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Star Of The Republic Museum

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THE GOLDEN FREE LAND:

Frontier Texas Landscapes by Hermann Lungkwitz



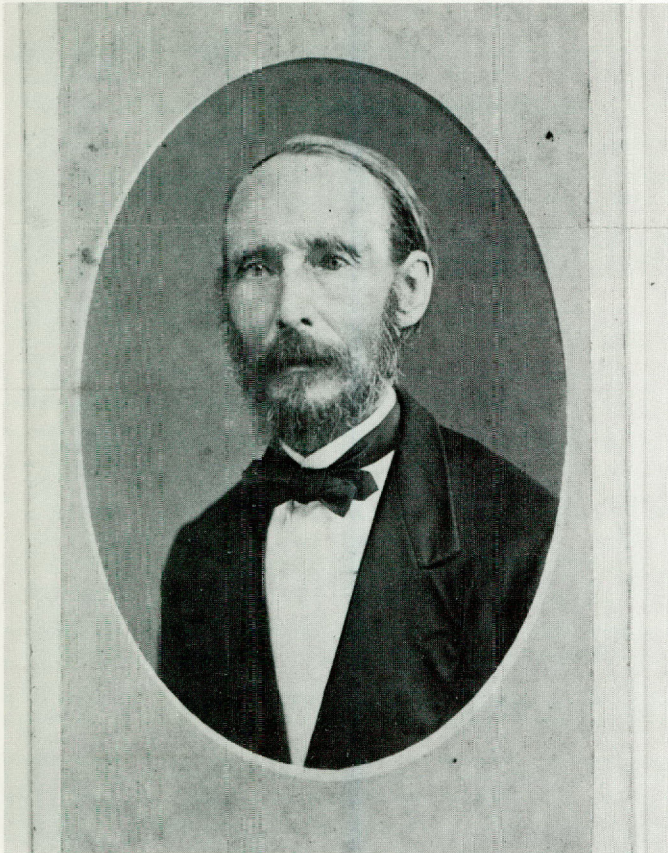
"West Cave on the Pedernales,"
1883. Private Collection.

If you lower your glance directly before you from the deep blue of the sky and the violet gray line of the mountains, you'll see a bright level meadowland before you. Below you, under the red, yellow, or newly green tops of the cypress trees, lies the dull green surface of the river in enchanting chiaroscuro. The water shows a lighter, almost imperceptible, mingling of color where close under the darker shadow of the opposite bank the bluish clay bottom

becomes more shallow and shimmers through the water. Downward to the left, often hidden from sight, the river flows more rapidly; and you hear its distant roar. The peculiar, but not glaring yellow light is reflected into the eyes from a nearby massive recess broken into the rock. Close by, its mighty gray masses tower above the highest treetops and are, in turn, crowned by the dark cedar bushes.

"The Cypress," by Hermann Seele

Hermann Lungkwitz was a romantic landscape artist on the Texas frontier, and the "Hill Country" described by Hermann Seele served as his inspiration. Like Seele, Lungkwitz was also from Germany and had come to "the Golden Free Land" * in 1851 seeking opportunity and the freedom of expression denied to him by the "oppressive events" in his native land. He was thirty-eight years old, and his world view was very much influenced by the events surrounding his life in Germany.



"Hermann Lungkwitz," circa 1880.
Private Collection.

Hermann Lungkwitz was born in the Saxon town of Halle in central Germany. The year was 1813, and outside the town gates Napoleon's army was being defeated; his hold on the German States he had once conquered was broken. In 1840, Lungkwitz enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden, a town then known as the "Florence of the North." There he was introduced to the latest concepts of romantic thinking and painting through his mentor, the landscape artist Ludwig Richter. He also became friends with a fellow artist, the talented portrait painter Richard Petri. Lungkwitz later married Petri's sister, Elise.

During his years at the academy, Lungkwitz developed his style, producing often fine, detailed pencil studies taken from Alpine sketching explorations. Throughout the remainder of his life, Lungkwitz's works reflected the influence of his academic training and the expression of German

Romantic ideals — the "union of man with nature and the reconciliation of the individual with the universe around him." Landscape art was not a "copy or transcription of nature, but a comprehensible symbol aiming to express the mystic unity of man and nature." Trees were his forte; "exactly rendered, often fantastically gnarled like wizened elders, they were as animate and individualistic as portraits."

With the failure of the 1848 Revolution in Dresden, Lungkwitz decided to emigrate, bringing Elise, his friend Richard Petri, and other relatives with him. After a brief stay in Wheeling, Virginia, Lungkwitz and Petri purchased a 320-acre farm on the Pedernales River southwest of Fredericksburg in 1852. Their coming to Texas was not an arbitrary decision. In the first half of the nineteenth century over fifty books had been published by Germans describing America, and "Texas was better discussed than any other state." The focus of German settlement in Texas was New Braunfels, in 1850 already the fourth largest city and an "oasis of European Culture" in the Hill Country.

During these early years, Lungkwitz was preoccupied with managing a farm and raising his growing family (he had six children) under very difficult circumstances. He faced drought, floods, malaria, "the lack of conversation," and the drowning of his brother-in-law, Richard Petri, in the Pedernales River in 1857. In many ways his works from these early Texas years seem uninspired and almost mechanical. Perhaps his reverence for nature was tempered by the reality and hardships of day to day existence on the frontier. There were always financial concerns, and to make ends meet Lungkwitz sold lithographs, raffled his paintings, painted stage scenery, and became involved in the new art of photography.

Along with Wilhelm Thielepape and William DeRyee, Lungkwitz produced a "Mammoth Agioscope." Using two magic lanterns, this dissolving-stereopticon show faded pictures in and out in synchronization. In 1861, they took this magic lantern show on tour to towns along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Their performance at the St. Louis Opera House was the object of rave reviews; the effect on the audience was "a continuous expression of astonishment. There is something new and startling about these exhibitions which cannot fail to make a deep impression upon the mind, and keep it a state of intense rapturous suspense and intense enjoyment. Go, See, Hear and Wonder!"

The events surrounding the Civil War and the succession of Texas from the Union put an abrupt end to this enterprise. The neutrality of the German community was perceived as being pro-union by many Texans. Consequently, Lungkwitz moved his family to San Antonio for protection from the violence of pro-Confederate militias who were harassing German settlers.

Following the War, he entered a period of relative financial security as the official photographer for the General Land Office under the post-war Republican administration. With the end of Reconstruction, Lungkwitz lost his govern-

* "The Golden Free Land" is the title of a book by Crystal Sasse Ragsdale on German pioneer women in Texas.



"Castle Rock, Llano County, Texas,"
Circa 1889. Private Collection.

ment position, and began to teach drawing at the German-American Select School for Boys, a private academy administered by his son-in-law, Jacob Bickler. After the death of his wife, and with his children grown and married, he began an "extraordinary final artistic florescence" in the 1880's.

Hermann Lungkwitz transferred his academic training and Romantic ideals to a frontier setting and "created a striking genre of the wilderness" in his paintings. He used trees, rocks, water, clouds, and even buildings in a symbolic manner. Life's force and mortality were expressed through the foliage and withered, twisted branches of trees. A half-dead giant cypress in the Guadalupe River at Sisterdale symbolized "earth-life," and trees conveyed an almost "humanoid vitality."

Rocks represented Lungkwitz's most repeated compositional element, both in Germany and in Texas. The area around Fredericksburg provided excellent opportunities for painting boulders, rocky hills, and limestone bluffs; then there was the awesome presence of Enchanted Rock. In his painting "Falls of the Colorado, Austin," a lone hunter is overshadowed by a massive boulder, expressing man's faith and unity with nature. Rocks symbolized an acknowledgement of mankind's mortality. The rocky canyon in "West Cave on the Pedernales" suggests the "overwhelming solitude and power of nature." Like his trees, rocks became surrogates for both human and architectural forms, "lined with fissures and glowing rosy-pink in the sun, or water-carved into drooping, grotesque faces."

Lungkwitz spent the last years of his life traveling through the Hill Country; painting in a more spontaneous style, his drawings reflected an "insistent staccato rhythm." His works suggested nature's "relentless cycle of death, decay,

and regeneration." His own death came in 1891 at the age of 78.

Hermann Lungkwitz's contemporaries conceded that he was a gifted artist, but a critic also commented that his paintings were "so obviously European in technique that they seemed culturally homeless in the Texas of 1850." It was not until the twentieth century that his works were discovered and reinterpreted. In *Painting in Texas*, Pauline Pinckney suggested that Lungkwitz's paintings were inspired by "imagination and enthusiasm in a new environment, where he painted with greater freshness and understanding. He had the gift of conveying the quiet, rugged beauty of the countryside." Lungkwitz was quite possibly the only European academy-trained landscapist in Texas during the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, he was hardly a cultural anomaly, but actually rather typical of the German emigrants who settled in Texas. He was one of many whose "German idealism" played a pivotal role in the civilizing of the Texas frontier.

In celebration of the Texas Sesquicentennial, the Star of the Republic Museum will open an exhibit of Hermann Lungkwitz's paintings on March 2, 1986. Entitled "The Golden Free Land: Frontier Texas Landscapes by Hermann Lungkwitz," the exhibition is composed of eleven paintings depicting images of the Hill Country and will be on display through June 1, 1986.

Much of this article was excerpted from the thorough, interdisciplinary study of Hermann Lungkwitz done by James Patrick McGuire, Hermann Lungkwitz: Romantic Landscapist on the Texas Frontier, and a review of McGuire's book by Michael Ennis, "Light in the Hills." The book is available in the Museum Gift Shop.

NOTES

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Star Of The Republic Museum

On Sunday, March 2, 1986, Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park will officially celebrate the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence and the Texas Sesquicentennial. The Museum will simultaneously open three new exhibitions: "The Golden Free Land: Frontier Texas Landscapes by Hermann Lungkwitz," "The Signers of the Declaration of Independence," and "Texans Ahead of Their Time," which examines Texans during the 1820-1850 period who exemplified scientific or philosophical thought beyond typical frontier attitudes.

The Park Headquarters/Interpretive Center will premiere the documentary film, "Independence," a depiction of the seventeen days of the Convention at Washington. They will also open a new permanent exhibit, "The Town of Washington: A Rare Place to Hold a National Convention," outlining the 150 year history of the site where the Texas Declaration of Independence was signed.

Sesquicentennial activities will begin at 11:00 a.m. with the Blinn College Varsity Band performing in the Park Amphitheater. At 12:00 a.m. the Children's Texas History Art Contest Awards Ceremony will be held in the Museum Theatre. The contest is sponsored each year between the fourth graders at the John C. Webb Middle School in Navasota and the Brenham Intermediate School in Brenham. The student's art work will be displayed in the Theatre. At 1:00 p.m. the University of Texas Varsity Choir will sing in the Park Amphitheater. The official Sesquicentennial program will begin at 2:00 p.m. with the arrival of Governor Mark A. White escorted by the Texas A&M Ross Volunteers. The Governor will then give the keynote address. Dr. Samir Sanbar, a representative from the United Nations, will present the Governor and Texas with an official United Nations flag. Representatives from the United States Postal Service will officiate at a ceremony marking the "first day issue of the Republic of Texas Sesquicentennial Stamp." Immediately following the program, the Singing Cadets of Texas A&M University will perform in the Park Amphitheater.

Other organizations will also be participating in various activities throughout the Park. At the Anson Jones Home the Daughters of the Texas Republic will be dressed in costume and serving cornbread and blackeyed peas. The Children of the Texas Republic will dedicate a memorial marker to the fifty-nine signers, which they recently placed near the Park Headquarters. The Texas Army will have a pioneer campsite in the picnic area and demonstrate crafts and firearms from the Republic period. There will be an 1840's style "mock election," along with the cutting of a "Texas size" birthday cake. In addition, the Brenham High School band will perform in the Park. Food concessions will be located directly across the street from Independence Hall, so do come out and join us to wish Texas a very special happy birthday.

This spring there will be a series of special events taking place at the Museum. Every weekend following March 2 through the end of May, the Museum will have traditional folk art or craft demonstrations from weaving and lace making to music and tall-tale telling. On April 6 and 13, the Museum will host Mrs. Mildred Walker as "Jane Long." The hour-long dramatic presentation will interpret the life of the "Mother of Texas." The program will be at 2:30 p.m. and is free to the public.

MUSEUM SCHEDULE

Open Daily
10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Administered by Blinn College, Brenham, Texas
Director D. Ryan Smith
Curator of Exhibits Sherry B. Humphreys
Curator of Education Ellen N. Murry

Editor: Ellen N. Murry

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