

People / 1C  
'Utopia Revisited'  
Photo Exhibit

Washington

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## Historian Tours Photo Exhibit

Local historian Ralph Gregory, right, was treated to a private viewing of the "A Trip to a Forgotten Utopia" photo essay exhibit on display at the Missouri Photojournalism Hall of Fame through Sunday, Oct. 2. Photographer Folker Winkelmann, center, provides details on each photo. Also shown is Rolf Schmidt, German author. The photo exhibit tells the story of the Giessen Emigration Society who left Germany in 1834 to come to America through the places and traces of what remains. For more information, see the feature story on 1C in today's paper.

Missourian Photo.

# PEOPLE

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Story by Karen Cernich, Features Editor  
Submitted Photos by Folker Winkelmann

## 'Utopia Revisited'

■ German Researchers Return With a Photo Exhibit,  
Bus Tour Re-Enacting 'Giessen Emigration' of 1834

Shifting through stacks of photographs laid out on a table in the Missouri Photojournalism Hall of Fame in Downtown Washington last Saturday morning, photographer Folker Winkelmann of Bremen, Germany, couldn't hide his excitement over the story being told in his photo essay. Over 175 years ago in 1834 two groups of Germans led by Friedrich Muench and Paul Follenius embarked on a journey to America where they hoped to establish a "utopian" society. They encountered many hardships, some before even leaving their country, and their dream, at least as they had envisioned it, was never fully realized.

But time has shaped this story, and looking at it today, through the lens of a 21st century world, Winkelmann and three of his colleagues in the Traveling Summer Republic out of Bremen, Germany, say the Giessen Emigration Society was a resounding success in another way — establishing a strong German community in Missouri and in Franklin and the surrounding counties, in particular. Winkelmann's photo essay, which he titled "A Trip to a Forgotten Utopia," are images he's collected over the last several years, beginning with a trip here in fall 2009.

Local residents may remember when Winkelmann and the others — producer Peter Roloff of Maxim Films, author Rolf Schmidt and researcher Monika Kiese-wetter — spent four days touring this area and researching what had come of the Giessen Emigration Society.

They didn't expect to find anything, but were both ecstatic and overwhelmed at being wrong.

"The results of this (2009) trip — the photos of Folker Winkelmann, my video films and Rolf Schmidt's archival research — became the base of a series of exhibits and performances in the north of Germany in 2010," Roloff said. "The main event was 'The Trip to Forgotten Utopia,' an evening walk through Missouri in the city of Bremen.

"It was a guided tour in eight stations. We pretended to be on Missouri soil while we were walking through the streets of Bremen . . . we presented with videos, photos and oral storytelling what we have found in Missouri."

That "evening walk" re-enacting what the researchers discovered was the inspiration for a similar tour here.

"Utopia Revisited" is a special bus tour being offered this Saturday, Sept. 24, that will re-enact the emigration, giving local residents an opportunity to see and feel what members of the Giessen Emigration Society experienced.

### Photo Exhibit

The setup of "A Trip to a Forgotten Utopia" is one visitors to the Hall of Fame haven't seen here before — photos hanging by clips from two intersecting strings of twine, much like a clothesline, are in such an order that the story of each flows into the next.

A photo of the German research team bent over books inside the Missouri Historical Society Museum, for example, is followed by a photo of Friedrich Muench's diary, "Thoughts in Lonely Hours," with the title handwritten in German on the cover.

The researchers were surprised and elated on their trip here in 2009 to find this well-preserved book documenting Muench's personal thoughts, although they weren't able to read it thoroughly on that short trip. They look forward to doing that this time around.

"It is like a treasure that hasn't been fully opened," Roloff remarked.

In the center of the exhibit are "key images" — among them portraits of local historian Ralph Gregory and Gunter Schroeder, the German organic farmer who operates a farm on the small island of Harriersand in the Weser River in Northern Germany, where one group of the Giessen Emigration Society was held up for five weeks waiting for the ship taking them to America to arrive.

Winkelmann said what he likes so much about Schroeder's photo is that he looks like Muench and in the photo he has a clear vision and plan for his life — much like Muench did when he embarked on his journey to America.

Among the other local photos in the exhibit are the Pelster Housebarn near New Haven, an evening scene in Hermann and



German photographer Folker Winkelmann, center, hangs photos for his exhibit, "A Trip to a Forgotten Utopia," on display at the Missouri Photojournalism Hall of Fame through Oct. 2. Also shown, from left, are Dorris Keeven-Franke, local historian, and Germans Rolf Schmidt, author, Peter Roloff, film producer, and Monika Kiese-wetter, researcher. Missourian Photo.



An evening scene in Hermann where the German team did much research.



Gunter Schroeder



The Pelster Housebarn near New Haven is an example of German construction.



Ralph Gregory

Muench's grave in Dutzow.

A photo of round-topped silos here is fascinating to Winkelmann because of their shape — silos in Germany do not have round tops and are smaller, he noted. "It is the culture of the American farm,

which is different in Germany," Winkelmann remarked.

In a brochure that accompanies the photo exhibit, Winkelmann explains, "The photo essay begins in Nieder-Gemünden (Hessen), Germany, where we meet Pastor Schill,

where he presides over the village's small church . . . this is the same one that Friedrich Muench was pastor at in 1834, where he was inspired to create the Society."

It's interesting to note that the population of this community is in decline, said  
•See 'Utopia' 4C

# 'Utopia'

•Continued From 1C

Roloff. There is not enough work to support young people staying here, he said.

Winkelmann's photos of a confirmation ceremony show only four participants and a small audience.

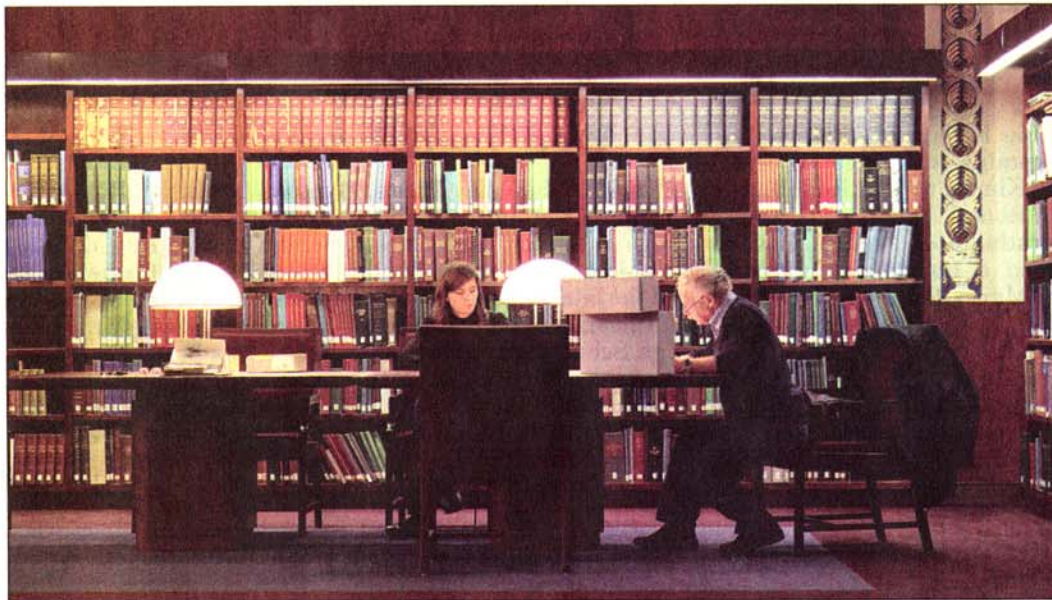
"The photos show us that even today, young people leave these small hamlets for larger cities and places in order to create better lives for their future," Winkelmann writes in the exhibit brochure.

The photos continue with images from Harriersand island, which is just a half-mile wide and six miles long. This is where members of the Giessen Emigration Society met in 1834 to board their ship headed for America.

When it wasn't there, the ship's owner sheltered the group on the island in a house barn (much like the Pelster Housebarn) for five weeks.

There are 12 dairy farms on the island today and also beaches where families come for a weekend of leisure. Winkelmann snapped photos of Schroeder's farm, because it is the actual site where the Giessen Emigration Society members lived out those five weeks. One wall of the coal shed that he photographed is original to the housebarn where the group lived.

There also is an image of a ship bell that the researchers hoped may have been from one of the ships that came to America, but it turned out to be much more recent — from



This photo from the photo essay exhibit "A Trip to a Forgotten Utopia" shows German researcher Monika Kiesewetter and author Rolf Schmidt doing research at the Missouri Historical Society Archives in St. Louis during a visit in 2009. The photo exhibit is on display at the Missouri Photojournalism Hall of Fame through Sunday, Oct. 2. Photo by Folker Winkelmann.

just 30 years ago. Schroeder uses it to call the cows in for meals, said Roloff.

The final series of photos in the essay will likely be familiar to many local residents. They are of the places and sites where members of the Giessen Emigration Society settled here.

The photo exhibit, which opened last Sunday, Sept. 18, will remain on display at the Photojournalism Hall of Fame for the next two weekends (open Saturdays and Sundays, 1 to 4 p.m.). Weekday tours may be available — call *The Missourian* at 636-239-7701 to inquire.

## Bus Tour Is Saturday

For curious residents who want to know even more of the Giessen Emigration Society there is a bus tour, "Utopia Revisted," offered this Saturday, Sept. 24. Participants will be assigned the name of an actual member of the Society and given papers and a ticket.

The tour will begin at the Washington Historical Society at 1 p.m. with a brief

video about the motivations of the Giessen Emigration Society, said Dorris Keeven-Franke, local historian who organized the tour.

The group will depart in two buses — just like the Giessen Emigration Society had two groups on two ships — to several locations in southern Warren County and visit the sites of Gottfried Duden's farm, and where he lived and wrote his

book which brought so many of the Germans to this area.

The tour will also visit the former farms of Paul Follenius and Friedrich Muench. After visiting Dutzow the passengers will return to Washington and the Missouri Photojournalism Hall of Fame to see the photo exhibit.

Among the participants on the bus tour are Muench family descendants, some who live in this area and others who are coming in from out of state for the tour and a family reunion that is being held this weekend as well.

Tickets must be purchased by Friday either through <http://mo-germans.com> or by calling Keeven-Franke at 636-221-1524 any time.

## Multimedia Exhibit

The next stop for all of the information and images collected by the German research team here in Missouri and throughout Germany is a traveling multimedia exhibit and book, "Utopia!," that is planned to open in Giessen, Germany, in October 2013.

From there the exhibit

will be set up in Bremen, Germany, and also at the German American Heritage Museum Washington, D.C.

Plans are to bring the exhibit to Missouri, although no details have been settled.

The exhibit will include Winkelmann's photos, Roloff's videos, Schmidt's research and a book and DVD to complement all of it.

Roloff said he envisions themed tables set up with stations where people can watch a video, listen to an audio story, see photos of the original documents (letters, ship rosters, etc.) and see books on the subject.

If members of the Giessen Emigration Society could see all that became of their efforts and how their mission has inspired a friendship between Germans and Americans today, would they still consider their work a failure?

Keeven-Franke thinks not.

"What they hoped to do came about greatly — Missouri is a very German area."