorrupted Heart*, 98.
[47] Ibid., 23.
[48] Ibid., 55.
[49] Koch, *Journey*, 110.
[50] Gustorf, *The Uncorrupted Heart*, 24.

miserable present, and in contemplation of a sad future, one illusion after another…Their despair can be read in the deep, dark lines of their faces."[51] Most Germans who were formerly useful in their homeland wasted away in America, living in poverty and abject misery. One of the few exceptions was a woman named Madam Bock and her five daughters who lived in a fine home decorated with German engravings, books, and a piano. Partaking in a rare pleasurable conversation, Gustorf and his new German friends talked about "the habits and customs of the Americans, which the Germans cannot get used to."[52] Apparently, Gustorf was not alone in his discomfort with American customs, which included obsessions with commercialism, money, and alcohol.

Some historians may assume that Gustorf thought that further German penetration through colonialism would improve American civilization, but he never commented that increased German immigration was necessary or even desirable. In fact, he possessed a strong dislike for Gottfried Duden, a German writer who overtly praised the fertile American soil and landscape, both adulations which led many Germans to immigrate to America and, subsequently, to live in dire poverty. If anything, Gustorf seems to have thought that America was a lost cause because its Anglo settlers had destroyed any semblance of productivity or good in the country.

Similar to Gustorf, Kurz offered scathing comments on American society, particularly on the Americans' determination to push Native Americans out of their native lands. After scrutinizing American treaties with Native Americans which supposedly protected natives' autonomy, Kurz wrote that they contained "nothing but hypocritical phrases to impose the belief upon a distant public that uncle Sam takes the Indians' fate much to heart. In reality, it is high

[51] Ibid., 77.
[52] Ibid., 134.

time that he did so."[53] Such hypocrisy resulted from the "dissembling, crafty" nature of all Americans.[54] Determined to trample over all others in their race to gain power, money, and prestige, they destroyed the real natives of America.

Gustorf, Koch, Paul Wilhelm, and Kurz each had differing opinions on American civilization and customs. Opinions lay on opposite sides of the spectrum, with Gustorf and Kurz offering scathing critiques of American drunkards and hypocrites, and Koch and Paul Wilhelm praising American diligence. Such differing opinions on American civilization demonstrate that Germans diligently studied Americans and American civilization and formed a variety of opinions on the new country without advocating for German colonial expansion into the country. Even if they each focused on the newness of American civilization, though, they still acknowledged that the land itself and its native inhabitants were ancient and on the same time scale as Europe. It was only Anglo-Americans and European immigrants and all that came along with them—cities, industrialization, commercialism, material goods—that were new.

Conclusion

Kurz, Paul Wilhelm, Gustorf, and Koch traveled through America for a variety of reasons: scientific study, artistic endeavors, or general observation of American life. Despite their different reasons, they found a commonality in their Romantic admiration for the American landscape and its ability to transform the soul. Differences in opinion existed over a variety of subjects, such as American industrialism, the civilization of Native Americans, and the moral character of white Americans. These differences to not serve to fragment this group of travelers; instead, they demonstrate the robust discourse surrounding America and its inhabitants that

[53] Kurz, *Journal*, 228.
[54] Ibid., 337.

existed in Germany at this time. Even though Germany did not have formal colonies, and even though these travelers did not have colonial ambitions in America, Germany was intimately connected to America through its travelers, emigrants, and intellectual discussions on the new country.

Figure 1

Absaroka (Crow). Probably Chief Rottentail. October 26, 1851.

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