

## 1

## “Ein ‘Trip’ nach Charlestown”

Traveling thirty miles in a wagon through the rugged terrain of the northern Ozarks, George Wagner's trip from Jefferson City to “Charleystown” in 1896 was a hard, tedious journey. Wagner had accepted an invitation to speak at the *Laurentius Fest*, an annual festival in honor of the patron saint of the parish. This is part of Wagner's column, as it appeared in the August 18, 1896 issue of the *Missouri Volksfreund*, the German-language newspaper of the region:

### Ein „Trip“ nach Charlestown. Herr Editor:

Unserem Versprechen gemäß, am 11. d. Mts. in Charlestown (St. Elisabeth), Miller Co., eine Rebe vom Stapel zu lassen, bestiegen wir am Montag Nachmittag in Begleitung unseres hochw. Landmannes Jacob Kagerbauer von Gebron, Moniteau Co., unser Gefährt und fuhren in südlicher Richtung bei großer Hitze St. Thomas zu. Mit geschickter Hand lenkte der Schiffer die Fähre über den Osagefluß und brachte uns glücklich an's jenseitige Ufer. Obwol uns Wasser in Fülle geboten war und unser Durst sich fühlbar machte, getrauten wir uns doch nicht, unserer Gewohnheit zu trozen und unsern Magen mit Wasser zu belästigen. Wir vertrösteten ihn auf baldige frische Erquickung und hielten auch Wort. Beim Schanklokal der Gebrüder Schell wurde angehalten und aus Gläsern mit vergoldeten Rändern ihm gebührende Zahlung zugeschlurft.

Nachdem wir uns genügend restauriert hatten, ging es über Berg und Thal, Stod und Stein, dunkle Schluchten und weit auslaufende Thaleinschnitte in südöstlicher Richtung Charlestown zu. Als wir in die Niederungen der Sugar Creek eingelenkt hatten, war die Sonne am Untergehen, und unheimlich starrten uns die fahlen Felswände und weißen Kiezenbäume an. Als wir die Furch der Sugar Creek hinter uns hatten, ging es über einen langen Berggründen den Niederungen der Big Lakein zu, woselbst wir in des Waldes düstern Gründen die Hand nicht mehr vor den Augen sehen konnten und unser Schick-

ergleibige Ernte, wenn noch zeitiger Regen eintreift. Sowol insolge dieser Verwüstung als auch der daselbst damals grassirenden Schweinecholera sind die Farmer etwas misguthig und bei schlechter Laune. Der Bau einer neuen Kirche, zu dem schon eine Menge Steinblöcke auf dem Plage sind, mußte aus diesem Grunde auf unbestimmte Zeit verschoben werden. Aber wenn's ein mal „losgeht“, dann giebt's was Gutes; dafür kennen wir die Abkömmlinge der Westphalier und Köhlstowner zu gut!

Bei unserer Heimreise bemerkten wir auch die großen Felswände und Bergschluchten, in denen Wildtjagen und Verglöwen ihr Heim aufgeschlagen haben und heutigen Tages noch behaupten. Drei Meilen von Charlestown befindet sich auch die große Höhle, in die man aufrecht zwei Meilen hineingehen kann, und wer weiß noch wie weit, wenn man zum Kriechen aufgelegt wäre und den Kampf mit den Bestien aufnehmen wollte.

Die Bewohner von Charlestown sind, wie schon vorher erwähnt, Abkömmlinge der Deutschen von Westphalia und Köhlstowner in Tjage County, und sie machen ihren Vorfahren, was Ehrlichkeit, Fleiß und gutes Betragen anbelangt, alle Ehre.

Abgeschlossen vom Geiße und Werausch der Welt, verlebten wir daselbst, wie bei der Hilm- und Herreise, ein paar ruhige Tage. Ungern verließen wir die Stätte, die ein so guter Volksstamm bewohnt. Wir fühlten uns dort wie zu Hause und im Kreise trauter Verwandten. Aber unseres Weibchens war einmal nicht da, und so verabschiedeten wir uns auf Wiedersehen.

Georg Wagner.

For those unable to read German, especially in the Gothic font, the English translation follows:



### **A Trip to Charlestown**

Dear Editor:

In accordance with the promise we made to deliver a speech on the 11th of the month in Charlestown (St. Elizabeth), Miller County, on Monday afternoon we began our trip in the accompaniment of the esteemed fellow countryman Jacob Kagerbauer of Cedron, Moniteau County. We traveled in great heat in a southerly direction to St. Thomas. With a skillful hand, the ferryman safely guided the ferry across the Osage River to the opposite bank. Although there was plenty of water available to us, and although our thirst was making itself felt, we did not think it was a good idea to ignore habitual practices and fill our stomachs with the water. We were comforted with the thought that there would soon be refreshments. That promise was fulfilled. We stopped at the local tavern of the Schell brothers and slurped the brewed beverages out of gold-rimmed glasses.

Then we went over hill and vale, sticks and stones, dark gorges and broad valleys, in a southeast direction towards Charlestown. As we turned toward the ford of Sugar Creek the sun was going down and the cold walls of the bluffs and the huge white trees were eerily frightening. After we had the ford of Sugar Creek behind us, we went over a long ridge to the ford across the Big Tavern, and the forest was so dark that we couldn't see our hands in front of our eyes anymore. We had to trust our fate to our driver, Mr. Henry Bax. Then we heard the mournful call of a barn owl, and we also heard the barking of a dog. Then we went down a long hill, and after an hour we saw the pale lights of the peaceful inhabitants of Charlestown.

At the rectory we stopped, got out, and went in. We were greeted with great joy by the people who were already there and given something to eat that looked good and would be good enough for a connoisseur. Freshly fortified and reinvigorated, we left the esteemed people there and procured lodging at Joseph Wilde's quarters.

At six o'clock in the morning the bells called the faithful to Mass, and from all sides the devout people came into the large house of God. We ourselves were mindful of our Christian duties and decided to go to High Mass at 8 o'clock. As we looked at the area in the early morning air, our amazement knew no bounds. A splendid frame church, a large rectory, a beautiful parochial school, and teacher's apartment formed the core of the town. Next to them were found some nice business buildings and large workshops and

also very cute private houses. It has only been a quarter century since a German set foot here and already there is such growth!

At the Solemn High Mass that began at 8:00, the most esteemed Fr. Friedrich Bruch from Mary's Home was the celebrant, the esteemed Fr. Kellersmann from Koeltztown was the deacon, and the esteemed Fr. Thomas Dette from Brinktown was the subdeacon. The esteemed Fr. Jacob Kagerbauer from Cedron was the master of ceremonies. The esteemed Fr. Conrad Mueller from St. Thomas gave the sermon. He performed his duty masterfully and it appeared that his well-chosen words made a deep impression on the worshippers present. The choir, under the leadership of the capable teacher John Schwietermann, sang pieces from Kaim's *Missa Cäcilia* and Arens' *Missa exultate Deo* in an excellent manner. At the end, the song of praise, “*Grosser Gott, wir loben dich*,” was sung. The whole parish sang along with the choir in pious exuberance. With that the feast of the church patron of the parish at Charlestown closed in a very worthy and beautiful way.

The celebration could not be observed on the day of the Feast of St. Lawrence, the patron of the church, because it was not possible for most of the clergy in the area to come on a Sunday due to the great distances.

In the afternoon there was a picnic that was well attended. There, we delivered our speeches, as faces were running with sweat, and we earned applause that was totally unexpected. The picnic went very well. By the way, at the end of the picnic there was a near spectacle when an American lady from the neighboring area took a very deadly weapon out of her sleeve and threatened to shoot a man accompanying her as well as everyone else standing around. The weapon had to be taken away from her, and she calmed down. We were touched by the irony of this story. There was just lemonade and soda water being sold. A license to sell alcoholic beverages is not to be had in Republican-*mucker* Miller County. And still there were such heated emotions! If only the American boys would not bring bottles full of whiskey to the picnic! The Germans handled themselves very properly and earned all praise.

On our trip home, which began on Wednesday morning, we had the opportunity to take a look at the severity of the damage that the last flood caused. The farmers living in the low areas had to replant their corn in the middle of June, and it is now looking very good and promises a rich harvest, if there is still enough rain. As a result of this flood damage, as well as severe pig cholera, the farmers are out of sorts and in a bad mood. Building a new church, for which many stone blocks are already on the lot, had to be put off indefinitely. But once it gets going, it will be something really good. We know this about the descendants of the Westphalians and the Koeltztowners!

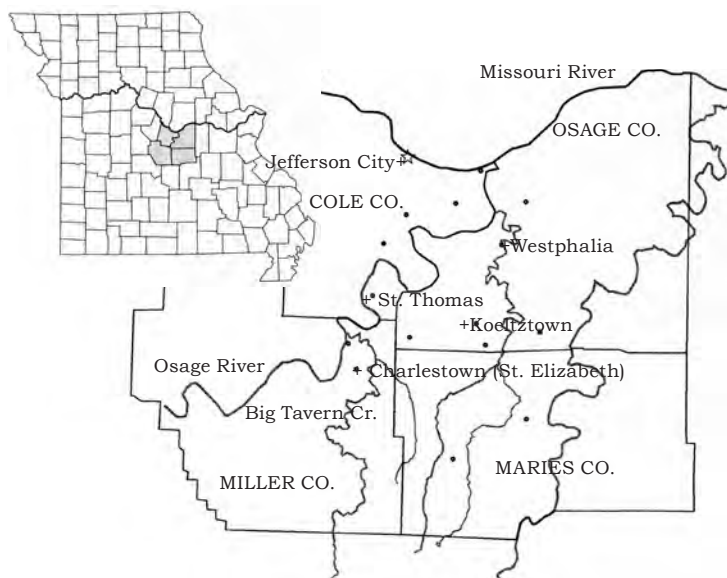
On our return home we also noticed the tall cliffs and ravines in which

the wildcats and mountain lions find their home and are still claiming it today. Three miles from Charlestown there is also a big cave in which you can walk into for two miles while standing up. And who knows how far you can go if you crawl in and want to try to fight with the beasts in there.

The inhabitants of Charlestown are, as I've already remarked, descendants of the Germans of Westphalia and Koeltztown in Osage County, and they are doing their ancestors proud in terms of honesty, hard work, and good behavior. Far away from the noise and hectic pace of the world, we experienced a few quiet days with our visit and the trip there and back. We didn't want to leave the town where such a good *Volkstamm*<sup>1</sup> lives. There we felt at home as if we were in the circle of trusted relatives. But we couldn't stay forever, so we left until we could come again.

George Wagner

Who were these German-speaking *Volkstamm*, as Wagner called them? Where did they come from? Why were they in central Missouri? What kind of culture was it that turned a patron saint's holy day into a secular festival? What was behind the complaint about not being able to get a liquor license in the county? Why, for that matter, was there a German-language newspaper that carried such a story, and who were its readers? To answer these and other questions, this book takes the reader on a trip back in history, to a place where Americans spoke German, where the religious and the worldly flowed together, and where everything was in order.



Map of the Mid-Missouri German settlement region, with towns mentioned by Wagner in his 1896 "Trip to Charlestown."

<sup>1</sup> Race or tribe of people.