

Erhard Pentenrieder – Trader, Artist and "Casino-Aristocrat"

Little is known about Erhard Pentenrieder. He is an example of the many who became respected members of society in their new homeland without ever becoming truly famous. He was the eldest son of the trader and mayor Josef Pentenrieder and his wife Karoline, born on January 8, 1830 in Bad Aibling. Before 1850 he was employed in Munich as an apprentice tradesman, and during his time in the city he was a member of a gymnastics association. It may have been the one founded in 1848 that was suspected by the police for having members with Republican tendencies, and was banned in 1850. The Bad Aibling chronicler Stephan Stürzer noted that on March 31, 1850 a group of 67 Munich gymnasts turned up to say farewell to him, and "practiced from 4 in the afternoon until 5.30 in the meadow in Irlach." The same entry makes it clear that Pentenrieder had made careful preparations to emigrate. On May 5, 1850 he set sail for New York on the three-master "Emma". After several moves, he eventually went to Texas and in 1852 he settled in San Antonio, which at that time was a very busy trading town. Texas had only belonged to the USA since 1848, and this made it an object of great interest in the emigrant newspapers and magazines that Pentenrieder probably read during the year before his departure. Together with G. Blerch, Pentenrieder opened a shop on the corner of Main Plaza and Commerce Street, and soon the two men had a thriving business, mainly selling luxury goods. According to uncertain sources he soon married a Miss Meyer, about whom nothing more is known. Quite a few German-speaking settlers lived in San Antonio, and Pentenrieder took active part in their cultural life. In 1858 he was a founder member of the gymnastics association and in 1869 he was elected captain of the newly-formed fire brigade, known as the Hook and Ladder Company. Even more important was his membership of the Casino Club, founded in 1854. It set up its own club building in 1857 and organized German cultural life. Its members performed theatre plays, for instance, in which Pentenrieder also acted. It was here that he met the artists W. C. A. Thielepape, Carl G. Iwonski and Hermann Lungkwitz. This circle may have provided him with inspiration for his most successful sales article: writing paper with a foliage pattern in green surrounding black-and-white medallions of the most famous buildings in San Antonio. Before him, Thielepape had already brought out stationery with a view of Main Plaza, but Pentenrieder's product, available from 1856 onwards, was far more elaborate. It showed the west side of Main Plaza at the top; the left-hand medallions showed the San Jose Mission, the Conception Mission, the Courthouse and a man on a donkey; those on the right showed the Alamo, the San Juan Mission, a Mexican hacienda, and a picture of a steer being caught. The stationery "Drawn from Nature by Erhard Pentenrieder" and produced by Pentenrieder & Blerch was soon extremely popular. It provided impressions of San Antonio for all letter recipients. The Swiss emigrant Henry Baumberger,

for instance sent one home on October 13, 1856 with the remark: "On this stationery you can see some of our town, San Antonio. At the top left there's an Indian, and on the top right a Mexican, and you can work out the rest for yourselves." Before 1869 a second, revised version appeared showing Main Plaza with camels, and also a few variations on the medallions. Pentenrieder's stationery was so popular that it had a powerful effect on the way people imagined Texas, and still do.

Business went well for Pentenrieder until the American Civil War forced him to flee in 1861 to Mexico, from where he travelled back to Germany. This was because he was sympathetic to the cause of the Northern States. In 1866, at the end of the Civil War, Pentenrieder returned to San Antonio and founded a new business. The military government of the North treated him as above board, and he was able to swear the "ironclad oath" of loyalty to the Union without a problem. Many members of the newly-appointed civic government were members of the Casino Club, which is why the "Daily Herald" referred to them scornfully as "Casino Aristocrats". One of these "aristocrats" was Pentenrieder. From 1867 to 1872 he was a member of the civic council and from 1868 to 1874 he was also one of the directors of the San Antonio National Bank. Before 1870 he married Franziska Eule. Pentenrieder was a prosperous man, and according to the U.S. census of 1870 he even employed two German servants. In 1875, illness forced him to give up his business, and he began to travel in order to recover. Erhard Pentenrieder died on November 10, 1875 in San Antonio. The local newspapers mourned him as "one of San Antonio's old, true and best citizens", who had distinguished himself most particularly as a progressive thinker.

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Literature

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