

Introduction

IN THE YEAR 1838 a young businessman of a good family in Germany arrived in the brand-new city of Houston. His arrival followed by a month or two that of another young businessman, from Massachusetts, who had landed in the same manner at the foot of Main Street in what is now the largest city in the Southwest. The latter, William Marsh Rice, whose name is borne by the well-known Rice Hotel in Houston as well as by Rice Institute, which he founded, fairly represents the predominant Anglo-American element of the population. The former, Gustav Dresel, was a characteristic member of that German element which added such a strong and distinctive note to the cosmopolitan polyphony of Houston life during the nineteenth century.

The young German spent over two years in Houston and its vicinity before returning to his native country. He became passionately attached to Texas, and to Houston in particular. Vividly and favorably impressed by the New World as he was, he wrote a most interesting and sympathetic account of the life in Houston and in its neighborhood under the Republic of Texas. This diary is of a nature to engage the attention of all Texans, and more particularly of all Houstonians, for a more glamorous and informative story set in the earliest period of their city has not come to light. Its appeal, however, is by no means only local. Here is an important document of general interest, illustrating the social, economic, and political conditions in the Texas Republic.

Gustav Dresel's account of his adventures in the United States and Texas in the years 1837 to 1841 did not appear during his lifetime. Not until 1922 was it published for the first and only time. The late Professor Julius Goebel, of the University of Illinois, deserves credit for having discovered and secured a manuscript of it from Gustav Dresel's nephew

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and namesake, an eye specialist who was living in San Francisco at that time, and for having published the German original, with a brief preface, in the yearbook of the German-American Historical Society of Illinois for 1920–21. This first edition thus did not appear in Texas, where the strongest interest in it was to be expected; neither has it ever been listed in Grace Gardner Griffin's "Writings on American History."* These are no doubt the reasons why it was largely overlooked and became known to very few of those interested in the history of Texas and the city of Houston.

Another manuscript of Dresel's *Journal* was purchased in 1931 by the Library of Congress from the bookseller Ferdinand Schöningh of Osnabrück, Germany. Schöningh ascertained, so he reports, that several copies of the *Journal* had been made for relatives of Gustav Dresel and that the manuscript now in possession of the Library of Congress hails from Geisenheim and is supposed to be the original. A close scrutiny of the Gœbel print reveals its inferiority as compared with the Library of Congress manuscript. It omits, presumably by oversight, two important passages, one of about two pages and the other of about ten pages. There are a number of smaller omissions, as well as hundreds of deviations and inaccuracies. The present translation is therefore based on the manuscript of the Library of Congress. Only occasionally does it substitute a reading, which seems preferable, from Goebel's version.

The Library of Congress manuscript is beautifully and regularly written in German script. On a label glued to one of the first pages, it is described as a diary written in ink by the author himself: "Tagebuch in eigenhändiger Niederschrift (in Tinte)." A comparison with an original German letter of Gustav Dresel (kindly lent by the late Ottmar Guenther of New Braunfels, Texas) convinced the present editor that the title page was indeed most probably written by the author himself. He is inclined to think, however, that, apart from the title page, the manuscript is not the original but a fair copy of it, written perhaps by a member of the Dresel household in Geisenheim or else by a professional copyist. The original itself, in which we should expect to find at least a few stylistic emendations from the pen of Hoffmann von Fallersleben (see p. xx) has not come to light and was perhaps destroyed or lost.

The manuscript volume contains ninety numbered folios of four quarto pages each. Three hundred and fifty-five of the pages are covered with writing. The binding is in dark-green cloth, the back and the

* *Annual Report*, American Historical Association (Washington, 1906—).

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corners in red leather. The volume bears an outside inscription in gilt letters: "Gustav Dresel: Erlebnisse in Nordamerika und Texas, 1837-41." This handsome volume has apparently been much used, without, however, having appreciably suffered thereby. The line "Carl Dresel-Tenge," which is embossed in big Roman gilt letters on one of the first leaves, no doubt denotes the onetime owner, i.e., Dresel's eldest brother and/or his wife Elise, who was a daughter of the wealthy landed proprietor Tenge of Barkhausen, near Bielefeld. The label attached to the Library of Congress manuscript describes the volume as having an American half-calf binding of the time. Provided this description is correct and refers to the time of the origin of the manuscript, it may be considered likely that it was Gustav Dresel's own copy and passed into Carl Dresel-Tenge's possession after Gustav's death.

The writer of the Texas diary was a native Rhinelander, like the great German-American statesman Carl Schurz. Gustav was born in the little town of Geisenheim on the Rhine on January 26, 1818. His father, Johann Dietrich Dresel, who had a flourishing wine business, became a member of the Liberal party in the Chamber of Deputies in the Duchy of Nassau, to which Geisenheim belonged. His spacious home often provided hospitality and shelter to poets and politicians of the Liberal persuasion. Among others, the poet Ferdinand Freiligrath was a frequent visitor, and it is possible that at some time or other he introduced to the Dresel family his American poet friend Longfellow in whose "Golden Legend" we read:

What bells are those, that ring so slow,
So mellow, musical, and low?
They are the bells of Geisenheim
That with their melancholy chime
Ring out the curfew of the sun.

As recently as 1949 the dedication of a marble plaque containing these verses, which was set in a fountain beside the Rheingau Cathedral in Geisenheim, inaugurated a Longfellow Society, whose object is to foster cultural relations between Germany and the United States.

Gustav Dresel attended the classical high school at Weilburg and afterwards, presumably in Frankfort, a business college. In 1836 he spent some time in the capital of France in the company of his friend Gustav Kolligs. He also visited London, but it was the stay in Paris that made a lasting impression on him. He was often referred to as "Le Parisien," and he liked to use that appellation himself. We gather from

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the diary that he had acquired a fine command of the French language. We can imagine that the liberal views holding sway in the Paris of the thirties tended to confirm and strengthen the political attitude that his father's home had given him.

In 1837, at the age of only nineteen, Gustav set out for the great adventure of his life. Partly in order to round off his training as a businessman and partly, we imagine, yielding to a longing for exotic and romantic experiences, he traveled to the New World. We learn from the *Journal* that in the course of his trip from New York, where he landed, toward the West, he formed the intention of establishing a sawmill on the upper Wisconsin or the Rock River. His family, however, having heard of the business depression in the United States, would not listen to these fond plans for staying on the other side of the ocean and did not send him the funds necessary for carrying them out. Deeply disappointed, he desisted and came down the Mississippi to New Orleans. Not finding employment there, he hit upon the idea of proceeding to the new Republic of Texas in order to become familiar with its trade before returning home. From August, 1838, for more than two years, his headquarters were in Houston. After finally spending half a year in New Orleans, Gustav Dresel reappeared in his fatherland in the summer of 1841. This first stay in the New World is what he describes in the *Texas Journal*.

Upon his return among his many relatives on the Rhine, Gustav Dresel was captivated again by the highly civilized life there, and he even discovered and learned to appreciate many new sides of it. He did not forget Texas, though, where he had spent his most impressionable years. In deference to the wishes of his family he refrained for a time from utilizing the business openings that he had created for himself in the New World. Instead, he allowed himself to be drawn into the firm of his father and his eldest brother, Carl, and he traveled about a good deal in their interest. Both at home, though, and on his business trips he had a great many occasions to discuss Texas and emigration thereto with all sorts of people. In fact, in his thoughts he was perhaps living more beyond the ocean than in Germany. He also remained in constant correspondence with some of his friends on the other side. In 1843 he asked his former first employer in Houston, George Fisher, to recommend him to the Secretary of State in the Republic of Texas for an appointment as an agent or consul for Texas in Germany. Although George Fisher wrote two letters, dated August 8 and 18, to Anson Jones in compliance with Dresel's request, nothing seems to have come of this. Gradually

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Dresel was looking out for means of establishing residence in his beloved Texas again.

Interest in Texas increased in Germany by leaps and bounds in the forties. A year after Dresel's return to his fatherland a number of German noblemen banded together in Biebrich on the Rhine for the purpose of purchasing lands in the Republic of Texas. Duke Adolf of Nassau was the protector of the society; Count Carl of Castell was its moving spirit and business director. In 1844 they reorganized themselves as the "Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas" and sent thousands upon thousands of Germans over on their ships during the next few years. The first commissioner-general of the Society in Texas, Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, founded the city of New Braunfels as the first settlement of the Society in Texas.*

There was a great deal of discontent among the German settlers of the Society. The Mexican War had made means of transportation from the coast to the interior extremely scarce. Unaccustomed as the colonists were to the country and its climate, an appalling number of them died on the way and after arrival from exhaustion or disease. There were complaints, too, that the Society kept the immigrants in tutelage and did not allow them the full measure of freedom and independence for the sake of which, partly, they had left their native country. The Society was not overly popular in Germany, either. Being headed by the high nobility, it appeared somewhat out of touch with the common people, from among whom most of the emigrants were recruited. Something had to be done to bolster the reputation and popularity of the Society.

A special agent of the Society, Dr. Grosse, tried to remedy matters by winning for the cause of the Society some men in whom the people of Germany had confidence. By 1844, Grosse was in contact with Gustav Dresel, whom he recommended to the Society on account of Dresel's familiarity with conditions in Texas, his experience as a businessman, and the weight of his family name among the Liberals of Germany. Gustav Dresel called on Count Castell a number of times in 1845 and 1846, and he finally applied for a suitable position with the Society, justly claiming that he was in a position to greatly influence emigration to Texas by his connections. Dresel had already aided the Society by some newspaper articles signed with his name when, in a letter dated June 22, 1846, the Count recommended him to Baron Otfried Hans von Meusebach, who had become Prince Solms's successor as commissioner-gen-

* See his *Texas* (Frankfort [1846], trans., Houston [1936]).

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eral. Grosse's suggestion was that Dresel represent the Society as a businessman in Texas while M. W. Settegast, liberal-minded son of a highly respected conservative family, do the same as agent-general of the Society at Biebrich in Germany.

By Christmas, 1846, Gustav Dresel, abandoning himself to his heart's desire, had already devoted so much time to the interests of the Society without receiving any remuneration or definite promise of appointment that his family complained about his having neglected their business for the last six months. He must not move a finger for the Society any more, they said to Dr. Grosse, before receiving a refund of from six hundred to a thousand florins. At length, in January, 1847, the tedious negotiations, in which Grosse acted as a go-between, came to a head. Dresel was appointed a leading official of the Society in Texas with the privilege of also carrying on business of his own at the same time.

A considerable number of young men of means and good education, chiefly from leading families in Darmstadt, Hesse, were to travel with Dresel. They had first intended to go to Wisconsin but had been persuaded by Grosse, for national considerations, to wend their way to Texas instead. Hermann Spiess, a forester, was the only one of them all who had been in the Texas settlements of the Society before. He was to become Meusebach's successor as commissioner-general. The Texas Society put thirty thousand florins at the disposal of these emigrants. The Nationalverein, a national union of Liberals for guiding German emigration, aided them by a memorial. It was addressed to the President of the United States because, after a decade of independence as a republic, Texas had joined her powerful neighbor to the north as a state.*

By this time a famous German poet had joined and reinforced the ranks of the friends of Texas in Germany. Hoffmann von Fallersleben was then at the height of his fame and popularity. Gustav Dresel had been back in his fatherland for two weeks when Hoffmann composed the song "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles," which was to become the national anthem of the German people. In the same year he had published the second volume of a collection of poems entitled *Unpolitische Lieder*. They criticized and satirized the governments, the aristocracy, and the condition of the people in the countries of the German Federation. In fact, these "unpolitical songs" were found by the

* The above information is based chiefly on letters and documents in the Solms-Braunfels Archives at Braunfels, Germany. These are available in the University of Texas Library in transcripts made of photostatic copies. See particularly LII, 189-92; LVII, 80, 251-52; LXVIII, 147-49.

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Prussian government to be so very political that early in 1843 it relieved the liberal-minded poet of the professorship of German literature that he had held in the University of Breslau and banished him from all Prussian territories. Hoffmann was obliged to take to the road and to rely henceforth on the hospitality of his political friends outside Prussia. He was frequently a house guest, for weeks at a time, under the hospitable roof of old Dresel and his eldest son and business partner, Carl, who became Hoffmann's intimate friend.

In his autobiography* Fallersleben relates how he spent from October 21 to November 10, 1843, in Geisenheim. Of Carl's six brothers, he says, three were at home at the time. Julius and Hermann were fully employed in the family business, while Gustav, who also worked for it, was really waiting for some position that would suit his particular fancy. Gustav knew how to narrate so vividly about his travels, particularly those in Texas, that Hoffmann was his grateful listener at all times. Gustav Dresel was apparently the first to instill in Hoffmann's mind that interest for Texas which was to bear such significant poetic fruit.

In the fall of 1845, Hoffmann's friend, Rev. Adolf Fuchs, resigned his position as pastor of Kölzow in Mecklenburg to emigrate to Texas. Hoffmann went to meet him and some other emigrants a few days before the departure of their boat. He reports† how, one evening, several of his songs, all of which referred to Fuchs's emigration, were sung by the departing pastor in his lovely tenor voice. On this occasion, playing with the intention of emigrating to Texas himself, Hoffmann von Fallersleben composed the fine song "Hin nach Texas" ("On to Texas") as a farewell token for Fuchs. Hoffmann remained in correspondence with his friend, who was to become the patriarch of a large and distinguished Texas family. He also read some books on Texas, among them Ehrenberg's famous account (see p. *xxix* of this Introduction). The upshot of all this occupation with Texas was a collection of thirty-one Texas songs of freedom, which was printed in Wandsbeck near Hamburg in the spring of 1846. The title page read: "Texanische Lieder. Aus mündlicher und schriftlicher Mittheilung deutscher Texaner. Mit Singweisen. San Felipe de Austin bei Adolf Fuchs & Co."‡

It is no wonder that the Society for the Protection of German Imm-

* *Mein Leben* (6 vols., Hanover, 1868), IV, 98 ff.

† *Ibid.*, 264-66.

‡ Cf. "Hoffmann von Fallersleben and his Texas Poems," by Frederic W. Kern (master's thesis, Rice Institute, 1933). It might be worth pointing out in this connection that a belated fruit of Hoffmann's interest in German Texans was his

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grants in Texas, in order to gain more popularity and success, cast out bait for this renowned and beloved exponent of interest in Texas. Toward the end of 1845, the Society made him an offer, through Gustav Dresel, of a log cabin, surrounded by sufficient land, in Texas. It was apparently presumed that the displaced and fugitive professor would willingly accept, for the *Bremer Zeitung*, about that time, published a notice to the effect that again a number of Germans were on the point of emigrating to Texas, that a German settlement was to be called Fallersleben, and that the bearer of this name was to proceed there himself. A document on the donation of three hundred acres, written and signed by Count Castell on November 6, 1846, was delivered to Hoffmann von Fallersleben by Dr. Grosse, who, on the twelfth of the same month, reported to the Count that it had made a good impression on the poet. The fact is, however, that after a considerable amount of hesitation, Hoffmann never went to Texas but stayed in his fatherland.

Hoffmann von Fallersleben, in the years from 1843 to 1847, became a sort of sponsor to Gustav Dresel's Texas diary. Gustav had written diary notes while in the New World. Hoffmann encouraged him to write down his memorable experiences in connected form. On another visit in Geisenheim, extending from November 2, 1846, to February 22, 1847, with a brief absence about New Year's time, he found Gustav diligently at work on his *Journal*. Whatever he had finished, he read to Hoffmann von Fallersleben and the circle of his relatives in the evening hours. When he had advanced fairly far with it, he began handing Hoffmann the *Journal* for revision. Hoffmann was glad to undertake the work, especially in view of the fact that he had induced Gustav to elaborate on his notes. Gustav added a postscript to the diary in January, 1847, and completed it in the first days of February while Hoffmann wrote a preface for it and prepared the whole for the printer.*

In a letter written from Geisenheim to Count Castell about this time, Grosse claims to have suggested to Gustav Dresel the idea of publishing, in co-operation with Hoffmann von Fallersleben, an account of his experiences in Texas. Thinking it would be a great gain among the Liberals to have the poet's name as editor on the title page, Grosse also hoped to induce Hoffmann to comment favorably on the Texas Immigration Society in the preface. Dresel, too, he wrote, must openly confess his

pleasing opera in three acts entitled *In beiden Welten* ("In Both Worlds"), written in 1852 and printed in the fifth volume of Hoffmann's autobiography. The libretto, however, was never set to music.

* Hoffmann von Fallersleben, *Mein Leben*, IV, 302, 311.

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activity for the Society in his book. He had urged Dresel, he added, to submit his manuscript to the Count so that the latter might influence it by means of observations and suggestions.*

It is significant, and no doubt reflects credit on the integrity and independence of the two men, that neither Dresel's *Journal* nor even his post-script shows any specific mention, let alone recommendation, of the Texas Immigration Society and that Hoffmann's preface has never come to light. The Liberal leader Welcker had declared that it would be foolish for Liberals, in an undertaking of national importance, not to co-operate with the Society only because it was founded and run by the high nobility. All the same, Dresel and Hoffmann were perhaps scared and wanted to be on the safe side. They apparently wanted to be sure that the reproach of commercial propaganda or of political disloyalty could not possibly be leveled against them or their book. Does it not remain puzzling, though, that after all the labor spent on its preparation, this book was never published in Germany? In Frankfort, Könitzer, who had been inclined to publish it, backed out after examining the manuscript. He had probably expected a typical lending-library book. Victor von Zabern, with whom Hoffmann had already come to an agreement, also declined in the end.

As time went on, Dresel, of course, had to concentrate his energy more and more on preparations for the imminent departure for Texas. Hoffmann was still in the home of the Dresel family when Gustav returned from Wiesbaden to Geisenheim on February 21, 1847. Some of the Darmstadt emigrants came along with him: Dr. Von Herff, Spiess, engineer Schleicher, and Schenk. In the evening his Rheingau friends turned up, and, in addition to them, Settegast, by now agent-general of the Society at Biebrich, and Eberhard Soherr of Bingen. Painter Müller had drawn an onion with leaves in Gustav's album, and every one of the thirty-seven friends present wrote his name on one of the leaves. This was a last cheerful reunion with Gustav in the Dresel home. On the following day his friends escorted him on the steamboat as far as St. Goar. The parting was painful to all of them, and not one eye remained without tears.

Gustav Dresel, young in years but old in experience, was looking forward to his future with confidence, being a veritable backwoodsman full of energy and perseverance. His lively, resolute, and decided manner, his imperturbable cheerfulness, and his honesty of purpose had earned

* Solms-Braunfels Archives Transcripts, LVII, 111-14.

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him everyone's love and esteem, according to Hoffmann von Fallersleben.* Of Carl Dresel's brothers, he liked Gustav best. In the beginning of the year Hoffmann had presented Gustav with a seal bearing the Star of Texas and the inscription in English: "My horse, rifle, and knife," accompanied by an appropriate poem "Fuer Gustav Dresel." He now handed him a farewell song, "An Gustav Dresel," which he had composed in December of the preceding year. In addition to his good wishes, it included a reminder that in Germany, too, they were striving for that freedom which he was to enjoy in Texas again, and an expression of the confidence that Gustav's heart would beat in sympathy and pride when some day the glad tidings of Germany's emancipation would reach him.†

In March, 1847, Dresel landed in New Orleans in the company of a large party of friends and other emigrants to Texas. He immediately went to work there and was able to straighten out a few of the business difficulties of the German Immigration Society. He arrived in Galveston about May 20, just a couple of weeks after another notable German had left this city to return to his native country, after having spent a year and a half in Texas. Dr. Ferdinand von Roemer had made the first scholarly study of the geology of the Lone Star State, thus earning the title, "Father of Texas Geology." He was to publish the results of this study in 1849 in the appendix to his book entitled *Texas*,‡ which gives the fascinating account of his personal experiences at the time of the German mass immigration, a classical story relating a good deal to the beginnings of New Braunfels and Fredericksburg.

There is scattered evidence of the many-sided activity of Gustav Dresel during his new stay in Texas. He now was agent-general in Galveston of the Immigration Society. The German immigrants were advised to enter any complaints concerning their voyage from Germany in a book provided for that purpose in Dresel's office and to ask him for any instructions or assistance they might need.§ R. L. Biesele|| has unearthed a certificate of the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, dated September 30, 1847, the wording of which shows that every German immigrant to Texas was required to "report to Mr. G. Dresel, the agent of the Society, who will give him additional necessary information."

* *Mein Leben*, IV, 312.

† *Gesammelte Werke* (8 vols., Berlin, 1890-93), VI, 38-40.

‡ Trans. (without the scientific appendix) Oswald Mueller (San Antonio, 1935).

§ Baron von Schütz, *Texas. Rathgeber für Auswanderer* (2d ed., Wiesbaden, 1847), 254, 260.

|| *History of the German Settlements in Texas, 1831-1861* (Austin, 1930), 97.

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It was not long before Dresel was appointed a consul of his native state in Texas. Duke Adolph of Nassau signed his commission at Biebrich on May 17, 1847, and eventually Dresel received the following American exequatur :

James K. Polk,

President of the United States of America.

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN :

Satisfactory evidence having been exhibited to me that Gustavus Dresel has been appointed Consul of the Duchy of Nassau for the State of Texas, to reside in the City of Galveston, I do hereby recognize him as such and declare him free to exercise and enjoy such functions, powers and privileges as are allowed to the Consuls of the most favored Nations in the United States.

In testimony whereof I have caused these letters to be made Patent, and the Seal of the United States to be hereunto affixed.

Given under my hand at the City of Washington the 13th day of September, A.D. 1847, and, of the Independence of the United States the 72nd.

By the President :

JAMES K. POLK

JAMES BUCHANAN, *Secretary of State.*

In June, 1847, Dresel was in New Braunfels, where he co-operated with Johann Jakob von Coll, the colonial director, who came from the Duchy of Nassau like himself. Along with him, Bene, Rev. L. C. Ervendberg, and Spiess, who was shortly to succeed Meusebach as commissioner-general, Dresel became one of the directors of the Western Texas Orphan Asylum in New Braunfels.

The Houston newspaper *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* of October 7, 1847, throws an interesting sidelight on Dresel's doings and interests at that time by the following paragraph, included in the editorial written by Francis Moore, Jr. :

Mr. Dresel, the agent of the German colony, arrived in town a few days since. He informs us that the colonists at Fredericksburg are enjoying excellent health, and are rapidly extending the settlements in the valley of the Llano. They planted a large quantity of corn in the spring and are gathering an abundant harvest. This is the first season that they have been enabled to raise corn, and they are greatly encouraged to find that they can raise their own provisions with so little difficulty. The land in the valley of the Llano is found to be even more fertile than the colonists expected, and they

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are delighted to find that the climate is as salubrious as that of the country from which they emigrated. The Indians have not molested them in any instance.—Several parties of the Comanches have visited the town, within the last two months, and manifested the warmest friendship for the settlers.

About October 20, Dresel left Galveston for a trip to New Orleans. In the spring of 1848 he was in New Braunfels, where he joined thirty-one other leading German Texans in signing a "Testimonial for Texas," which was drawn up for the purpose of having it published in newspapers in Germany because many erroneous opinions and false reports had been spread there concerning Texas.

There are business letters showing that Dresel supplied Rhine wine to the firm of F. Wrede and Company in New Braunfels. In pursuance of his business interests, and following his own convivial nature, he broke the neck of many a bottle from Father Rhine in the company of friends such as Louis Becker, another agent of the Society, and Rudolph Oetting, a businessman in Galveston. Oetting wrote in a letter from Galveston, dated August 1, 1848, that on a recent occasion of this kind, Dresel expressed confidence that the affairs of the colony would soon be in proper shape again. On July 28, Dresel completed an important business transaction for the German Immigration Company. As its lawfully constituted attorney, he conveyed Nassau Farm near Industry, which had belonged to the Company for several years, to Otto von Roeder for the sum of fourteen thousand dollars.* Armed with experience, skill, and tact, Dresel appears to have been well on the way toward fulfilling his task in Texas when fate decreed a sudden premature end of his promising career.

He set out from Galveston in August, 1848, in the company of Becker, with the intention of going first to New Braunfels and then to the upper German settlements on the Society's grant. He also wanted to develop a big business enterprise of his own between New Orleans, San Antonio, and Mexico City. But above all he intended to help those settlers regain the capital that they had deposited with the Society on leaving Germany for Texas. This is a matter that seems to have caused him any amount of concern and worry. Unfortunately he contracted yellow fever on the way and died, only thirty years old, on the Morris farm, on the road between Victoria and Gonzales, on September 14, 1848. He was buried at the same place. According to the report of his companion Becker, he was a victim of the German Texas Society:

* Biesele, *History of the German Settlements in Texas, 1831-1861*, 68.

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“While fatigues and a cold had adduced a rheumatic disease in Dresel’s hip, vexation and a deep violation of a conscious and generally recognized feeling for justice brought about a nervous fever of which he died after several hours of suffering.”

Louis Becker was appointed administrator of Gustav Dresel’s estate. He was required to give bond for fifteen thousand dollars, for Dresel left considerable property, consisting mainly of land. In due time Becker was also appointed Dresel’s successor pro tempore as Consul of Nassau.

A couple of months after Gustav’s death, his elder brother Julius landed in Galveston. Julius, who had been a student of history and literature at the University of Heidelberg and later an assistant in his father’s business, had taken an active part in the political movement that was to culminate in the 1848 Rebellion, and therefore he had been obliged to leave Germany. He now took Becker’s place as administrator of Gustav’s estate and eventually became Gustav’s sole heir. Gustav had never married and had left no last will. His natural heirs, namely, his father and his brothers and sisters, had sent a joint declaration, dated Geisenheim, November 6, 1848, to the effect that they renounced their rights in favor of Julius Dresel. This declaration was accompanied by an extract from the official register of persons born in the city of Geisenheim, which enumerates all the members of the Dresel family with their birth dates. Its correctness is attested by the Reverend Kneisel under the same date.

Julius Dresel, who was the poet of the family, did not feel capable of carrying on the mercantile undertakings of his deceased brother. He took up farming in Sisterdale, Texas, where a number of other highly educated Germans had done likewise. Forty years later he was to write down the interesting, though partly unreliable, story of his first two years in this “Latin Settlement.”*

Soon after Gustav’s departure Carl Dresel had confided to Hoffmann von Fallersleben† that the family business was on the way to dissolution. In the year 1848, old Dresel was one of the fifty-one Liberal members of the German Chambers of Deputies who met in Heidelberg on March 5 and resolved to request their respective governments to bring about a speedy gathering of representatives of the German nation. We can

* Julius Dresel’s Sisterdale diary, as translated into English by his granddaughter Johanna Dresel, is included in Clyde H. Porter’s recent collection of typewritten material concerning the history of the Dresel family, which has been deposited in various public libraries in Texas.

† *Mein Leben*, IV, 337.

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believe that the subsequent failure of the Revolution of the German Liberals may have accelerated the decline of the Dresel firm. We can also accept the probability that in view of the well-known Liberal sympathies of the Dresel family, not only Julius but also three other brothers did not feel quite safe in Germany any longer and emigrated for this additional reason. Emil and Rudolph Dresel joined their brother Julius in Sisterdale in 1849. Emil was soon seized by the gold-rush fever and rode on horseback to California, where he founded and managed the Rhineland Vineyards in Sonoma County, which, after the Civil War, were taken over by his brother Julius. Rudolph, the youngest of the Dresel brothers, spent a number of years in Texas and eventually became a prominent merchant in Monterrey, Mexico, where he also acted as United States vice-consul from 1877 to 1883. Still another Dresel brother had come over in 1848 to America from the Old World: Otto Dresel settled in Boston, Massachusetts, where he had a successful career as a musician for many years. He had a son who was destined to play a prominent part in the official relations between his native country and that of his ancestors. When the peace treaty between the United States and Germany was concluded in Berlin on August 25, 1921, it was Ellis Loring Dresel who acted as the American plenipotentiary. This nephew of the writer of the *Houston Journal* was thus privileged to help restore the friendly relations that had always existed between the two nations prior to World War I.

As we have already seen, Gustav Dresel came from a milieu that felt the desire for greater political freedom in Germany. Furthermore, he was probably full of a romantic yearning for primitive nature, primitive people, and primitive living conditions. He was confident of finding all that in the New World, and after having come over, he was satisfied that he had found all that here. Dresel, who was not out of his teens until after his arrival in America, was looking at Texas and the city of Houston through the rose-colored glasses of youth and optimism. The enthusiastic account of this young man makes light of the shortcomings and hardships that were then to be encountered in this new country and city. He does not accuse the population of Houston of thievery nor its administration of moral cowardice as does Edward Stiff in *The Texan Emigrant.* Galveston Island, or a Few Months off the Coast of Texas: The Journal of Francis C. Sheridan, 1839-1840*† is another, and a most interesting, account of Texas. The sophisticated writer, a British colonial

* Cincinnati, 1840.

† Ed. Willis W. Pratt (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1954).

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official, includes, however, a shocking indictment of the Texans, so far as their lawlessness and their manners are concerned, and of Houston, the former capital, which he believed to be the most uncivilized place in Texas. Sensitive descendants of pioneer Texans may turn in disgust from this impression toward the young German's refreshing Houston diary, there to find sympathetic insight and understanding. Nor was Dresel disgusted with this city, like the French Abbé E. Domenech, who arrived here ten years after Dresel and who, in his *Journal d'un Missionnaire au Texas et au Mexique*,* had even then not much more than this to say about the town: "Houston is a wretched little town of a score of brick stores and about a hundred wooden huts strewn among the trunks of felled trees. It is populated by Methodists and above all by ants."

Dresel also found his ideals of political and social equality realized over here. There were no class differences. Every man had as many rights as any other. While Texas was an independent republic, a German could expect to exert about as much influence as an Anglo-American immigrant from the United States. The Republic of Texas was a sort of buffer state between Mexico, of which it had so lately been a part, and the United States of America, toward which it was verging and which it ultimately joined as a state. All sorts of interesting possibilities, then, were connected with the further development of the virgin republic. The German element might even become so powerful as to establish there a German colony or republic. While no explicit statement of Dresel on this point has come to light, a passage in his *Journal* (p. 108) seems to reveal that he too indulged in such bold dreams on occasion. Notions of this kind were actually entertained by some of the princely sponsors of the big German immigration venture of the following years as well as, apparently, by one or more German Liberal leaders. The annexation of Texas by the United States put an end to any and all such political aspirations on the part of these Germans as well as the English and French. The fact is that in course of time Texas served more and more as a convenient haven of refuge for German Liberals. Germans made up by far the largest contingent of European immigrants to Texas. In the year 1850, one out of every six Houstonians was a native German, as may be gathered from the United States Census. Dresel's diary, being that of a German, naturally gives considerable prominence to the German element in Texas, and the present editor has accordingly done the same in his explanatory notes.

* Paris, 1857, p. 28.

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Young Dresel was thoroughly devoted to Texas and promptly became a citizen of the Republic. On all accounts, he was a very likeable young man of easy manners. He was a good mixer, to use the modern American term. His social background and experience helped him to get along well with all sorts of people in America. He was a cultured *bon vivant*, who did not deny himself a good glass of wine or a cigar. The fine portrait that adorns this edition probably gives a very good idea of the appearance of the man about the time when he was an agent-general of the German Immigration Society, and a consul of the Duchy of Nassau in Texas. Perhaps, however, it is identical to the one done in 1846 by Wittemann, who painted all the Dresel children for the silver wedding anniversary of their parents.

Dresel's narrative is interspersed with reflections and observations on topics of general interest, such as the question of Negro slavery, immigration in general, and German immigration into Texas in particular. They do not always represent the author's individual views only; they often reflect general opinion as held in Texas, or in the circles, American or German, in which he moved with such ease and responsiveness. Since he came from an entirely different environment, his reaction to conditions and happenings in Houston was bound to be stronger, his narrative more graphic and detached than that of any Anglo-American could have been. There can be no doubt that Dresel's account constitutes an important source for that period of the history of civilization in these parts of the world.

In its final form, which alone is extant, Dresel's so-called "journal" is not a real journal or diary in the strict and original meaning of these terms. That is to say, it is not, and perhaps it never was, a day-by-day record of events. His narrative is based, however, on what must have been fairly copious notes carefully taken down by him while in Texas. Of such notes, a sample may be found on page 10 of this translation. Dresel is remarkably correct and mature in his statements, and there are but few of them, pointed out in the notes to this edition, where he is, or seems to be, mistaken.

Unpretentious as is Dresel's account with regard to form, it is not without interest for the historian of literature. On the one hand, it belongs to the large number of more or less practical travel and emigration books—English, French, and German—concerning America and Texas. On the other hand, it is in line with other more purely literary works of travel such as Heinrich Heine's famous *Harzreise*, which describes in a witty and poetic fashion the student-author's walking tour through the

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Harz Mountains in North Germany. It is true that Dresel never breaks into verse like Heine. But there are purple patches of eloquent or humorous prose in his account, as in Heine's book. Comparison with a work of genius like *Die Harzreise* brings out Dresel's shortcomings. His execution is uneven. It is not surprising, of course, to find him writing largely in the sentimental style of his time, a fashion initiated by Jean Jacques Rousseau and taken up by many other writers in France and elsewhere. There is no doubt that Dresel was under the influence of literary patterns. He cannot be said to be original in his attitude toward the Indians. On the contrary, he had probably taken it over from the romanticist writers of the immediate past and of the present. He was perhaps influenced by such stories as Chateaubriand's *Atala* and *René*. In general he extols the Indians in comparison with the conceited civilized Christian whites. In one passage (p. 34) he goes so far as to praise the Indian girls at the expense of his German countrywomen.

There is a novelist of the time who was one of the first to make Texas the scene of works of fiction and who no doubt contributed his share of influence on Dresel's attitude and style. He is "the Great Unknown" who wrote in German and in English under the assumed name of Charles Sealsfield but whose real name was Karl Anton Postl. This German Fenimore Cooper had been educated for the Catholic priesthood but fled from the monastery and Metternich's autocratic Austria in disgust and had come to the United States, of which he became such a fervid and eloquent booster. Several of his best-known books had appeared by the time Dresel wrote his *Texas Journal*. Dresel is likely enough to have read one or all of *Tokeah; or the Wild Rose*, *Nathan the Squatter*, or *the First American in Texas*, and *The Cabin Book*, which includes the famous description of the prairie on the San Jacinto.

Like Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Dresel had no doubt read another Texas German's book before giving his *Texas Journal* its final shape. Hermann Ehrenberg had taken part in the Texan fight for freedom and independence along with a considerable number of other Germans. He had belonged to the followers of Fannin at Goliad and had become a prisoner of the Mexicans with them. There was a German named Holzinger in the Mexican Army, the chief of General Urrea's artillery. Holzinger offered to save his countryman Ehrenberg as well as the other Germans among Fannin's men. Ehrenberg, however, along with the rest of them, refused to accept the hand extended to them. They preferred to share the fate, whatever it might be, of their American comrades by whose side they had fought for the cause of Texas. Thus in the ensuing

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massacre of the Texans, Ehrenberg was shot at like the rest, but luckily he was not hit and was able to escape by swimming across the San Antonio River and vanishing into the prairie. Thus he was spared to write the book *Der Freiheitskampf in Texas im Jahre 1836* ("The Fight for Freedom in Texas in the Year 1836"), which first appeared in Leipzig in 1843 and which was made available in English translation under the title *With Milam and Fannin*.^{*} Dresel, in his passage on the Battle of San Jacinto (pp. 30–31) and elsewhere, exhibits that same feeling of solidarity with other Texans of whatever racial origin, nay, that Texas national feeling which began to grow up under the Republic of Texas.

By the time of Gustav Dresel's second stay in Texas, which had become a part of the United States in the meanwhile, any sort of Texas nationalism had, of course, fizzled out. It is only in humorous remarks that it survives to the present day. Shortly before and after Texas statehood, Germans came over in very large numbers, and centenaries of various significant events of that period are being celebrated among Texans of German descent nowadays. The *Neu-Braunfelser Zeitung*, one of the earliest Texas newspapers in the German language, the only one still published in the state at the present time, made its first appearance in 1852. In the following year New Braunfels was host to the first German song-festival in Texas. A year later the oldest Texas social club with an uninterrupted existence of a hundred years was founded by a group of young German immigrants: 1954 is the centenary year of the Houston Turnverein.

What a far cry from the precarious condition of Dresel's tiny pioneer "city" to the roaring commercial and industrial activity of today's gigantic metropolis of Houston, from the tottering, though romantic, Republic of Texas to the present well-anchored and flourishing Lone Star State!

^{*} *With Milam and Fannin; Adventures of a German Boy in Texas' Revolution*, trans. Charlotte Churchill, ed. Henry Smith (Dallas, 1935).

GUSTAV DRESEL'S
HOUSTON JOURNAL

Adventures in North America and Texas

1837–1841

