

***A Call for Emigration: The Giessen Emigration Society
Der Giessener Auswanderer Gessellschaft***

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The first *Call and Declaration Concerning An Emigration En Masse From Germany to the North American States* was published in March of 1833, firmly establishing and laying out the plans of the Giessen Emigration Society. When that edition of the *Call* rapidly sold out, organizers Paul Follenius and Friedrich Münch were asked to issue a new one. J. Ricker quickly published a second edition of the *Call*, also issued from Giessen with the addition of the Statutes of the Society, in July of that year.¹

Those plans had climaxed with the small publication by Gottfried Duden (1789-1856) of his self-published first edition of *A Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America, and a Stay of Several Years Along the Missouri (during the Years 1824, '25, '26, 1827*. Duden's *Report* was a culmination of his research begun when he was a Jurist in Cologne in early 1818. Duden first purchased land in the U.S. in February of 1819, but was unable to travel to his farm until 1824. Duden returned to Germany in 1827 with plans to publish, and then return to his Missouri farm. When Duden's 1500 copies of his *Report* rolled off the presses in 1829, it was an instant best seller because it provided many Germans, including thirty year-old Münch, and his best friend and brother-in-law Follenius, just what they needed to hear at the precise time they needed to hear it.

In the 1980 English edition of Duden's *Report*, editor James Goodrich states "Münch's information may be reliable, since he corresponded with Duden before his departure for America."² Evidence in many of the statements made in the *Call* does reveal that Münch and Follenius did correspond and visit with Duden. In March of 1833, however, Münch and Follenius had nothing better for an understanding of the United States, from Duden, than this first edition of the *Report*, which did undergo numerous reprints, including pirated versions. Münch and Follenius apparently studied Duden's *Report* carefully, and its advice, as many of the Statutes are directly related. In addition to advice found in the chapter *The Thirty First Letter* where Duden spoke directly to the subject of

emigration to Missouri, he included “*Concerning the Nature of the North American United States or Concerning the masses of the Political Situation of the North Americans.*”

In that chapter, *Concerning the Nature*, Münch and Follenius found their calling. Duden stated, “I shall for the present refrain from making more detailed suggestions. I shall indicate briefly one single way of executing such a plan only in order to the insipid jeerers that this is not a question of flighty planning. A company organized in Europe buys tracts of land of an area of five to ten thousand Morgen. On these individual tracts towns are founded and populated by colonists who are transported free of charge on the condition that they take over a house in the new town at a moderate price, together with ten to fifteen Morgen of land...and live there at least six successive years. The security given for this must equal the cost of the journey. The contract becomes void as soon as the colonist violates it. On the other hand, he is free to cancel it by repayment of the traveling expenses.”³

The *Call* laid out the Giessen Emigration Society’s plans as follows:

“We the undersigned, together with many of our most respected friends and fellow citizens have decided to leave Germany and to seek their new homeland in the states of North America. This intention awoke in us once we had become convinced that, so far as we are concerned, conditions in Germany neither now nor in the future will satisfy the demands that we as persons and citizens must make of life for ourselves or our children.... It is our idea that the better part of the many Germans who have decided to emigrate should settle as a group, united as a whole in keeping with the purified and presently existing political form and received into the great federation of states, so that in this way the survival of German customs, language, etc., should be secured, so that a free and popular form of life could be created. This is our idea, whose execution appears grandiose and desirable, appears to us to be possible and not too difficult.”⁴

It goes on to assure the government that “the purpose of our call and declaration is to win our German countrymen already determined to emigrate for our idea, and to encourage them to act together with us to carry it out”... and added “We are not violating any existing law by calling for a unification of all German emigrants...we desire to establish a new Fatherland in combination with countrymen who are of the same mind.”⁵

“The major reasons for such a unification of all emigrants en masse are the following.... 1) create a German state among the various states of the Union itself, a rejuvenated Germany in North America... 2) “travel as a solidly established and organized whole for dealing as a group, consisting of several colonies,

uniting all resources into a free existence, independent of foreigners... 3) consist of persons of all classes, as found in Germany... 4) through arrangements made by private association according to legal and binding principles... security for families is in the interest of all, associations will easily be established for this purpose, and provided with good establishment will provide adequate support in the manner of ordinary widows' and orphans institutions... 5) The association of all emigrants with the intention of settling individual colonies alongside one another... providing the greatest possible significance... 6) Since the entire undertaking described below is projected for a series of years and an establishment will be made that provides and administrative authority remaining in Germany for later emigration..."⁶

was stated first.

This was followed by the proclamation that what they promised in general was with great certainty going to happen. Each member was to have equal rights, yet be proud to stand for security and they would create a "rejuvenated, moral religious life in which the true spirit of Christianity...in the free exchange of ideas... and one in which a simpler and more natural way of life" would be found. "We hope to avoid permanently the specter of people without work or bread, for whom we have no help here [in Germany], plagued with an unworthy worry about the survival of their children..."⁷

Composition of the Giessen Emigration Society

The organizers then went on to lay out the membership and organization of the Society,

"It is clear that only irreproachable and industrious families, free of prejudices of class or birth, can be received into our Society.... in order to properly carry out our goals, to plan for a number of years to complete them and to create an organization that permits planned effort.

Insofar as we will put all our strength into directing all future emigration to one and the same place, we specifically want to work to have the mass of those belonging to our society and leaving first to be organized even before embarkation into individual associations *of which each forms a separate colony*, but each stands in the closest organizational contact with all the other German colonies, with all of them settling sufficiently closely together so as to be held or occupied exclusively or predominantly only by Germans. For this reason it is necessary *at this moment* to erect a Central Committee as well as the necessary number of special committees in all parts of Germany where emigrants are in sufficient number.

After the *settlement of the first colonies*, alongside the aforementioned Central Committee *remaining in Germany* there should be a *second one in America*... everything that can be done on the spot for the subsequent colonies, to make later settlements easier in every way, and specifically to make it possible for poorer families in Germany to settle in the new homeland... All committee members receive no compensation for their efforts except remuneration for payments made on behalf of the society for which they are responsible... in order to get things started, the undersigned organizers, along with some men named below who have great interest in this matter for various reasons, have formed themselves as a provisional Central Committee with its seat in Giessen, in the Grand Duchy of Hesse. ”⁸

Even more specifically, the organizers and the Central Committee would state:

“a few more words concerning the individual societies /colonies.

It remains for each of these to constitute themselves according to their own decision and to order according to their particular situations. However, such a colony can only be included in the larger community if its constitution does not offend the essential principles on which the whole rests.

In this regard, we consider as essential:

Firstly, that no individual colony grants any legal existence to any variety of aristocracy,

Secondly, that each renounces the introduction of slavery forever.

Since it appears extremely desirable that the constitutions of all individual colonies should agree as much as possible, it will be in the general interest that there be an essential exchange of views before the various societies definitively accept their statutes.

We only add that the statutes of each of the individual colonies in many cases must accept rules that only operate assuming their agreement with the positive laws effective in America, but since these are *not adequately known to us at this time, especially those depending on local conditions*, it is desired that all of the statutes to be adopted restrict themselves only to what is essential and contain as few special conditions as possible!”⁹

The Organizers considered and laid out the means of membership at great length as well.

“*Registration* may be made with each of the undersigned as well as agents named later by us, but only in person, not in writing, excepting only a registrant known personally to us. *Acceptance* only

becomes effective through the entire provisional leadership; hence only by us and the other members we will associate with us through review and special election.

The payment that we expect immediately from each member, to be paid in cash, will be either direct to us or to our agent, or finally to Mr. Jordan, estate manager at Lindheim in the Wetterau, who has declared himself willing to hold the position of cashier and clerk, and through whom all necessary common payments will be made ...At the time of registration, each head of family has to pay one Gulden on acceptance ... On acceptance, every head of family is to pay five Gulden for every member, but if these do not total at least five members, the charge will still be 25 Gulden, which will be kept in the Society treasury, and will be used for payments for the benefit of the entire Society. The surplus remaining after payment of expenses will be refunded to the members of the Society. Whoever resigns before embarkation will have no claim and his portion will remain with the Society.

Our colony cannot depart under any circumstance before early in 1834...As soon as the time of departure is set, each family must deliver enough cash to the Society treasury to cover by estimation their transportation to the goal and according to the number of heads, their support until the next harvest, the purchase of at least 50 acres of land, clearance of land needed *at the outset*, and purchase of necessary equipment. Families that cannot demonstrate they have adequate wealth cannot be accepted...Everyone travels to the place of embarkation at his own expense.”¹⁰

Destination and establishment of the commune

“The following is to be observed concerning the choice of the place for our coming settlements by the undersigned organizers, in conjunction with the other members of the provisional Central Committee:

We seek a land whose autonomous development cannot be restricted by the presence of an unchangeable state institution, in which case we will not enter an *already constituted* state, but rather we wish to populate a territory of the Union where it is still possible to *legislate autonomously in keeping with our nationality*... *Arkansas* ... a region of 5700 square [German] miles, hence incidentally half the size of Germany, bound by the states of Mississippi, Louisiana and Tennessee, as well as by Mexico, watered by the Arkansas, Mississippi, the Red and White Rivers, with their many tributaries, blessed with all the riches of nature, healthy on its heights, with the climate of northern Italy, populated with colonies of benign Indians and scattered Frenchmen from Louisiana, making a total population of about 30,000 souls... *we*

shall not depart until we are thoroughly informed on the conditions to be expected there through all available means, perhaps through a report of the Society being formed, through a commission sent for that express purpose... Once the place of the colony has been set, then there will be an agreement concerning the building lots. Each home site should have at least 20 acres undivided attached. Primary care should be taken that, even though agriculture will be the chief occupation, the layout should accommodate the conditions of a future town of crafts and trade...After the subtraction of those plots that are necessary and purchased for the commune, everyone may purchase land as desired, and in order that there should be no conflict among members of the Society over this, a certain order should be established on this through agreement. In order to exclude those not suited to our purposes from penetrating into our community, all participants in our undertaking will be committed, for a specified time not yet determined, in which the right to buy real property within the limits of the commune will be reserved to them and then any member of the Society. A common treasury will be reserved to cover unavoidable common expenses. The schoolteacher, physician and clerk will be the sole employees to be paid communally. Courts of arbitration will be established to settle disputes, whose decisions all are bound to obey. On the death of a head of the family, a special guardian of the family will be named, with concurrence of the widow or other nearest relatives, who will represent the family in all things so long as it has minor members, and will care for its well-being as best he can, on his own responsibility.”¹¹

The undersigned organizers were Paul Follenius, Grand-Ducal Hessian Aulic, and Friedrich Münch, Grand-Ducal Hessian Pastor at Nieder-Gemünden, Alsfeld District. The members of the Provisional Central Committee were: Christian von Buri, Aulic Court Advocate at Giessen; Gottfried Jordan, Pension Master at Lindheim in der Wetterau; Dr. Ph. Fr. Wilh. Vogt, Professor of Medicine at Giessen; G.H. Engelhard, Pharmacy owner at Frankfurt a. M.; and Georg Engelbach, Doctor of Medicine and Surgery at Lauterbach in the Grand Duchy of Hesse.

The Statutes of the Giessen Emigration Society

The Foreword to the Statutes of the Society,

“In our “Call and Declaration, etc., etc.” we have reserved to ourselves ... the right to undertake all the actions for the special colony with which we intend to cross to the United States of America in early 1834 that could not be delayed if our goal was to be reached... This was done provisionally, that is, until the election of a Society Committee ...The statutes themselves will speak for us, showing that we are far

from the presumption of making the Society permanently a work of our own hands... But these statutes can only establish the legal relationships in which the individual members of the Society stand to one another and to the entire Society *until* such time as *the first and most important goal, the common settlement* has been achieved... the settlement has proceeded to the point where the Society has completed its establishment and has reached sufficient knowledge of the local resources of the new homeland... As soon as, in our judgment, we have a sufficient number of Society members, and this point appears to be very near, we will call a general assembly at once, and we will precipitate the election of a Committee, making a precise accounting of what we have done to date.”¹²

The following half, 24 of the 51 pages, of the *Call*, was devoted to the Statutes of the Society. They included: I) Purpose and Form of the Society; II) Constitution of the Society and its Officers; III) On the individual members of the Society; IV) General Rules; V) Guarantee of the Statutes. The Statutes were a more thoroughly detailed version of the *Call*, of which some items should be noted:

“The Emigration Society founded at Giessen declares itself a member of the general German Emigration Society, which has the purpose to settle in a region of the North American Union, specifically, so far as it is possible, in the region of *Arkansas*, making a new Fatherland, eventually establishing an essentially German state of our own and to enter as such into the league of North American states...All authority delegated through mutual contract of members rests alone in the *totality of all* voting heads of families, *completely equal* in rights and obligations. The slightest part of the authority of the Society can never be *delegated* to individual members of the Society *for their own person*... Exempted from the power and resolutions of the Society are: All matters of religion, in which the Society as such will not mix in any situation. Society officials are a committee consisting of five members, of which one is declared to be the President, the Secretary, the Clerk, the Society’s Physician, two teachers and three arbitration judges and two alternates.

The official functions and duties of the Society officials are as follows: for the ship contract for the crossing from Europe to America, as well as contracts for the continuation from the landing harbor to the place of settlement; for the purchase of the land needed by the Society (specifically 50 acres for each family) for the clearance of a part of these lands before the arrival of the Society, including raising necessary log cabins for housing at the outset, for the contract with the Society physician, the teachers and

the commissioners to be sent ahead... Limiting the territory designates of the colony by using the advice of experts (translator's note: The German here is "Gemarkung," which designates an area under a single communal control, such as an open-field village with attached meadows and commons.)

On the individual members of the Society ... All members of families are members of the Society... only the adult male heads of families ... are members with voting rights...morality vouched for by signed documents... An independent household of his own...Adult, specifically the completion of the 22nd year ... Every member of the Society renounces receiving slaves; contrary action will be punished with expulsion from the Society and the loss of landed property within the limits ... proof of the required wealth...¹³

all of which the Statutes proceeded to lay out the exact amount of funds necessary for each member from the moment they departed Bremen.

The Giessen Emigration Society departs for North America

The General Assembly spoken of in the *Call* was held the 1st of September 1833. It is unclear at what date between then, and the actual departure that their agent returned with the advice "do not go to Arkansas." Just previous to departure the first alteration to the Society's plan, was to be its' destination. Some reports state that upon learning that a change was needed, a decision to meet in St. Louis was made.

Pastor at Nieder-Gemünden, August Lotz entered the entry into the Church Chronicle, "On March 2, 1834 Münch gave his farewell sermon, Acts 20:32, and emigrated with his family with high illusions expecting happiness and glory in the land of the Utopia of America."

In The Autobiography of Frederick Muench [sic], translated from the German language by historian and Centenarian Ralph Gregory, Münch writes;

"From the time I and Paul Follenius concluded the founding of The Giessen Emigration Society" there followed a hard trial of patience and courage.. A month after the first division under Follenius leadership departed from Bremen to New Orleans [31 March 1834¹⁴], I as leader of the second, was due to start on the way to Baltimore... I had already given up my place as minister... an antiquated regulation, not put to use until then was made the most against me... The Provincial Councilor not once permitted me to announce for the information of fellow travelers, the day of departure in the newspaper.

Meanwhile my wife became deathly ill...In the first night's lodging we became infested with scarlet fever. It broke out when we got to Hanover and the children fell sick...the time agreed on for departure from Bremen was approaching... and since a considerable penalty was fixed...for every day the departure was delayed through fault of the Society...I wanted to hurry off...that the doctor would not permit.

In Bremen we were by no means received friendly by our ship charterers, Messrs. Delius. They informed me they had written me to postpone our departure... as the ship that was to have taken us away was held back in America longer than expected and had not yet landed.”¹⁵

What Münch did not know at the time, and perhaps never learned was that the ship had floundered and sank, the day previous to its slated arrival. The local authorities and Messrs. Delius did not wish this information to be announced in the local newspapers because it would have been bad for business. Münch goes on...

“Our contract stated that for every day the departure was delayed because of the fault of our ship brokers, a penalty equal to that imposed on use we could summon from them. But, they said to us, that if we would have patience, they would procure us many advantages, or else, in spite of our contract, they could treat us severely. They also sought through consolations to hold us there.

So passed a week... we lost time and the company had to spend their own money...nothing remained for me but to hire a lawyer...the lawyer made the introductory steps...he told us he must make a journey... and recommend another...he had no desire to represent...against the rich Delius. The other lawyer explained... our case may go on for a month and advised a compromise. And one thereafter was brought about finally, by which we became quartered and provided with ship rations in a warehouse, on an island named Harriersand, in the Weser River across from Brake, until a vessel was at hand which could take us on.

I worked busily with the leading members toward putting their records in order. The others pleased themselves with gymnastic exercises and pastime of all kinds. When after four weeks more our ship still did not appear... the ship *Medora* under the American Captain Griffith laid to in Bremerhaven, our ship charterers considered it most advantageous to turn us over to the American.”¹⁶

The *Medora* actually departed the 3rd day of June, 1834¹⁷, a delay of 64 days from the date Follenius and his group had departed Germany, thinking that Münch would be just a few weeks behind them. At this point, the

destination and the timeline had been drastically altered despite all of the well-laid plans. When Follenius' and group reached Paducah, Follenius fell ill and was himself delayed.

“The worst thing was that while Follenius and his family lay sick in Paducah, the treasurer and the bookkeeper had taken the cash to St. Louis, and there had divided the money among the surviving members, in what now appeared a very inaccurate manner, and then deposited an amount smaller than was due us, in St. Louis.”¹⁸

Münch, aboard the *Medora* arrives in Baltimore, July 24th, 1834, and after a brief encounter with sunstroke, the colony heads for St. Louis, experiencing many difficulties.

“At Cincinnati... we headed for a hotel... At the hotel a small, elderly man, to my surprise, addressed me in German, and voiced his conjecture that we belonged to the second division of the Giessen Society.

“What do you know about this matter?!” ... he replied, “I can tell you much about it that you do not yet know; the first division has had much hard luck on the journey up the Mississippi. It has lost many of its members by cholera. Follenius himself fell sick, and lay down on the way; the company broke up and scattered, since each sought to himself as he could. Now, Follenius lives not far from me., near the place where Duden lived. My name is Bock¹⁹ and I am on my way to Philadelphia...”²⁰

“I was as if thunderstruck by this information, the accuracy of which I could not doubt. With great incessant exertion and unspeakable sacrifices, I had held my division together, had kept our accounts punctiliously, and in many a bitter hour had referred to the approaching contact with ..the first division... when everything would become better, and so had succeeded in keeping alive a general and hopeful enthusiasm, in spite of many a setback. Now this all was ended.

The journey went slow... two whole weeks... from Wheeling to St. Louis...then troubles with the boat...the nearer we came to St. Louis, the higher our anxiety became for another reason. We had received reports that cholera had broken out in the city in violent form....Since I, contrary to expectation, received no news here from Follenius... the next day I went 20 miles farther to the little town of St.

Charles...serious illness of two members of my family compelled me to stop for several days. From there I sent a messenger to Follenius. In response Follenius himself soon came to us.

What we had to tell each other was little in accord with the plan and expectation we had when we left the homeland. He lived with a dozen fellow immigrants in a farmhouse, the former owner²¹of which

still occupied with a large flock of children. Nevertheless, he had already provided the temporary, very necessary shelter for my family in the neighborhood.

With dejected feeling I returned to St. Louis. There I assembled our people, all of whom were now of the opinion that we must go separately. I explained to them the condition of things, distributed the means I had on hand, and assured them of my deep regret that our cherished plan should have so miscarried.”²²

Conclusion

In July of 1833, the *Call* was issued with such great hope for the Giessen Emigration Society:

“We are right to choose as our model in this great enterprise the first settlers in the region of the North American Union. For them as with us the idea of freedom shone, before which all hindrances, immeasurably greater in those days, must vanish. This idea of freedom filled the first settlers with a resolve that was crowned with success before which Europe is justified in marveling. They were primarily spurred by the idea of religious freedom, as we are predominantly moved by the equally elevated and exciting idea of civil freedom to show ourselves worthy of our great predecessors.

In our undertaking we have a significant advantage over those first settlers, which is that we are entering one and the same region in a mass standing as closely as possible together, not giving up but rather holding on to our nationality, splendid in its talents, making it effective in our new public and private life.”²³

Like the explorers Lewis and Clark, sent by Jefferson to locate a ‘way to the western sea’ that didn’t exist, Münch and Follenius had set out to “*settle as a group, united as a whole, received into the great federation of states.*”²⁴ However, just as the *Corps of Discovery* did open a whole new land for the United States, the Giessen Emigration Society’s “great enterprise” did create yet another stream, in that rapidly flooding river of German emigrants, during the 1830s.

The leader of the Giessen Emigration Society, Friedrich Münch, became one of the most prolific German writers of the mid-nineteenth century, before he died December 14, 1881. And, over 100 years later, German is still the largest ancestry in the United States.²⁵

Endnotes

¹ *Call and Declaration Concerning An Emigration En Masse From Germany To the North American States*, Steve Rowan, translation, *Aussorderung und Erl arung in Betress einer Auswanderung im Grosen aus Deutschland in die nordamerikanischen freistaaten*, J. Ricker, Giessen, Juli 1833; non-published, 2009

² Duden, Gottfried *Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America and a Stay of Several Years Along the Missouri (During the Years 1824, '25, '26, 1827)* Goodrich, James W., General Editor; An English Translation, The State Historical Society of Missouri and University of Missouri Press, 1980

³ Duden

⁴ *Call*

⁵ *Call*

⁶ *Call*

⁷ *Call*

⁸ *Call*

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¹¹ *Call*

¹² *Call*

¹³ *Call*

¹⁴ M nch, Friedrich, *Briefe von Deutschen aus Nord Amerika, mit besonderer Beziehung auf die Giessner Auswander Gessellschaft vom Jahre 1834*, Fr. Gleich, Altenberg, 1836

¹⁵ Gregory, Ralph, *The Autobiography of Frederick Muench*, English translation, Three Pines Publishing Company, Marthasville, 1964

¹⁶ Gregory

¹⁷ M nch, Friedrich, *Briefe von Deutschen aus Nord Amerika, mit besonderer Beziehung auf die Giessner Auswander Gessellschaft vom Jahre 1834*, Fr. Gleich, Altenberg, 1836

¹⁸ Gregory

¹⁹ This is Baron Johann Wilhelm von Bock 1785-1852, formerly of Dutzow, born in Mecklenberg and leader of the Berlin Emigration Society, who founded Dutzow, Missouri in the United States in 1834.

²⁰ Gregory

²¹ This was Jacob Haun, the same farmer that had assisted with the purchase of Duden's land in February 1819, and then lodged Duden, Eversmann and their cook, from 1824 until approximately 1826. Follenius purchased Haun's farm.

²² Gregory

²³ *Call*

²⁴ *Call*

²⁵ 2000 United States Census Bureau figures, page 3.