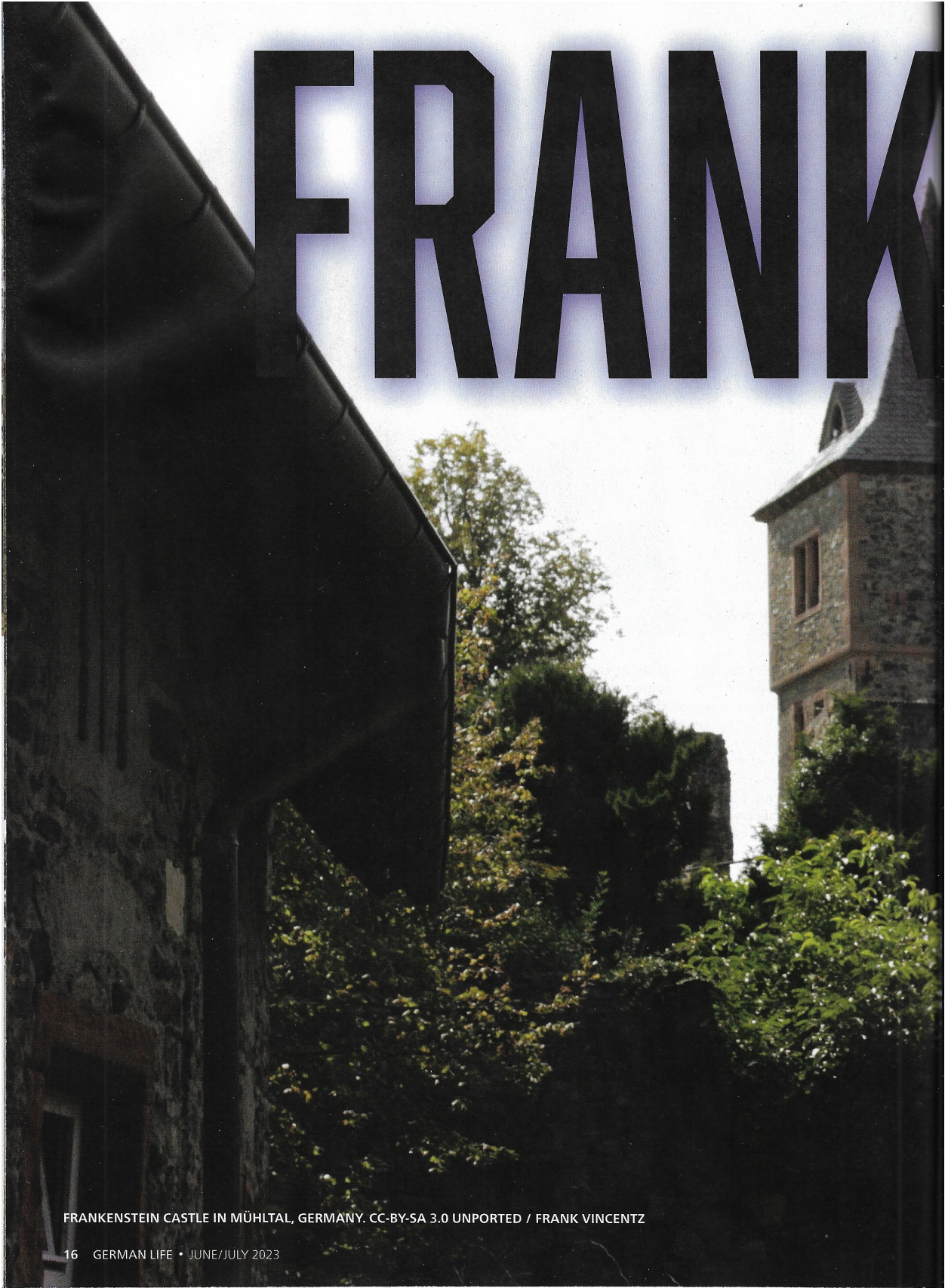


FRANK



FRANKENSTEIN CASTLE IN MÜHLTAL, GERMANY. CC-BY-SA 3.0 UNPORTED / FRANK VINCENTZ

ENSTEIN



A film, a novel and a German-American artist.

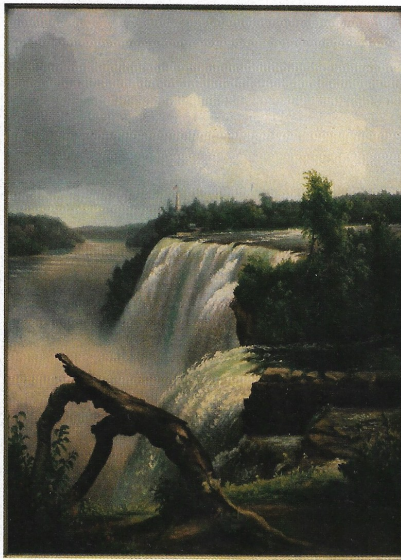
BY DON HEINRICH TOLZMANN



THE FRANKENSTEIN CASTLE IN MÜHLTAL, GERMANY. WIKIPEDIA

Mention "Frankenstein" and the 1931 Hollywood film starring Boris Karloff will probably come to mind. It bears little resemblance to the 1818 novel by Mary Shelley (1797-1851): *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, as there is much more to the story than what you see in the film. However, it is probably better known than the novel, and is often shown on television during the Halloween season. Less well known is the story of a German-American artist named Frankenstein. His name came from the Frankenstein Castle near Darmstadt in what is today the German state of Hesse. It was built in the 13th century by Konrad I von Frankenstein, founder of the Barony of Frankenstein.

On her way to Switzerland, Shelley traveled down the Rhine, but apparently did not visit the ruins of the Frankenstein Castle that were more than ten miles away. However, she was fascinated by the Rhine River Valley, and incorporated descriptions of the Rhineland into her novel. She wrote: "The course of the Rhine below Mayence (French for Mainz) becomes much more picturesque. The river descends



FRANKENSTEIN'S NIAGARA FALLS PAINTING, AN AREA WHICH CAPTIVATED HIM. PUBLIC DOMAIN

rapidly and winds between hills, not high, but steep, and of beautiful forms. We saw many ruined castles standing on the edges of precipices, surrounded by black woods, high and inaccessible."

She continues: "This part of the Rhine, indeed, presents, a singularly variegated landscape. In one spot you view rugged hills, ruined castles, overlooking tremendous precipices, with the dark Rhine rushing beneath." She takes note of "flourishing vineyards and populous towns, and a meandering river with green sloping banks," and felt that "there is a charm of the banks of this divine river that I never before saw equaled". During her travels, she apparently heard of the Frankenstein Castle and thought the name ideal for her novel. She was not alone in her interest in the name.

The Drach family was also attracted to the name and had ties to two towns not far from the castle: Raidelbach and Worfelden. The emigration of this family to America took place in the post-Napoleonic era, which was a time rife with socio-political discontent. Germans had fought for a greater



RANKENSTEIN CASTLE IN MÜHLTAL, GERMANY. CC-BY-SA 3.0 UNPORTED / FRANK VINCENTZ

degree of unity and freedom for the German states in the War of Liberation from the French Emperor. However, they were disheartened by the restoration of the old order in Europe after the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15.

Many looked to America, especially after the publication of an influential book by Gottfried Duden (1789-1856). He had been in the U.S. for several years, and in 1829 published a travel account of his time there: *Bericht über eine Reise nach den westlichen Staaten Nordamerikas und einen mehrjährigen Aufenthalt am Missouri in den Jahren 1824 bis 1827* (1829). Duden's *Bericht* (report) is considered one of the most influential books in the history of German emigration. It painted a glowing picture of life in the New World and was widely read in Germany.

Johann Anton (1789-1842) and Anna Katharina Drach (?-1870), might have read the book, but if not, were no doubt aware of the growing wave of interest in emigration that was sweeping across Germany. The Drach family lived in Raidelbach, and Drach was headmaster of the school in nearby Worfelden and also choir director and or-

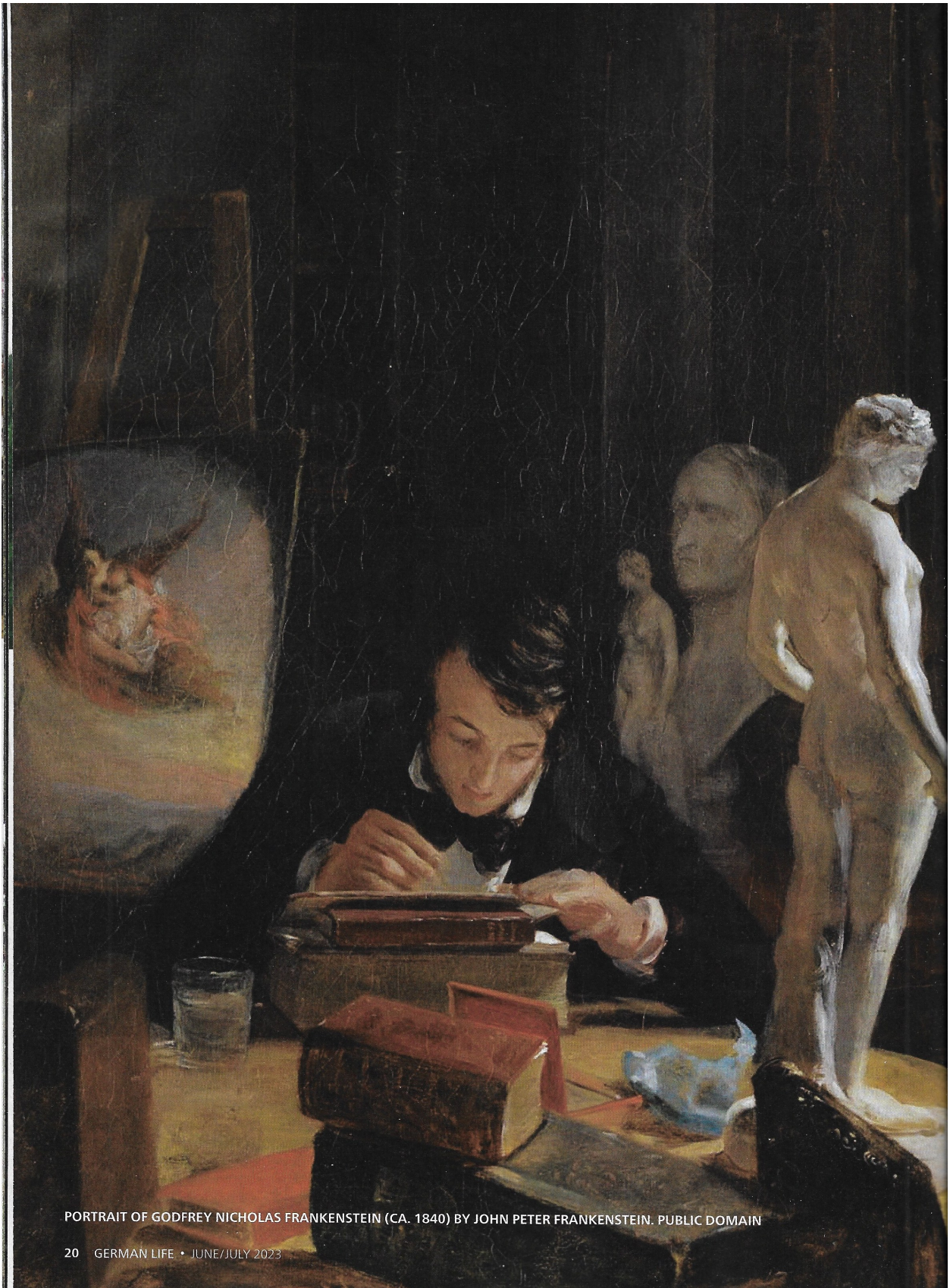


A CONTEMPORARY SKETCH OF GODFREY NICHOLAS FRANKENSTEIN AS A PLEIN AIR PAINTER. CC-BY-SA 4.0 INTERNATIONAL

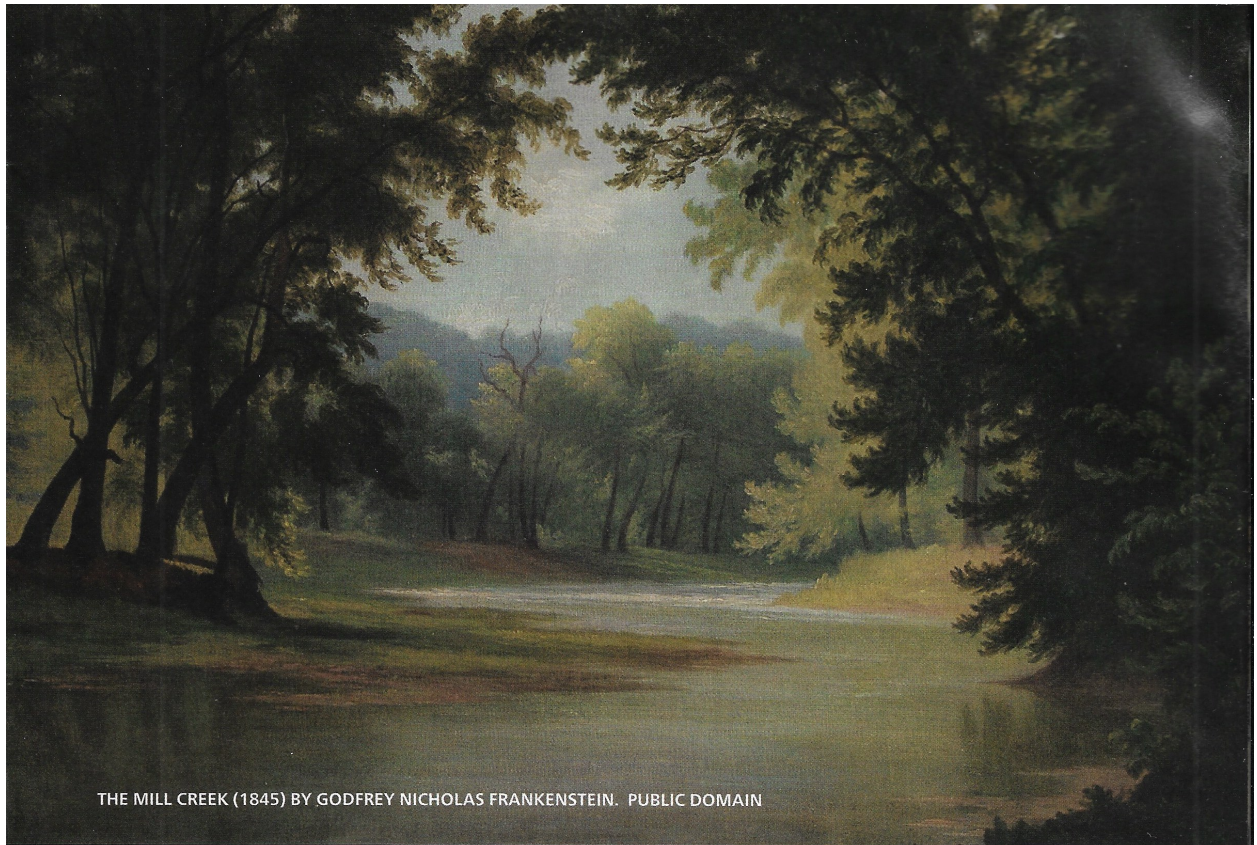
ganist of the Lutheran church there, but was increasingly ostracized because of his liberal views and friends. The last straw for Drach was losing his position at the church, as well as the right to offer private instruction.

Not surprisingly, the Drach family decided to emigrate in fall 1831, and settled in Cincinnati, Ohio. By this time, Cincinnati was developing into a major destination for German emigrants. According to Duden: "Cincinnati is called the most beautiful city of the entire West, and truly the European who involuntarily associates all kinds of ideas about savage life with the words American interior, could scarcely trust his eyes if he could suddenly be transported from his home to this city." He also noted the area was "well settled, and mostly by Germans" and that one could travel "with the same comfort as in the hilly regions of Germany".

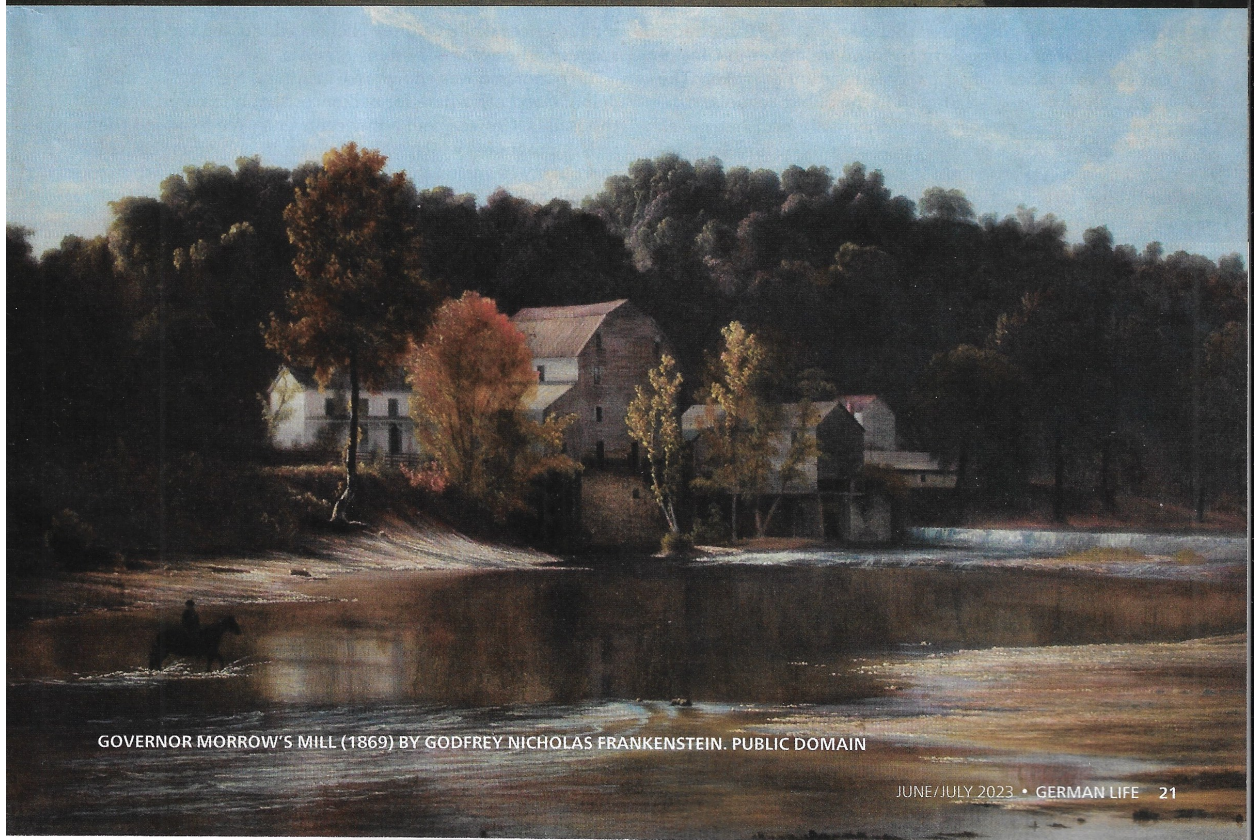
Upon arrival in America, Johann Anton decided to change the family name to Frankenstein, since he felt Drach was often mispronounced, sounding like "drash," which was quite close to "trash". So, the family took on a name from a well-known landmark it was familiar with: the Frankenstein Castle. Not



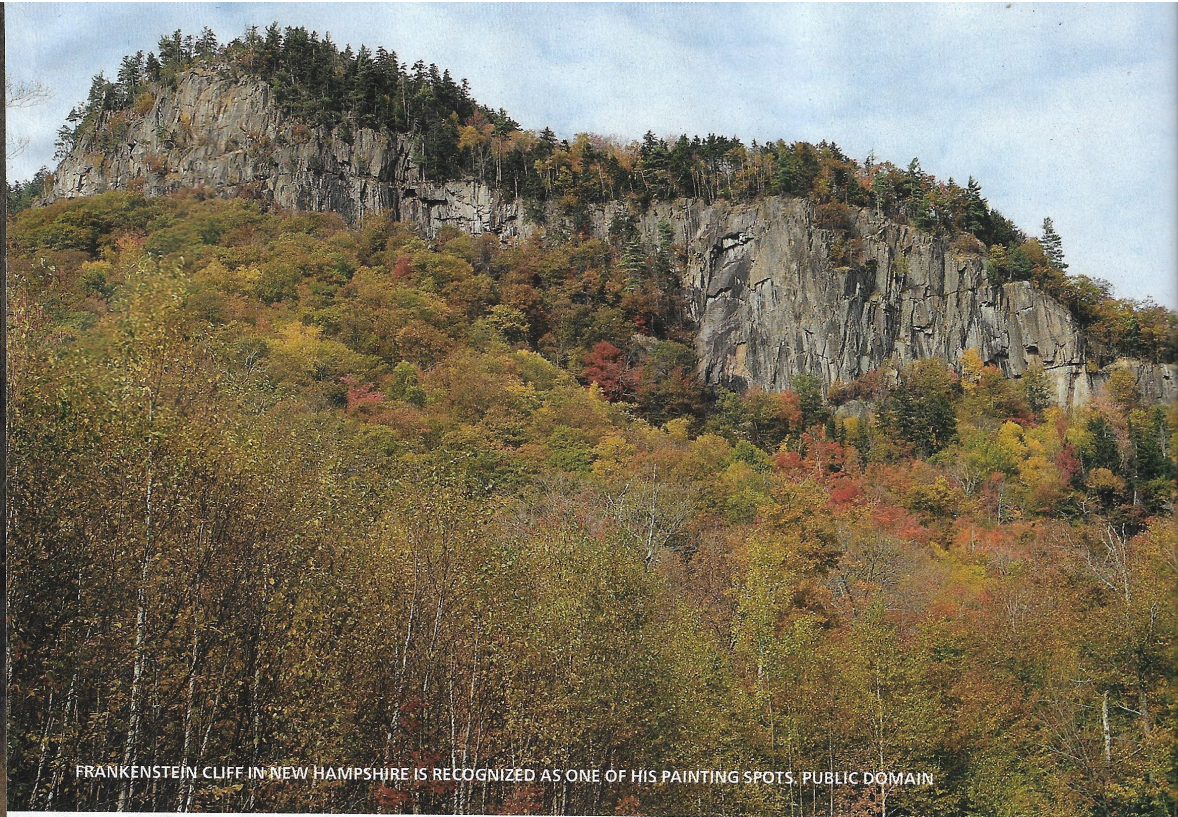
PORTRAIT OF GODFREY NICHOLAS FRANKENSTEIN (CA. 1840) BY JOHN PETER FRANKENSTEIN. PUBLIC DOMAIN



THE MILL CREEK (1845) BY GODFREY NICHOLAS FRANKENSTEIN. PUBLIC DOMAIN



GOVERNOR MORROW'S MILL (1869) BY GODFREY NICHOLAS FRANKENSTEIN. PUBLIC DOMAIN



FRANKENSTEIN CLIFF IN NEW HAMPSHIRE IS RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF HIS PAINTING SPOTS. PUBLIC DOMAIN

being fluent in English, the father decided to learn a trade, and apprenticed with a German furniture maker in Cincinnati, thereafter becoming a successful cabinet maker. The family's children learned English in the public schools.

In 1831, Shelley published another edition of her novel, explaining how the work had come about. The novel was inspired by a group of friends, including Mary Wollstonecraft, her future husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and others, who were at a social get-together in Geneva, Switzerland. They amused themselves by reading from a collection of German ghost stories, with each then telling a story. Mary went on to write her incredible novel. Did the family learn that there was a novel by Shelley that shared their family name? This is unknown.

Early on the Frankenstein children demonstrated artistic talents. Most successful of the siblings as an artist was Godfrey Nicholas (1820-73) who might best be called a child prodigy. At age twelve he apprenticed as a sign painter, and thereafter started his own sign painting business. In 1838, he organized the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts, and was elected as its president. By age nineteen he had his own studio in Cincinnati and was receiving commissions for landscape and portrait paintings.

In 1844, he began the first of many annual trips to Niagara Falls, which captivated his interest as an ideal site for his landscape paintings and sketches. He completed them at various times of the day, so as to capture views of the Falls from dawn to dusk. With the assistance of his brothers, he created an incredible panoramic painting of the Falls: "Frankenstein's Panorama". Altogether, it consisted of more than eighty paintings. It was rolled up on a spindle, and unrolled

for audiences while Godfrey Nicholas discussed the various scenes to the accompaniment of music.

The panorama was shown in Cincinnati, New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere for audiences that numbered in the thousands. Crowds paid a fifty cents entry fee to attend the artist's programs, which only came to an end when he had thoroughly traversed the country, especially in the East. According to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, his paintings of the Niagara Falls "have not been equaled by any other artist", and after their appearance "his time was taken up in copying them in reduced size for the private collections of persons giving him commissions".

In 1852, he became acquainted with Jenny Lind (1820-87), the Swedish opera singer and she acquired several of his paintings, and this attracted international attention to his work. In 1853, his brother Gustavus Ludwig (1829-93) moved to Springfield, Ohio, where Godfrey Nicholas, his mother, and sisters had moved in 1849. Whenever possible, both brothers taught art classes at the Springfield Female Seminary, but Godfrey Nicholas continued to travel widely, especially after his panorama presentations ended.

In Canada he completed landscape paintings and sketches, and from there he went to New England, and painted at various locations. In Boston he received numerous commissions for portraits of notables such as Charles Francis Adams (1807-86), a well-known politician and historian, and George Ticknor (1791-1871), a noteworthy literary scholar. He also traveled to Europe to paint scenes of the Swiss Alps, and steel engravings of his paintings soon appeared in *Meyer's Universum*, a popular German monthly journal. They attracted such attention that tourists gathered around him,



DARMSTADT'S MARKETPLACE CLOSE TO FRANKENSTEIN CASTLE, GERMANY, 1980S. PUBLIC DOMAIN

watching him paint scenes on site in the Alps.

The paintings of Godfrey Nicholas reflect the influence of the German Romantic tradition, so his paintings and portraits were Romanticized portrayals, rather than attempts at photographic-like reproductions. His portraits were equally well known as carefully done character studies painted to reveal the subject's personality. Reproductions of his paintings are available via Amazon.com.

According to Henry Howe's *Historical Collections of Ohio* (1891), he painted "many beautiful landscapes, closely and carefully studied from nature, finding his themes all the way from the White Mountains (New Hampshire) to the Knobs of Indiana, including Niagara, of which latter place he painted hundreds of views, uniting most of them in a famous and very effective panorama".

Howe also wrote that he was "an affable and honorable gentleman; qualities which, together with his acknowledged talent secured for him many warm friends". According to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*: "In private life he was a delightful companion, a good conversationalist, and an earnest and intelligent thinker. With a quiet vein of humor running

through all he said, his wit was without venom, and, what is a rare thing in his profession, his nature without a jealous emotion pervading it."

In 1873, he died unexpectedly of an inflammation of the brain, and is buried at Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati. His last words were in German: *Himmel* (Heaven) and *Mutter* (mother). His brother John Peter (1817-81) captured his personality in a painting now at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. In the painting, we see the artist busily writing, while surrounded by sculptures, books, and an unfinished painting in the background.

Aside from his paintings in museums and private collections, the memory of Godfrey Nicholas has been kept alive in the White Mountains near Bartlett, New Hampshire. There is a gigantic rock formation there named for him: Frankenstein Cliff. It was so named, as the artist enjoyed painting scenes in the area. Seen from afar, it looks vaguely reminiscent of the rugged ruins of the Frankenstein Castle. Fortunately, there is a historical marker there, indicating that it does not memorialize a fictional character, but rather honors a German-American artist: Godfrey Nicholas Frankenstein. GL