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**The Mass Migration of Germans from Schleswig-Holstein
to the United States - The 'Forty-Eighter' Theodor Olshausen and
Joseph Pulitzer at the *Westliche Post* in St. Louis**



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Overview: The History of the German-Language Press: *Westliche Post*

Over seven million Germans have left their homeland since 1830. In the old Elbe duchies of Schleswig, Holstein, and Lauenburg, emigration did not begin until the late 1840s. It is estimated that by the time of the world economic crisis of 1930 200,000 people from this region, a long-time bone of contention between Germany and Denmark, had emigrated to North America, for the most part to the Midwestern states of Iowa, Nebraska, and Missouri.

The *Westliche Post*, the largest German-language daily newspaper west of New York, was published in St. Louis from 1857 to 1938. Its primary purpose was to further a sense of community among the groups of German immigrants, but it was also actively involved in events in St. Louis, the state of Missouri, and the entire world.



Joseph Pulitzer

The preeminent personalities in the history of the *Westliche Post* were Theodore Olshausen from Kiel, a participant in the revolution of 1848 and member of the “Provisory Government” of Schleswig-Holstein, Karl Schurz, and the famous reporter Joseph Pulitzer, who began his impressive career as a twenty-one-year-old immigrant with this newspaper.

The *Westliche Post* fought primarily for goals such as human rights and productive government. Its decisive actions against slavery actually began before the American Civil War. On another front, the newspaper directed its efforts against national jealousies and territorial claims of the United States. Readers throughout the whole country were also kept informed in detail about the Schleswig-Holstein question.

Departure

Ferdinand Freiligrath (1810-1876), a freedom fighter and poet of the revolution, stood deeply moved on the wharf, an impassioned eyewitness to the beginning mass emigration of Germans to North America. His well-known poem “The Emigrants” stems from the year 1838:

“I cannot turn my gaze from you,
I must behold you constantly,
And watch as you with busy hands
Pass the boatsman all you own.”

In simple words, the poet succeeded in expressing the emigrants’ mixed feelings: disappointment and yearning, self-confidence and firmness of purpose, a longing for faraway places and faith in the future. Only those whose homeland has become intolerable to them are capable of taking a step as drastic as this. But beyond the broad Atlantic, they knew, lay the land of hope.

The emigrants set out from Hamburg, Bremen, Copenhagen, and other ports on a difficult ocean voyage that could take up to ten weeks. Those with not much money had to find a place in crowded quarters in the lower decks; sanitary conditions were catastrophic and the death rate alarmingly high.

But the innumerable dangers and obstacles during the journey and the prospect of a difficult beginning in the young country of the United States were not able to deter the hordes of farmers and workers. What was it, then, that drove so many people from house and home? Why did they subject themselves to hardships that could last for months, even years? Scholars describe this in terms of the interaction between so-called push and pull factors.

Driven and Tempted Away

By push-forces, historians understand those motives that led middle-class citizens and workers to give up their homeland, usually forever, in order to build a new existence for themselves on a different continent. The most significant impulse behind the mass exodus from Germany was certainly the increasingly worsening economic and social condition of broad strata of society, and a factor that triggered this was the enormous growth in population. Employment opportunities could not keep step with this explosion. Ultimately, the inflexible structure of their society drove many young, enterprising individuals away from Europe.

Der deutsche Auswanderer (The German Emigrant), a weekly journal for emigrants, characterized them as people “who are beginning to feel uncomfortable and constricted among the ruins of the Middle Ages, in the rubble of the feudal system.”

The spatially, politically, and economically expanding society of the United States, on the other hand, offered everything the emigrants were hoping for: large areas of inexpensive cropland and a multitude of job opportunities. Pull-factors such as these drew millions of Europeans to the United States, which became the melting pot of nations in the process.



Theodor Olshausen

Theodore Olshausen compared the Old and the New World in a letter to his brother Justus:

“From our vantage point here, conditions in Europe appear to us extremely desolate and almost beyond hope. You wrote to me once that I would certainly find it distasteful here, and I must concede that there is a great deal of crudeness and pretence, and not much honesty and sincerity; but nonetheless I feel in general no longing to return to Germany. All the petty considerations one has to take there, the constraints of daily life, the unavoidable clash with state authority and with the biases of the people, are almost completely lacking here. The size of the country alone does away with many offensive elements that are inescapable in the old world, and anyone who does not feel at ease in one place moves to a different one.” Until his deportation in 1851, Justus Olshausen was a professor of

Oriental culture at the University of Kiel, and thereafter, through the mediation of his friend Alexander von Humboldt, a librarian in Königsberg.

Full of Hope from Schleswig-Holstein to America

Most immigrants from Schleswig-Holstein did not enter the New World in the metropolis of New York, but in New Orleans in the deep South. From there the groups traveled by steamboat up the Mississippi to the state of Iowa. The Davenport area and the region around St. Louis, Missouri became the preferred settlement locations of the North German farmers, workers, and craftsmen. Only a very few succumbed to the gold rush.

Those who had survived the “torture chamber” of travel in the lower decks had to reckon with new dangers. Manuals for emigrants warned them firmly about deceptive transportation agents, innkeepers, and land agents. To give themselves a sense of “back home,” of familiarity and security, the Germans liked to settle in groups in a new village or section of a city.

On average, it took ten years until a young couple was able to build a house on its own property. Many settlers did not make it, a few returned to Germany, but most became masters of their destiny, such as the Schleswig-Holsteiner Christian F. Meggers, who arrived in Chicago in 1854 from Klein Bennebek via Quebec. After working for six months for the railroad, Meggers drove a team of oxen owned by one of his countrymen to Clinton County near Davenport, worked on various farms for eight years, married Calena Schultz, an orphan, acquired a farm, and ultimately owned 460 acres and held public offices as a well-to-do and highly respected man.

The generation of immigrants was not always able to achieve prosperity. But the pioneer spirit in this continent of new beginnings offered everyone a chance. As early as 1870 a “Useful Travel Guide to America” offered the following advice: “Workers and day laborers should take advantage of every available opportunity to work, and should never consider this or the other job too lowly for them; in America people are not ashamed of work, no matter of what sort, but slackers are despised, and anyone who cannot be conscientious about carrying out a small task will never be put in charge of a large one.” The principle “work is no disgrace” carries weight even today.

In the nineteenth century, freedom and democracy developed better and more quickly in the United States than in Europe. As a rule, Germans were not involved in the persecution and extermination of Indians, and they fought on the side of the Northern states in the American Civil War (1861-1865), when the issue in question was the abolishment of slavery.

Most Germans adapted quickly to American society. By the third generation very few still knew their mother tongue; around 1900, English had become the dominant language everywhere. Nonetheless, the most recent polls indicate that approximately every second person living in Iowa, Nebraska, and Missouri had German-speaking forebears. Still, there were some families and communities that maintained their traditions into the twentieth century, such as speaking Low German, using recipes from Schleswig-Holstein, and celebrating *Oktoberfest*.

Journalists of the *Westliche Post* in St. Louis (1857-1938)

Theodor Olshausen

Among the first emigrants to America from Schleswig-Holstein were the eminent democrats of the unsuccessful revolution of 1848, the so-called “’48ers.” Following the failed uprising against Denmark, many had to leave the duchies of the Northern Elbe region. The leading representative of this group was Theodor Olshausen.

The son of a pastor, Olshausen (1802-1869) was born in Glückstadt on the Lower Elbe and studied law in Kiel and Jena, where he joined a radical student association. As a young man Olshausen was already opposing the Danish authorities. He fled to avoid arrest for “demagogic activities” and went abroad. From 1830 to 1848 he was publisher and editor of the *Kieler Correspondenz Blatt* (*Kiel Correspondent*) and for a few years director of the Altona-Kiel railway.

On the basis of an article opposing the established succession to the throne - at that time the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein both belonged to Denmark - he was put in prison in Rendsburg. He was soon released, however, thanks to the intervention of Hans Reimer Claussen, a friend from his university days.

In 1848, a year of revolution in Germany, Olshausen was a member of the Provisory Government in Kiel and the State Assembly of Schleswig-Holstein. As editor of the *Norddeutsche Freie Presse* (*North German Free Press*) he worked for the rights of farm-hands, day laborers, and other socially powerless groups. On the basis of these political activities, the Danish king Fredrik VII excluded Olshausen and his friends from the general amnesty. In order to escape impending arrest, Olshausen decided to leave in exile for America.

“The Editorship will not be Subservient to any Clique!” - Olshausen as a Successful Newspaper Publisher during the American Civil War

Like so many other Germans with political views similar to his who had already emigrated or intended to emigrate, Theodor Olshausen placed his hope in America. From 1851 to 1856 he made his living in St. Louis by writing books, since what he earned as a reporter with the *Anzeiger des Westens* (*Western Reporter*) was not enough. Later he moved to Davenport, Iowa, the center of the Schleswig-Holstein immigrants, where he and Henry Lischer took over the newspaper *Der Demokrat* from Theodor Gülich. In 1860, however, he returned to St. Louis and bought the *Westliche Post* from Carl Dänzer. Olshausen immediately established his subsequent political line: “The editorship will not be subservient to any clique of so-called party leaders! We are in favor of an open-minded political stance that constantly strives to do honor to truth and justice.” On the political situation in his former homeland he wrote: “Only as a result of the revolutionary confusion does Germany have the hope of emerging again as a free and united nation. We will pay particularly close attention to keeping our readers informed about the incidents and events that follow in the wake of such upheavals.” On the other hand, he did not want to remain completely neutral: “The newspaper will support the principles of the Republican Party in America and urge the election of its candidates to positions in which they will be able to do as much good as possible.”



Beginning with the May 22, 1860 edition, Theodor Olshausen published articles supporting the election of Abraham Lincoln as president and Hannibal Hamelin as vice president of the United States.

By July the *Westliche Post* was printing more advertisements than ever before, and in the following year it was listed in the catalogue of newspapers in second place among all German-language papers ever published in the United States.

In 1860 Olshausen wrote to his brother Justus: "I am astonished at the scanty, pitiful, distorted reports the "*Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*" (*Augsburg Universal Reporter*) prints about our state of affairs. The editors have no notion of conditions here, and the paper's correspondents intentionally mislead them. My current position here, similar to my previous one in Kiel, is one that is universally respected among Germans and Americans."

The *Westliche Post* was located above a drugstore for three years. A single room housed the editorial staff, the city desk and the telegraph office. A second room, containing only a writing desk, served as business office. Type was set on the third floor. The printer was located close to De Bar's Theater. Shortly before the presidential election of 1860 the number of copies printed increased dramatically.

One of the self-imposed assignments of the *Westliche Post* was to enlighten its German readers about the processes and procedures of a democratic government. Two months before the elections of 1860, for example, it explained the American electoral system and the procedure followed when Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams were elected to the presidency in earlier days.

News reports from Germany, especially on the Schleswig-Holstein question, were followed with interest by the readers of the *Westliche Post*. From approximately 1860 on, the city or region of each individual report was indicated at the head of the article:

- "Frankfurt: Higher speeds on more of the railway lines are contributing significantly to the unification of Germany and Europe. The stretch from Vienna to Paris can now be covered in 39 hours."
- "Schleswig-Holstein: The Germans living here recently conducted a ceremony commemorating the Battle of Idstedt. The German colors, along with those of Schleswig-Holstein, were unfurled. The mood of the German population here is growing more and more resolute. One speaker, using 'vigorous language,' came out in favor of a strong Germany (Germany was divided into many independent territories). Thunderous applause was duly bestowed upon the speaker."
- "Hamburg, 23 Dec. 1863. The police authorities of Hamburg have struck another blow against the Schleswig-Holstein Society. It was reported that police officials appeared at the gymnasium in St. Pauli and put a stop to the military exercises going on there and prohibited their continuation."

Early in 1865 the *Westliche Post* gave its response to the urgings of readers that the paper support Schleswig-Holstein in the German-Danish War with a demonstration, a collection of money, and a statement of support. Based on his own painful experience, Olshausen strongly recommended a period of waiting: "After the uprising in Schleswig-Holstein in 1848, the Germans in St. Louis sent a well-written letter of support in which they expressed with republican sentiments their joy and hope regarding this event. But the opponents of republican institutions rejected the assumption that the Schleswig-Holstein uprising was republican-based with contempt or pity - and now (1865) once again the entire higher and lower aristocracy is the sworn enemy of those who want to make use of the current situation for the genuine liberation of the people. ... After the betrayal of Schleswig-Holstein (1850) the princes were vile enough to hand over all its weaponry and military supplies as a lasting reminder of the humiliation the Germans had suffered. ... If a civil war over Schleswig-Holstein really does develop, let us at that time raise an expeditionary force and equip it as completely as possible and send it over with a number of our best German officers: This can be of value to our German brothers. But mere speeches thousands of miles away are useless to them."

“Let us Establish an Expeditionary Force - Mere Speeches are Useless”

In April 1864, Olshausen anticipated the subsequent solution of the Schleswig-Holstein question through the peace treaty of Versailles in 1920: “Though we are being attacked by many a democratic newspaper because of our recommended proposal for the division of Schleswig, the most respected leaders of German democracy, as we noted recently, are in agreement with us. ... The Schleswig-Holstein Question is a question of nationality. It is not a matter of whether the male or female line should rule there, nor whether the Danes have violated the constitution and broken their promises; no, it is quite simply a matter of whether a people of German ancestry should live under Danish rule or renounce this rule following a free vote of self-determination. ... ‘Divide up the whole business,’ Lord Palmerston said, ‘according to nationalities. Give the Germans what is German, and the Danes what is Danish, and leave Europe in peace.’ ... Let there be a vote from parish to parish, under the direction of unbiased commissioners, under the direction of a central committee made up of all concerned, of all the great powers, and ask two questions: If Danish - do you want to be part of the Kingdom of Denmark? If German - do you want to be part of Germany? ... Assuming that the North Frisian minority declare themselves for Germany, the language boundary would extend roughly from Tondern to Flensburg, and the island of Alsen would go to Denmark. ...”

“Our Black Soldiers are Making Progress!” - Olshausen and Slavery

The struggle for freedom against despotism always met with understanding; no matter what nationalities were involved, revolutions against autocratic regimes were greeted with enthusiasm. The *Westliche Post* was also enthusiastic when President Lincoln made it possible for blacks to enlist in the Union army. At the end of 1855 Olshausen was already making predictions: “Yet relatively speaking, Missouri is regressing more and more as a result of its ‘peculiar institution,’ as slavery is usually glossed here. It is absurd that the Missourians do not do away with slavery, since this still could happen here, whereas it is of course impossible without external assistance in states like South Carolina. In the next Congress a great storm will break out over slavery. It seems very probable to me now that in the near future there will indeed be an attempt at dividing the free and slave states.”

Letters to the editor were usually printed on page 3 of the *Westliche Post*, but Olshausen considered the content of a letter from 1864 to be so important that he placed it prominently on page 1. In this letter, the commanding officer of an African-American regiment in Vicksburg, Virginia wrote:

“Our black soldiers are making welcome progress, and some are already comparable to our best regular regiments. Accustomed by nature to strict discipline and obedience, they are especially well-suited to military service. Charitable, yet strict treatment is the sole means of making them compliant. Their curiosity and sensitivity, when they are treated decently, have led to impressive results. At the moment there are scarcely twenty men of 800 in our regiment who are not able to read to a certain degree. There are even several sergeants who know how to write not only legibly, but even in an elegant style. ... At the last Sunday parade there was not a white regiment that could compare with us in military bearing, precise execution of rapidly changing commands, and general polish. ... During our march through the city, even the die-hard opponents in Vicksburg (inhabitants of the southern states) could not suppress an admiring murmur as we passed by.”

Olshausen Expands: *Westliche Post*, Weekly Edition for Germany

Many changes were taking place at the *Westliche Post*. In 1863 the newspaper acquired the *Tageschronik (Daily Chronicle)*, a paper that since 1853 had directed its attention toward Catholic readers for the most part. Changes in scope were signs of growth. In 1863 Olshausen and the *Westliche Post* moved into the old town hall.

News transmitted by telegraph now began to appear in the first column of page one; items of background information, set off clearly by lines of demarcation, were preceded by a prominent headline. The newspaper's new look was more refined and easier to read.

In 1863 Olshausen announced a new project: "Since our readers here constantly request us to send our weekly to their relatives in Germany, we have decided to print a special edition for this purpose beginning December 1st; its title will be: *Westliche Post, Weekly Edition for Germany*. This edition will differ from our usual weekly newspaper in that it will contain no stories, advertisements, or anything else that is of no interest to Germany, but will offer instead all the more American news. ... The first issue of this newspaper will arrive in Germany sometime around Christmas or New Year's Day."



Theodor Olshausen

The confusions of the Civil War period were reflected in the contradictory names of newspapers and the changing party allegiances of the St. Louis press: The leading English-language publication of the Republicans was the *Missouri Democrat*; the most important German daily of the Democratic party was called the *St. Louis Republican*; the *Western Reporter* supported President Lincoln, while Olshausen's *Westliche Post* wanted to see him replaced by his more radical fellow party member John Fremont, and the *Missouri Radical* - founded to support Fremont - became Lincoln's standard bearer.

After the South's surrender, a close friend of Olshausen wrote about the outcome of the war from a German perspective: "In the course of these difficult times, the Missouri Germans set an example for their countrymen and fellow citizens in the entire Union. ... They proved that through unswerving loyalty they were serving not only their own interests, but also those of freedom and the republic, to which they gave decisive help in the hour of greatest need."

At the end of 1864 Dr. Emil Preetorius assumed the position of editor-in-chief that Olshausen had given up "for reasons of age and health." When Olshausen returned to his native Germany in 1865, he sold his shares to the new editor-in-chief and to Theodor Plate. After continuing to write for the newspaper from Europe, Theodor Olshausen died in the house of his sisters in Hamburg on March 31, 1869.

The democratic heritage of the eminent Schleswig-Holstein revolutionaries of 1848 has been almost completely forgotten in their old homeland. This notwithstanding, a street in the university area of Kiel was named after Olshausen.

Arthur and Gustav A. Olshausen Become Co-Owners of the *Westliche Post*

After Olshausen's departure from St. Louis, Karl Schurz, the most famous of all German immigrants and subsequent U. S. Secretary of the Interior, became co-owner of the *Westliche Post*. The remaining responsibilities were seen to by Preetorius, Plate, and Theodore's half-brother Arthur. The precise share given to Arthur Olshausen is not known, but apparently it was not insubstantial, since the firm bore the name "Plate, Olshausen & Co." beginning May 1867.

After Theodor Olshausen had settled in Switzerland, Theodor Plate and Arthur assumed business responsibilities for the *Westliche Post*, with Schurz and Preetorius listed in the masthead as publishers. The admission of Karl Schurz and Arthur Olshausen to the directorship was announced to the readers along with the explanation that the political principles of the new journalists were, after all, known throughout the country.

On July 5, 1872, after "Plate, Olshausen & Co." stepped down, "K. Schurz, A. Olshausen, G. A. Olshausen, and E. Preetorius" were named as executive committee directors. The newcomer Gustav A. Olshausen was Arthur's son and seems to have filled Plate's position as managing director.



Arthur Olshausen

Among the early emigrants from Schleswig-Holstein to the United States were Theodor Olshausen's half-brothers. Arthur, born in Eutin in 1819 and a typesetter by profession, arrived in New York in 1837; a few years later he was followed by Johannes, a trained physician.

It took Arthur four weeks to get from New York to St. Louis, a city that at that time numbered approximately 12,000 inhabitants. Here he got a job as typesetter for the *Anzeiger des Westens* (*Western Reporter*), a newspaper with 300 subscribers. In 1844 Arthur Olshausen became a partner, and two years later sole owner of the newspaper, which now appeared daily. A full year before Theodor arrived in St. Louis to live with his half-brothers, Arthur had already sold the *Western Reporter* and become managing director of the Washington Fire and Life Insurance Company.

Joseph Pulitzer: Soldier, Ostler, Journalist

Joseph Pulitzer was born in Mako, Hungary on April 10, 1847. At the age of seventeen he went to Hamburg to become a sailor, but volunteered instead for the American Union army; the agent, who was only interested in the bounty he would receive, didn't bother to have him undergo the required physical examination. As they were nearing Boston, Pulitzer learned from a conversation he secretly overheard that he was more or less a prisoner; he escaped into the surrounding darkness and set out for New York, arriving there in late September 1864.

Soon after joining the First New York Cavalry Regiment, which had been organized by Karl Schurz and recruited mostly Germans, he experienced an insuperable repugnance toward military life, even though he had been involved only in a few skirmishes; around the middle of 1865 he took leave of the army.

Since he wasn't able to find a job in the east and wanted very much to improve his language ability, he decided to seek his fortune elsewhere. Hearing about St. Louis, he became convinced by an old comrade: "That's the right place to become an American, because there you will hear nothing but English." Joseph

Pulitzer had no way of knowing that between 1840 and 1940 a total of twenty-one German-American daily newspapers would be published in this city since the majority of its residents were German-speaking.

His first years in St. Louis turned out to be extremely difficult. "In order to keep his emaciated body alive, he was forced for years to take on undistinguished jobs: farm laborer, hostler, waiter, coachman...." In October 1865 he had read in the *Westliche Post*: "Wanted: hostler for Benton Barracks, former cavalryman preferred." Thus he became the "personal attendant of sixteen mules," but despised this job so much that he stuck with it for only two days.

His meager savings were used up soon after his arrival in St. Louis, and he had no prospect of a steady job. Along with forty other destitute souls, he turned to an agency that promised well-paid work on a sugar plantation in Louisiana. The agent demanded a fee of five dollars from each applicant. The members of this community of unfortunates put their last savings together in order to pay the required sum. In the same night they boarded a steamboat and immediately set off downstream. At three o'clock in the morning they were put off the boat at a point where there was not even a clearing, let alone houses or streets. By the time the group had figured out the situation, the steamboat had disappeared.

They decided to return to St. Louis to put an end to the agent's career once and for all, to storm his office and kill him. But when this "ragged army" arrived in the city three days later, the agent had already made his exit.

A Reporter Sets New Standard

At the suggestion of a journalist, Pulitzer wrote up his sad tale in German and offered it to the *Westliche Post*. His subsequent acquaintance with the publishers, Schurz and Preetorius, was the result of his skill at the game of chess.



Joseph Pulitzer

The chess room in the library of St. Louis, which Pulitzer visited at every opportunity, was a popular spot among educated Germans, including the journalists Dr. Emil Preetorius and Karl Schurz. As the young man was watching a game one day, he made a suggestion for improving a bad move. The players were of the opinion that if he knew so much about the game he should try it himself and prove that he could do better. It turned out that he could indeed do better; in fact, he played with such skill that he was made a member of the chess club.

Schurz and Preetorius gave him the position of secretary of the "German Society," an organization that had just been created by the two journalists to help immigrants. In this capacity Pulitzer directed new arrivals to employers in St. Louis - a service that he himself could have used badly not long before.

When a position as reporter with the *Westliche Post* became available, Pulitzer was hired by the owners. Thanks to his outstanding journalistic talent, he became a co-owner within five years and aroused the envy of many colleagues; his publications, which were more informative and better researched, set new standards for American journalism on into the future.

Shortly before moving to New York at the end of the nineteenth century, he expressed in the following words the spirit of the driving force that characterized the *Westliche Post*: "I know that my departure will

have no effect on the principles held by the newspaper. The *Westliche Post* will always fight for progress and reform without itself belonging to any party; it will put a stop to the abuses of privileged circles and of those who would plunder the public coffers; it will never be lacking in sympathy for the poor and always stand up for the welfare of the people; it will never content itself with merely printing news, and at the same time will maintain its independence resolutely and not shrink from identifying evil practices, whether they stem from an exploitative plutocracy or from the working classes.”

Joseph Pulitzer died on October 29, 1911, after having established in his will what was to become America’s most important award for outstanding achievement in journalism, literature and music. This Pulitzer Price was instituted in the year 1917.

Dr. Joachim Reppmann, born in Flensburg in 1957. Studied history, East European history, English, and philosophy at the Universities of Kiel and Bochum. Extended research trips throughout North America from 1976 on; MA in 1984. Published (among other: “Schleswig-Holstein Place Names in the American Middle West” (1979), “America: Hope and Longing - Selections from Old Manuals for Emigrants” (1983), “ Hans Reimer Claussen, 1804-1894 -A Sketch of His Life” (1994), “Freedom, Education, and Prosperity for All! Schleswig-Holstein ‘Forty-Eighters’ in the United States, 1847-1860” (1994 in German, and 1999 in English), and “ 150 Years After the German Revolution of 1848/49 - Friedrich Hedde: Schleswig-Holstein 1848 Revolutionary in the USA” (1999). Guest professor at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota since 1992, and at Carleton College, Northfield, MN 55057 since 1997.