

## **CINCINNATI, OHIO; “The El Dorado of the German Emigrant” Writings about the Queen City of the West**

*By Friedrich Gerstäcker, German Travel writer and novelist; Edited and Translated by Don Heinrich Tolzmann, NCSA Literatur Press, Indianapolis, IN, 2020, paperback, 88 pgs. ISBN:978-1-880788-56-1. \$13.00 + s/h.*

Dr. Tolzmann has an interest of long standing in the German contributions to the City of Cincinnati and is well acquainted with his subject matter. In 1993, he wrote, *The Ohio Valley; the German Dimension*, and in 1994, *Cincinnati's German Heritage*. Also, in 2005 he wrote *German Cincinnati* and in 2011, *German Cincinnati Revisited*. Here he has translated and edited extractions from some works of German travel author, Friedrich Gerstäcker (1816-1872), who expressed a particular fondness for Cincinnati as he visited various parts of the eastern United States. In 1844, Gerstäcker wrote his book in the German language, titled *Cincinnati, Queen of the West – the El Dorado of the German Emigrant*. An English translation appeared in 1854 in England and in the United States in 1859. In it he expounded on the beauty

of the area and the opportunities awaiting incoming settlers. Gerstäcker was a prolific author, amassing a collected work of 44 volumes, many of which have not yet been translated.

It is Dr. Tolzmann's intention to share with the reader a fresh look at the history of the German settlement in Cincinnati through the eyes of one who had been there. This publication brings together, for the first time, the various writings of Gerstäcker as they pertain to Cincinnati which he considered to be the most desirable destination in America for newly arriving immigrants. Gerstäcker was writing in the mid 1800's for an audience in Germany who had become discontent with their situation due to the prevailing socioeconomic and political conditions. They were receptive and eager to learn more about "a better place". Many articles were being written about life in America, particularly in Pennsylvania; however, Gerstäcker captured their attention with his story telling and consequently was an influencing factor for emigrants. He spoke convincingly and his works were best sellers in Germany at the time of their publication.

Gerstäcker seems to have been a colorful character. He travelled as a vagabond, picking up just enough work, doing a variety of things,

to make ends meet and keep himself going. He wrote the book *Wild Sports of the Far West* about his hunting expeditions in Arkansas, Mississippi and the Louisiana Territory. In addition to travels in the US, he visited German colonies in South America, particularly in Venezuela. He also went to Polynesia, Australia and Egypt from his home base in Germany. He offered his readers a realistic view of frontier life, sharing the hardships as well as the thrills and excitement he experienced firsthand. He conveyed his observations with honesty and humor. Gerstäcker opined on a wide variety of subject matter which gave his readers a real feel for events as they occurred. His firsthand, conversational style makes for an interesting yet easy and enjoyable reading experience which Dr. Tolzmann was able to capture in his translation. Another reviewer has summed it up well by saying Gerstäcker “provides insight into the life and times of the German immigrant.”

The book contains an interesting Appendix of Illustrations along with an Appendix of Gerstäcker’s “Works on the Americas” and a selected bibliography.