

German Cultural Influences at the Cincinnati Zoo¹

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With 4 Figures

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In the mid-nineteenth century one of the fastest growing cities in America was Cincinnati, Ohio. Located on the Ohio River, the city became a regional midwestern manufacturing and commerce center. As a result Cincinnati became a magnet for foreign immigrant workers. Large numbers of German immigrants settled in the city beginning in the 1840s. Within a few decades these new citizens played a vital role in the economic, social, and political life in Cincinnati. They were involved in the establishment of a variety of urban cultural institutions, patterned after both European and eastern U.S.A. models, including museums and musical organizations and festivals. A group of these German immigrants were the main founders of the Cincinnati Zoological Garden, the second major zoological garden to be established in North America.

In the early 1800s public zoological gardens were established in several European cities throughout Europe. The first German zoological garden to open was the Berlin Zoological Garden in 1844. In areas of Germanic culture zoological gardens soon became popular and over the next thirty years zoos were established in a number of large German cities. The leading zoological gardens of the era were distinguished from earlier menageries in having much larger and spacious enclosures. They had both educational and scientific purposes beyond the entertainment objectives of menageries. Exhibits were organized according to current zoological taxonomy and labeled for educational interest and study. Animal exhibit design was often intended to be naturalistic or, at least, to represent nature. Exhibits were located within a landscape park setting of trees, shrubs, ponds, streams, and woodlands. Within the limitations of existing technology, animal species such as deer and other hoofed animals were displayed in large, often planted enclosures. In architecture natural building materials were often used to represent or suggest elements of nature, including geological landforms and vegetation types.

Influential members of Cincinnati's German community had visited the new zoological gardens of Europe and decided to develop a similar institution locally.

¹ This paper is dedicated to Dr. JAMES M. DOLAN, JR., on his 60th birthday.

ANDREAS ERKENBRECHER was the leading advocate of a zoological garden in Cincinnati. He was a popular, genial animal lover with great energy and determination. ERKENBRECHER had overcome adversity to become one of the world's leading starch manufacturers. His social connections in both the German and Anglo-American communities were critical in gaining support for the Zoo. He formed a nucleus of supporters, primarily of German immigrants, but also including influential Anglo-Americans, such as CHARLES PHELPS TAFT, the half brother of President-to-be WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT and son of ALPHONSO TAFT, former Attorney General and an ambassador to both Russia and Austria-Hungary.

During this same period in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania another group was founding a large zoological garden, patterned largely after the London Zoo. The Philadelphia Zoological Garden opened on July 1, 1874, becoming the first major zoological garden to open in America although earlier smaller menagerie-style zoos had started in Central Park in New York (1864) and Lincoln Park in Chicago (1868).

In Cincinnati the founders of the Zoo sought advice from the renowned German zoologist, ALFRED E. BREHM. BREHM had written several leading zoology texts and operated private zoos in Berlin and Hamburg. BREHM provided information about European zoos regarding organization, attendance and operations. The Zoological Society of Cincinnati was incorporated on July 11, 1873. It was organized as a joint stock company for profit, a pattern of organization that then existed in several other zoos in Europe. An agent of the Zoological Society, ARMIN TENNER, was sent to Germany to negotiate with BREHM about becoming Superintendent of the Cincinnati Zoo. Unfortunately, an international business crash occurred in September and the recruiting of BREHM ended. Later in 1875 Dr. HEINRICH DORNER, the Scientific Secretary of the Hamburg Zoological Garden, was hired as the Cincinnati Zoo's first Superintendent.

While in Europe in the early 1870s the Cincinnati Zoo's agent ARMIN TENNER had studied zoo design. He decided that the newly rebuilt Frankfurt Zoological Garden would be the best model to follow and made extensive drawings for the design of buildings and exhibits. In Cincinnati a scenic site was carefully chosen for the zoological garden. Compared to the flat location of the Frankfurt Zoo the Cincinnati site had picturesque hilly topography with streams, ponds, and forested woodland. Located three miles from the center of the city, the site was 26 hectares in size, comparable to the Berlin Zoological Garden, then the largest European zoo.

THEODOR FINDEISEN, a German landscape gardener and engineer who had previous experience in Europe, was hired to design the early Zoo layout. He located buildings, exhibits, curvilinear walkways, and plantings. The design was of an informal curvilinear style with a primary circular walkway and smaller secondary pathways. This design was similar to the design of leading German zoological gardens in Frankfurt and Berlin. Existing streams and ravines were utilized for animal exhibits as essential aesthetic elements in the landscape. Buildings and exhibits were carefully located at scenic vantage points. Likewise, panoramic views of the surrounding countryside were used as important parts of the design. As a tribute to the aesthetics, organization, and functionalism of FINDEISEN's design much of it still remains today.

An outstanding local architect, JAMES McLAUGHLIN, was selected to design the Zoo's buildings (fig. 1). Earlier, he had designed the starch factory and personal residence of Zoo founder ANDREAS ERKENBRECHER. McLAUGHLIN used the drawings that

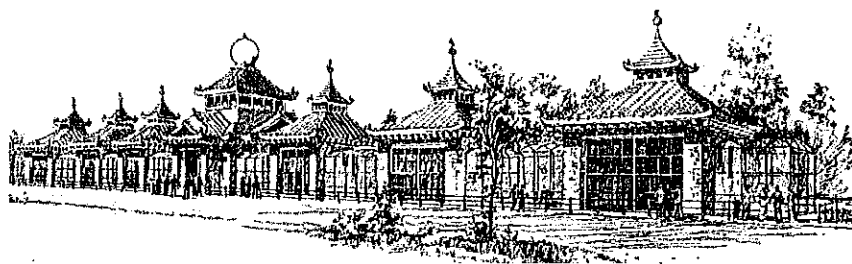


Fig. 1. Aviary exhibits built in 1875

Zoo agent ARMIN TENNER had made in designing animal exhibit and shelter buildings that resembled the vernacular buildings found in the geographic origins of exhibited animals. This was intended as a demonstration and instruction in geography, relating ethnography and zoogeography. This architecture included Japanese pagoda-style aviaries, a Teutonic-style log deer house, an American-style log cabin elk shelter house, and a Turkish-style monkey house.

Animal exhibit design was often naturalistic in intent. A pond was enlarged to provide improved waterfowl habitat. Streams were fenced in to provide displays for waterfowl, turtles, and even alligators. Otters and beavers were given ponds. The bear exhibit was placed in a steep hillside, suggesting the animals' wild haunts. Wild goat and sheep species were placed on rugged hillside locations. Other species of hoofed animals were sited on spacious level areas, implying their natural habitats of plains and grasslands. Natural building materials were often utilized to suggest elements of nature, including geological landforms and vegetation types. Boulders and stone blocks were used to represent rugged montane landforms and logs and branches were used in rustic styles to suggest forests and naturalism.

Another of the Cincinnati Zoo's significant German designers was ADOLPH STRAUCH, a native of Silesia. STRAUCH trained at Schoenbrunn in Vienna where he was influenced by Baron HERMANN VON PUCKLER-MUSKAU, one of the leading landscape designers of the time. He also worked in Ghent, Paris and Regent's Park in London. After immigrating to America in 1852, he became Superintendent of Cincinnati's Spring Grove Cemetery where he became internationally famous for its pastoral landscape design, botanical collection, and outstanding horticultural practices. STRAUCH was also the Superintendent of the city of Cincinnati's park system. STRAUCH was an avid bird breeder and the first to breed trumpeter swans, which he shipped around the world to parks, estates, and even the London Zoo. STRAUCH recommended that the new Cincinnati Zoo be both a zoological garden and an experimental horticultural garden. He directed the Zoo's horticultural operations and landscape planting for a period between 1878 and his death in 1883. Following a leading German horticultural authority, H. JABGER, who wrote about zoo landscape design in "Lehrbuch der Gartenkunst", STRAUCH advocated using plants around animal exhibits that best expressed the character of the vegetation of the animal's natural habitats.

Another design feature in common with German zoos of the period was the location of a pond or small lake at the center of the Cincinnati Zoo. Also like German

zoos a large restaurant was located along the lake shore. The Cincinnati Zoo's three-story building could seat over a thousand visitors and host large civic meetings and events. Customers could also sit outside on the spacious verandahs and enjoy musical performances while viewing a survey of the natural and human world in the Zoo's collections, displays, and architecture.

The incorporation of music into the life of the Cincinnati Zoo was another significant German influence. Similar to German zoos of the period the bandstand was located next to the centrally-located restaurant. Cincinnati's German population was especially fond of music. Cincinnati was then an important classical music center in the U.S.A. with a variety of music facilities, festivals, schools, and symphonies. At the Zoo both classical music and popular music were played for appreciative visitors. German language choral groups were special favorites at the Zoo for many years.

When the Cincinnati Zoological Garden opened on September 18, 1875 many of its animals were donated by local animal lovers. Of the animals purchased by Superintendent DORNER the majority was from CARL HAGENBECK, then a young animal dealer in Hamburg, Germany. HAGENBECK later became the world's largest animal dealer, a leading innovator in animal handling and management, and the pioneer who developed the first barless, naturalistic exhibits. The relationship between the HAGENBECK firm and Cincinnati Zoo would continue for the next 75 years.

The first guidebook of the Zoo, published in 1876, was a German language publication, "Führer durch den Zoologischen Garten zu Cincinnati". This lengthy guidebook provided extensive descriptions of the Zoo's animal collection. A later English language guidebook, published in 1893, contained animal illustrations by well-known Berlin artist FRIEDRICH SPECHT.

The Zoo's first Superintendent, Dr. HEINRICH DORNER, was dismissed after serving only one year. After this there were several other Superintendents and interim Superintendents who served only a short time. Finally, in 1886 the head keeper, SOL A. STEPHAN, was appointed Superintendent. SOL STEPHAN was the son of German immigrant parents and served as the Zoo's Superintendent and General Manager for 51 years. Over this time he became a well-known figure in the zoo world because of his extensive knowledge and long experience. STEPHAN frequently hired German immigrants because they often liked animals and were hard-working efficient employees.

In the late 1880s several new buildings and exhibits were built at the Zoo (fig. 2). They were designed by architect GUSTAV DRACH, whose parents were German immigrants. They were stylistically similar to exhibit buildings at the Berlin Zoological Garden, and included decorative rustic styles, more elaborate ornamentation, and larger-sized structures such as a massive cage for birds of prey that was approximately 14 meters high and 27 meters long. During this period an entry plaza was also constructed, which was modeled after a similar plaza at the Berlin Zoological Garden.

Like a number of German zoos the Zoological Society of Cincinnati was founded as a for-profit corporation. However, the Cincinnati Zoo rarely operated on a profit basis, primarily because of high rental costs and the lingering effects of three worldwide financial depressions between 1873 and the mid-1890s. In 1897 the original Zoological Society went into receivership. A new non-profit organization, the Cincinnati Zoological Company, was then formed to manage the Zoo.

In the early 1900s one of Cincinnati's leading architectural firms ELZNER & ANDERSON, was hired to design a major new building at the Zoo (fig. 3). One of the partners, ALFRED O. ELZNER, was of German heritage. This monumental building was originally called the "Herbivora Building" but, today is known as the "Elephant House." It opened in 1906 and was one of the first poured concrete structures in

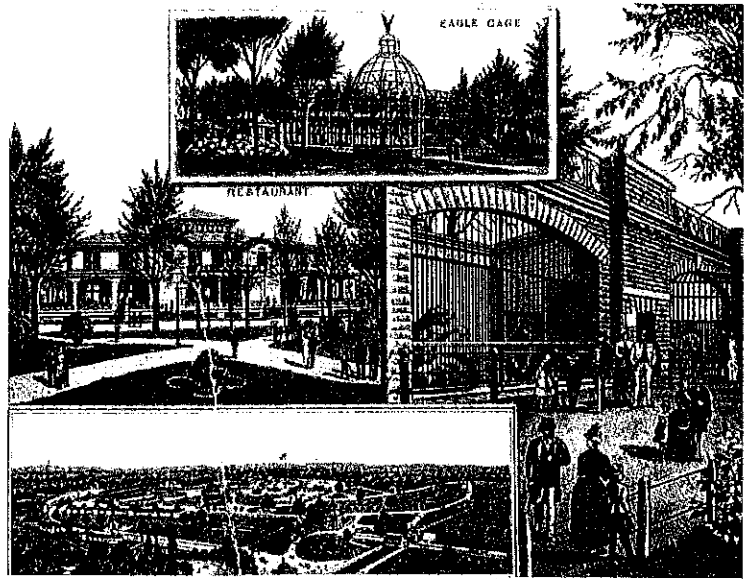


Fig. 2. The Cincinnati Zoo in the late 1880s (from a souvenir card)

No. 12. Herbivora Building, Cincinnati Zoological Gardens.
Largest and Most Complete Concrete Animal Building in the World.
Length 150 ft., Width 75 ft., Height 75 ft.



Fig. 3. The elephant House, originally called the Herbivora Building, opened in 1906. Its Islamic design is in the ethnographic style of the 19th century European zoos.

America. It was designed in the ethnographic-style of zoo architecture that was most prominently visible at the Berlin Zoological Garden. Cincinnati's structure was a Muslim-inspired design, featuring a series of domes and minarets, recalling the Taj Mahal. It was a design analogous to an elephant exhibit building in Berlin, that was built in an Indian Hindu style. Cincinnati's Elephant House is 45 meters long and 22 meters high and is one of the most spectacular historic zoo buildings in the world today. Because of its historic architecture the Cincinnati Zoo was designated as a U.S. National Historic Landmark in 1987.

At the turn of the century CARL HAGENBECK of Hamburg, Germany was the largest animal trader in the world. He was a remarkable entrepreneur and innovator who operated a small zoo in Hamburg and circuses in Europe and North America. HAGENBECK was a brilliant innovator in many aspects of animal handling, training, and management. In 1907 he opened his barless zoo, HAGENBECKS Tierpark, which revolutionized modern zoo design. He eliminated small old-style cages and fenced enclosures and used instead moated enclosures and artificial concrete rockwork, that simulated natural landforms, to enclose animals and hide shelter buildings.

In the early 1900s the Cincinnati Zoo's Superintendent, SOL STEPHAN, became the animal sales agent in America for CARL HAGENBECK. STEPHAN was one of the first in America to advocate HAGENBECK's barless zoo exhibits and his methods of animal handling and management. STEPHAN and his son, JOSEPH, maintained a close relationship with HAGENBECK and the HAGENBECK sons, LORENZ and HEINRICH, for many years. JOSEPH STEPHAN assisted his father in managing the Cincinnati Zoo for thirty years. As a young man in 1905, "JOE" STEPHAN, traveled to Hamburg with LORENZ HAGENBECK, manager of the HAGENBECK's American circus. Here STEPHAN stayed with the HAGENBECK family, helped in the construction of the Tierpark, and was trained in the HAGENBECK's animal management practices. In 1906 he accompanied LORENZ HAGENBECK to Africa on a largescale expedition to ship 2,000 camels to German Southwest Africa.

During the 1930s a combination of federal Depression era unemployment programs and private funding provided the Cincinnati Zoo with the opportunity to finally construct barless exhibits. The HAGENBECK firm's sculptor JOSEF PALLEMBERG, designed and constructed the Lion and Tiger Grottos (fig. 4) along with a bird exhibit, which opened in 1934. The Zoo's hilly topography was used effectively to hide the massive gunite walls of the big cat exhibits. When PALLEMBERG later became involved in constructing the Detroit Zoo's new exhibits, a Swiss-trained landscaper, CARL KERN, was brought in to direct and manage the construction of the African Veldt and the Bear Grottos. KERN, then a Cincinnati resident, JOSEPH STEPHAN, and PALLEMBERG visited the rocky cliffs of the Kentucky River to study geological forms for these exhibits. A level plateau site was used to construct the spacious African Veldt exhibit of antelope, zebra, and birds. KERN became directly involved in the ongoing design and construction of the projects as PALLEMBERG was able to only visit infrequently. The African Veldt was completed in 1935 while the Bear Grottos were finished in 1936.

The historical role of early German zoos in influencing the development of zoos in other parts of the world has been little appreciated in recent years. The history of the Cincinnati Zoo, one of America's earliest zoos, demonstrates, however, a wide range of German influences from animal acquisitions to zoo design.



Fig. 4. The Tiger Grotto was designed by JOSEF PALLEMBERG of the HAGENBECK firm of Hamburg. The exhibit opened in 1934.

References

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