

Bericht der Historikerin Dorris Keeven-Franke über die
Aktivitäten der Missouri-Expedition "Trip to a forgotten Utopia"
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Hello all!

These past four days have been quite a whirlwind!! A wonderful encounter with kindred spirits from afar. Almost unbelievable, and I want to especially thank Don Heinrich for sending them our way.

Peter Roloff, Folker Winkelmann, Monika Kiesewetter and I joined up with author and historian Rolf Schmidt when we met Wolfgang Gram's group in New Melle at the Kamphoefner house on Wednesday morning. We headed quickly to Hermann to meet Lois Puchta at the Gasconade County Historical Society Archives. I soon learned that when traveling with Peter, everything you do must be captured on film, especially when Lois began to share some of her wonderful original documents from the Gasconade County Court. Everyone was so impressed with the meticulous care and attention in the preservation of these records. However, when the copy of *Der Lichtfreund* came out and there was an article by Friedrich Muench I understood the intense focus that Peter and the others have for the Giessen Society, and especially Herr Muench.

After a very quick lunch we headed to Deutschheim where Cheryl Hoffmann was waiting patiently. All time was spent at the Strehly house (which I have been criticized for calling the Strehly-Muehl house) that Eduard Muehl bought, lived and died in, when he moved his Cincinnati newspaper *Der Lichtfreund* to Hermann. Folker and Peter took many great shots, and I was happy because I knew that this would be the only building that still existed that certainly Muench would have been a regular visitor of. Although the installation of the Washington Press is not complete, knowing that soon visitors will be able to see the early German newspaper office that Muench was so involved in is really great. (Cheryl says that she is retiring next May, and I fear things are critical in regards to State funding and operations at this only German site in State Parks. Please friends, writing letters to Senators and friends with connections is important here, to help them understand what a treasure Deutschheim is.)

Next we visited the Pelster House Barn. While this was the only stop not directly related to Giessen, the absolute quiet peaceful sounds of nature and the fantastic architecture of the building should be helpful in Peters film about the recollections of a forgotten Utopia, I am sure. It also helped to reinforce how today's economy has impacted our historic sites, and the strains this is putting on our State Park system. Deputy Director Mark Miles with Missouri's SHPO was a great help in seeing that the group had access here, and we really appreciated it. It was a tired but happy group that returned to Washington way after dark that evening.

The original plans for Thursday called for a day long intensive journey to Lake Creek full of filming and interviews. However, an incredible weather front which dumped several inches of steady pouring cold rain over us the entire day soon reminded us that we human beings can only plan so much. We were scheduled to have lunch at Blumenhof winery in Dutzow but really need to thank our hosts Mark Blumenberg and his son Eric for when we suddenly descended on them at 10 am! There we were able to gather Ralph Gregory, Chic Ruether, Gerd Petermann and some local residents of the area to do a "tabletop tour" as the drenching rain continued and continued. After a delicious catered lunch provided by our hosts, Rolf Schmidt joined others at Osage Corners, the home of Penny Pitman at the top of Lake Creek. With the only flexibility in the schedule to be between Thursday and Saturday, we headed to Marthasville with 100 year old Ralph Gregory to see the Augustus Grabs house, another example of the proper time period. In the quietness there, with cameras rolling, Peter captured a fantastic interview with our centenarian and historian. And best of all, this was an opportunity for Ralph to share not only his abundant knowledge of local history and Muench, but his rich philosophical views on life. This was time well spent and which we hoped would free up some time on Saturday. After returning Ralph to his home, definitely one of a historian we rejoined the others at Penny's, another great example of the architecture of the time period. An unforgettable moment was watching Rolf walk out to "the point" in the rain, to look at the headwaters of Lake Creek. Peter and group were anxious that the weather not prevent them from seeing Muench's home as well.

Friday began at our local Radio Station with a great interview of Peter by Diane Jones. Of course, Folker captured that on film as well. Then we rushed to St. Louis for our appointment at the Missouri Historical Society's archives. As all filming had to be completed, and equipment removed by noon sharp (and it was still raining!) we really had to hurry. Everything was prepared for our arrival, but Rolf and I were not prepared for what we would find. Of course there was much more than what we could possibly take in in a few short hours, but while Rolf and I studied, Peter and Folker filmed. Before I knew it, we had everyone at the Archives also actively involved, scurrying to make copies and retrieve the early portraits of Friedrich and his wife. By this time I think Rolf was considering a move to the U.S. He was plotting how he could divide his time between Hermann and St. Louis archives as a volunteer. That afternoon, we were guests of St. Louis on the Riverboat Becky Thatcher, where Peter and Folker tried so hard to film the Missouri riverfront as - you guessed it - it was still raining!! The box lunch carried us through. As we returned to the Far West that afternoon though, the rain began to lighten, then - oh wonders of all - it finally stopped.

By this time, the riverfront in Washington was closed because of flooding. Peter then asked if we could just go to the creek on Muench's farm, to film, to prove to those back home that they could absolutely not cross the creek. The creek that they had journeyed 4,000 miles to cross. As we stood there along the raging swollen stream I recalled how Nathan Boone had said it was

rapid and 30 foot wide when he surveyed it in 1817. Perhaps he visited the site after two days and several inches of rain though too! Suddenly I was inspired to call the old farm's owner, Dr. William McHugh. Here we were, stranded on the far side of the creek, so close yet so far. It was late because we had stopped at Muench's German Church at Lake Creek site, and a few moments at Duden's. I took a chance, called Doc to let him know that tomorrow (Saturday) morning we were coming across that creek and descending on him, one way or another!! He not only answered, he said hold tight, he'd be right down to get us. It's impossible to describe that journey in that ancient (but high) red pickup as he gunned the motor and knowing just where in the creek bed to drive, reached the bank on the far side. It was one unforgettable moment. I won't describe old Doc McHugh (a self proclaimed hermit) or his house, because he is indescribable. Rolf thinks that he is possessed by the spirit of Muench. Not hard to imagine when you sit in that dark old log cabin, as evening comes on rather quickly. We shared coffee, ghost stories and visited, and were invited back on Saturday.

Saturday dawned and the weather was beautiful!! Our local newspaper the Missourian's writer Karen Cernich arrived to do an interview over breakfast. We had hoped to be in Dutzow by 10 am and were just crossing the Highway 47 bridge by that time. First stop was the Follenius farm and a visit with old Mr. Schemmer, whose family has owned it since 1922. Then the group, joined by other local residents, walked down to the Follenius cemetery.

Then, as more were joining us (we invited everyone!) and we had made arrangements with Penny who owns a Land Rover, she began ferrying us (comfortably) across Lake Creek to Muench's farm. After a brief picnic of cakes, we spent hours there and filmed Muench's barn, the wine cellar, the smoke house, the original sites, where the vineyard was, and the whole incredible landscape. Then the group ascended the hillside behind the home and visited the cemetery where Muench is buried. This was what this group had wanted, had traveled and trudged so far for, and I was so happy that they could finally make it. At last, the one uncontrollable, the weather, had cleared and given us blue skies with puffy white - not black - clouds. For a brief few hours it was not hard to imagine oneself back in time. Of course every angle, every sound, every spot, had to be captured because this was the mission of the Traveling Summer Republic Tour. The afternoon was fading, and the sun descending, as we took the last shots of the creek itself, and the far bank. Those last shots looked to be exactly like Bruere drew the farm in the 1840s and I am sure they will be fantastic.

Unfortunately the group was not able to make it to the museum at Washington, only because of the problems with filming due to the weather, something no one can control. We gathered to wrap up the events of the visit, and we waited for friends we hoped would join us, but unfortunately could not make it. Peter did a few last interviews, one with a Muench descendent, and shared his documentary *Inselkongress - Ausflug in die Utopien* about the groups activities on Harriersand, translating it for the group. We shared wines from Blumenhof and Lake Creek's hillsides. And now we have a new official U.S. Contingent of the Traveling Summer Republic here on Lake Creek! An incredible time, when the incredible history and spirit of those first Lake Creek residents had brought us all together. Thank you very very much, every one of you for an unforgettable experience.

Dorris