



New Worlds to Seek: Pioneer Heinrich Leinhard in Switzerland and America, 1824-1846

Heinrich Lienhard

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An adventurer in both the physical and intellectual senses of the word, Heinrich Lienhard was born in Switzerland in 1822 and immigrated to America in 1843. Published here for the first time in either the original German or in English translation, this initial section of Lienhard's enormous manuscript autobiography (more than half a million words) covers the years after his birth through his first several years in America.

Lienhard's account of his early years consists of four segments: his early years and boyhood in the Swiss canton of Glarus, 1822–1843; his journey to America, August–November 1843; his two and a half years in Highland, Illinois; and his life in the upper Mississippi Valley. This section ends in April 1846, when Lienhard began the arduous and dangerous journey from St. Louis to Captain John Sutter's fort at New Helvetia, California.

Lienhard has provided an unusually full account of his early life. The book contains fifty-one chapters, with each chapter featuring one or more life-shaping incidents for this pioneer who would successfully cross the Rocky Mountains at the same time the Donner party, taking a different and more obvious route, perished.

A few of the chapter titles demonstrate both the flavor and the thoroughness of this autobiography: "Father's Thoughtless Words—Abuse from Brother Peter and Undeserved Punishment by Father"; "An Appropriate Warning to Father—How Brother Peter Treated Me Deceitfully and Treacherously—How Apprentices Are Treated"; "Becoming More or Less American"; and "Short Stay at Schneider's—Going to Mollet's Where Three Times Daily for a Period of Nine Weeks I Am Fed Bad Cornbread, Oversalted Bacon, and Wheat Slop."

In his foreword, John H. Lienhard IV characterizes his great-grandfather: "Certain family writings and comments suggest that my grandfather had trouble understanding Heinrich's 'who-cares' attitude toward the consumption of his fortune. The irony is clear. Heinrich's fortune was the result of his pursuit of freedom, not of fortune. His son enjoyed the settled life that Heinrich's gains had provided. My grandfather could far better understand 'good business' than the forces driving Heinrich."

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