

GERMAN-AMERICAN ARTISTS AND LITHOGRAPHERS IN EARLY CINCINNATI

Cincinnati at the beginning of the nineteenth century has been described as "an oasis of intellectual and creative talent west of the Appalachians."¹ A good part of this talent was concentrated in the area of art, and by the middle of the last century Cincinnati had evolved into a major national art center. Because Cincinnati attracted many German immigrants during this period, it is not surprising that many of the artists who were active in early Cincinnati were either German-born or of German descent.

One of the first German artists to settle in Cincinnati was the painter and sculptor Frederick Eckstein (1787-1832). A native of Berlin, Eckstein received training at the Berlin Academy. After arriving in Cincinnati in 1823 he was an early teacher of the celebrated local sculptor Hiram Powers. Eckstein's sister, Louis Eckstein Addesterren, appears to have been the first notable woman artist in Cincinnati.²

The Swiss-born John Caspar Wild (c. 1804-1846) was another important immigrant artist in frontier Cincinnati. Although he was an accomplished painter of portraits and landscapes, Wild is best remembered for his work as a lithographic artist. After working in Cincinnati during the 1820s he left to work in St. Louis and Davenport.³

A remarkable group of artists in early Ohio was the Frankenstein family, who came to Cincinnati from Germany in 1831 and later settled in Springfield, Ohio. The outstanding talent in the family was Godfrey Frankenstein (1820-1873), who supported himself mainly by portrait commissions but also painted landscapes,

including pictures of the Ohio countryside and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. With his brothers George and Gustavus, he created an immense panoramic painting of Niagara Falls which was rolled from one spindle to another while a lecture was read. Another brother, John Peter Frankenstein, was an eccentric portrait artist who also modeled portrait busts. Their two sisters, Marie and Elizabeth, taught art at a girls' school in Springfield.⁴

Henry J. Koempel and Gerhardt Mueller were two minor local artists who opened a studio in 1840 for painting altarpieces. William Lamprecht (b. 1838) was a painter of historical and religious subjects who was active in Cincinnati at least from 1853. Lamprecht returned to Germany during the 1860s to study in Munich but was back in the United States by around 1867. He was at one time in partnership with George Lang, another German-born painter in Cincinnati. In 1868 both he and Lang were engaged to do paintings for the church of St. Romuald D'Echemin in Quebec Province. Lamprecht was involved with the Institute of Catholic Art in Lexington and decorated a number of Benedictine churches. At one time Lamprecht was also in partnership with Philip Lang, a German-born portrait painter in Cincinnati who later settled in Rockport, Indiana.⁵ One wonders, of course, whether George Lang and Philip Lang were related or perhaps even the same person, but the record on this point is unclear.

Louis Schwebel, Jr. (b. 1833) was a minor German-born portrait artist who was active in Cincinnati in 1850.⁶ The engraver

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Hubert Kollmer (b. ca. 1828) was active there about the same time.⁷ The Swiss-born Rudolf Tschudi (1855-1923) established himself in Cincinnati as a popular painter of idyllic landscapes who also painted portraits and historical subjects. The Cincinnati Historical Society has six of his works and the Glarus Kunstverein in Switzerland also has a number of his paintings.⁸

Several drawings and paintings by Richard Andriessen, an artist born in Ratibor, Prussia in 1856, have turned up in Cincinnati, where he was active at the end of the last century. Little is known about him, except that he was married in Germany and may have studied in Munich.⁹ Anthony Biester (1837-1917) was a painter of portraits and landscapes who came to America



Figure 1: Godfrey Frankenstein (1820-1873), shown here in a self-portrait, was the most noteworthy member of a family of artists in Ohio (Photo courtesy of William Coyle, Delray Beach, Florida).

in 1870 after having received instruction in Cleve and Dusseldorf.¹⁰

German-trained craftsmen to a great extent introduced the lithographic process, which was invented in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century, into the United States. With the advent of chromolithography in 1826, lithography quickly took hold as both an artistic medium and a commercially important technology. Although the lithographic industry in the United States first developed in Philadelphia and other eastern cities, German-run lithography shops soon began to appear in such Midwestern cities as Cincinnati and Milwaukee. As elsewhere in the United States, the early lithography industry in Cincinnati had a palpably German character.¹¹

The earliest lithographic firm in Cincinnati was the partnership of Klauprecht and Menzel, established some time prior to 1840. Emil Klauprecht (1815-1896) was a journalist and writer while Adolphus Menzel was a skilled lithographer.¹² The firm produced many chromolithographic views of Cincinnati and other Ohio towns. In addition it published illustrated German-language periodicals for which Klauprecht was the editor and Menzel was in charge of the illustrations. The lithographer Charles Menzel, who was active in Cincinnati in the 1840s, was presumably related in some way to Adolphus Menzel. Klauprecht and Menzel employed persons named Gustavus A. Menzel and Herman G. Menzel, and by 1856 the name of the firm had been changed to G. H. Menzel and Company. The firm disappeared during or just after the Civil War.

Otto Onken's lithographic establishment, which existed from about 1848 to 1850, employed several German immigrant

lithographers, including Ferdinand von Laer, who came to North America from Berlin around 1850. Peter Ehrgott and Gustav Forbrigger were also employed by Onken but later organized their own firm, Ehrgott and Forbrigger, which produced chromolithographs of Civil War battles.¹³ Gustav Herrlein, another German-born lithographer in Cincinnati, was active about the same time.¹⁴ Christian Fabronius, who had earlier worked in New York was active in Cincinnati from 1858 to 1873.¹⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century a generation of American-born artists of German descent was coming of age in Cincinnati. We may start by mentioning three of these artists who achieved national recognition: Robert Frederick Blum (1857-1903), Frank Duveneck (1848-1919), and John Henry Twachtman (1853-1902).

Blum's father was a native of Rohrbach, Bavaria, who came to the United States in the 1850s. Blum's mother was also of German extraction. Blum himself was born in Cincinnati, where he began his career as a lithographer. He worked for a time in Philadelphia and eventually settled in New York, where he was known as both a painter and prolific illustrator. Blum spent some time in Europe and in 1890 visited Japan, where he painted many street scenes.¹⁶

Frank Duveneck was one of the most important American painters of his time and was also remarkable as a teacher of wide-ranging influence. He was born in Covington, Kentucky, just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. His name was originally Frank Decker and he acquired the name Duveneck from his stepfather. Both his father, Bernard Decker, and his mother (nee Katherine Seimers) came from a small town near Vechta in Oldenburg. As a young

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man in Cincinnati, Duveneck worked as an assistant to the church decorator William Lamprecht, discussed above. Duveneck was also a friend of the Cincinnati painter Rudolf Tschudi, whose portrait he painted. During a long stay in Munich, Duveneck was influenced by the realism of such painters as Wilhelm Leibl and Wilhelm von Dietz.¹⁷

John Henry Twachtman, who was born in Cincinnati, was the son of immigrant parents from Hannover. He studied under Duveneck in Cincinnati after Duveneck's return from Munich, but soon put aside Munich realism in favor of an impressionist and tonalist style.¹⁸

There were numerous other artists who were born into German families in Cincinnati. William Jacob Baer (1860-1941) began as a lithographer but turned to painting after study in Munich. He is known particularly for his miniatures, portraits, and genre scenes. Edward G. Eisenlohr (1872-1961) studied at the academy in Karlsruhe and eventually settled in Texas, where he painted western subjects. John Rettig (1860-1932) was a pupil of the Cincinnati Art School whose entire life was spent in Cincinnati. The sculptor Charles Henry Niehaus (1855-1935) came from a German immigrant family and went to study in Munich after studying at the McMicken

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NOTES

- ¹Arthur R. Schultz, *German-American Relations and German Culture in America: A Subject Bibliography* (Millwood, New York: Kraus International Publications, 1984), Vol. 1, 506.
- ²Ophia D. Smith, "Frederick Eckstein, the Father of Cincinnati Art," *Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio*, Vol. 9 (1951), 266-282.
- ³Judith A. Barter and Lynn E. Springer, *Currents of Expansion: Painting in the Midwest 1820-1940* (St. Louis: The St. Louis Art Museum, 1977), 71, 176.
- ⁴William Coyle, *The Frankenstein Family in Springfield* (Springfield, Ohio: Clark County Historical Society, 1967).
- ⁵For information on Koempel and Lamprecht, see William H. Gerdtz, *Art Across America: Two Centuries of Regional Painting* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), Vol. 2, 185. For information on Gerhardt Mueller, see George C. Groce and David H. Wallace, *The New York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564-1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), 459.
- ⁶Groce and Wallace, 565.
- ⁷Groce and Wallace, 383-384.
- ⁸Karl Brun, *Schweizerisches Künstler-Lexikon* (Frauenfeld: Huber, 1905-1917), Vol. 3, 341.
- ⁹Barter and Springer, 107.
- ¹⁰Edna Marie Clark, *Ohio Art and Artists* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1932), 443.
- ¹¹Benjamin F. Klein, *Lithography in Cincinnati*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati: Young and Klein, 1858-1959).
- ¹²For information on Klauprecht, see Robert Ward, *A Bio-Bibliography of German-American Writers* (White Plains, New York: Kraus International Publications, 1985), 155. For Menzel, see Groce and Wallace, 438.
- ¹³Martin W. Wiesendanger, "Lithographic Lives," *American-German Review*, Vol. 9 (June 1943), 7-10.
- ¹⁴Groce and Wallace, 311.
- ¹⁵Groce and Wallace, 218.
- ¹⁶Bruce Weber, "Robert Frederick Blum (1857-1903) and his Milieu." 2 vols. (Dissertation, City University of New York, 1985).
- ¹⁷Allen Johnson and Duman Malone (eds.), *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's 1957), Vol. 3, 558-561.
- ¹⁸Wanda M. Corn, *The Color of Mood: American Tonalism 1900-1910* (San Francisco: M. H. DeYoung Memorial Museum, 1972).
- ¹⁹Biographical information on many of these artist can be found in Peter Hastings Falk (ed.), *Who Was Who in American Art* (Madison, Connecticut: Sound View Press, 1985) and in Mantle Fielding, *Mantle Fielding's Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers*. Second revised edition, Glen B. Opitz, ed. (Poughkeepsie, NY: Apollo Book, 1986).
- ²⁰On the passing of the German cultural scene in Cincinnati, see particularly Guido A. Dobbert, "The Cincinnati Germans, 1870-1920: Disintegration of an Immigrant Community," *Bulletin of the Cincinnati Historical Society*, Vol. 23 (1965), 224-242. On the vitality of Cincinnati's artistic legacy, see *Cincinnati Art Galleries, Panorama of Cincinnati Art 1850-1950* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Art Galleries, 1986). Arthur R. Schultz, *German-American Relations and German Culture in America: A Subject Bibliography* (Millwood, New York: Kraus International Publications, 1984), Vol. 1, 506.