Julius Tempeltey after Conrad Caspar Rordorf

Panorama der Stadt Neu-Braunfels in Texas, aufgenommen von der Südwestseite im Sommer 1847, toned lithograph on paper, 18 x 98 cm., printed by Delius Brothers, Berlin (Wiesbaden: Verein zum Schutze Deutscher Auswanderer nach Texas, 1851).

This lithographed panorama of New Braunfels was drawn on stone by Berlin lithographic artist Julius Tempeltey (1802-1870) and based on a sketch by Swiss artist Conrad Caspar Rordorf (1800-1847). Rordorf, a trained view artist, had traveled to Texas in 1847 as part of a newly formed Naturforschender Verein (Natural Sciences Society), a group associated with the Verein zum Schutze Deutscher Auswanderer nach Texas (Society for the Protection of German Emigrants to Texas, also known as the Texas Adelsverein or Society of Nobles on account of their aristocratic membership). Rordorf made his original sketch from atop the Sophienburg, a hill in New Braunfels that is today the site of the Sophienburg Museum & Archives. The location is noted on a map Karte der Stadt Neu Braunfels published by the Adelsverein that originally accompanied the panorama: “Standpunkt des Malers bei aufnahme des Panoramas“ (Place where the artist stood when he made the panorama). It is interesting to note that modern buildings and trees block the view that can only be approximated today from atop the roof of the museum. The print is a convincingly authentic Texas town- and landscape with German-Texan wooden structures in excellent perspective, “exotic tropical vegetation” such as prickly pear and agaves in the foreground, and random German “cowboys,” horses, dogs, and cattle scampering about. Identifiable at left, for example, with a steeple is a church (Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church).

Unfortunately, shortly after making this sketch Rordorf was shot and killed on the night of October 28, 1847 at the Adelsverein’s Nassau Plantation in Fayette County in an altercation with a rival German faction. One of those charged with the crime was Dr. Friedrich Schubbert, but he was acquitted, and he later garnered a better reputation back in Germany as an adventure novelist under the name Friedrich Armand Strubberg (1806-1889). For many years the lithograph Panorama der Stadt Neu-Braunfels was the only known work of Rordorf’s to survive but recently historian James C. Kearney has convincingly attributed other prints made from Rordorf’s sketches.