

PIONEER DAYS IN AMERICA

As Experienced by LEOPOLD STEIN, Anno 1833

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Among the papers left by my great-grandfather, Leopold Stein, who came to this country in 1833, there was found a diary which he had kept during the period of his travels, from the time he left Germany until he arrived in Baltimore. This diary, with letters found among his effects, is the basis of the account of his experiences which I am about to narrate. It is not my purpose to dwell upon matters of family interest, but to confine myself to such matters as are perhaps typical of the experiences of many other persons who left the Fatherland for that unknown country, America, in the early days of the nineteenth century. Only such extracts from the family letters as give a picture of conditions in this country in those times are here included.

The letters and the diary were written in German script, and in the minutely fine handwriting of that period; their translation was a slow and tedious task. Although written with a goose-quill pen, so fine is the closely written handwriting, that it was often necessary to use a magnifying glass in order to decipher the script.

My great-grandfather, whose full name was Franz Leopold Stein, was born in the year 1806, in Schwetzingen, in the old Grand-Duchy of Baden, the son of a physician, Dr. Anton Stein. His mother was born Crescentia Williard, of Ettlingen, a town not far from Karlsruhe. The family of Dr. Stein consisted of three sons and two daughters, my great-grandfather, called Leopold by the family, being the youngest of the sons.

This Dr. Stein had an appointment as physician to the Grand Duke at the courts at Schwetzingen and at Rastadt, and accordingly resided during a portion of the year in each of these towns. After the death of Dr. Stein, the family remained in Rastadt. This seemingly

quiet and secure existence, however, was repeatedly disturbed by the invasions of the French armies, during the long course of the Napoleonic Wars, which continued until 1815.

When my great-grandfather grew up he was sent to the University of Heidelberg to be trained for a civil position in the government service. As was the custom, he became a member of one of the student duelling corps, for which the University is so well known. The Constitution and Duelling Regulations of this corps were among the papers which he brought to this country.

After the War of Liberation, the students were fired with the ideal of a United German People, and the student corps assumed a patriotic and political aspect. In short, they engaged in politics, and were soon regarded as radicals inimical to the pig-tailed traditions of the governing class. Laws were passed suppressing their activities, and imposing severe penalties upon offenders. Nevertheless student agitation for German unity and reform continued, but secretly; offenders, when detected, either fled the country, or paid the penalty for their patriotism, which oftentimes was death.

After completing his course at Heidelberg, my ancestor studied jurisprudence at the University of Freiburg, and was engaged in his studies there when events occurred which forced him to become an exile from the land of his birth. In 1832 it was discovered that the students at that university were plotting to bring about certain democratic reforms. The leaders of the movement were seized and thrown into prison—save those who were fortunate enough to find safety in flight. Among these was Leopold Stein, who was visiting his relatives at Rastadt, when the news of the discovery of the plot and

arrest of some of its leaders was revealed. Knowing that his own arrest and imprisonment, or perhaps an even worse fate would follow if he remained in Germany, he made a hasty departure and found a temporary refuge across the Rhein, in French territory. As there was no hope of a return to his land, he determined to seek a new home in America, where one of his friends, a certain Dr. Frank of Rastadt, had already gone.

Among the papers which I found accompanying my ancestor's diary were several letters of this Dr. Frank. These contain an interesting account of conditions in the United States, and urged Leopold Stein, as well as other members of his family, to join him in the New World. Dr. Frank, writing from Germantown, Ohio, after being in the United States some six months, and having traveled extensively, advises his friend Leopold to avoid New England, as being cold and inhospitable, the people unfriendly and inclined to religious bigotry. Of the West, in the Missouri territory, the inhabitants were crude and lacking in the qualities of civilization; hence that part of the country was not to be recommended. As to the Eastern States, he writes that due to the already dense population, there was little opportunity for a newcomer to prosper. The best prospects for advancement, as well as the most beautiful lands, said Dr. Frank, may be found in the valleys of the Ohio River, and its tributaries. There the lands are beautiful, like the shores of the Rhein, and well suited to the cultivation of the grape. Such lands are now no longer cheap, but may be purchased for from \$15.00 to \$40.00 per acre. A fine farm is worth from \$6000. to \$10,000. according to size and location. If this represents too large a sum for his friend to invest, he recommends the purchase of a more modest abode in one of the growing towns, where various kinds of profitable employment may be found. He says "Ein hübsches Haus und Gartenplatz mögen Sie für \$150-\$200. kaufen, und ein Haus für \$400-\$600. erbauen lassen." For example, a cer-

tain Herr Stein (no relative of ours) who has recently come to America from the Rheinland, has received a Congressional appointment as chief engineer with a salary of \$5000. If Karl would come over and try his luck he might do equally as well. (Karl Stein, the oldest brother of my great-grandfather was then a military engineer in the service of the Grand Duke of Baden; having a good position at home, wisely ignored this advice, and remained in Germany.) "I am sure that all of your family, if they applied themselves with diligence, would find excellent opportunities for profitable employment in this country. Though you would be leaving much that is good at home, and should give careful consideration before making a decision, I feel confident that you would find it to the ultimate advantage of all of you to come to America."

Another letter of Dr. Frank, also from Germantown, Ohio, is dated December 24, 1832. The writer begins by apologizing for not having written sooner, but sends additional information about conditions in America, promised in his previous letter. He explains that he has been overcome by a spell of homesickness. It is difficult to prosper in America, he writes, unless one is acquainted with the English language; he recommends that his friend Leopold read the works of Cooper and of Lord Byron, and to study English grammar. "Without a knowledge of English, it is difficult to have any success among these Yankees, who think of nothing but making money. They are adept in the arts of lying and deception. In these respects they exceed even the most avaricious Jews of Europe. These Yankees know nothing of music, indeed have little culture whatsoever. Nevertheless, all that is really needed for success is sound health and determination. The experiences of others have proven this. While learning English, I have been making my living by teaching, but as soon as I have mastered the language, I shall resume the practice of Medicine.

"The wisest course for you, friend Leopold, would be to purchase some

land. In this country land constantly rises in value. In the past six years, the price of land has doubled! Farm products are in good demand, and bring high prices—flour \$6.00 the barrel; corn meal, which is used for baking, 3c to 4c the pound; pork 2c to 2½c the pound; potatoes 25c the bushel; apples and the like \$2. the barrel. It would be still better to grow products of which there is as yet none here, such as cauliflower, sugar beets, red cabbage, and lettuce. Seeds for these should be brought with you, as they cannot be purchased here.

"There is no need to bring more than one gun, as game is already scarce—'Die Jagd ist nichts mehr.' There are still plenty of wild pigeons, rabbits, and squirrels. For deer, one must go 100 miles from the city, and of buffalo there are none at all. Fishing was formerly good but has been ruined by the building of dams.

"It is needless to bring furniture, as the necessary articles can be purchased here cheaply. A good table for \$6.; a set of six Windsor chairs for the same price, a sideboard or cabinet for \$5; soap and candles must be made in the household. The paper here is good enough for writing purposes, but there is no good paper for drawing and sketching. Knives, forks, scissors, and other small instruments should be brought with you; the finer articles cannot be purchased here. It would be an excellent thing to bring the necessary equipment for a *Liquörenfabrik* or *Stillerei*. An excellent demand would be found for good liquors, such as our own *Kirschwasser* and brandy. *Even the Cherokee Indians would appreciate them!*

"If the ladies should accompany you to America, a *Putzmacher-geschäft* (Millinery store) would do well. Stylish hats are in great demand by the American ladies, but very few are available. For this purpose the finer materials should be purchased in Germany and brought along. Materials such as fine silks, laces, trimmings, fine feathers, and embroideries cannot be obtained here.

Little children's silk hats, such as we have at home, would take well. In addition a good profit could be made by selling face powders, perfumes, and all sorts of articles of luxury for ladies. Except in the Atlantic coast provinces, such articles are not obtainable, and even there are very expensive. Good silk costs \$1.50 the yard, linen 25c the yard. Recipes for dyeing you should also bring along with you. All these articles would be in good demand in Cincinnati. It would be well also to bring recipes for making fine chocolates, cakes, *und alle Art Confituren*.

"Success in this country requires only energy and resolution, and possessed of these you cannot fail to be fortunate."

On the whole, this account of American conditions does not seem an especially favorable one; nevertheless it apparently made a good impression upon its recipients. Leopold Stein, of course, had little choice; he had either to leave Germany, or to stand the consequences of the political events in which he had participated; but when he left for America, strangely enough, his mother, two sisters and brother Eduard decided to accompany him. Only the oldest brother, Karl, remained in Germany. The other members of the family joined Leopold in Strassburg, where they sold the possessions which they had brought along and converted them into gold. With this they planned to purchase a home, in whatever part of America might please them best. They took with them a number of household articles, family portraits, and other personal effects, some of which have been preserved to the present day. Leopold apparently mistrusted his friend's judgment as to the lack of need for weapons in America, for he brought with him, in addition to the rifle which Dr. Frank had recommended, two duelling pistols, a small pocket pistol, a Heidelberg duelling sword, a dagger, and a sword cane. On several occasions, he found the last named weapon to be of good service, for Baltimore, in the first half of the nineteenth century, was by no means the law-abiding place that it has since become.

The details of the journey to America are fully set forth in the diary of Leopold Stein. From Strassburg, he and his family journeyed across France to Havre, where they embarked on the sailing ship "Lexington," of Boston, bound for New Orleans.

At Havre, they purchased supplies for the sea voyage, it being necessary in those days for the passengers to supply their own food while on shipboard. The list of these supplies is set forth in the diary, and is as follows:

360 Pf. Biscuit	12 Littres de
130 Pf. Viande de	l'eau de vie
conserve	1 quintal de
40 Pf. de Riz	sucre
40 Littres pois	20 Pf. de café
et haricots	5 Pf. de Chocolat
30 Pf. de beurre	10 Pf. Mehl
sale	20 Flaschenessence
½ barrique de	d'oranges
vin	12 Bousseau de
60 Littres do	Pommes de
vinaigre	terre

Setting sail on April 21, 1833, the travelers departed for the New World. The voyage was uneventful, and seven weeks later they arrived off the mouth of the Mississippi River, where a pilot boarded the ship, and conducted them to the port of New Orleans. The shores of the new land offered a welcome sight to the voyagers, clouded somewhat by the thought that slavery still prevailed there.

"Am 6tn Juni, Morgens sehen wir vom Schiff aus die Stadt New Orleans von der Morgensonne beleuchtet, sie scheint sehr gross, und in einem halb-Kreise am Ufer des Mississippi erbaut."

Here the diary is interrupted. The travelers had intended to land at New Orleans, and had tentative plans to make this town their permanent home, if they found it, and the surrounding country, to their liking. As a notation in the diary indicates, before leaving Europe they had engaged hotel rooms in New Orleans in the inn of a certain Herr Bauer in Lewis Street. When the ship arrived at New Orleans, however, it was found that a cholera epidemic was raging, and the passengers were advised

that it was not safe for them to land. They therefore transferred to the river steamer "Walk-in-the-Water" and continued up the Mississippi, with the intention of joining Dr. Frank in Ohio. They had not proceeded far from New Orleans, however, when the cholera broke out among the crew and passengers on board their ship. Among these was Frau Stein, who soon became very ill, and died on shipboard, shortly before the steamer reached the little town of New Madrid in the State of Missouri. This sad event is recorded by the following entry in the diary:

"Abends 4 Uhr am 19tn Juni 1833— starb unsere Mutter auf dem Dampfboot "Walk-in-the-Water" an der Cholera; am 20tn Juni, 1833, Morgens gegen 10 Uhr wurde sie zu New Madrid im Staat Missouri hart am Ufer des Mississippi begraben."

A pressed rose bud is found between the pages of the diary containing this entry. Overcome by their grief the travelers failed to keep a close watch upon their valuables, and upon their return from the burial of their mother, they discovered, to their horror, that the trunk containing the gold which they had brought with them to purchase a home, had been stolen, and that they were now left almost penniless in a strange land. With only a small sum of money in their pockets, they continued up the river, eventually reaching Cincinnati, in the latter part of June, 1833. There they met their friend, Dr. Frank, but did not linger long. Whether they did not find Cincinnati to their liking, or whether, being unable to purchase a home or farm due to the loss of their money, they were impelled to leave, is not revealed.

On the advice of a friend, whom they had met in Cincinnati, they determined to go east and settle in Baltimore; and accordingly, departed from Cincinnati on the evening of July 15, 1833, by the river steamer "Mount Vernon."

At this point, entries in the diary are very brief and bear evidence of the pessimism and depression from which the travelers suffered, by reason of their

double misfortune. The notations consist chiefly of the names of the various towns which the steamer passed in its journey up the Ohio River. They stopped for a day or two in Pittsburgh, (which is spelled "Pizebourg" in the diary) and proceeded from there, by gradual stages, to Baltimore, which they reached on July 24, 1833. With their arrival in Baltimore the diary comes to a close; the final entry is—"Baltimore, July 25th, 1833—Temperature 110° Fahrenheit."

Then followed the difficult period of becoming adjusted to a new life in a strange land. It was doubly difficult because the long period of American prosperity so enthusiastically described by Dr. Frank in his letters, when "land doubled in price every few years, and employment was easy to be had" was drawing to a close; the hard times, which reached a crisis in the panic of 1837, were not far off. Eduard, the older brother, was the first to obtain employment. He gave lessons in German and French, and thus supported the family. His brother Leopold worked at various jobs, eventually becoming a clerk in the hat shop of Craft and Cole in Clerkenwell Street. The two sisters did fancy embroidering and similar work. In 1836, they received word that their friend Dr. Frank had died in New Orleans of the yellow fever. This event is perpetuated in the diary by a picture of his grave, with a tombstone set at the foot of a weeping willow tree, evidently painted by one of the sisters. The same year the older sister married Juan Caseres, a Spanish sea-captain, and the following year Leopold Stein married a Miss Young, of a Southern Maryland family.

By this time the two brothers had accumulated a little capital out of their earnings, and they determined to establish a business of their own. Leopold Stein, having learned something of the hat trade, thought that the manufacture of hats would be profitable. It was the fashion for men, at this time, to wear tall "beaver" hats made of dyed fur. There was an available supply of fur, for this purpose, but the brothers did

not know how to cure and dye it, nor was the art known in Baltimore. Accordingly, sometime in the year 1836, Leopold Stein wrote to his brother Karl, in Germany, asking him to obtain and send the formula for curing and dyeing fur, as done in the fur centers of Germany. Karl Stein was, at this time, district engineer (Bezirksingenieur) in Heidelberg. A long and interesting letter from Karl, sent in response to this request, is among the letters preserved by Leopold Stein.

This letter is dated Heidelberg, March 25, 1837. In it, Karl Stein says that he has found it very difficult to obtain the desired information concerning the "Pelzfärberei," although he has made several trips to Manheim for that purpose. The older workmen who know the craft well are very suspicious and will not talk freely, and the younger men no longer take the trouble to learn their trade properly, hence their advice is not to be relied upon. However, he has finally found an old and experienced fur dyer, from whom he has purchased a formula for the best method of curing and dyeing fur for hats. This formula he sets forth in detail. The letter closes with news of various relatives and friends in Germany, and a request that the brothers send him some Indian relics and natural history specimens.

Supplied with this information from Germany, the two brothers opened a fur dyeing and hat making establishment, which soon flourished sufficiently to provide them with a good livelihood. But, succeeding the panic of 1837, business conditions became very bad, and in the long period of hard times which followed, and lasted for several years thereafter, the hat business was not sufficient to support both families. The elder brother temporarily withdrew from the partnership and sought other employment, since his brother Leopold, who by that time had a wife and child, had greater needs than he. It would be difficult to find a more vivid picture of the condition of the business world during the hard times which followed the panic of 1837, than that contained in a letter written February 24, 1839, by

Eduard Stein to his sister Amanda. This letter was written at New Orleans, where Eduard had gone in the hope of selling some merchandise.

"Ich habe dir zwar bei meiner Abreise gesagt, dass wenn meine Geschäfte hier schlecht gehen, so würde ich gar nicht schreiben; diesmal aber muss ich mein Vorhaben brechen. Nicht nur sind die Geschäfte schlecht, so wieder alles ist schlecht. Ich habe also diese langen 3 Wochen keine Hoffnung etwas zu verkaufen bekommen, und selbst mein Geld in kurzer Zeit zu Ende gehen wird. Ich habe in diesen Tagen die Preise der Waaren erkundigt, und bemerkte ich, zu meinem grossen Schrecken, dass ich nicht nur gar keinen Nutzen machen, sondern selbst nicht um den halben Kostpreis verkaufen kann. Alles will nur verkaufen, und niemand einkaufen, und man bot mir hier dieselben Waaren um die halben Preise was Hubbard in Baltimore bezahlte—wie kann ich verkaufen? Die Stadt ist voll von Sachen aller Art, und niemand kann verkaufen. Zwei drittheile der Schiffe die hier liegen müssen ohne Fracht wieder weggehen. Ich bin im Marine Hotel und zahle \$9.00 die Woche. Dies ist das billigste was ich finden konnte. Dies ist ein Unglück für mich, unter solche Verhältnisse mein Haus in Baltimore zu verlassen, und wenn ich nicht nach 3 Wochen mehr meine Waaren verkaufen kann, muss ich solche versteigern um meine Rechnung zu zahlen, ehe ich weg kann. Wenn die Verhältnisse sich nicht bald ändern, so weiss ich nicht was aus mir werden soll. Ich will inzwischen die Hoffnung noch nicht ganz aufgeben, und wenn ich keine Stelle hier bekommen kann, so werde ich meine Waaren so schnell wie möglich versteigern, und zu Geheim nach Baltimore zu kommen, und von da nach Europa, was meinst du?

dein dich liebender Bruder,

EDUARD."

If it were not for the ancient ink and paper, one might readily believe that this letter had been written, not in 1839, but in 1939.

It seems to have been typical of the experiences of many families which

came to America that contacts with friends and relatives who remained in Germany were soon broken. It is noteworthy, in this connection, that the letters received by the Steins in America from their brother in Germany frequently mention delays in receiving communications from America, or a failure to have received a response to a letter previously written. Once the chain of correspondence was broken by either of the parties moving to another locality, the chances of resuming contact between the two branches of a family were rather slim. This is well illustrated by a letter written by Karl Stein to his brothers in America, in the year 1842, which was the last communication ever received by the Steins from their brother in Germany.

Sometime in the year 1838, the sisters and brothers collected a large number of Indian relics, some specimens of natural history and minerals. These they packed in a large box and shipped to their brother in Germany, in accordance with the request which he had made of them. They waited for a long time, but received no acknowledgment of its receipt. Letters were written, and still no reply was received. Finally, after four years had passed, they received a letter from Waldshut, Baden, in which their brother Karl said as follows:

"So long a time had passed without receiving any news from you, that I had finally given up all hope of ever hearing again from my brothers and sisters in America. I had written several letters without receiving any reply, and finally in moving here, lost your address; I had, indeed, supposed that you had moved away from Baltimore. Last month, however, I received a letter from a certain Captain Beermann of Bremen, saying that he had in his possession a large box shipped by a Stein family of Baltimore, but that during the sea voyage, the rats had eaten away the address, so that he did not know for whom the box was intended. Recently he had been informed of a certain Herr Stein, in Baden, who had relatives in Baltimore, and he inquired whether I was the person for whom the box was intended. Ac-

cordingly, I wrote him that I was indeed the proper party, and he sent me the box, which I have received today, after so long a delay. Needless to say, I was delighted to hear once again from my dear sisters and brothers, and to receive the beautiful embroideries made by the dear Amanda, as well as the Indian relics and natural history specimens. The accompanying letter from Amanda is dated April 2, 1838. At that time I had left Heidelberg and was then stationed in Bruchsal; I was thereafter transferred to Mannheim, and I am now stationed in Waldshut, where I am Bezirksingenieur. I am indeed overjoyed to receive news of you once more,

but it was to my great surprise that I learned that my brother Leopold had actually married an American woman, "*hoffentlich doch keine Schwartze.*" Then follows news of various persons in Germany, and an account of his own marriage and of the birth of a son named Adolf.

With these quotations of this last letter of Karl Stein, I bring this account of the experiences of the Stein family to a close. The events narrated are in themselves of little importance, but the accompanying picture and comments on American life of more than one hundred years ago are, I believe, worth recording.