# The Silent Professor: The Story of Wilhelm Lehmann

# or

## Nationalism on the Run: The experience of a German Immigrant's Identity Formation

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### Abstract

My research will focus on William Lehmann (1802-1881), a German immigrant from the Prussian territory in present day Westphalia. He immigrated due to political pressure from the government, though arrived in American virtually unknown, continuing his life as a professor. He initially taught in colleges in Pennsylvania and Georgia, after which he made his way to Dodge County in Wisconsin, where his family resided thereafter. His arrival and experiences raise questions on the education systems in America, as well as in Germany, in addition to questions of cultural reception. Though his national recognition is almost non-existent, I would like to attempt to show that his impact on German reception in American is under-appreciated. To help form the discussion on his impact in America, I will use the experiences of Francis Lieber and Charles Follen. Both individuals immigrated during the same period as Lehmann, though upon their arrival, achieved a position in society that is well known still today. All three men, Lehmann, Lieber, and Follen have similar educational backgrounds, having studied at universities in Germany. They were all forced to leave Germany due to political turmoil as a result of the fall of Napoleon. They all three made their way to America, whereupon they became involved in academia. My questions will involve the differences and similarities related to these three individuals in hopes to better understand German immigration and cultural reception of Germans in America. I would also like to look into their stories in hopes of telling a more complete story of the political refugee prior to the revolutions of 1848.

### Bibliography

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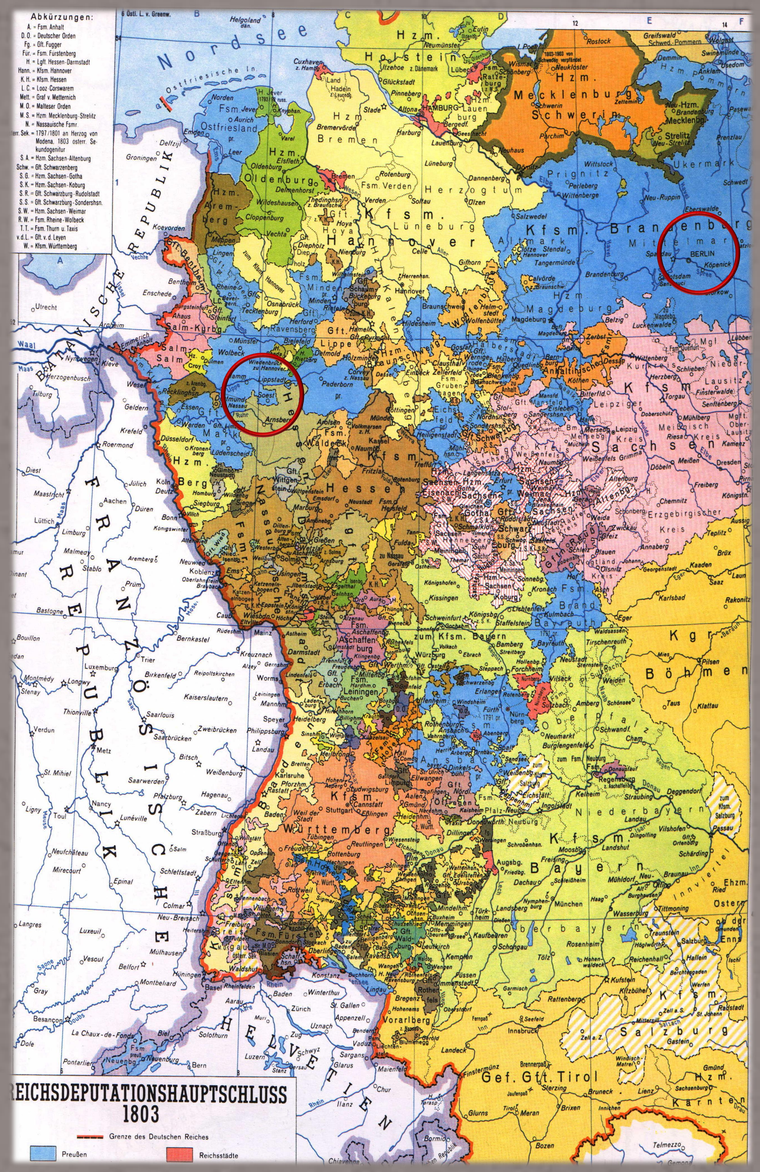
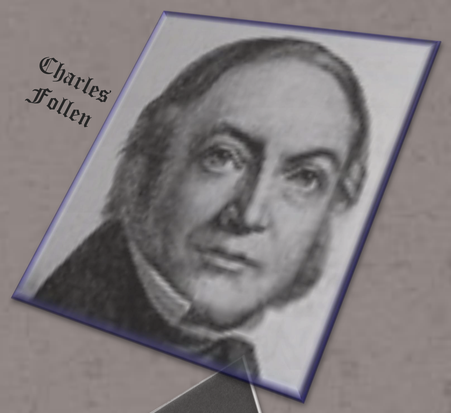
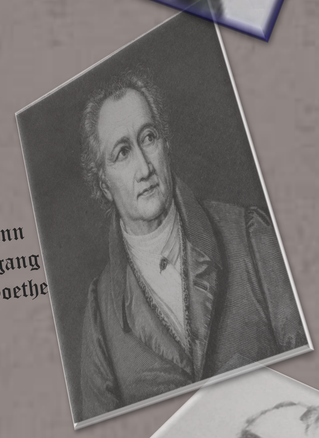
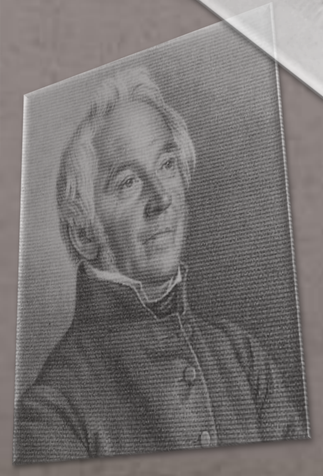



The German political landscape immediately following the fall of Napoleon was a model example of a fractured state. The Congress of Vienna followed after Napoleon's defeat, and the sense of identity confusion only increased. The two major powers at the congress were Prussia and Austria, both of which were vying for a controlling interest in the shattered remains of the German speaking countries that lay outside their influence. As the Congress progressed it was clear by many that the path ahead was not one of progressive but one of restoration of the earlier absolutist governments. There were some who felt this path was taking a course that was disastrous. The possibility to form something great and unified was there, but the ministers at the congress were ignoring this. Even the various German soldiers, upon returning from defending "Germany" from the French invasion asked where the Germany they fought for was


Charles Follen


Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Francis Lieber


Ernst Moritz Arndt

### Die Kulturnation

The idea of a *Kulturnation* can be best found in the views of men like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller and Johann Gottfried Herder. These men are vastly important in the development of German as a literary language and in doing so produced ideas about what being German meant. Geo-politically, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was no state of "Germany". The land we now know as Germany was a collection of states ranging in size and power that were loosely united under the failing leadership of the Holy Roman Empire. The inability of the Holy Roman Empire to effectively unite the various states resulted in a mixed sense of identity. For men like Goethe, Schiller and Herder, political unification was a detail that they, at times, ignored. Their primary objective was the advancement of German culture, which fit into the idea of a republic of letters. These philosophers and writers were joined during the Napoleonic wars, by men like Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and Ernst Moritz Arndt, who saw the French invasion as a threat to German culture. This mixture of German patriotism in defense of the *Kulturnation* was a development from many enlightenment era philosophies that ignored the ability of intellectual culture to change society. The *Kulturnation* will be the common theme in the lives of the three men I am looking at, from their time in Germany to their arrival in America. Their identities while in Germany will be concentrated on their involvement in the defense of the *Kulturnation*, but upon their arrival to America, their identity changes to where all three men can experience what the *Kulturnation* stands for.

### Conclusion

This research was a constant struggle to sift through the seemingly mundane aspects of life, both at home and abroad and arrive at the desired element. That desired element is the language that fosters a sense of self and nurtures identity. Such an element can be found easily in the themes of nationalism during the early part of the 19th century. The writings of the better known German intellectuals have been read and written and rewritten about extensively, providing for a sound basis of general knowledge on the topic. The writings of lesser known, or in this case, entirely unknown writers who experienced identical hardships and similar cultural receptions are not contradictory to the earlier writings, but work as reinforcement to the general theme. This theme is one that depicts a refugee who flees out of fear of imprisonment or worse, and seeks not only physical freedom in America but a cultural and intellectual freedom to express their views in the safety of a republican form of government, this in comparison to those who stayed and fought the governments until they died. The reception of these men can be seen as a watershed in the history of American academic progression. They introduced not only German culture, but a sense of reassurance that despite America's young government, its perception abroad is a positive one, drawing scholars to it. Unlike the later German immigrants who came seeking the tangible benefits of land, these few intellectuals care more for the free expression of ideas. These were the ideas that were repressed in their native land, and never had the chance to be debated and discussed, to enhance them. It is ultimately the desire of every person with an intellectual passion to see their ideas flourish in a manner most beneficial to the enhancement of culture. The idea that such passions are forgotten in the musty trunks in the attic is a disservice to not only the originators of the ideas, but to the modern scholars who wish to resurrect such debates for the benefit of modern society.