

## RECOLLECTIONS OF FRIEDRICH “FAR WEST” MUENCH, GERMAN-AMERICAN NESTOR OF MISSOURI

**F**riedrich Muench (1799–1881) was one of the most influential German pioneers in the history of Missouri and might rightly be viewed as one of the fathers of the German immigration to the state. Widely known for his writings in German and English, which often appeared under the pseudonym “Far West,” Muench was one of the more prolific German-American authors of his time, writing on a whole range of social, political, cultural, historical and philosophical topics.<sup>1</sup>

Muench is particularly well known in the Missouri River Valley region called the Missouri Rhineland.<sup>2</sup> However, his writings played an important role in the history of German immigration both to Missouri and to America. His many publications on German-American history illuminate the time period in which he lived. Additionally, there are his significant works dealing with viticulture and his work as one of the pioneers of winemaking in Missouri.

Ralph Gregory has translated Muench’s autobiography, providing a fascinating survey of the life of this influential co-founder of

the Giessen Immigration Society for a wide readership.<sup>3</sup> The autobiography and numerous obituaries which appeared in the German-American press describe his life and work in detail, covering the basic dates, facts and events. Adding to our understanding of this influential Missouri German pioneer is an account of him written by Gert Goebel, editor of the German-language newspaper published in Hermann, Missouri, the *Hermanner Volksblatt*.<sup>4</sup>

Goebel’s series of articles was entitled “Aus dem Privatleben des alten Veteranen Friedrich Münch aus früher Zeit,” or: “From the Private Life of an old Veteran from Early On.” This series appeared the *Hermanner Volksblatt* in five installments from December 23, 1881, to February 17, 1882.<sup>5</sup> Rather than writing a standard obituary, Goebel chose to write a lengthier biographical essay consisting of his recollections of Muench.

What follows is my translation of Goebel’s series of articles together with explanatory notes. Before this series appeared, Goebel published an announcement that serves as an introduction

to his series. As his series supplements and complements but does not replace the obituaries that appeared in the press, one of them is included here, following the translation of his articles, as it offers a concise biographical sketch of Muench's life and work on both sides of the Atlantic. Taken together, they provide a picture of Far West as viewed and understood by his contemporaries in the German-American press of Missouri.

**FRIEDRICH MUENCH, BY GERT GOEBEL, *HERMANNER VOLKSBLATT*, 16 DECEMBER 1881**

Yesterday evening, we received the following postcard:

Dutzow, 12 December 1881

Friedrich Muench was found dead this evening with the grapevine shears in his hand in his vineyard.<sup>6</sup>

Burial, Friday, 2 P.M.

Sincerely, Dr. Klueber

Even though it is not particularly noteworthy when someone dies at the age of 83, we nevertheless were speechless for several minutes after receiving this postcard last night.

We are probably the oldest of the friends still living of our old "Far West," as we came on the

same ship together in the summer of 1834 to Baltimore and several months later to Missouri. We lived no more than twelve miles from one another and it was only the fact that the Missouri River flowed between our farms, which kept us from getting together more often than was the case.<sup>7</sup>

Not many mortals have the good fortune as did our old friend of passing away so easily and beautifully, with the proof of his unending work, the grapevine shears in his cold hand.<sup>8</sup>

We were already about to go to press and have not collected our thoughts enough so as to be able to calmly and freely write an obituary of this worthy pioneer, but will try to make up for this in time for the next issue this coming week.

**FROM THE PRIVATE LIFE OF AN OLD VETERAN FROM EARLY ON, PART I, BY GERT GOEBEL, *HERMANNER WOCHENBLATT*, 23 DECEMBER 1881**

Since we were informed of the unexpected death of our old friend Friedrich Muench by means of a postcard, it was already too late for us to report in detail of the loss suffered by the entire German element of the U.S. as a result of the demise of this outstanding pio-

neer, as we were about to go to press.

Due to the articles, which have appeared since last week in the *Westliche Post* and the *Anzeiger des Westens* regarding the life and death of our old Far West, we have been beaten to the punch in this regard and can only confirm that which already been said. However, in these articles the focus has been primarily on his public life, as not much was known of his private affairs, especially early on.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, it might be of interest for who knew him personally to learn something of his early life in Missouri before he had made a name for himself. Outside of his family we probably know more about his early history than anyone else alive.

When Friedrich Muench emigrated, he was in his 36<sup>th</sup> year and was a large, slender and very robust man. My father and his family were Muench's traveling companions from Bremen to Baltimore and from there to the distant West.<sup>10</sup> It was then that I got to know him as a man who took action when it was necessary to do so and who knew how to fend for himself.

At that time, there were no trains in the East and we had to make the journey from Baltimore with freight wagons. The trip was slow, as only 15 to 18 miles could be covered daily. The women and children rode on the packed wagons and the man and young boys walked mainly on ahead or alongside them.<sup>11</sup>

The driver of one wagon had the bad habit of drinking too much and was once so intoxicated that he could not steer the four-horse team and laid down in the wagon, unconcerned with his cargo. In such cases, Muench mounted a saddled horse and steered the horses along, something he had never done as a student or pastor. This was not really a great work of art, as the horses knew their way and calmly walked behind the other wagons. However, in all cases he never mistreated the horses forcefully.

One time when he was driving the team, my father got tired and wanted to get down from the wagon and asked Muench to stop. He did everything possible to fulfill my father's request, but nothing worked. All commands, shouting, and reining-in did not have the desired effect and the horses kept calmly moving on. Later on,

my father sarcastically remarked that his friend Muench "did not yet know the magic word to bring American horses to a halt."

Our highly learned friend was certainly not able at this time to deliver an English-language address in the senate.

On the journey on the Ohio River Muench was the lead singer almost every evening with his fine-sounding tenor voice, as we immigrants sang our German songs to the best of our abilities for the captain and his crew.<sup>12</sup>

In St. Louis we then split up. Several weeks earlier, Paul Follenius, Muench's brother-in-law, had already purchased what was then called "classic land" in the vicinity of the old Duden farm in Warren County and our friend Muench followed him there.<sup>13</sup> My father moved to the area near the old Newport, on the other hand.

Even though we lived only twelve miles from each other, it was not easy at the time to find German settlers in the area.

However, Muench searched and found his good friend, my father, and I recall the joy we all had one evening when we saw a stranger walking down a forest path and then recognized him as

our traveling companion, Friedrich Muench.

My father did not dare take such journeys alone in the woods, but I did. A friend, Ferdinand, who had come with us to Missouri, decided to visit Muench several months later. We found the way without difficulty to the then still quite insignificant settlement of Washington. There we crossed the river, but then we stood like "oxen at the mountain" as the expression goes, since we had no idea which way to go and so took the first path that we found. Soon we came to a rather large old farm in the bottoms. We stopped there, inquiring as to the direction to Muench's farm.

We were immediately recognized as Germans due to our attire, our German hunting gear, but especially because of our gibberish, which was supposed to be English. They were very friendly and endeavored to tell us the way. Our friend Muench had already aroused the interest of his American neighbors, since as much as we could understand, people spoke with high regard of the noteworthy German by the name of "Minsch," was the way Americans pronounced his name.

Without further difficulties or adventures, we found what was then a small farm with a simple log house, located on a rather steep hill. We were greeted with the greatest joy as old friends by the entire family, since traveling companions who had shared a journey lasting almost six months acquire a life-long affinity for one another.

After this visit, it was almost four more years (1838) until we saw each other again. In the meantime, we both had learned much that we hadn't known before, but the experiences we had made were of a quite different kind.

The few Americans who had settled in the hilly woods at Lake Creek and Femme-Osage were almost all gone and Germans, many of whom had belonged to the Giessen Immigration Society, had moved their in droves.<sup>14</sup>

In our neighborhood on the south side of the Missouri River there were only a few Germans and I had no German friends of my age. And, so I grew up among the backwoods hunters and their sons, acquiring their language, customs and traditions, as well as their skills. However, I cannot say that I made any particular contribution to the progress of civilization.

So, after these kinds of changes had transpired, we managed to see each other again.

**FROM THE PRIVATE LIFE..., PART 2, *HERMANNER WOCHENBLATT*, 13 JANUARY 1882**

The so-called Americanization in practical matters took place much more slowly in the almost exclusively German settlements at Lake Creek than by us on the south side of the Missouri, because there was a lack of examples and teachers and only by means of untiring perseverance and diligence was the difficulty in clearing the forests overcome. And, this was the main task, as only those with means were able to buy the small, still very insignificant farms of the Americans, while the poorer folk had to build huts in the middle of the woods.

Also, in this regard Muench set a good example, as he one of the most hard-working, but in the beginning he made the same mistakes as his neighbors, which was quite understandable.

The many Germans, who came with us into the country, made their way into these new circumstances, even though their prejudices and piety for their old ways stood in their way for many

years, as all German farmers are as a rule not very progressive-minded. However, the countless strokes of genius, which were accomplished by the many craftsmen and even artists and scholars, who had never in their life had held a hoe or axe, bordered on the unbelievable and such reminiscences today provide often provide the stuff for amusing conversation. But the current generation does not always have a sense for, or understanding of such matters.

However, there are two sides to everything. Even if these early settlers were left to their own devices and only slowly made some progress by means of great effort on their part, they nevertheless were spared for the most part from the humdrum of backwoods life. But such life was only the child of its time and had arisen from the first primitive beginnings of civilization and now been almost completely overcome.

Most striking of all to me as I came to visit Muench and became acquainted with his surroundings was the fact that one seldom hear a word of English, while in Franklin County I rarely spoke German outside of my parental home.<sup>15</sup> Even twenty-five years later, many of the older people in the

German settlements were not even able to explain in an understandable way to an American how to get to the next farm.

Our friend Muench had to deal with these kinds of difficulties in the beginning, because he rarely had the opportunity of speaking English.

However, he eagerly devoted himself to the study of the English language and as a man with a thoroughly scholarly education who was knowledgeable of classical languages, he was soon able to write splendid essays in English. Nevertheless, he still had difficulty speaking it, as he thought in German and had to translate his thoughts while speaking.

When I was with him and traveling Americans stayed over night, he usually said to me as a rule: "Tonight, you will have to take over the conversation, as I cannot handle this in the right way."

And, when we had talked for a while in our backwoods lingo, he would often say: "I only understand half of what you are chattering about with one another," because he couldn't make out many of the peculiar perceptions of the backwoodsmen, or their non-classical expressions and

phrases, which were foreign to him. However, a scholarly work in English, which was Greek to me, he could read without difficulty.

As I was mainly with Muench from the first days of April 1838 to the end of the year, I had the chance to really get to know his household quite well.<sup>16</sup>

Everyone rose quite early each day and all those who could work were busy the entire day. And, even though the entire household was thoroughly German, several American customs nonetheless made their presence known. For example, for breakfast there was bacon, corn bread and coffee; the mid-day meal was a true German dinner; and the beverage at supper time was almost always spice tee.

At that time, I had taken on the task of clearing a strip of the forest behind the house and so did not work with Muench. Therefore, we often saw each other only at mealtimes and also sat together in the evenings. His conversations, which frequently touched on philosophical topics, were often quite new to me as an inexperienced young man, but always instructive. After I had gone to bed, he read and wrote until past midnight. Now and then, however,

we spent an evening with his brother Georg, or with his brother-in-law Paul Follenius and there never was a lack of stimulating conversation at such get-togethers.<sup>17</sup>

Neighbors then were still frequently quite dependent on one another, especially when it came to building log houses. On such occasions, Muench and I were regularly the “corner men,” that is, the ones who chopped the corner notches that interlocked the logs.

Then the only wine available was the so-called French Claret, or port wine, which, however contain a drop of grape juice. Only whiskey was on hand and people were quite generous with it during community building projects.<sup>18</sup>

And, when the corner men were given the bottle, Muench would take a swallow and then pass it on to me, while rubbing his sides, saying “Goebel—that does one good on such a cold morning—warms one up!”

I often think of such trifles, as they show that people don't change with time. Fifteen or twenty years later, when he had wine that he produced in his cellar, he looked down on beverages, such as beer and schnapps, but in earli-

er times a glass of bitters had tasted quite good.

**FROM THE PRIVATE LIFE..., PART 3, HERMANNER WOCHENBLATT, 5 FEBRUARY 1882**

During evening conversations our old friend often spoke about the life of his father, whose early childhood must have been in the last years of the Seven Years War.<sup>19</sup>

According to him, his father was a small, slender man of great learning and was for the time also a man who for that time quite enlightened in terms of his religious views, but in his sermons had to be quite careful, so that the pious farmers of his congregation could understand him, or better yet, not misunderstand him. Also, he did not want to come into conflict with the church hierarchy, as most of the wig-covered theologians of that time were not that bright.<sup>20</sup>

Some of the episodes from the life of his father still remain in my memory, but are probably known to no one else, and might be told here for that reason.

Muench's father attended the University of Giessen as a very young, but poor student, who aside from a small stipend and free

meals had absolutely nothing. Nights were used for study, but in his free time during the day he offered private instruction. However, the revenue was very modest, as at this time and later private instructors were poorly paid. In spite of all his thriftiness, his earnings did not go far enough and he had to try to preserve his only suit in an appropriate condition, but once its lower extremities were so worn out that he had to avoid every rapid movement so no one could catch sight of how threadbare it was.

He was bitterly embarrassed, because a student without money and without a name, could not get anywhere.

However, when the need is the greatest, God is also the closest. At that time, the students in Hessian lands had the privilege of hunting and this of course included our student, who was in the possession of a rifle and now and then practices the noble art of hunting and now and then earned some money by means of selling rabbit fur. And, exactly at the time of his greatest need, he got two foxes one evening and earned enough from their hides to get a new pair of pants.

The great learnedness of our theological candidate, his integrity, and virtuosity won him in the course of time the hand of a wealthy lady and the lucrative church position in Nieder-Gemünden, where he remained until his death and where his son Friedrich served as an assistant during his latter years.<sup>21</sup>

From the stories of our old friend we know that his father was a courageous and determined man in spite of his physique.

In the last decades of the 18th century, there was a group of robbers terrorizing the area and especially the pastoral homes were plagued with numerous break-ins, as more was to be found in them than in the homes of the farmers.

Pastor Muench, however, was dead set on defending his home and during this time of unrest a pair of loaded rifles hung on the wall of the Muench home and during the evening when he was studying there were a pair of loaded pistols on his desk next to his books.

These defensive measures, as well as the readiness to put up a fight may well have become known in the area, as his home was spared, while those of col-

leagues in the surrounding villages were plundered.

In 1838, Friedrich Muench still functioned as an ordained pastor and held a position at a small, free, non-denominational congregation in Dutzow, where he preached in a log house, i.e. if you can call it a log house, which had been constructed for that purpose and was very well attended. Georg Muench was also an important speaker and spoke with an overpowering eloquence.

These two men did much good at that time and the effects of their reasoned, erudite and tolerant lectures can still be found in the settlements of the area.

At their church meetings the Protestant ritual was of course maintained and the text of the sermon was always from the Bible, but the tendency of their sermons was always in the direction of humanity, tolerance and responsibility for one's fellow man.

There was never a word of religious intolerance and likewise nothing was said of the eternal damnation of Hell, which many wanted to believe in regardless of this, nor of the delights of Heaven, both of which we can know nothing of, or what they consist of.

Of Heaven and Hell not much was said at all, because no one knows where these places actually are, which cause so many fears to people and not even the most faithful think about them often, hoping that they will make it into Heaven.

Every point on this earth can be geographically determined and by means of astronomy the location of every star can be located in place and time, but the longitude and latitude of Heaven and Hell cannot be found and just as little do we know in what galaxy these places that cause too much concern may be.<sup>22</sup>

**FROM THE PRIVATE LIFE..., PART 4, HERMANNER WOCHENBLATT, 10 FEBRUARY 1882**

In the second half of the 1840s a log house was built on the land of our friend to serve as the district school and if I am not mistaken, my father was its first teacher. Until this time, Muench had not only instructed the older ones of his children, but also several of those of his neighbors at his home and he was often sent pupils from St. Louis and other places.<sup>23</sup>

The time when he gave up his position as an ordained minister is something I can no longer exactly

recall. However, I believe it was in the year 1848, when the first great Catawba harvest of our old friend Michael Poeschel, who lived then at Cole's Creek, which aroused such great interest, that Muench had nothing more to do with the ministry.<sup>24</sup>

In that fall, visitors came from far and wide, on horse and on steamboats, (trains had not been built yet) and traveled over the rough hills at Cole's Creek to the small Poeschel farm, so as to admire the heretofore unseen splendid grape of the vine.

Muench also returned quite enthusiastically from Hermann and devoted himself energetically to viniculture and his demise is proof that he remained true to his love of this to his last breath.<sup>25</sup>

Viniculture was then still a quite new industrial branch.

The many wild grapevines, which were found in great numbers in the hills around Hermann, brought the many Southern Germans and Swiss, who formed the core of the first settlers in Gasconade County, the idea that the region was conducive to the cultivation of the vine.

The first attempts that were made with the Cape and Isabella

did not produce very favorable results and only the introduction of the Catawba from Longworth in Cincinnati, which however was accomplished by means of great difficulty and at great cost, can be regarded as the beginning of viticulture in Missouri.<sup>26</sup>

So that this sketch does not develop into a history of viticulture, we shall have to return to our old friend, Friedrich Muench.

The steep western slope of the high hills not far from his house was the site he chose for his first grapevine field. At that time, people were not as yet emancipated from the ideas regarding viticulture that they had brought with them from Germany and considered digging up the soil as absolutely essential.

Our old friend devoted himself to this difficult task with untiring diligence and admirable perseverance, as he dug up the land at his place without any hired hands on an entire acre of land in somewhat rather stony soil. He dug 2–3 foot trenches in which plant his grapevines, as well as his trellises, posts, and lattices (wire trellises were not yet used then).

It was strange, but true that exactly those people who in Germany had perhaps never seen a

vineyard, as for example the Altenburgers, were the first who on the basis of their own observations, independent thought and their own experiences in their youth, had come to the conviction that grapevines should be dealt with differently here due to the different kind of soil and climate.<sup>27</sup> This view is now almost generally held now, but there are still a few fossil-types who handle their grapevines like their fathers and grandfathers in the Rhineland.

For years the success of our friend was not very encouraging at all, even though he gave his grapevines the greatest attention and care. If his hopes were great in the early summer, they were reduced to the bare minimum by almost every fall.

The uncertainty of a splendid Catawba was perhaps at least partly the cause why so many new unreliable sorts of grapes were tried and our friend eagerly tried everything that was new, a recent discovery, or some kind of improvement in the field of agriculture, especially horticulture. And, he did so based on his extensive correspondence and his reading of journals and newspapers at his disposal. He never failed to have the latest sort of grapevine

that he considered worthy of adopting, as progress in every area was his motto and he remained true to this belief to his very end.

The many errors that many of the vintners succumbed to, such as the ideas of Dr. Gall, do need not be explained here.<sup>28</sup> By means of these countless blunders the wine trade in Missouri was almost destroyed. And, only in the past few years have Missouri wines again attained their former good reputation. Gall's ideas should not be discounted, but should be understood, as without being correctly understood, they lead to nothing less than a mishandling of vineyards.

Even our old friend was not error free in this regard, because he had to first learn from his mistakes like so many others, but in the later years he succeeded in producing very fine wines.

Regarding his literary activity nothing much needs to be said here, as his numerous publications in German and English speak for themselves, finding an audience across the U.S. as well as in Germany and are well known to every reader of the press.

Until the outbreak of the war, he lived quietly on his farm, but in constant activity in the area of

writing and wine-making. He was untiring in his efforts to introduce new sorts of grapevines and it was only a stump-tour through the East with the freedom-fighter Friedrich Hecker during the campaign for Fremont in 1856 and a trip to Germany that pulled him out of his still-life household, both times taking him away from home for several months.<sup>29</sup>

**FROM THE PRIVATE LIFE..., PART FIVE, *HERMANNER WOCHENBLATT*, 17 FEBRUARY 1882**

In the fall of 1862, Muench, a dedicated emancipationist, was elected to the Missouri State Senate and in this high office represented the loyal and human principles of his constituents in the most worthy fashion. His kind friendliness and liveliness that he brought to every conversation, especially with a religious or political focus, aroused the attention and trust of his colleagues. And his consequential steadfastness based on principles of belief and his decisive resistance to every kind of corruption won him the regard of his political opponents in the same measure as that of members of his own political party.

Muench remained undisturbed so long as issues revolved around the general administration

of the state, but as soon as questions came to the fore that dealt with equal rights for all or issues that appeared unreasonable, then he was on his feet and ready to fight and became forceful and passionate in debates.

A certain example of this remains unforgettable to me.

When it was once suggested that the "Sunday laws" be sharpened, a certain senator, an upright saint, from the northwestern part of the state, held a long, unctuous speech in support of this idea.<sup>30</sup> But as soon as he spoke his final word, Far West stood up and ventilated his opinion on the nonsense his colleague had just unloaded and did so without regard or mercy. This reply brought his colleagues to their feet and then Muench spoke again and the disputation, which had earlier had not involved the others, now went on until the mid-day recess.

In the afternoon, the Senate was called back to order and the two battle roosters began anew, both of them as if by mutual agreement, now armed with the Bible. Each read to the other, citing verses from Scripture, rather than from law books. Both gentlemen meant well of the other in the debate and seemed to commiserate with the

other. The pious senator felt that his colleague Muench was on the road to the gates of Hell, while he himself was now looked on as having gone overboard in his remarks. The mutual attempt at trying to convince the other of their error amounted to an uphill business both ways, as it was just as impossible to transform Muench into a Sunday lawmaker, as it was to make turn the other into a rational-thinking human being.

The final result of the vote on this matter is something I cannot recall, but in any event it was one of the most interesting and enjoyable debates of the entire session.

Soon after taking office, our friend became the corresponding secretary of the State Immigration Commission and remained in this post many years after his term had run its course (1866).

The members of the state boards served without remuneration, but in consideration of his services one of the last legislative sessions voted to grant him a small annual salary for the rest of his life and this was well-deserved recognition of the great work he had rendered during his lifetime.

During the last twelve years of his life, Muench withdrew

almost completely from public life and led a relatively quiet, but active life in the bosom of his family.

The last time I saw him was in May 1881. As I had not seen him for some time, I could not fail to notice that he had visibly aged, but he still was very lively and never thought of such things as his demise. When I let slip the observation that we old-timers were past our prime, he became agitated and replied with great emphasis: "What are you talking about there? I still have much to do, which absolutely must be done and do can nothing else!"

And, my observation that probably no one will be concerned with our affairs after our hour had struck did not sit all that well with him.

Our dear friend was granted a beautiful end, one which can only be hoped for by all mortals. He died without pain, without any misgivings and literally "in harness."

May he rest in peace – his name will be remembered for many generations to come.

OBITUARY FROM THE WESTLICHE POST

By way of comparison, the following obituary from a major German-American newspaper in St. Louis follows in translation, as it conveys some of the basic bi-bibliographical data relating to Friedrich Muench, which are points that Goebel did not address in his series due to the fact that they had been covered by such obituaries. For the convenience of the reader, this obituary is included here to provide the basic facts relating to the life and work of Muench.

FRIEDRICH MUENCH (*WESTLICHE POST*, 16 DECEMBER 1881)

The year that took our Friedrich Hecker from us will not come to an end without robbing us of another great Friedrich. Friedrich Muench, the German-American Nestor and the pride of his countrymen in Missouri, was called away yesterday from whence there is no return!<sup>31</sup>

Standing in his 83<sup>rd</sup> year, Muench enjoyed a uniquely long history of a healthy body and mind. We hold in our hands the undeniable evidence of this fact: Only three days ago we received his last article for the *Westliche Post*, written in his finely written

script. Its content, which deals with the state of German students today, will convince every reader of the sharp intellectual powers of its author and this valuable work will appear in the next Sunday edition.<sup>32</sup>

This, however, is but a great piece of consolation in our sorrow. It was the dearest wish of the departed to pass away in robust health, or as he said "in harness." When he visited us a few weeks ago, he bid us farewell with a particularly firm handshake, adding with a smile: "So we will see each other again in the spring, or not at all."

We would not see our loyal old friend and colleague again! After contributing to our newspaper, whose pages were enriched with his beautiful essays that elevated the spirit and mind, he has now passed away. True right up to his death, true to his beliefs and principles, true to his old and new fatherland, true to his family and his friends – thus lived Friedrich Muench and thus he died.

The course of his life, which he has described in such an interesting way for our readers on various occasions, is found here briefly sketched. Here we would like to again express our feeling of

deep sorrow for our oldest friend, a feeling that thousands and thousands of German-Americans join with us in. Then so great and so irreplaceable, so deep and widely felt is our loss. Peace be with him and honor, the immortal honor to his memory!

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Friedrich Muench, the elderly German pioneer of Missouri, suddenly died yesterday morning on his farm in Dutzow, Warren County, most likely as the result of weaknesses due to his age. There may be older Germans in Missouri and in the West, but there is no one better known, whose name reached further and which attained such high regard among German-Americans as the elderly Far West. For almost a half century this old gentleman lived in our state: he saw the Indians gradually disappear, who swarmed around his home in the woods fifty years ago; he saw St. Louis and Chicago grow to become great commercial centers and saw blossoming towns and cities arise, where prairie grass waved and the forest stood when he arrived.

Muench was born 25 June 1799 in Nieder-Gemünden, Hessen-Darmstadt, where his father was a minister and studied theolo-

gy at the University of Giessen. Thereafter, he became an assistant at his father's church.

As a young country minister he continued his studies, devoting most of his spare time to philosophy and the German language. At the same time, he had an open mind for all that was happening then even though he was spared the horrors of the persecutions of the 1820s, he nonetheless remained true to his belief in the principles of the German student movement and showed great interest in public affairs.

Naturally, the July Revolution and the following inflammatory developments in Germany greatly affected him. Many of his best friends participated in the popular movements of the time and several participated in the Frankfurt Uprising. However, the reaction suppressed all hopes, as well as the desire of removing these unchangeable, hopeless conditions in Germany, of the educated young people in general.

Muench conceived of the plan of immigrating to America. His friend and brother-in-law, Paul Follenius, enthusiastically joined in on the same, but expanded the idea to that of a mass migration "to create a worthy home for German

life across the ocean." As described in Gustav Koerner's history, from whence we have taken most of this information, Muench let himself be talked into this plan by this imaginative and ingenious man, which ultimately met its well-known unfavorable conclusion.

Gottfried Duden from Rhenish Prussia had settled down in Warren County in 1824 and published the most positive report of this, which caused Muench and Follenius to lead their immigration society to Missouri. However, the society dissolved before it had reached its destination. Several deserted in New Orleans and moved to Arkansas and here in St. Louis some moved on to Illinois. Muench and Follenius were not led astray and moved with their families to Warren County, where the young clergyman removed his pastoral garb and established a home for his family as a Latin Farmer in Marthasville.

The first years were obviously quite difficult, but efforts were finally crowned with success. Soon his home was surrounded by vineyards and fruit gardens, just like in Germany, and the industrious pioneer did not at all lose his interest in intellectual pursuits. He

instructed his children and those of his neighbors and began publishing and writing for the press, which soon acquired him a reputation in the old and new worlds, so that the German-American press today now sees its Nestor being laid to rest.

The journals for which he wrote for in the last forty or so years are too numerous to list here. We only mention the *Anzeiger des Westens*, the *Belletristisches Journal*, and the *Westliche Post*.<sup>33</sup>

For more than twenty five years, he was editor of the *Amerikanische Agriculturist*. Moreover, he published a countless number of interesting pamphlets and treatises. For example, he published *Ueber Religion und Christenthum* (1846) and *A Treatise on Religion, Christianity, Orthodoxy and Rationalism* (1847). Poems and novellas also flowed from his pen. Additionally, the following should be mentioned: *Der Staat Missouri*, *Die Weinbauschule*, *Geisteslehre fuer die heranwachsende Jugend*, *Die sinnliche und geistige Lebensanschauung*, and other prize-winning works and lectures.<sup>34</sup>

It was impossible that such a lively, active intellect would not take interest in the political life of the land. Muench was a delegate

to the memorable Republican national convention in May 1860, which chose Lincoln as its presidential nominee.<sup>35</sup> The outbreak of the Civil War brought him into personal danger, as secessionists lived nearby his home. In spite of this, he remained at his home, two of his sons joined the Home Guard and two others joined the volunteers, of which one of them met a heroic death at Wilson's Creek in September 1861.<sup>36</sup>

From 1862 to 1866, he represented Warren, Montgomery and St. Charles Counties in the State Senate. Muench was married twice. His first wife, with whom he had two children (Pauline and Adolph), died after a short, happy marriage in Germany. Shortly before immigrating to America in the spring of 1833, he married his second wife, who in her seventieth year survived him now. Four of their children, of whom their son Hugo Muench, a lawyer, resided here, as well as thirty-three grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren survive him.<sup>37</sup>

A rich, fully lived and useful life came to a conclusion in these last days of the year. This unfortunate year has witnessed the loss of many old friends and colleagues of this paper: In the first days of

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the year, we lost Arnold Ruge in Brighton, England, then Friedrich Hecker in Illinois and now the oldest one is gone—Friedrich Muench.<sup>38</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

Gert Goebel's recollections of Muench and the obituary in the *Westliche Post* reflect the high regard in which Muench was held. Although the latter provides us with the basic data regarding Muench, Goebel's account brings a more personal, close-up picture into focus that helps complete the image we have of Far West. In

portraying the private life of Muench, Goebel complements and supplements our knowledge of Muench's public life. Above and beyond the accolades that he undoubtedly deserves for his numerous accomplishments and achievements, we obtain a personal view of Muench by means of Goebel's account, which helps underscore and confirm why he was called the German-American Nestor, while at the same time adding to our knowledge of him and the role he played in German-American history.

— DON HEINRICH TOLZMANN  
CLEVES, OH

## Notes

- 1 For basic bio-bibliographical information about Muench, see: Don Heinrich Tolzmann, "The Writings of Friedrich Muench," in: Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *German-Americana: Selected Essays* (Milford, OH: Little Miami Publishing Co., 2009), 113–23
- 2 A good example of Muench's standing in German-American history is the fact that H.J. Ruetenik included him in his biographical dictionary of 150 outstanding German-Americans. See: H.J. Ruetenik, *Berühmte deutsche Vorkämpfer für Fortschritt, Freiheit und Friede in Nordamerika, von 1626 bis 1898: Einhundert und fünfzig Biographien, mit sechzehn Portraits* (Cleveland, OH; Forest City Bookbinding Co., 1899). He was also included in the more recent German-American biographical work: Gerard Wilk, *Americans from Germany*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Indianapolis: Max Kade German-American Center, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis & Indiana German Heritage Society, 1995). In that volume Muench was one of fewer than fifty biographical entries, clearly indicating that his ranking as one of the more significant persons in German-American history.
- 3 See Friedrich Muench, *The Autobiography of Friedrich Muench*, trans., Ralph Gregory (Marthasville, MO: Three Pines Publishing Co., 2001; reprint of 1964 edition). See also Ralph Gregory, *The German-Americans in the Washington, Missouri Area* (Washington, MO: Missourian Publishing Co., 1981), which contains numerous references to Muench.
- 4 The Goebel family came to Missouri as members of the Giessen Immigration Society, belonging to the group that was led by Muench. At the time (1834), Goebel was eighteen years old. Aside from working on the family farm, he became an experienced backwoodsman, hunting whenever possible, skills which enable him to become a surveyor in the 1850s. When the Civil War broke out, he helped organize a unit of the home guard and then was elected to the state legislature in 1862. In 1864 and 1866 he was elected to the state Senate and thereafter held other local elective offices. Later on, he published a valuable work entitled *Länger als ein Menschenleben in Missouri*. (St. Louis: C. Witter's Buchhandlung, 1877). Gustav Koerner wrote of the book: "It consists of a chronicle of his impressions and experiences of life in Missouri, including coverage of the most important events that transpired in the state in his time. However, the main part of the book focuses on events in his own immediate area." See Gustav Koerner, "German Immigration and Settlement," in: Don Heinrich Tolzmann, ed., *Missouri's German Heritage*, second edition (Milford, OH: Little Miami Publishing Co., 2006), 22. For a general history of the settlement of Missouri, see: Russell L. Gerlach, *Settlement Patterns in Missouri: A Study of Population Origins, with a Wall Map* (Columbus, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1976).

- 5 Many thanks to Lois Puchta, Director of the Archives and Research Center of the Gasconade County Historical Society in Hermann for providing me with copies of the Goebel's articles from the *Hermanner Volksblatt*. The *Volksblatt* was a weekly German-language newspaper published in Hermann, Missouri from 1854 to 1928
- 6 A recurrent theme in Goebel's writings of Muench, as well as in other obituaries, is that Muench worked and was active right up to the very end of his life.
- 7 Goebel's family came with the part of the Giessen Immigration Society that departed from Bremerhaven on June 3, 1834. This group, which was led by Muench, consisted of 250 people and followed the first group led by Paul Follenius, which had departed several months earlier, on March 3, 1834. See Don Heinrich Tolzmann, "A New Germany in America: The Invitation and Explanation by Paul Follenius and Friedrich Muench, Part 1 of 3," *Der Maibaum* 38:1 (2010): 4–5, 14–15.
- 8 Here again Goebel touches on the theme of Muench's dying while still "in harness" in the fields.
- 9 For other obituaries of Muench, see Friedrich Muench, *Gesammelte Schriften* (St. Louis: C. Witter, 1902).
- 10 Baltimore was a major port of entry for those heading westwards; New Orleans served as the other major port, particularly before the development of the railroads.
- 11 Traveling at these speeds, it must have taken at least a couple of weeks to make the journey from Baltimore to the Ohio River.
- 12 The group most likely reached the Ohio River at Wheeling, West Virginia, where travelers then could board a steamboat for the journey down the Ohio River to St. Louis. This, of course, would have been a much speedier way of travel than traveling by wagon from Baltimore.
- 13 Reference here is made here by Goebel to Muench's fellow co-founder of the Giessen Immigration Society, Paul Follenius (1799–1844), who had preceded the other half of the society led by Muench. For a brief biographical sketch of Follenius and his son, Reinhold, see: Ernst D. Kargau, *The German Element in St. Louis: A Translation from German of Ernst D. Kargau's St. Louis in Former Years: A Commemorative History of the German Element*, trans. William G. Bek, edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann (Baltimore, MD: Clearfield Company, Inc, 2000), 321–23. Note that although Kargau focuses on St. Louis, he also makes many references to the Missouri Rhineland region. This may have been in part due to the fact that in 1860 he served as editor of the *Hermanner Volksblatt*, but also because of the interconnectedness of the region's German element. For further information about Follenius and his brothers, see Tolzmann, "A New Germany in America," 5. In the passage of the text footnoted here, Goebel also makes mention of the influential book by Gottfried Duden. In that regard, see: Dorris Keeven-Franke, "Gottfried Duden: The Man

- behind the Book,” in Tolzmann, ed., *Missouri’s German Heritage*, 85–95.
- 14 Regarding Lake Creek and Femme-Osage, see Tolzmann, ed., *Missouri’s German Heritage*, 28, 30, 89–90.
- 15 For a survey of the history of the German language in Missouri, see: A.E. Schroeder, “Deutsche Sprache in Missouri,” in Heinz Kloss, ed., *Deutsch als Muttersprache in den Vereinigten Staaten: Teil 1: Der Mittelwesten* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979), 125–59.
- 16 For a close-up look at Muench’s home, see Siegmar Muehl, “A Visit with Friedrich Muench,” in Tolzmann, ed., *Missouri’s German Heritage*, 97–108.
- 17 Georg Muench, who was two years younger than his brother, came to Missouri in 1837. According to Gustav Koerner, “He had many of the fine characteristics of his brother. After many years of hard work and sacrifice, he built a fine country home near Augusta in St. Charles County. He devoted himself to viticulture with great success. He, too, had enjoyed a sound education, and had served in Germany as a clergyman.” Koerner also calls him “one of the best and noblest German pioneers of the West.” See Gustav Koerner, “German Immigration and Settlement,” in Tolzmann, ed., *Missouri’s German Heritage*, 14.
- 18 See Koerner’s discussion of the growth and development of the wine industry in Missouri (*ibid*, 25, 36). See also Kargau, *The German Element in St. Louis*, 299–301.
- 19 The Seven Years War was fought in Europe from 1756 to 1763, but also had its repercussions in America, where the war was also fought out and known as the French and Indian War.
- 20 Muench wrote of his father: “My father was pastor in Nieder-Gemuenden, a village in the Duchy of Upper-Hessia, on the border of Vogelsberg and Wetterau. I always think of him with thanks, love and real respect. In him an instructive spirit was joined to the warmest feeling. A manly, unterrified mind, thus a practical one, was something original to his whole being. He was conscientious even in the littlest things, genuinely pious, without being bound to literal orthodoxy, and so serene he was often in a joyous humor; therefore, always active. In the basic needs of life, he was at once the simplest and most temperate man I have ever known” (Muench, *Autobiography*, 3).
- 21 Nieder-Gemuenden was incorporated into the municipality of Gemuenden in 1971. It is located near the city of Marburg.
- 22 H.A. Rattermann described Muench’s theological views as pantheistic. See: Muehl, “A Visit with Friedrich Muench,” 102. Also, see Muench’s lengthy discussion of his religious views, which consists of five of his lectures on the topic, in Muench, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 135–216.
- 23 For further information on the St. Louis Germans, see: Kargau, *The German Element in St. Louis*, especially Part II on “German-American Life,” 147–229.

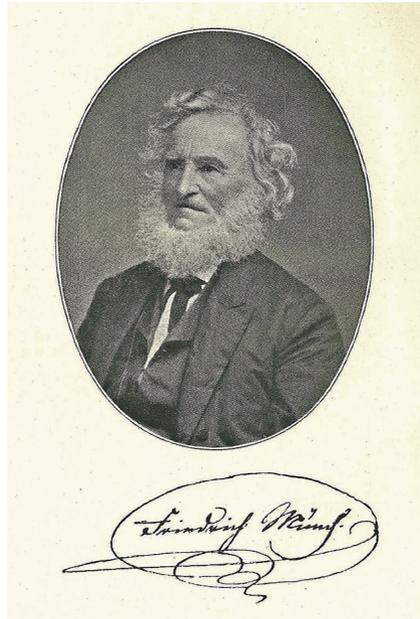
- 24 Koerner wrote of Poeschel with regard to grape cultivation in the Hermann area that: “Michael Poeschel and Hermann Burkhardt were the first successful cultivators of grapes. They obtained the plants of the Catawba grape from Nicholas Longworth in Cincinnati, and Poeschel soon became an important grape grower.” See Gustav Koerner, “German Immigration and Settlement,” 23. Kargau refers to Poeschel as “the pioneer of the Hermann grape culture.” See: Kargau, *The German Element in St. Louis*, 299.
- 25 For further information on the history of Hermann, see William G. Bek, *The German Settlement Society of Philadelphia and its Colony Hermann, Missouri* (New York: American Press, Inc., 1984).
- 26 Nicholas Longworth (1782–1863) was a pioneer of wine-making in the Ohio Valley, specializing in the cultivation of Catawba grapes in Cincinnati. He had two hundred acres of vineyards himself and used grapes from German vintners as well. See Henry Howe, *Hamilton County, Ohio: As Extracted from Henry Howe’s Historical Collections of Ohio, edited with a new Preface and Introduction by Barbara Keyser Gargiulo* (Milford, OH: Little Miami Publishing Company, 2005), 85–86.
- 27 For references to Altenburg, Missouri, see Tolzmann, ed., *Missouri’s German Heritage*, 41, 58, and 133.
- 28 George Husmann wrote of Dr. Ludwig Gall that he “has at last reduced the whole science of wine-making to such a mathematical certainty, that we stand amazed only, that so simple a process should not have been discovered long ago. It is the old story of the egg of Columbus; but the poor vintners of Germany, and France, and we here, are none the less deeply indebted to those intelligent and persevering men for the incalculable benefits they have conferred upon us. The production of good wine is thus reduced to a mathematical certainty; although we cannot in a bad season, produce as high flavored and delicate wines, as in the best years, we can now always make a fair article, by following the simple rules laid down by Dr. Gall. When this method was first introduced, it was calumniated and despised—called adulteration of wine, and even prohibited by the governments of Europe; but, Dr. Gall fearlessly challenged his opponents to have his wines analyzed by the most eminent chemists; which was repeatedly done, and the results showed that they contained nothing but such ingredients which pure wine should contain; and since men like Von Babo, Dobereiner and others have openly endorsed and recommended gallizing, prejudice is giving way before the light of scientific knowledge.” See George Husmann, *The Cultivation of the Native Grape and the Manufacture of American Wines* (New York: F.W. Woodward, 1868), 149. Regarding Husmann, see Linda Walker Stevens, “The Spirit of George Husmann,” in *What Wondrous Life: The World of George Husmann, a Photographic Exhibit on the Life and Achievement of George Husmann* (Columbia, MO:

University of Missouri-Columbia and Western Historical Manuscript Collection, 2002), 13–27. Also, see Kargau, *The German Element in St. Louis*, 280, where Kargau refers to Husmann as “the celebrated wine grower in Hermann, Missouri.”

- 29 Hecker (1814–1881) was one of the best known and popular of the German Forty-Eighters. For biographical information on him, see Alice Reynolds, “Friedrich Hecker,” in Don Heinrich Tolzmann, ed., *Illinois’ German Heritage* (Milford,

OH: Little Miami Publishing Co., 2005), 107–115.

- 30 The reference to “Sunday laws” refers to those laws banning the consumption of alcoholic beverages on Sunday, a day which German-Americans viewed as a day not only for worship, but also for festivity. This kind of a Continental Sunday contrasted sharply with the traditional Anglo-American Puritan Sunday.
- 31 The designation “Nestor” derives from a figure in Greek mythology



**FRONTISPIECE PICTURE OF FRIEDRICH MUENCH FROM HIS *GESAMMELTE SCHRIFTEN* (ST. LOUIS: IM VERLAG VON C. WITTER, 1902)**

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- noted for his advice and speaking ability. In current usage it refers to an elder statesman venerated by the general public. Obviously, this is a term that fits well with Muench in terms of his reputation amongst German-Americans.
- 32 This particular obituary was reprinted in: Muench, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 521–23.
- 33 For further information on the two papers published in St. Louis, the *Anzeiger des Westens* and the *Westliche Post*, see Tolzmann, ed., *Missouri's German Heritage*, 115–16.
- 34 For an annotated checklist of the works of Muench, see Tolzmann, “The Writings of Frederick Muench,” as cited in note one.
- 35 Lincoln was especially popular with German-Americans; and, as he came from Illinois, it is not surprising that German-Americans, such as Gustav Koerner and Friedrich Hecker campaigned for him. See Tolzmann, ed., *Illinois' German Heritage*, especially the essays by Everts B. Greene on Koerner, 93–105, and Alice Reynolds on Hecker, 107–115. See also Kargau, *The German Element in St. Louis*, 68, 84, 92, 103, 162, and 300.
- 36 Friedrich Schnake wrote a history of German-Americans from St. Louis and surrounding areas in the Civil War. See Tolzmann, ed., *Missouri's German Heritage*, 45.
- 37 Hugo Muench and his brothers Ferdinand and Julius wrote the foreword for their father's selection of writings. See Muench, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vii–ix. They explain how they originally had arranged to have Konrad Nies, a well-known German-American author, edit their father's writings, but that due to Nies' ill health the work had to be completed by Carl G. Rathmann.
- 38 Here it is of interest to note the importance placed on the two Forty-Eighters, Hecker and Ruge. Arnold Ruge (1802–1888) was a German Forty-Eighter who moved to London after the failure of the 1848 Revolution. The press obituary here must have been considered definitive by the Muench family, as it was reprinted in the posthumously published collection of Muench's writings. See Muench, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 521–23.