

# Notable German-Americans

## Rudolf Cronau (1855-1939), German-American Artist, Author, and Historian

### By Don Heinrich Tolzmann

#### Introduction

By means of pen, pencil and paintbrush, Rudolf Cronau sought to document his two great interests in life: the American West and the Native Americans who inhabited it, and the German element and its contributions to the making of America. A search of his name on the Internet reveals a countless number of his works of art, and that many of his books are still in print, a testament to his amazing output as an artist, author, and historian.

#### Biography

Rudolf Daniel Ludwig Cronau was born 21 January 1855 in Solingen in what is now the German state of Nord-Rhein-Westfalen. As an aspiring young artist, he attended the Art Academy in Düsseldorf, but soon left it to join the Prussian Army during the Franco-Prussian War. Thereafter he returned to continue his studies, and also began writing and illustrating articles for the German press. The *Gartenlaube*, one of the major family journals in Germany, took a liking to his work, and sent him to the U.S. as a correspondent in 1881.

He traveled widely across the country, writing and illustrating articles about his travels. He was drawn to the American West due to its “captivating charm” and its “irresistible magic.” He even visited Sitting Bull at the Sioux reservation at Standing Rock, South Dakota, and completed a life portrait of the legendary Sioux chief, the first one ever done. He followed up on his illustrated articles by collecting, and publishing them in book form in Germany.

He married, settled down, and raised a family in New York, where he became a freelance author for the German and German-American press. By 1900, he had become a U.S. citizen, and gotten actively involved in German-American community life. As a member of the German-American Alliance, a national federation of German-American societies, he proposed that a monument be erected in honor of Franz Daniel Pastorius and the thirteen German families who in 1683 founded Germantown, Pennsylvania, the first permanent German settlement in what became the U.S. The Alliance approved his proposal, and appointed him Chairman of the German Memorial Monument Commission. Funds for the monument, now



Rudolf Cronau, 1882  
Courtesy of Wikipedia

named the Pastorius Monument, came from the Alliance and Congress, and it was completed in 1917, but not dedicated until 1920 due to World War I. It is located in Germantown, now part of the city of Philadelphia. The monument was created by Albert Jaegers (1868-1925) a well-known German-American sculptor.

As a result of World War I, the Alliance was dissolved, so Cronau pushed for the creation of a new national German-American organization, and in 1919 became one of the founding fathers of the Steuben Society of America, an organization that recently celebrated its centennial and publishes a journal, *Steuben News*. Additionally, he proposed that the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, the date of Baron von Steuben's birth in 1730, should be celebrated as Steuben Day, and the first such celebration took place in the Bronx in 1922. This became the basis for the annual Steuben Day Parades that emerged after World War II in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago.

After World War I, Cronau continued to publish works in German and English, and in 1931 visited his hometown in Germany, depositing a collection of his works in the City Archives. Shortly before his demise in 1939, he completed an autobiography, a work that remains unpublished and on deposit at the archives in Solingen. He is buried at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Sleepy Hollow, New York.

### **Books by Cronau**

His first major publication appeared in 1885-86: *Von Wunderland zu Wunderland* (From Wonderland to Wonderland), a beautifully illustrated two-volume work on the American West. A new edition also appeared in 1887 as: *Unter dem Sternenbanner* (Under the Stars and Stripes). In 1886, he published *Fahrten im Lande der Sioux* (Travels in the Land of the Sioux). He followed up in 1890 with another travel account: *Im Wilden Westen: Eine Künstlerfahrt durch die Prärien und Felsengebirge der Union* (In the Wild West: An Artist's Journey through the Rocky Mountains of the Union).

His next publication was a two-volume work that appeared in 1890-92 for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus: *Amerika: Die Geschichte seiner Entdeckung von der ältesten bis auf die neueste Zeit. Eine Festschrift zur 400 jährigen Jubelfeier der Entdeckung Amerikas durch Christoph Columbus* (America: The History of its Discovery from the Oldest to the most recent Time: A Festschrift for the 400<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Celebration of the Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus). In this work he discusses not only the voyages of Columbus, but also subsequent explorations of America, including his own travels in the American West. Like all of his books, this work was profusely illustrated, and beautifully bound with gilt lettering on the cover and spine.

His love of the American landscape resulted in the publication of his first book in English in 1908: *Our Wasteful Nation; The Story of American Prodigality and the Abuse of our Natural Resources*. This was a pioneering work on the preservation of America's natural resources. He wrote passionately about the destruction of forests; the waste of water, soil and other mineral resources; the declining population of wild animals; the waste of public lands, funds, and property. In retrospect, how prophetic and relevant his words are today.

In 1909, he published *Drei Jahrhunderte deutschen Lebens in Amerika* (Three Centuries of German Life in America), his magnum opus on German-American history. This is a work of more than six hundred pages, reflecting extensive research, and is filled with numerous illustrations. It consists of two parts, the first covering the colonial period, and the second the time period thereafter. Especially useful for researchers is Cronau's bibliographical essay on source materials in German and English (pp. 2012-31). In 1924, a second edition appeared, with an additional chapter on "The True Causes of the World War," and the experiences of German-Americans during that time.

During World War I, Cronau published several books dealing with that conflict, and followed up with a work in English based



on his 1909 German-American history. This was his *German Achievement in America* (1916), which he described as: “A tribute to the memory of the men and women, who worked, fought, and died for the welfare of this country; and a recognition of the living who with equal enterprise, genius and patriotism helped in the making of our United States.” This work is not a translation, but rather an abridged version in English of his German-language history. Like many of his other works, this book has often been reprinted, and is still in print.

In 1919, he published another pioneering work, this one on women’s history: *Woman Triumphant: The Story of Her Struggles for Freedom, Education and Rights*. Here it should be noted that American women obtained the right to vote in the 1920 election, and that Cronau was one of its most vocal supporters. He then published two works based on his earlier German-language work on the Columbian discovery: *The Discovery of America and the Landfall of Columbus* (1921), and *The Final Resting Place of Columbus: A Monograph Based on Personal Investigations* (1926).

For the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city of New York, he published a work on the role Germans played in the founding of New Amsterdam, showing that it was not exclusively a Dutch settlement. And in the same year, he published *The Destruction of the American Brewing Industry*, showing the disastrous impact of Prohibition on the American economy.

### Conclusion

The monument Cronau proposed, the Pastorius Monument, still stands in Philadelphia; Steuben’s birthday is celebrated annually via the various Steuben parades; and the society he helped found is still active. Although his name is most likely not even associated with them today, the inspiration nevertheless came from him. More enduring as achievements directly connected to his name, however, are the contributions he made by enriching our understanding of American history by means of his artistic portrayals of the American West and his publications documenting German immigration, settlement, and influences on American life.

**Nachtrag – Addendum: Franz Joseph Stallo (1793-1833)**

The last issue of the *Palatine Immigrant* (XLVII: No. 3, June 2022) contained my article on Stallo, and concluded with several inconsistencies I had found. One of them was that I had found different dates for his birth. After the article appeared, I received an E-Mail from Ernest Thode, notifying me that he had found the actual birth date. Various sources listed 2 May 1793, while another source listed 10 May 1793. Ernest also sent a copy of the baptismal register that listed the actual birth date. It indicates that Stallo was born on 10 May 1793, and baptized on 12 May 1793. Vielen Dank an Ernest Thode!

Don Heinrich Tolzmann

Source: Matricula, <https://data.matricula-online.eu/de/>

Matricula Online Fonds Map Search for Places Suppo

Deutschland / Vechta, r.k. Offizialatsarchiv / Damme, St. Viktor / Taufen | KB09

Geburt		Taufe		Namen der Getauften.	Knabe	Mäd-chen
Tag	Monat	Tag	Monat			
4	Maj	9	Maj	Johann Adam Albers & Antonghne Ehem. Johann Heinrich Haverbeke, Albers. Cath. Maria Luise Eheleute Johann Adam Weltering, Diefz & Klenne, Albers. Cath. Maria Luise Eheleute Johann Adam Weltering	1	
9	Maj	9	Maj	Johann Adam Weltering, Cath. Maria Luise Eheleute Johann Adam Weltering	1	
10	Maj	12	Maj	Franz Joseph Stallo Ehem. Adam Stallo, Cath. Maria Luise Eheleute Friedrich Stallo, Adam Kempf, Cath. Maria Luise Eheleute Johann Adam Weltering	1	X