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Panorama der Stadt Neu-Braunfels (ca. 1847) by Conrad Caspar Rordorf (1800–1847). Copies of the painting exist at Yale University's Beinecke Library; the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth; the Sophienburg Museum in New Braunfels; the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas in Austin; the Fayette County Heritage Museum and Archives in La Grange, Texas; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. This version from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Bayou Bend Collection, museum purchase funded by Rose Cullen In honor of Harry H. Cullen, B.98.22.

The Murder of Conrad Caspar Rordorf: Art, Violence, and Intrigue on the Texas Frontier

By James C. Kearney*

In 2010, as a fundraiser, the Texas State Historical Association auctioned an 1851 painting of a Hill Country grist mill by the Texas German artist Hermann Lungkwitz. The painting fetched a price of $48,000, an extraordinary sum that underscores the important role European immigrant artists played in the visual history of mid-nineteenth-century Texas and the appreciation they now enjoy among art historians, serious collectors, and the general public.[1] Hermann Lungkwitz (1813–1891), Lungkwitz's brother-in-law Richard Petri (1824–1857), and Carl von Iwonski (1830–1912) are remembered as the "big three" among Texas German artists. Theodor Gentilz (1830–1912), a Frenchman recruited as a surveyor by Henri Castro for his Alsatian colony west of San Antonio in 1842, rounds out the group of important European artists on the Texas frontier.

To this list, however, posterity might well have added another name, the Swiss artist Conrad Caspar Rordorf (1800–1847), had not a tragedy played out at Nassau Plantation in northern Fayette County in October 1847 that cost the artist both his life and at least part of his artistic legacy.

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[1] The price of the Lungwitz painting was confirmed to the author by J. P. Bryan, the auctioneer at the 2010 event, at the Conference on Texas held at the Witte Museum, May 3–4, 2019.

This is because two sketchbooks containing forty-five drawings of Texas Hill Country scenes disappeared in the wake of the shooting and their whereabouts remain a mystery to this day. Only one of Rordorf's Texas's works, *Panorama der Stadt Neu-Braunfels* (Panorama of the City of New Braunfels), is known with certainty to have survived.[2] There is tantalizing evidence, however, that one, and possibly three, of his renderings of Texas cities appeared as uncredited prints in the 1856–57 editions of a popular German language monthly, *Meyer's Universum*, and that at least five Hill Country landscapes also survived as illustrations under false attribution in an adventure novel written by Friedrich Armand Strubberg (also known as Dr. Schubbert) in 1858. These surviving works give us a taste of what was lost with Rordorf's untimely death in 1847.

The effects of Rordorf's murder extended beyond art, however. The circumstances of his death inflamed a growing anti-immigrant (specifically anti-German) sentiment among a faction of the Texas political establishment, which found a vociferous advocate in James Mayfield, ex-secretary of state of the Republic of Texas during the Lamar administration, former legislator, lawyer, and land speculator. The shoot-out accelerated the disengagement of the Society for the Protection of German Emigrants in Texas—Adelsverein in shorthand—from its ambitious colonization efforts in the Texas Hill Country, a consequence that has never been thoroughly explored in the literature about the organization. And the ramifications of the shooting did not end there. Rordorf's death at Nassau Plantation also led directly to another spectacular shoot-out on the streets of La Grange in July 1849 between James Mayfield and a notorious rowdy, Absalom Bostick. The affair, which created a sensation across the state because of Mayfield's prominence, exposed, in a bizarre turn of events, one of the largest criminal conspiracies to surface in Texas up to that point. The Rordorf story, consequently, is worth revisiting on several counts.

Born in Zürich, Switzerland, Caspar Rordorf began his artistic training as a student of Johann Jakob Wetzel (1781–1834), a prominent landscape artist from Zürich who is best remembered for a very successful book he produced, which appeared between 1817 and 1827 in several editions: *Voyages pittoresques aux lacs de la Suisse* (Picturesque Voyages to the Lakes of Switzerland), a selection of 137 Swiss and Italian lake scenes. The book appealed to a growing appetite among the educated classes of Europe for geographical and historical knowledge of faraway places by offering

[2] The provenance of *Panorama der Stadt Neu-Braunfels* was established by James Patrick McGuire in "Carl Rordorf: Artist to the Adelsverein," an unpublished study commissioned by the Citizens Bank of New Braunfels on the occasion of the unveiling of the work in May 1987. The article was graciously shared with the author by Ron Tyler.

highly accurate and dramatic landscapes, often referred to by the Italian term *vedute* (views).[3]

Rordorf built his reputation first and foremost as a *vedutisti*, and his chosen medium was aquatint, a process suited for finer quality prints.[4] Using these skills, Rordorf arrived in Texas in 1847 with an established reputation and the credentials to reach a large audience, which helps to explain his enthusiastic reception and the general belief that he was the only artist on the scene at the time with sufficient skills to visually promote the colonization efforts of the Adelsverein.[5]

Most accounts of Rordorf portray him not only as a prominent artist but also as a congenial bon vivant with a rather cavalier attitude toward

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[3] *Vedute* were detailed, accurate, and recognizable landscape and cityscape paintings or engravings that originated in Flanders in the sixteenth century. Dutch painters continued the tradition throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Under the influence of Late Romantic sensibilities, nineteenth-century Swiss and German artists often added dramatic skyscapes over sweeping compositions with stock groupings of animals or people in the foreground—the *staffage*—but continued the tradition of accurate depiction of the subject matter. "Veduta," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veduta> [Accessed May 9, 2018].

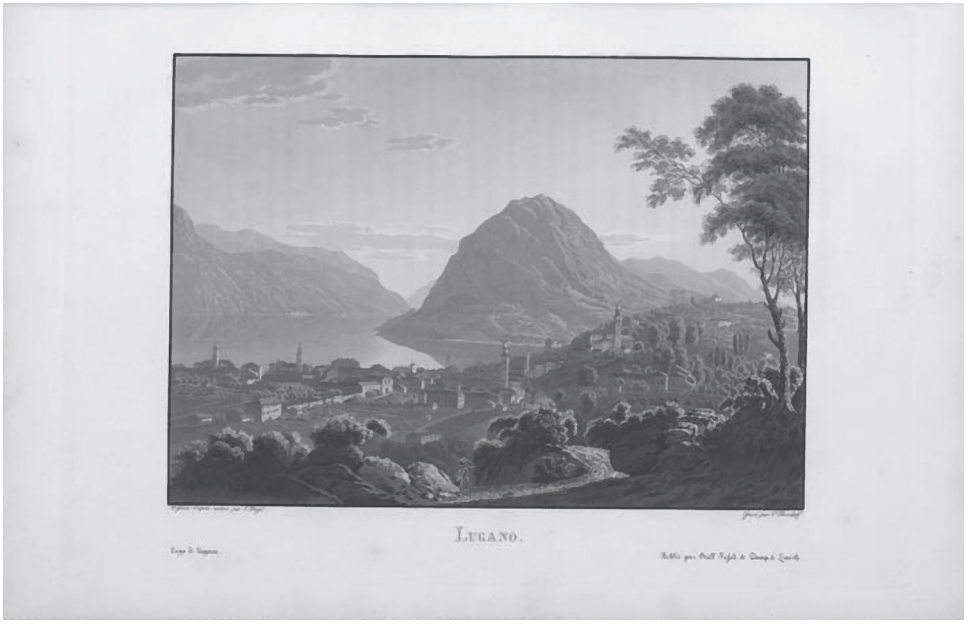
[4] The aquatint technique consists of exposing a copperplate to acid through a layer of melted granulated resin. The acid bites away the plate only in the interstices between the resin grains, leaving an evenly pitted surface that yields broad areas of tone when the grains are removed and the plate is printed. A practically infinite number of tones can be achieved by exposing various parts of the plate to acid baths of different strengths for different periods of time. Tones can also be altered by scraping and burnishing. Etched or engraved lines are often used with aquatint to achieve greater definition of form. "Aquatint," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/aquatint> [Accessed May 9, 2018].

[5] Acting commissioner Ludwig Bené, for instance, wrote in 1849 that Rordorf was "the only one able to make such sketches." Bené to the Committee, Dec. 28, 1849, Solms-Braunfels Archives (transcripts), henceforth cited as "SBAt," XLIV, 266.

This study relies heavily on the reports, letters, and documents contained in the Solms Braunfels Archives (SBAt) and related collections. The name is misleading. The SBAt are the official records of the Verein zum Schutz deutscher Einwanderer in Texas (Society for the Protection of German Emigrants in Texas), often called in shorthand the Adelsverein (Society of Noblemen). The documents found a home at one point in the castle of the Solms-Braunfels family and hence the name. The documents languished unknown to American scholars until the late 1930s when Dr. Rudolph Biesele, author of the seminal work, *History of the German Settlements in Texas* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1930), became aware of them. Prior to World War II, he headed up a team that transcribed and indexed the thousands of reports, letters and documents into typewritten German, rendering them accessible and useable to a much wider audience. Interestingly, Biesele himself did not have the benefit of the archives when he wrote his book on the German settlements in Texas, while later authors of works on the Adelsverein with potential access to the resources of the SBAt and the authors appear not to have been aware of their existence. In general, the SBAt represents a treasure trove of original source material about Texas in the 1840s and 1850s. In proportion to their significance, it is astounding how little they have been used.

After the disruption of the war, parts of the SBAt went missing, the most important part being the papers of Friedrich Armand Strubberg. The various parts eventually resurfaced and came up for auction in New York. Both the University of Texas (UT) and Yale University tried to acquire the collections, but Yale prevailed, ending up with the original documents of the SBAt as well as the Strubberg Collection, both of which are now housed in the Beinecke Rare Book Library. Small parts of the original SBAt did end up at UT, namely the Verein and Wied Collections.

The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at UT, the Texas State Library in Austin, and the Sophienburg Museum in New Braunfels all have identical copies of the transcripts. The author has also copied most of the official reports and correspondence in the SBAt for himself over the years (about half of the total collection) and has made them more user-friendly by rearranging everything in chronological order. The full collections comprise about 20,000 pages collected into seventy binders or volumes. These



1823 *Veduta* of the Swiss city of Lugano painted by Johann Jakob Wetzel and engraved by Conrad Caspar Rordorf. *Swiss National Library, GS-GUGE-208-a-59.*

money and debt.[6] He traveled widely and spent several years in Germany prior to coming to Texas. At the age of twenty-six, Rordorf moved to Dresden, home of the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts and the center of the Romantic school of landscape painting, epitomized by Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840).

From 1828 until 1834 Rordorf lived in the quaint and scenic German university town of Heidelberg, where he met and married Anna Elisabetha Steitz in 1829.[7] While there, in addition to several panoramic views of Heidelberg, he completed a series of illustrations of the Rhine River and of the city of Bonn, which straddles that scenic river along its middle reach.[8] Rordorf also worked on a series of aquatints for a picture book undertaken by his old mentor, Jakob Wetzel. The book featured landscapes taken from the scenic mountainous area between Dresden and the Bohemian

volumes are labeled with roman numerals I–LXX in the official index. The author has preserved this convention for purposes of consistency.

[6] See, for instance, Siegfried Schultz to the officials of the Verein, Mar. 11, 1846, SBAt, LVI, 232, in which Schultz noted how Rordorf "ingratiates himself with the officials of the Society" and "his jovial nature." For a report concerning the debts he accumulated, see SBAt LVI, 251.

[7] *Schweizerische Monats-Chronik* (Zurich: J. J. Ulrich, 1829), 11, 43.

[8] Karl-Heinz Stader, "Die Bonn- und Rheinansichten des Schweizers Conrad Caspar Rordorf (1800–1847)," *Bonner Geschichtsblätter* 55/56 (2006): 21–54.

border, a region often referred to as "Saxon Switzerland." Rordorf's artistic activity during this period helped to cement his reputation in the German-speaking countries of Europe.

In 1846 Rordorf faced imminent imprisonment for reasons that remain unclear, but which undoubtedly influenced his fateful decision to join a newly formed company bound for Texas, the Naturforschender Verein (Natural Sciences Society), leaving his wife and daughter behind.[9] The largely undescribed (and to German eyes, exotic) flora and fauna of Texas had suggested interesting business possibilities to two Texas German settlers and amateur naturalists, August Altstädten and Johann von Bauer.[10] The two returned to Europe in the summer of 1846 and visited with Siegfried Schultz, an agent of the Adelsverein in Bonn.[11] These three then joined with Rordorf, M. Sürth, and J. A. Sürth to found the Natural Sciences Society in September 1847.[12] The stated purpose of the society was "to conduct exact research into all aspects associated with the natural history of Texas."[13] It was to accomplish this "through comprehensive collections, careful observations, meticulous descriptions, and faithful drawings, and also by the establishment of a museum to house the fruits of our investigations."[14] The statutes list Rordorf as a "painter, copper engraver, and conservator." From this it would appear that at some point Rordorf had also acquired the skills of a *Konservator*, that is, someone who has the ability to skin and preserve animals, birds, and reptiles for future display in museums and universities. Because of his established reputation as a skilled artist, Rordorf clearly stood out as the most prestigious member of the group.[15]

Siegfried Schultz's membership in the company strengthened its association with the Adelsverein. He took the title "corresponding member," which meant in practice that he served as liaison for the group and managed its business affairs in Europe. Count Carl of Castell, the business director of the Adelsverein in Wiesbaden, was quite familiar with Schulz and looked favorably on the Natural Sciences Society.[16] He granted

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[9] See "Rordorf, Conrad Caspar," *Deutsche Biographische Enzyklopädie,* ed. Rudolf Vierhaus (15 vols.; Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag, 2007), V, 8, 522.

[10] Samuel Woods Geiser profiles both men in "A Century of Scientific Exploration in Texas: Part 1b 1820–1880," *Field and Laboratory,* April 1936, 29–52.

[11] Siegfried Schultz to Adolph, Duke Nassau of Nassau, Aug. 4, 1848, SBAt, LVI, 246–254.

[12] Schultz to Count Carl of Castell, Oct. 12, 1846, SBAt, LVI, 256, 257.

[13] "Statuten des Naturforschenden Vereins" (Statutes of the Natural Sciences Society of Texas), SBAt, LVI, 203, 204.

[14] Ibid., 203.

[15] There are several quotations from contemporaries that corroborate this assertion. See, for instance, Bené to the Committee, Dec. 28, 1849, SBAt, XLIV, 266.

[16] Count Carl of Castell-Castell was one of the most underappreciated men associated with the Adelsverein. He and Count Christian of Leiningen can be considered the founders of the society. Count Castell assumed the role of *Geschäftsführer* (CEO) of the society early on and retained that position until 1848,

it a subsidy of one hundred florins in the fall of that year and offered to pay for its passage to Galveston.[17] With this relationship established, officials of the Adelsverein began cataloging all correspondence associated with the society and its activities in Texas. The company departed Antwerp on November 16, 1846, taking passage on the American three-masted schooner *Schanunga,* and arrived in Galveston on January 11, 1847, after a nearly sixty-day passage. For reasons that are not clear, J. A. Sürth stayed behind. The four remaining members of the society quickly set up a camp on the mouth of Dickinson Bayou, located just north of Galveston Island. Dickinson Bayou provided an ideal habitat for numerous species of water fowl and other bird life, as well as a rich assortment of animal and reptilian life.[18]

The Natural Sciences Society issued its first (and only) report on February 8, 1847.[19] The report was more about people than nature: it cataloged the hardships accompanying the sea voyage and related desperate stories the members had heard concerning the German colonists in Texas; it only offered a few observations on the natural history of the state. Galveston was awash with bad news concerning the Adelverein's colonization efforts, much of it from first-hand experience and observation. The report made no attempt to whitewash this reality, which eventually created a breach with the Adelsverein, the society's sponsor.

Rordorf, however, tried to stay on the Adelsverein's good side. He apparently made the decision to part ways with the Natural Sciences Society early on, either during the passage over or immediately thereafter. By one report, he began currying favor with local officials of the Adelsverein almost from the first day he set foot in Galveston.[20] Alwin Sörgel, who was serving as a courier for the company at the time, provided a rather unflattering picture of the deportment and seriousness of the Natural Sciences Society: "[T]he much touted Naturforschende Verein arrived here [Galveston] from Germany. Its members avidly accumulated debts, filled up on food, soaked their heads in spirits, and explored the nature of laziness, a subject that they still pursue . . . [but] Rohrdorf [*sic*] separated himself from this company at the very beginning."[21]

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when he was forced to step down. He set an ambitious agenda for the Society that had as its cornerstone a land grant contract with the Republic of Texas. Count Castell had previously commissioned Schulz to write a short history of the colonies in Texas, which he had completed in 1845. See Siegfried Schultz, *Deutsche Ansiedlung in Texas* (Bonn: Friedrich Encke, 1845).

[17] Count Castell to Schultz, Sept.16, 1846, SBAt, LVI, 206.

[18] Ibid.; "Erster Bericht des Naturforschenden Vereins" (First report of the Texas Natural Sciences Society), SBAt, LVI, 207.

[19] "Erster Bericht des Naturforschenden Vereins," SBAt, LVI, 207–210.

[20] " . . . setzt sich bei den Beamtern des Vereins in Gunst" (curries favor with the officials of the Society), SBAt, LVI, 232.

[21] Sörgel discusses this in a letter written in Galveston and dated June 30, 1847. See Alwin H. Sörgel, *A Sojourn in Texas: Alwin Sörgel's Texas Writings* (San Marcos: German-Texan Heritage Society, 1992), 125.

With its most prestigious member gone, the Natural Sciences Society soon disbanded, leaving behind a trail of debts and recriminations both in Texas and Germany.[22] Its members placed the blame squarely with Rordorf for the company's demise. Johann von Bauer, one of the members, wrote back to Siegfried Schultz in Germany: "It is impossible to state all the ways and means employed by Rordorf to bring down the Society so that he could pursue, unimpeded, his own private interests, which unfolded to him in such a tempting fashion in Galveston."[23]

It is not clear exactly when Rordorf made his way from Galveston to New Braunfels, but it was in this town that he first made acquaintance with Alwin Sörgel. Sörgel was quite taken with Rordorf, and he later wrote about how the two quickly hatched a plan for a collaborative picture book similar to the books that Rordorf had worked on in Germany and Switzerland:

> He painted a panorama and a few views of Galveston. They are a real pleasure; if only you could see them! But you will. Rohrdorf [*sic*] and I will travel through Texas; he will paint and depict the country in distinctive views and I will write the text. . . . We want to give special attention to the parts of the country settled by Germans and to other areas suitable for settlement by German on account of their geography and landscape.[24]

Rordorf's association with Sörgel shows that he apparently put little stock in honoring previous agreements if a good opportunity came along. The contract he signed with the Natural Sciences Society stipulated that the regular members would serve for a full two years beginning the day they arrived in Texas and not permit personal interests or third-party temptations to sway them from their stated goals.[25] Rordorf arrived in New Braunfels not long after tensions between the Adelsverein's colonists and its commissioner general, Baron Otfried Hans Freiherr von Meusebach (usually rendered in English as John O. Meusebach), had reached a head. In late December 1846, after Meusebach returned to New Braunfels from

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Alwin Sörgel had come over under the auspices of the Adelsverein in 1845, but quickly gave up on the idea of settling in the Fisher-Miller Land Grant, choosing instead to set up a farm with several companions in the more settled German communities of south-central Texas. He bought a farm in northern Fayette County next to Nassau Plantation. Sörgel seems to have had a love/hate relationship with the Adelsverein. He wrote a book highly critical of its colonization efforts: *Für Auswanderungslustige: Briefe eines unter dem Schutze des Mainzervereins nach Texas Ausgewanderten* (Leipzig, 1847). He subsequently changed his mind and even took a position with the company in Texas as a courier. He then wrote another book, more sympathetic to the company: *Neuste Nachrichten aus Texas* (Eisleben, Germany, 1847). W. M. Von-Maszewski combined and translated both books as *A Sojourn in Texas: Alwin Sörgel's Texas Writings*.

[22] See for example: Schultz to Castell, Jan. 21, 1848, SBAt, LVI, 224.

[23] Schultz to the Adelsverein, SBAt, LVI, 231, 232.

[24] Sörgel, *A Sojourn in Texas*, 125.

[25] "Statuten des Naturforschenden Vereins," SBAt, LVI, 204.

Nassau Plantation in Fayette County, where he had made his headquarters during most of the preceding year, an angry mob of colonists presented him with a list of demands and, when he was not forthcoming, threatened to lynch him. Meusebach was able to stare down the mob, but he realized that the settlers needed to receive title to the lands in Texas that had been promised them before they left Germany. To fulfill this promise, however, the Adelsverein needed to survey the Fisher-Miller Land Grant by September 1, 1847.[26] But in order for the surveyors to be able to do their work, the Adelsverein needed to reach an agreement with the formidable Penetaka, or Southern Comanches, who claimed the grant area as hereditary tribal land and who had not been informed that a company of Germans now claimed their lands.

Through an interpreter, Meusebach arranged to meet in March 1847 with Buffalo Hump, Old Owl, and other important chiefs of the Penetaka Comanche band at their winter camp on the San Saba River, practically in the very heart of the Fisher-Miller Land Grant.[27] The talks were fruitful, breathing fresh life into the whole venture and providing Meusebach with his crowning achievement as the Adelsverein's commissioner general. Another large meeting was set for the first full moon in May 1847 in Fredericksburg. At this time, the Comanches and Germans signed the much-lauded Meusebach-Comanche Treaty.

Several scholars have suggested that Rordorf actually accompanied Meusebach on his expedition, but this is doubtful.[28] No muster rolls exist that could establish with certainty that he was a member, and none of the published reports mention him as one.[29] It is also unlikely that Rordorf would have reached Fredericksburg in time to join the expedition. Meusebach departed Fredericksburg on January 22, 1847, with fifty-four men, three wagons, and a pack train of mules. It would have been almost impossible for Rordorf to have traveled from Galveston to Fredericksburg in time to join the expedition considering that the Natural Sciences Society arrived in Galveston on January 11, 1847.

The belief that Rordorf accompanied the expedition rests on a subsequent report written by none other than Commissioner Meusebach

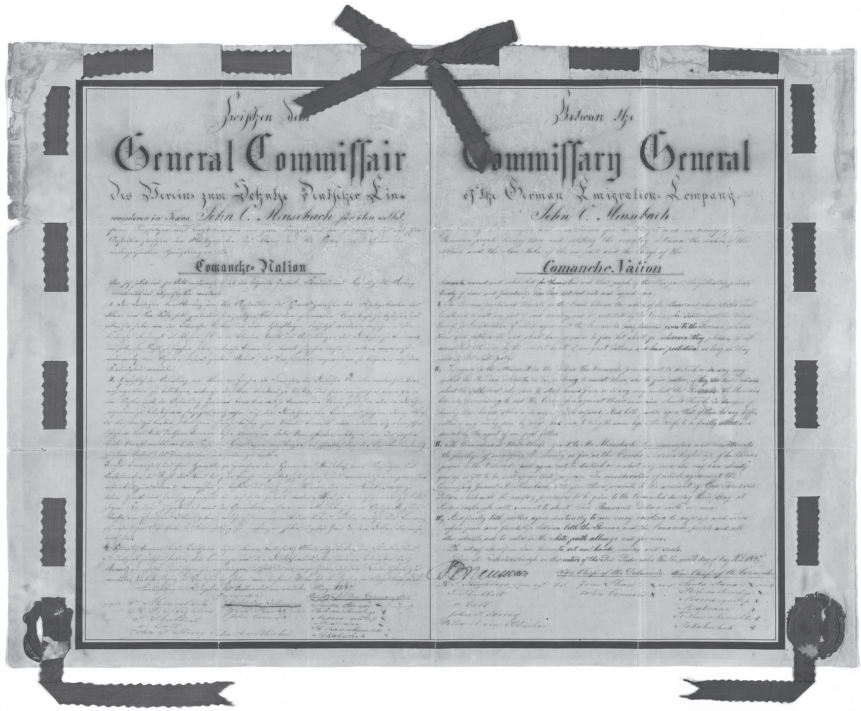
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[26] See Rudolph Biesele, *The History of the German Settlements in Texas* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1930; reprint, San Marcos: German Texan Heritage Society, 1987), 86–95. Married men had been promised 640 acres; unmarried men 320 acres.

[27] Ferdinand Roemer, *Roemer's Texas*, trans. Oswald Mueller (1849; reprint, San Marcos: German-Texas Heritage Society, 1983), 269. The Penetaka Comanche composed the southern grouping of the Comanche Nation, which was a loose confederation of many bands divided into roughly three groupings, the northern, middle, and southern bands.

[28] McGuire, "Carl Rordorf: Artist to the Adelsverein," 7.

[29] See, for example, Roemer, *Roemer's Texas*, 220–288, and Ludwig Bené, "Meusebach's Expedition into the Comanche Territory," In: *Fredericksburg, Texas: The First Fifty Years*, ed. Robert Penninger (Fredericksburg, Tex.: Fredericksburg Publishing Co., 1971), 37–45.



The German-Comanche Treaty of 1847. *1972/141-1, Courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives Commission.*

himself. In a letter dated July 20, 1847, and addressed to Count Carl of Castell in Germany, Meusebach wrote at length about Rordorf and his importance for the Adelsverein:

I engaged Herr Conrad Rordorf in order to, by and by, do renderings of all the towns and settlements established by me, that is by the Adelsverein, as well as other interesting regions, since the printing and distribution of such pictures will do much more to attract emigrants than newspaper articles and the like.[30]

In an interesting aside, Meusebach also intimated that Rordorf not only executed the treaty document, but also completed drawings of the talks on the San Saba and portraits of all the principal participants:

You can expect to receive, moreover, a faithful copy of the definitively now signed and sealed treaty with the Comanche chiefs that was concluded in Fredericksburg on May 7th of this year [1847] and you will receive a very comprehensive report of

[30] Meusebach to Count Carl of Castell, July 20, 1847, SBAt, XL, 237, 238.

the same, as well as a completed picture of the council held on the San Saba with portraits of the participants and original costumes."[31]

How, then, do we reconcile Meusebach's report with the likelihood that Rordorf did not accompany him on the expedition to the San Saba River? The most likely scenario is as follows: Rordorf arrived in Fredericksburg sometime after the main expedition departed on January 22, 1847, but before the treaty was signed in Fredericksburg on May 7, 1847. Rordorf would have had the opportunity to observe all the principal chiefs and participants present at the San Saba council, and he could have easily reconstructed a picture of the negotiations based on these observations. Moreover, in the period between the signing of the treaty and July 20, the date of Meusebach's letter, he would have had ample opportunity to accompany one of the smaller parties making regular trips into the grant area to support the team who stayed behind to complete the survey.

Whether or not Rordorf accompanied the San Saba expedition, Meusebach clearly thought highly of his talent. Meusebach engaged Rordorf to be the official artist of the Adelsverein sometime before July 20, 1847. Meusebach was so enthusiastic about hiring Rordorf that he included very detailed instructions in his letter to Count Carl of Castell as to how the artist's panorama of New Braunfels was to be reproduced in Germany:

> I suggest having the picture engraved by a competent copper engraver as soon as possible. Should this happen with Tanner at Boeckenheim (in the vicinity of Frankfurt am Main), then it should be ordered as an aquatint on a plate, which should cost approximately 200 to 250 florins. The labeling will cost an extra 10 florins. The printing itself would best be done by Felsing in Darmstadt. 100 copies from the plate together with the paper would cost five to six florins. Tanner could then take these prints and do the colorizing, and the cost of this would be open to negotiation . . . We will be able to realize a profit of at least 5 to 800 florins with the picture If we market it in bookstores or through art dealers after the copper engraving is completed. As soon as it is finished I would request ten to twenty colorized prints be sent here to be displayed at the offices of the various agencies in Galveston, New Orleans, etc.[32]

In the same letter, Meusebach also announced his resignation as commissioner general of the Adelsverein. Several factors played into his decision. Most importantly, though, he had grown increasingly isolated. With some justification, he felt that he enjoyed the support of neither the leadership in Germany nor the bureaucracy in Texas, while finding

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

scant appreciation among the colonists themselves for the challenges he had faced and the progress he had made. His last official act was to fire the man known as "Dr. Schubbert" from his position as colonial director of Fredericksburg. Dr. Schubbert would play a prominent role in Conrad Caspar Rordorf's murder and—quite possibly—the fate of the artist's work from the Texas frontier.

Meusebach's association with Dr. Schubbert reached back to April 1846, when he had offered Schubbert a future lease on Nassau Plantation under favorable terms as an inducement for accepting the position of colonial director of Fredericksburg.[33] Accordingly, once Fredericksburg was established and ready for incorporation under state law, Dr. Schubbert would step down and assume management of the plantation. The date was set for January 1, 1848, although he was contractually allowed to take up residence five months prior to that date, that is, on August 1, 1847.

Dr. Schubbert initially appeared ideal for the job, but over the course of the fall, winter, and spring of 1846–47 a rift developed between the colonial director and the commissioner general that grew increasingly ugly and personal. Meusebach believed that Schubbert was opinionated, insubordinate, and a loose cannon, and that he had spread alarmist rumors by exaggerating both the number and warlike intent of the Comanche Indians in the area of the Fisher-Miller Land Grant. As Meusebach put it in a letter to Schubbert: "Your job is to follow orders; not offer opinions."[34] Schubbert, for his part, accused Meusebach of being an atheist, of gross insensitivity concerning the plight of the colonists, and of subordinating the present needs of the colonists to the future goals of the leadership in Germany, which were to satisfy, come what may, the terms of the Fisher-Miller Land Grant contract and thereby gain title to the hundreds of thousands of acres of land specified by the terms of the contract.[35] Each man also accused the other of mismanaging of funds. The final straw came for Meusebach when he discovered that Dr. Schubbert was, in fact, an imposter whose real name was Friedrich Armand Strubberg, and that many of his claims, including that he was a medical doctor, were likely fraudulent as well.[36] Meusebach's dismissal of Dr. Schubbert/Strubberg and his revocation of the lease on Nassau Plantation set the stage for the

[33] The contract was to begin on January 1, 1848, and the term was six years. The transfer, however, was scheduled for August 1, 1847. Lease Agreement, Meusebach to Schubbert, Apr. 7, 1846, Fayette County Deed Book D, 536–542 (Fayette County Courthouse Annex, La Grange, Texas; hereafter cited as FCCA).

[34] Meusebach to Schubbert, July 1, 1847, SBAt, LIV, 120, 121, and July 12, 1847, SBAt, LIV, 123–125.

[35] Schubbert to Meusebach, July 5, 1847, SBAt, XLI, 246–253.

[36] Apparently, word got out about the real identity of Dr. Schubbert through a settler by the name of Bernstein. "Bernstein had knowledge of Schubbert's earlier life and from him we learned that his name was Strubach [*sic*: Strubberg] not Schubbert." See Julius Splittgerber, "The Second Train," in Penninger, *Fredericksburg*, 35.

subsequent tragic events that culminated in Conrad Caspar Rordorf's death.[37]

Upon his dismissal, Dr. Schubbert packed his belongings and headed to La Grange, the county seat of Fayette County, where Nassau Plantation was located. Schubbert, apparently a Mason in good standing, quickly made the acquaintance of several prominent men in La Grange, most likely through the local Masonic lodge.[38] Among others, he met James Mayfield and Absalom Bostick.

One can only imagine what Dr. Schubbert had to say against Meusebach and the Adelsverein in order to excuse his dismissal and to ingratiate himself with these men, but the society's published intent to make the German colonies in the Hill Country a slave-free zone was almost certainly part of the narrative.[39] This narrative fell on very receptive ears, especially those of Mayfield, who had already established a record of pro-slavery and anti-immigrant agitation in the halls of government.[40] But more importantly, both Mayfield and Bostick, each for his own reasons, saw reason to take up the cause of Dr. Schubbert.

Mayfield was already well-known across Texas by 1847. He had served as secretary of state under Republic of Texas president Mirabeau Lamar and was an enthusiastic supporter of Lamar's policy of either removal or extermination of Native Americans. During a stint as a legislator from Nacogdoches County in 1840, Mayfield killed a colleague named Kaufman in a duel, earning him the distinction as only Texas legislator to kill another while the legislature was in session.[41] He was also one of the principal actors in the hilariously improbable row known as the "Pig War," which played out between Dubois de Saligny, the French counsel in Austin, and a local tavern owner, Richard Bullock, over a matter of marauding pigs. The row escalated to the point that it triggered a brief diplomatic rift between the Republic of Texas and France.[42] During the short invasion of

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[37] Meusebach to Castell, July 20, 1847, SBAt, XL, 237–240.

[38] This can be inferred from a passage in the novel *Friedrichsburg*. In his role as colonial director Dr. Schubbert commissioned the Vereinskirche, the eight-sided communal church in Fredericksburg on the main square that has become the symbol of the city. In the novel, he depicts the ceremony to dedicate the laying of the cornerstone as a masonic ritual in which he plays a prominent role. See Friedrich Armand Strubberg, *Friedrichsburg: A Novel*, trans. and ed. by James C. Kearney (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 196–200. For corroboration of Mayfield's Masonic affiliation, see file on him in Walter Freytag Papers (Fayette County Heritage Museum and Archives, La Grange, Texas).

[39] See, for example, "Bekanntmachung über Sklaverei" (Proclamation concerning Slavery), *Frankfurter Journal*, July 17, 1844.

[40] For a discussion of the connection between proslavery politics and antislavery sentiment during the annexation controversy, see David E. Narrett, "A Choice of Destiny: Immigration Policy, Slavery, and the Annexation of Texas, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 100 (January 1997): 271–336.

[41] James R. Norvell, "The Ames Case Revisited," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 63 (July 1959): 63–83.

[42] Nancy M. Barker, "Pig War," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mgp01> [Accessed June 3, 2018].

Texas by the Mexican general Adrian Woll in 1842, Mayfield raised and commanded a contingent of volunteers from La Grange, but his behavior led Edward Burleson, the vice president of Texas and a commander of volunteers, to accuse him of cowardice. Mayfield subsequently challenged Burleson to a duel but did not go through with the challenge. In 1847, Mayfield not only practiced law in La Grange but speculated in real estate in a big way.

In September, Bostick and Benjamin Breeding, another notorious rowdy apparently at the behest of Mayfield, confronted a local German, Ernst Sörgel, the temporary overseer of Nassau Plantation.[43] Ernst was the nephew of Alwin Sörgel and had taken over the farm and house that adjoined the plantation when his uncle hastily returned to Germany in late June 1847. Bostick, professing to be an officer of the law, demanded the keys to the *Herrenhaus* (manor house), and when Ernst Sörgel hesitated—he did not speak English and later testified he did not understand the request—Bostick pulled out his pistol and hit Sörgel over the head, whereupon he fell senseless to the ground. He also threatened Sörgel's companion, a German named Adolph Benner, by pointing the pistol at his breast. Benner quickly retreated, whereupon Bostick took over the Herrenhaus. Soon thereafter, Dr. Schubbert arrived with another La Grange man, Captain Frederick Summers, a prominent Mason formerly of New Orleans. The four took up residence in the Herrenhaus in preparation for Schubbert's complete takeover of the whole plantation, which, by the terms of the lease, was scheduled to take effect on January 1, 1848.[44]

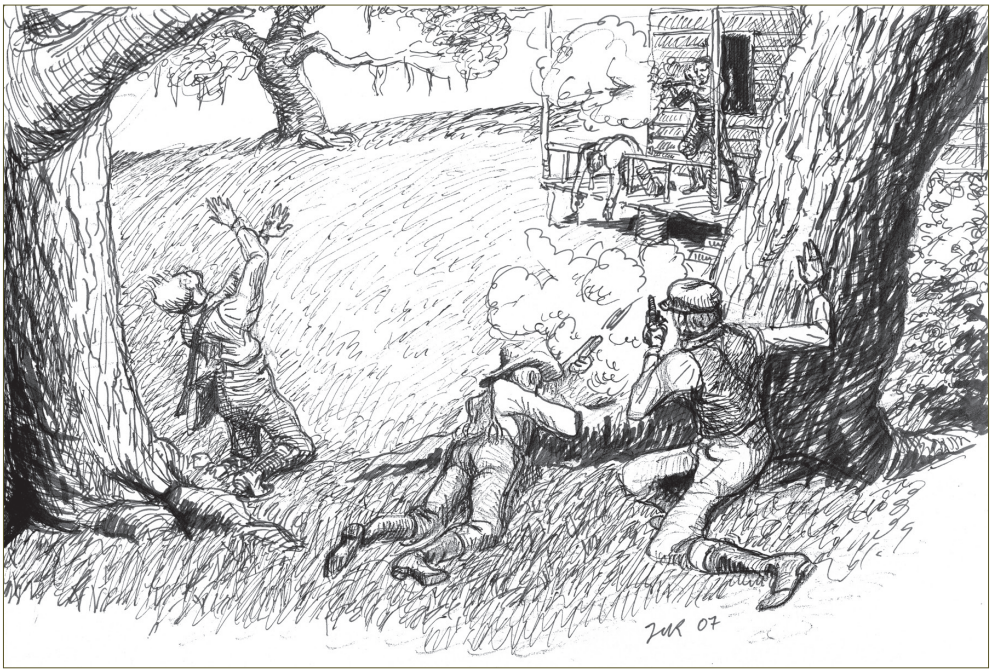
Once he regained his senses, Ernst Sörgel rode straightaway to New Braunfels to relate the turn of events. Upon hearing the report, Hermann Spiess, who had succeeded Meusebach as commissioner-general, believed that he needed to act quickly and decisively to regain possession of the company's property.[45] He quickly gathered up several employees of the society who worked at the company's compound in New Braunfels. Rordorf happened to be in New Braunfels at the time and volunteered to go along with the party. The company's lawyer, M. A. Dooley, who was also

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[43] Like Bostick, Breeding appears in the Fayette County Criminal Minutes Book (FCCA) in several entries for gambling, drunkenness, disturbing the peace, etc.

[44] Lease Agreement, Meusebach to Schubbert, Apr. 7, 1846, Fayette County Deed Book D (FCCA). For Strubberg's connection to Capt. Summers, see Armin O. Huber, "Frederic Armand Strubberg, Alias Dr. Shubbert: Town-Builder, Physician, and Adventurer, 1806–1887," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 38 (1962): 53.

[45] The Adelsverein considered the plantation to be its chief asset in Texas. By issuing a series of mortgages on the plantation, the company had been able to quickly raise funds in Texas on a number of occasions. Hermann Spiess, Memoirs, MS 239, Dresel and Spiess Families Records, 1785–1914 (Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, Texas), 22 (hereafter cited as "Spiess, Memoirs").



The Shoot-Out (2006, pen and ink) by James C. Kearney.

present, hastened ahead to La Grange to commence legal challenges to the takeover of the plantation. The party of eight men departed the next day for the house of Ernst Sörgel, near the present-day location of Round Top. Several of the men were on horseback, but Spiess drove a buckboard with supplies for the trip.

On the afternoon of October 28, 1847, Spiess and his party arrived at the Sörgel house, located a little more than a mile and a half from the plantation's Herrenhaus at the northwest corner of the plantation. They then held council with M. A. Dooley and a landowner from the area, Hamilton Ledbetter.[46] Ledbetter, who already had an inkling of the plot soon to unfold, warned Spiess that Bostick was playing a double game with Dr. Schubbert; Bostick's real agenda was to gain control of the plantation and steal the slaves for himself. Moreover, since only Spiess and his men stood between him and his goal, Bostick would not hesitate

[46] Hamilton Ledbetter moved with his family and slaves from Tennessee to Texas in 1840 and set up a plantation near Victoria. He moved shortly thereafter to northern Fayette County to set up another plantation. One of his sons, William Hamilton, subsequently achieved prominence as a soldier, lawyer, and state representative. Spiess, Memoirs, 36.

to attack with his band of ruffians the moment he heard Spiess was in the neighborhood.[47]

Feeling himself and his men threatened, Spiess decided to take the initiative. The party arose well before daybreak on the morning of October 28, saddled their horses, and made their way stealthily toward the Herrenhaus, which sat on the crown of a high hill with a magnificent panoramic view of the area.[48] Accounts vary as to what happened next.

Most contemporary accounts offered a decidedly pro-Schubbert/Mayfield account, according to which Captain Summers emerged unarmed from the house and walked out on the front gallery.[49] Without warning, he was struck by a musket ball and fell mortally wounded to the porch. At the sound of gunfire, the others inside the house quickly roused themselves and reached for their weapons. Bostick, with shotgun in hand, was first to emerge from the house. The attacking party fired numerous rounds at him from different vantage points, but miraculously all the shots missed. Bostick then discharged his shotgun toward a small outbuilding where both Rordorf and Spiess had ensconced themselves. Bostick's buckshot struck Rordorf squarely in the head and cheek. The wound would prove mortal, but not before Rordorf suffered in great agony for several hours.

Spiess's never published but extremely detailed account of the affray differs markedly from this version. Spiess argued that he and his men, far from being the aggressors, were ambushed by Bostick and company, who had received advanced warning and who were waiting with guns cocked. Bostick fired the first shot, which killed Rordorf, and in the gun-battle that ensued, Captain Summers also fell mortally wounded, most likely accidentally killed by his own men.[50]

Whichever account is correct, both agree on what happened next: Spiess and his men, unnerved by the unexpectedly strong resistance, fled in a panic, leaving Rordorf and his drawings behind. Sörgel and another German named Zorch, were apprehended shortly thereafter (whether at the scene or at Sörgel's house is not clear). Sörgel apparently fled on Rordorf's horse, leaving his buckboard behind. The alarm was quickly sounded, and a posse gathered to pursue the panicked group of Germans. The others, however, made their escape to New Braunfels. By one account, Spiess continued his flight and eventually found a temporary hideout at Castell in the unorganized frontier territory north of Fredericksburg on

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[47] There is evidence from a different source to corroborate that Ledbetter suspected Bostick's real intentions. In his confession, discussed later, James Short, younger brother of Thomas Short, stated Bostick planned on murdering Ledbetter because Ledbetter suspected the plot. See *Texas State Gazette* (Austin), Aug. 25, 1849.

[48] Armin Huber gives the 28th as the date in "Frederic Armand Strubberg, Alias Dr. Shubbert," 66–68.

[49] See, for example, *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston), Dec. 2, 1847. The *Galveston Zeitung*, Nov. 10, 1847, gives an account more sympathetic to Spiess and his men.

[50] Spiess, Memoirs, 31.

the Llano River.[51] In November, however, a sobered Spiess, facing the inevitable and confident that he could prove his version of the events in a court of law surrendered to authorities in La Grange despite advice not to do so from M. A. Dooley.

Spiess wrote in his memoirs that at the time he feared Bostick and Mayfield more than the murder charge.[52] At the examining trial, held two days after the shooting, Mayfield justified this fear by attacking the Adelsverein's lawyer, M. A. Dooley. Mayfield grabbed Dooley by the beard and threw him to the ground, and then in an act of brutal intimidation, cocked and dry-snapped his pistol in his face.[53] At the examining trial, both Spiess and Sörgel faced separate indictments for the murder of Captain Summers, but the remaining six were indicted as a group.[54]

When the case came up for trial in the spring 1848 term of district court, spirits were high and the situation was rife for violence. Spiess recorded in his memoirs that Mayfield made a "violent speech" against him with accusations that the commissioner general intended to "stir up incitement among the Negros." Furthermore, "rowdies stirred up trouble" and "one fellow . . . wanted to shoot and kill me."[55] Mayfield's accusations against Spiess are a clear example of growing anti-immigrant—especially anti-German—sentiment in 1840s Texas. By his and many other Texans' estimation, German immigrants were insufficiently committed to slavery, and indeed were even seeking to undermine the institution.

Hamilton Ledbetter, who had been present at the Sörgel house the night before the shoot-out, corroborated Spiess's account. Because of his stature and credibility in the community as a prominent Anglo plantation owner, he probably carried the jury. Spiess wrote, "If I had ordered an attack, as the opposing party claimed, I would have been convicted of murder, but the jury believed the sworn evidence to the contrary, and the better citizens of the county applauded the verdict of not-guilty."[56] With Spiess's acquittal the case against the others quickly collapsed.

Rordorf's death and the shoot-out at Nassau set into motion a chain reaction of unexpected consequences. Two years later, on July 20, 1849, Absalom Bostick, the man who fired the shot that killed Rordorf, publicly accosted James Mayfield in a public establishment located on the courthouse square in La Grange. The former associates, now enemies, got into fisticuffs until bystanders separated them. Bostick then left, saying the

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[51] Bené to Count Carl of Castell, Nov. 25, 1847, SBAt, LXIII, 107–116.

[52] Spiess, Memoirs, 21.

[53] Ibid., 33.

[54] Fayette County Case Book E/ 400; State v. Spiess, et al. Nov. 5, 1847, Fayette County Criminal Minutes, ABCD, 410, Case N. 51 (FCCA).

[55] Spiess, Memoirs, 35, 37.

[56] State v. Spiess, "not guilty," Sept. 29, 1848, Fayette County District Court Minutes, E/138 (FCCA); Spiess, Memoirs, 37.

affair was not over, and that "blood would be shed."[57] Mayfield took the threat seriously. The two went for their weapons and met soon thereafter for a duel on the courthouse square. According to eyewitness accounts, Bostick fired the first shot with his pistol, but missed. Mayfield returned fire with a shotgun, which knocked Bostick down and disabled him, but did not kill him. He then calmly walked over and delivered the coup de grace at point blank range.

Newspaper accounts stated that the duel was the result of a political dispute connected with the sheriff's race. The political dispute, however, related directly to the takeover of Nassau Plantation by Bostick, a fact never explored in the newspaper accounts, but a connection that Hermann Spiess later took pains to clarify.[58] Bostick had seen his plans for the plantation and its slaves thwarted, and he held the sheriff largely responsible because he had sequestered the plantation in the wake of the shoot-out and had charged Bostick with breaking and entering and assault and battery.[59] When Mayfield continued to support the sheriff in the upcoming election, Bostick was incensed. What came to light after the Bostick-Mayfield shoot-out was nothing short of bizarre. Bostick had on his body papers that revealed a massive criminal conspiracy, an organized gang of counterfeiters and thieves of slaves and horses that stretched from Missouri to the Rio Grande and included over twenty members.[60] Three members of the gang offered confessions in exchange for their lives that were published in full by several Texas newspapers.[61] Irate slaveholders quickly organized a three-county vigilante committee that summarily lynched many of the remaining men implicated in the plot.[62] This revelation confirmed Hamilton Ledbetter's suspicion, expressed two years earlier, that Bostick, one of the key ringleaders of the gang, had conspired all along to play a double game with Dr. Schubbert, hoping to steal the plantation's slaves for resale outside of the state. There was never any indication that Mayfield himself had been involved in the criminal conspiracy, so Bostick had most likely deceived him as well.

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[57] See Spiess's account of the shoot-out in *Neu-Braunfelser Zeitung* (New Braunfels, Tex.), July 15, 1853.

[58] Spiess, Memoirs, 29, 33, 35.

[59] State v. Absalom Bostick, Fayette County District Court Minutes, D/387, 388, 401 (FCCA).

[60] "Fatal affray at La Grange," *Victoria Advocate*, July 31, 1849; *Northern Standard* (Clarksville, Tex.), Sept.1, Sept 8, 1849; *Telegraph and Texas Register*, July 5, 1849.

[61] The three were A. J. Grigg, Orland Sap, and Thomas Short. An Austin newspaper published the full text of their confessions, *Texas State Gazette*, Aug. 25, 1849.

[62] Spiess stated in his memoirs that a secret three-county vigilante committee comprised of some of the most prominent planters in these counties subsequently lynched "a half-dozen or more" of those implicated. The lynchings received no direct coverage in the newspapers. Neither is the episode mentioned in any official histories of Fayette County. Hermann Spiess described how they dispatched one of the gang members. They put him on the back of a gentle donkey without a bridle with a rope around the neck of the condemned under a giant spreading live oak tree. Then they left. When the donkey emerged from the overhanging limbs they knew that the deed had been done. Spiess, Memoirs, 59, 60.

The consequences of the shoot-out also seriously compromised the Adelsverein and led to an abrupt change in course. Even though Hermann Spiess and his cohorts were all eventually acquitted, the affair, known to Germans as the *Katastrophe*, prompted the leadership in Germany to drastically reexamine their ambitious colonization scheme in Texas—a fact that has been largely missed by scholars of the Adelsverein. With Nassau Plantation, the company's main asset in Texas, tied up in litigation, its commissioner general facing murder charges, and a new avalanche of expenses to deal with, the company drifted into de facto insolvency. Although it never declared bankruptcy officially, it settled into a miserable state of paralysis from which no one could gain any advantage; not the settlers, since their promised lands were in limbo; not the creditors, since they could not be paid; and not the company, since the Texas legislature balked at certifying the bonus and premium lands in the grant area, which amounted to hundreds of thousands of acres, unless and until the company reached some sort of accommodation with its creditors in Texas The shoot-out and its aftermath further prejudiced the company's claims to the Fisher-Miller Land Grant since it brought to the fore anti-immigrant and anti-German sentiments, exemplified by Mayfield's courtroom outbursts and bolstered by contemporary newspaper commentary.

The shoot-out also altered the course of Dr. Schubbert's life and set him on a path to becoming an important figure in German literature. It all ended quite favorably for Dr. Schubbert (henceforth, Friedrich Armand Strubberg, his real name). The Adelsverein reached an out-of-court settlement in his lawsuit, and Strubberg departed La Grange in May 1848 after the spring term of district court had concluded with $3,000 in pocket and the valuable Rordorf drawings in hand.[63] According to one of his biographers, Strubberg then moved to Arkansas, where he resumed his profession as a medical doctor.[64] He is said to have become engaged to the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner, but an accident there altered the course of his life. He was stung in the eye by an insect, and the wound refused to heal. In 1854 Strubberg broke off the engagement

[63] Patrick McGuire argues that Strubberg did not come into possession of the drawings in "Carl Rordorf: Artist to the Adelsverein." A court case in La Grange, however, indicated that Strubberg did end up with the drawings. See Wilke vs. Schubbert, Fayette County District Court Minutes, E/89, case# 297, C/159 (FCCA), "The petition of Herman Wilke adm of the estate of Conrad Casper Rohrdorf deceased late of Comal County in the said state of Texas, the plaintiff in this suit, complaining of Frederick Schubbert, the defendant in the suit, who resides in the county of Fayette . . . respectfully represents unto your honor that said intestate (Rohrdorf) in his lifetime . . . was lawfully possessed of two certain sketch books containing drawings of views and landscapes in Texas as of his own property and . . . the said Conrad Caspar. . . died possessed thereof after whose death . . . the said books came to the possession of said defendant [Strubberg] by finding." A subsequent report by Ludwig Bené, apparently unknown to McGuire, established with certainty that Strubberg ended up with the drawings. In the article, written after all litigation had been settled and closed, Bené states that Strubberg "stole" the drawings. See Bené to the Committee, Dec. 28, 1849, SBAt, XLIV, 266, 267.

[64] Huber, "Frederic Armand Strubberg, Alias Dr. Shubbert," 69.

and returned to Europe, hoping German doctors could provide relief. His efforts proved unsuccessful, and he wore a patch over his left eye for the rest of his life.

Strubberg eventually moved in with a spinster sister who still lived in Kassel, the city where he was born and grew up. Here he cut quite a figure with the eye patch, large western hat, and fringed leather hunting frock that he sported on his daily walks. He was also in the habit of spending part of each day at a local coffeehouse at the Hotel Schombardt in Kassel.[65] Here, he entertained acquaintances and strangers alike with hair-raising tales of Indian fights and hunting adventures on the Texas frontier. Several encouraged him to write down these tales and this is how Strubberg reinvented himself as an author. Under the pen name "Armand," his middle name, Strubberg built a new and successful career over the next twenty years as an important pioneer in the new genre of adventure novels based on the American West. He was very productive, eventually penning more than twenty novels in forty volumes, ten of which are set on the Texas frontier.[66]

Strubberg's first novel was *Amerikanische Jagd- und Reiseabenteuer aus meinem Leben in den westlichen Indianergebieten mit 24 von Verfasser nach der Natur entworfenen Skizzen* (American Travel and Hunting Adventures, with twenty-four drawings done by the author himself).[67] It appeared in 1858, was published by the prestigious publishing firm Cotta'scher Verlag, and went through several editions. Several factors suggest that at least five of the drawings that Strubberg passed off as his own were actually done by Rordorf:

- In a letter dated December 23, 1849, the Adelsverein's general agent, Ludwig Bené wrote: "I allow myself the liberty of informing you that, due to the efforts of Commissioner-General Meusebach during his tenure, a very excellent and completed panorama of New Braunfels (done by Rordorf), was forwarded to the Verein, and directed to the address of Count Carl of Castell, which is especially suited for eventual lithographic reproduction. Unfortunately, in the wake of the Schubbert/Spiess/Nassau affair, in which Rordorf was left in the lurch and murdered, the outstanding sketch books he had in his possession were stolen [*entwendet worden*]."[68]
- All five of the drawings in question are Hill Country scenes. They include: 1) a panoramic view of Enchanted Rock, taken from the south

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[65] Ibid., 53.

[66] See the present author's introduction to Strubberg, *Friedrichsburg* for a full discussion of Strubberg's literary career and his importance in German literature.

[67] *Amerikanische Jagd- und Reiseabenteuer aus meinem Leben in den westlichen Indianergebieten mit 24 von Verfasser nach der Natur entworfenen Skizzen* (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag), 1858.

[68] Bené to the Committee, Dec. 28, 1849, SBAt, XLIV, 266, 267.



Friedrich Armand Strubberg/Dr. Schubbert. This steel engraving was the title page to *Amerikanische Jagd- und Reiseabenteuer aus meinem Leben in den westlichen Indianergebieten mit 24 von Verfasser nach der Natur entworfenen Skizzen* (American Travel and Hunting Adventures, with twenty-four drawings done by the author himself), published in 1858 by Cotta'scher Verlag.



Friedrich Armand Strubberg/ Dr. Schubbert. *Stadtarchiv of Kassel, Germany.*

looking north; 2) a panoramic view of the Llano River; 3) a spring on a Hill Country stream; 4) a Hill Country panorama, and; 5) beavers in a stream with cypress trees.

- None of the five drawings in question, with the exception of the beaver scene, relate to any of the episodes in the book, although all the other drawings do.
- All five pictures represent precisely and accurately the flora and fauna of Texas; the remaining pictures often depict exotic tropical plants not native to Texas. (See, for example, the illustration of a jaguar that accompanies.) Clearly, whoever made these drawings had never set foot in Texas. At the very least, it is clear that more than one artist was responsible for the drawings.
- Strubberg had a well-established track record of fraud and misrepresentation, leaving little reason to doubt that he would be capable of plagiarism.
- Strubberg claimed to be an accomplished artist, but nothing firmly corroborates this claim; of the scores of entries in the Solms-Braunfels Archives, there is not one hint that Strubberg (Dr. Schubbert) ever took time out from his pressing duties as colonial director of Fredericksburg to sketch the natural wonders of the Hill Country or to capture Native Americans in pen and ink. Certainly, no pictures survive. Even in his quasi-autobiographical, homodiegetic novel, *Friedrichsburg*, in which he places himself in the novel using his real name, there is never a mention of artistic activity or of Enchanted Rock.
- Only the first edition carried the subtitle, "with twenty-four drawings done by the author himself." Subsequent editions (four in number) dropped this claim and were accompanied by a completely new set of illustrations. It was as if someone had called Strubberg out on the earlier claim.

Strubberg died in 1887 with no children. A great niece inherited his papers and continued to manage his estate and oversee reprints of his books. In 1945, during the waning months of World War II, she made the unfortunate decision to flee Kassel to Berlin to escape the approaching U.S. Army, only to be caught up in the horrendous Battle of Berlin. A bomb made a direct hit on the house where she was staying, killing her and incinerating the Strubberg papers. Presumably, the Rordorf's drawings went up in flames as well.[69]

The destruction of the Strubberg papers, then, would seem to be the end of the wide-ranging effects of the shoot-out at Nassau Plantation

[69] Story related to the author by Ulf Debelius of Marburg, Germany, at the National Cowboy Symposium and Celebration held in Lubbock, Texas, September 5–8, 2013.



Enchanted Rock (possibly drawn by Conrad Caspar Rordorf in 1847). Steel engraving from *Amerikanische Jagd- und Reiseabenteuer aus meinem Leben in den westlichen Indianergebieten mit 24 von Verfasser nach der Natur entworfenen Skizzen* (American Travel and Hunting Adventures, with twenty-four drawings done by the author himself), published in 1858 by Cotta'scher Verlag, p. 108.



Hill Country Waterfall Scene (possibly drawn by Conrad Caspar Rordorf in 1847). Steel engraving from *Amerikanische Jagd- und Reiseabenteuer aus meinem Leben in den westlichen Indianergebieten mit 24 von Verfasser nach der Natur entworfenen Skizzen* (American Travel and Hunting Adventures, with twenty-four drawings done by the author himself), published in 1858 by Cotta'scher Verlag, p. 334.



Beavers (possibly drawn by Conrad Caspar Rordorf in 1847). Steel engraving from *Amerikanische Jagd- und Reiseabenteuer aus meinem Leben in den westlichen Indianergebieten mit 24 von Verfasser nach der Natur entworfenen Skizzen* (American Travel and Hunting Adventures, with twenty-four drawings done by the author himself), published in 1858 by Cotta'scher Verlag, p. 334.



Jaguar. Steel engraving from *Amerikanische Jagd- und Reiseabenteuer aus meinem Leben in den westlichen Indianergebieten mit 24 von Verfasser nach der Natur entworfenen Skizzen* (American Travel and Hunting Adventures, with twenty-four drawings done by the author himself), published in 1858 by Cotta'scher Verlag, p. 439.

that left Conrad Caspar Rordorf dead and made *Panorama der Stadt Neu Braunfels* his only surviving work. But much like the prints apparently stolen by Strubberg, three more of Rordorf's works appear to have surfaced elsewhere without proper attribution.

These three prints, which feature Galveston, New Braunfels, and San Antonio, appeared in *Meyer's Universum* in 1856 and 1857 and have been featured in several prominent books on historic nineteenth-century Texas prints.[70] Unfortunately, however, due to either the language barrier or an incomplete understanding of the process by which Joseph Meyer acquired art and reproduced it in his *Universum*, the discussions that accompany the reproductions are either factually wrong or unavoidably vague. Art historian Pauline Pinckney, for instance, attributes the Galveston print to the well-known German artist "Eigenthum des Verlegers," the label that appears under the vast majority of the prints that appeared in the *Universum*. The phrase translates to "Property of the Publisher," so obviously Pinckney's attribution is not quite correct. A subsequent publication, Mavis P. Kelsey Sr. and Robin Brandt Hutchinson's *Engraved Prints of Texas, 1554–1900*, reproduces the Galveston print along with renditions of New Braunfels and San Antonio, crediting all as appearing in *Meyer's Universum* in 1856 and 1857, and stating, correctly, that the artist or artists were unknown.[71] However, the authors may not be correct in their assumption that the prints themselves date to 1856–57. If indeed Rordorf is the artist, then they clearly date from an earlier period.

Because he plays a critical role in this story and his modus operandi is generally not understood in English-speaking countries, a word about Joseph Meyer and his *Universum* is in order. Joseph Meyer (1796–1856) was an extraordinary German entrepreneur who arose from modest circumstances to build one of the most successful and innovative publishing houses in Europe. He published the *Universum* monthly from 1833 until his death. The wildly successful publication contained during its complete run 1,238 steel engravings of notable landscapes, *vedute*, and architectural monuments from around the world, and 2,800 pages of text, nearly all of which Meyer wrote himself.[72]

Despite his many innovations in publishing, Meyer was a controversial figure. In order to make his publication affordable, he plagiarized other,

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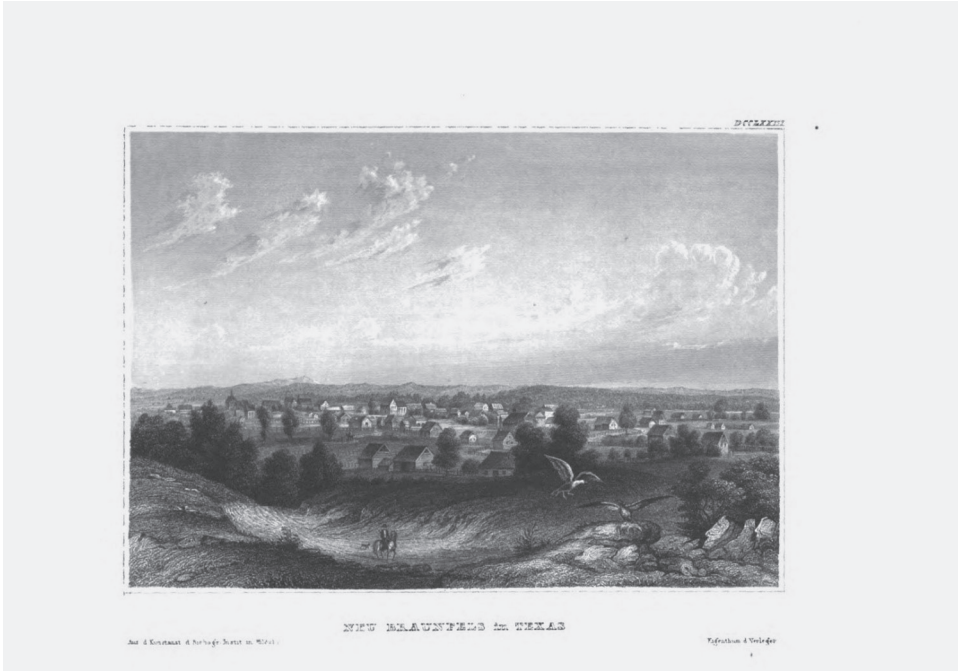
[70] For the Galveston print, see Pauline Pinckney, *Painting in Texas: The Nineteenth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 153. The prints of New Braunfels and San Antonio from 1847 are reproduced in I. N. Phelps Stokes and Daniel C. Haskell, *American Historical Prints: Early Views of American Cities, etc* (New York: New York Public Library, 1933), Plate L, 91, B, and in Mavis P. Kelsey Sr. and Robin Brandt Hutchinson, *Engraved Prints of Texas, 1554–1900* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 93.

[71] Kelsey and Hutchinson, *Engraved Prints of Texas,* 93.

[72] Angelika Marsch, *Meyer's Universum: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Stahlstiches und des Verlagswesens im 19. Jahrhundert* (Lüneberg, Germany: Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1972), 32; Kirsten Belgum, "Visualizing the World in *Meyer's Universum,*" *Colloquia Germanica* 49 (2016): 235–258.



Panorama of Galveston, *Meyer's Universum*, XVII (1856), plate DCCLXXV, with text on pp. 73–79. Possibly executed by Conrad Caspar Rordorf in 1847.



New Braunfels, *Meyer's Universum*, XVIII (1857), plate DCCLXXIII, text on pp. 55–57. Possibly executed by Conrad Caspar Rordorf in 1847.



San Antonio. *Meyer's Universum*, XVIII (1857), plate DCCXV, text on pp. 149–150. Possibly executed by Conrad Caspar Rordorf in 1847.

principally English sources, avoiding the necessity of paying royalties for the art work he used. Nearly all the 1,238 prints that appeared in the *Universum* over the years are labeled simply "Eigenthum des Verlegers" with no hint indication of the original artist's identity.[73] It is also important to note that although Meyer insisted that his prints be accurate depictions of their subject matters—a stipulation consistent with the *vedute* genre of landscape painting— they were not always up to date. This was obviously due to the simple fact that it was easier to plagiarize older prints than contemporary ones.

Several clues suggest that Rordorf produced the masterful Galveston print that appeared in *Meyer's Universum*:

- An examination of the Galveston print places it no earlier than 1847 but not much later than 1848. One can clearly make out the spires of St. Mary Cathedral Basilica, which was completed in 1847. One can also make out the old custom house with a large American flag flying

[73] Marsch, *Meyer's Universum*, 34.

over it, another indication that the print could not date prior to Texas's annexation. Fueled by large-scale European immigration as well as the expanding cotton economy, Galveston experienced phenomenal growth after Texas's annexation in 1845, and the number and composition of the buildings along the wharf changed accordingly. A comparison of the Galveston print with an earlier print that appeared in another German book, *Reise nach Texas in 1846* (Travels to Texas in 1846) by Carl von Sommer, is revealing.[74] Although the von Sommer print is much cruder and lacks the artistic sophistication of a true *veduta*, it clearly shows practically the same array of buildings along the wharf that appear in the more famous rendition with one important exception, which would be expected from an 1846 print, namely the spires of St. Mary Cathedral Basilica are missing. From this one can infer that the Meyer print is consistent with Galveston in 1847, the year Rordorf was there and known to have sketched the city.

- Alwin Sörgel stated that Rordorf completed a marvelous panorama of Galveston in a letter dated June 1847 and addressed to an unknown professor in Germany. He told the recipient that he would soon see the painting for himself, which suggests that he had the Rordorf painting with him when he departed Texas, never to return.[75]
- No other artist with sufficient expertise, certainly no other German artist, was known to be in Texas in 1847. As noted previously, both Hermann Lungkwitz and Richard Petri did not arrive in Texas until 1851, and Carl von Iwonski was still a teenager.
- The quality of the Galveston print is exceptional and consistent with someone of Rordorf's talents. All three exhibit stylistic affinities characteristic of the late-romantic *veduta* style strongly associated with Rordorf and are especially pronounced in the Galveston print. The image contains sweeping panoramas, dramatic skyscapes, and the obligatory *staffage* of peasants and animals in the foreground that compliment rather than detract from the focal point of the pictures.

The evidence, then, is quite persuasive that Rordorf was indeed the artist who executed the prototype of the Galveston engraving that appeared in *Meyer's Universum* in 1856. The other two engravings of Texas communities that appeared in that publication in 1856–57 and subsequently cited by Texas art historians, namely an alternate panorama of New Braunfels, executed from a different perspective than Rordorf's more famous rendition, and a view of San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, are more problematic. It is possible, even likely, that Rordorf

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[74] Carl von Sommer, *Reise nach Texas in 1846* (Bremen: Heyse Verlag, 1847), illustration following title page.

[75] Sörgel, *A Sojourn in Texas*, 125.

produced these, but the evidence is incomplete. But whether one, two, or all three were drawn by the Swiss artist, certain questions remain unanswered and will probably forever remain so. How did Joseph Meyer come to possess the drawings in the first place, and who sold them to him? The evidence seems to point to Sörgel, but we will never know for sure.

In conclusion, the death of Conrad Caspar Rordorf on a crisp fall morning in October 1847 at the hands of a Texas rowdy was not only a personal tragedy but a severe loss for Texas. The exceptional quality of the Galveston print that appeared in *Meyer's Universum* as well as the accuracy and precision of the five Hill Country scenes that appeared in Strubberg's *American Travel and Hunting Adventures*, including the first known rendition of Enchanted Rock, underscore the magnitude of the loss. Had all of Rordorf's forty-five drawings survived, either as aquatints or lithographs, they would undoubtedly stand alongside the works of the other notable European immigrant artists—Lungkwitz, Petri, von Iwonski, and Gentilz—who left, each in his own style, such marvelous first-hand impressions of frontier life in mid-nineteenth-century Texas. The significance of the Rordorf story, however, extends beyond lost art. His death and the events surrounding it reverberated in unexpected and fascinating ways, both in Texas and Germany, making Rordorf's story all the more compelling. The shoot-out that took his life led to severe strain for the Adelsverein, and his killer ended up involved in a massive criminal conspiracy—a conspiracy that came to light only after he himself was shot to death by a fairly prominent Texas politician. It would be nice to stand at Rordorf's grave and reflect on the poignancy and drama of this fascinating two-continent story, but, alas, his final resting place has disappeared from history along with most of his drawings.