

Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860)

Deutscher Nationalismus – Europa –
Transatlantische Perspektiven

Herausgegeben von
Walter Erhart und Arne Koch

Niemeyer

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MAX KADE CENTER FOR GERMAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

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Historical Legacies and Controversies Converge in Kansas

Walter Erhart

When Ellen Kelley, a descendant of German author and politician Ernst Moritz Arndt, visited Germany recently, she and her family considered leaving twenty-one autographed letters (dated 1843–1852), along with photographs, silverware, a telescope, and a letter seal, to the Arndt Museum in Bonn. Finally, however, the Arndt heirs decided to donate the items, which have been valued at \$1 million, to the Max Kade Center.

Known today to students and scholars of German literature as a poet and to historians as a leading politician in the first half of the nineteenth century, Arndt studied and later taught at the University of Greifswald in northeastern Germany. Coincidentally, this semester, almost two hundred years later, Professor Walter Erhart came from the Ernst Moritz Arndt University to Lawrence as this year's visiting professor at the Max Kade Center. His reflections presented on April 14 follow:

Ernst Moritz Arndt was born in 1769 and died in 1860. He lived through important and exciting times in modern German history. Only twenty years old when the French Revolution broke out, he experienced the difficult years of the Napoleonic wars and saw Europe change through the repressive governments that followed. Along with Hegel, Fichte, Schleiermacher, and Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, he belonged to the generation of German Romanticism. In 1848 he experienced a period of revolution. A member of the National Assembly in the Frankfurt *Paulskirche*, he was a

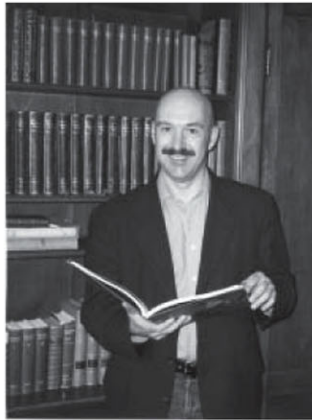


writer, a journalist, poet, professor of history, and politician. While one of the first to envision a united Europe, he supported royalist interests rather than democratic reforms.

Before Napoleon invaded Germany, Arndt had been teaching at the University of Greifswald. Because of his anti-Napoleonic stance, he had to flee. After he returned from Sweden, he was forced to flee again, this time to Berlin, where he lived in concealment for a year. He was in Russia when Napoleon invaded the country. In his autobiography, he described the burning of Moscow. After taking part in the

war of liberation from Napoleon, he wrote patriotic articles and poems. He became famous for such poems as "Die Leipziger Schlacht" and "Der Gott, der Eisen wachsen ließ," which expressed his intense hostility to Napoleon and the French.

In 1818 he was appointed professor of modern German history at the newly founded University of Bonn, in 1824 his son Hartmuth was born. In 1855 Hartmuth emigrated to the United States, and after living in Wisconsin, Mississippi and Florida, settled in Kansas, where he died in 1876. We owe the preservation of the valuable letters and artifacts to his descendants, the Schultheis and Kelley families. Letters now destined for the archives of the Max Kade Center were addressed by Arndt to his son Hartmuth. They show a private side of the writer. We learn that Arndt's son did not display scholarly interests or potential; when Hartmuth was sixteen years



Professor Walter Erhart in the Max Kade Center apartment

old, Arndt wrote: "Hartmuth . . . wird wohl kein Lesekerl werden."

Arndt wanted Hartmuth to become a farmer. To his father's dismay, Hartmuth intended to pursue this goal not in Germany but in the United States.

The letters reflect Arndt's state of mind during the years before, during, and after the 1848

revolution. At the age of seventy-eight, Arndt was elected to the National Assembly in Frankfurt. He was a member of the delegation that offered Friedrich Wilhelm IV the crown in the spring of 1849. In his letters he tells his son about his personal and public life. At the same time, the letters reflect his son's new beginnings in America and they bring to life events and connections.

Although I cannot say that I am an Ernst Moritz Arndt scholar, I come from a university named after him, and I have taken part in discussions about his controversial historical role. Because of Arndt's intense animosity toward the French, certain people believe that it is inappropriate to link our university to his name. Many wish to delete Arndt from the name of the university. I believe that it is good to have such debates, and I also believe that it would make sense to keep Arndt's name, to symbolize the history of our university and to reflect on his historical role. When Professor Keel informed me about the existence of the Arndt letters, I described this as "sensational news."

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann wrote: "A biography is a collection of coincidences." The discovery of the Arndt letters in Kansas and my presence here as a visiting professor from the Ernst Moritz Arndt University are unusual coincidences that no one could have predicted, but for which I am very grateful.



Grant and Ellen Kelley with Professors Erhart and Keel

