

Ignatz Hülswitt, the German “John R. Jewitt” at Nootka Sound?

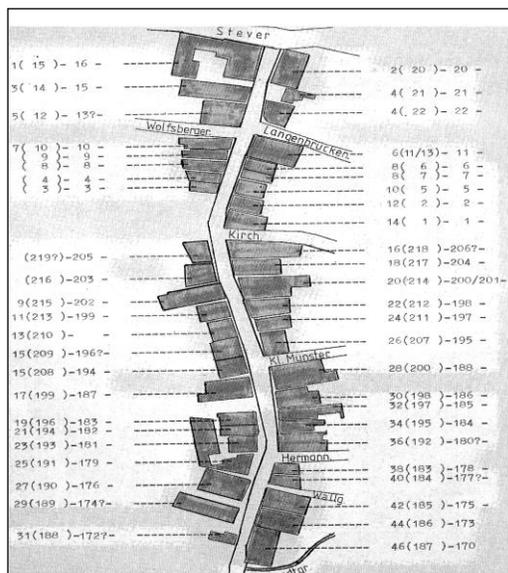
Some of the most well known libraries in the world contain a book that tells a gruesome story of suffering and endurance on the American Northwest coast. It is written by Ignatz Hülswitt in German and titled *Tagebuch einer Reise nach den vereinigten Staaten und der Nordwestküste von Amerika* [Journal of a voyage to the united states and the Northwest Coast of America]. It was published in Münster, the main town of provincial Westphalia/Germany in 1828.

The reason for holding this book is obvious. It contains a first hand account of a voyage to the Nootka Sound. There, after an alleged insult by the captain to the native chief of the local Indians, the ship was raided and all but two of the crew were killed. The survivors were eventually freed and returned home luckily.

Although a very similar story is known by John R. Jewitt, not many scholars seemed to have been interested in a closer examination of the book or the author, Ignatz Hülswitt himself. Information about him is scarce.

Ignatz Hülswitt was born 16 May 1793¹ in the small market town of Lüdinghausen, just about 20 miles south of Münster. Although not big in size Lüdinghausen had a history dating back for a thousand years. First mentioned in 800, it was the year Charlemagne was crowned emperor. 500 years later the town received the important *Stadtrechte* (town charter) in 1308.²

The Hülswitt family was very well connected, having provided first and deputy mayors of the town regularly since 1638.³ When Hülswitt was born at the end of the 18th century, the family lived at No. 16 Mühlenstraße.⁴



On this town map of 1827 the location of the Hülswitt house can be seen on the top left (No. 16, Mühlenstr.) by the small river Stever

His father Bernhard might have been a trader or manufacturer of pot ash, a powder that was extracted from burned wood and was used to manufacture soap. Ignatz had at least two brothers, Mauritz and Friedrich, and one sister, Anna.⁵ Both brothers married, Mauritz in October 1814, Friedrich in 1816.⁶ Ignatz often mentions his wife in his book but the exact date of their marriage is unknown. If he carried on the tradition of his elder brothers to get married at the age of 26 it could have been 1819, the year the couple decided to immigrate to America.

Ignatz joined the Prussian army as a volunteer together with his brothers Friedrich and Mauritz. The exact year is not known.⁷ Ignatz must have had a decent career. He was proud to

have fought as a Prussian officer against the French⁸ and adds to his name “former lieutenant of the artillery” on the title page of his book.

Not much else is known about his life apart from the eight years he spent in his own words in America.⁹ When he returned to Germany at some point in 1827 he set out to get his book published the year after.

Hülswitt died at the *Clemenshospital* in Münster at 12.30a.m. on 20 January 1832 at the age of 38. The cause of death was *Apoplexie* (stroke). He was buried at the *St. Ludgerie Friedhof* in Münster.¹⁰

The name Hülswitt still exists both in Lüdinghausen and Münster and is not uncommon in this northern part of Germany.¹¹

Hülswitt’s book can be subdivided into four sections:

- pages 1-39 emigration to America with his wife, arrival in New York and sole voyage to the Northwest coast.
- pages 40-167 capture at Nootka Sound, release and return to New York
- pages 168-317 travel to Tennessee and Louisiana, death of wife and return to Europe
- pages 318-379 general remarks about America, the people, the constitution, climate and produces.

In the foreword of his book Hülswitt remarks that he does not intend to attract interest in his work by flowery narrative or even fabrication¹². But a close examination especially of the pages 40-167 reveals, that Hülswitt’s alleged capture at Nootka Sound in 1822-1824 is almost a literal translation of John Jewitt’s narrative, which happened 1803-1805¹³. There are only a few exceptions, one is particularly striking. Jewitt tells us about the deep wound he received from a blow onto his head by one of the attacking Indians. The scar on his forehead was obvious to everybody as a reminder of his adventure.

Hülswitt had nothing to show, so consequently this detail was just skipped from his story. There were other issues, Hülswitt had to consider. For example he had to leave out Jewitt’s introduction which gives details about his family and his earlier years (Jewitt was born and brought up in England). To cover traces as much as possible Hülswitt never mentions the name of the ship *Boston* or the name of the Captain, *John Salter*, quite contrary to Jewitt. But Hülswitt gives us the name of the ship owner, although wrongly, as a Mr. Armory¹⁴. The real owners were in fact the Boston merchants F. & T. Amory.

Still Hülswitt had to make some effort to adapt the story to his own life. Jewitt’s ship *Boston* commenced the voyage from England. Hülswitt was in America, so his ship had to leave anchor from New York.

In order not to rewrite the whole story, for example to describe a different season from the original, Hülswitt had to time-synchronize both stories. Jewitt started the voyage on 3 Sep (1802) from England, Hülswitt on 3 Oct (1821) from New York to “meet up” again in perfect synchronization on Dec 25 to round Cape Horn. From then on Hülswitt more or less just had to translate from English into German.

One might forgive a bit of vanity and overlook the promotion Hülswitt gave himself compared to the original author. Jewitt joined the crew as a simple armourer, Hülswitt made himself supercargo apparently without being qualified for this job. The second survivor of the Indian attack, named *Karl* for the German reader (his real name was John Thompson), became “graduated” from a sail-maker to an armourer.

But still Hülswitt made further mistakes. In his story he repeats Jewitt's 1803 description of the chief of the Nootka Indians, Maquinna, as a gracious, educated man of very fine stature, when he, allegedly, first saw him in 1822. That must have been then only years before his death. Maquinna is last reported in 1825 by a Hudson's Bay Company trader. Already in 1817 Camille de Roquefeuil on the *Borderlais* described him as crippled with rheumatism and about sixty years old.¹⁵ Re-dating a story by almost 20 years, one still cannot cheat age.

Hülswitt's account finishes the same way as Jewitt's. He recollects the words of a Nootkan war song. But here Hülswitt eventually gets one over Jewitt. Although he repeats only half of the song, Hülswitt provides a translation into German.¹⁶

It just seems clear that Hülswitt got hold of Jewitt's publication at some point after his arrival in America in 1819. It is even possible that he met Jewitt in person. Although Jewitt's whereabouts for the last four years of his life are not certain, he was in New York in November 1817¹⁷ and possibly stayed there for a while. Hülswitt arrived in New York by July 1820.¹⁸

While Hülswitt "prepared" for his great adventure, Jewitt died on 7 January 1821 in Hartford, Connecticut.¹⁹

Because of the boldness, to say the least, Hülswitt displayed in publishing such a book, other parts of it must be questioned as well. There is no hard proof that Hülswitt was in America at all. The only hint we have is his mentioning of an American brig in 1819, he and his wife found waiting in Rotterdam for their voyage across the Atlantic to Kennebunk in Maine. The name of the captain according to Hülswitt was *Krediford*.²⁰ A contemporary Rotterdam newspaper gives for 1 November 1819 the name of a ship, *The Generaal Pike*, bound for Boston, Captain *J. Credefort*.²¹

So Hülswitt's book might have its antiquarian value, its contribution to the history of the Northwest coast of America is very limited indeed.

¹ Bistumsarchiv Münster, Kirchenbuch No. 4 (Lüdinghausen, Taufen 1736-1803). Hülswitt's first names were *Joan Gotfried Ignaz*. The sometimes found year of his birth 1790 is therefore wrong and might be a confusion with his brother Friedrich who was born in that year.

² The author is grateful to Mrs. Liane Schmitz, archivist of the town of Lüdinghausen, for her help in gathering local information.

³ **Schnieder, Stephan** (Pfarrer i. R.), *Festschrift zum Stadt-Jubiläum Lüdinghausen 1308-1958. Aus dem Leben einer kleinen Stadt*, Lüdinghausen, 1958, pp. 25, 27.

⁴ Evidently the family lived there 1788-1843. Bernhard (Ignatz' father) for example is mentioned for the year 1807 and Mauritz (his brother) with the profession of a pot ash fabricant for 1820, see: **VHS Lüdinghausen, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Westfälische Geschichte, Spaziergänge durch die Mühlenstraße**, Lüdinghausen 1989, p. 113.

⁵ Friedrich was born as *Fridericus Wilhelmus Josephus* on March 20, 1790 (parents *Bernadus* and *Francisca Sybilla Hülswitt*, god parents *Wilhelmus Hülswitt* and *Anna Elisabeth Hülswitt, née Brenner*). Sister *Anna Maria Elisabeth Theresia* was born on January 9, 1795, Bistumsarchiv Münster, Kirchenbuch No. 4 (Lüdinghausen, 1736-1803). The exact dates for *Mauritz* are unknown but the year of his birth was 1788 (see: footnote 7).

⁶ Bistumsarchiv Münster, Kirchenbuch No. 9 (Lüdinghausen, St. Felicitas: Heiraten 1810-1821).

⁷ Stadtarchiv Lüdinghausen, Akte: Landwehr Lüdinghausen und Kriegsreserve und Wehrmänner, Signatur 5-160 (Verzeichnis der Landwehropflichtigen der Stadt Lüdinghausen).

Nr. 14 of the list is Ignatz Hülswitt, living at [Mühlenstraße] No. 16, year of birth [correctly] 1793. No. 12 is his brother Mauritz, born in 1788 and No. 13 is his other brother Friedrich, born in 1790. No profession is given for any of them.

⁸ **Hülswitt, Tagebuch**, p. 19.

⁹ The local writer Edith Stienert-Baldenbach recently wrote a short essay which unfortunately is almost entirely based on Hülswitt's own published account, see: **Stienert-Baldenbach, Edith**, *Unter stolzen und schiefen Dächern: Vergangenes über Land und Leute*, Lüdinghausen, 1994, pp. 90-92.

A supposed article in connection with Hülswitt in the weekly supplement *Unterhaltungsblatt für Stadt und Leute* of the *Westfälische Nachrichten* of the year 1832 could not be traced. The most complete findings of this newspaper are located in the *Stadtarchiv Münster*. A personal survey by the author of the relevant microfilm revealed that unfortunately supplement Nos. 1, 8, 21, 27, 28, 31-42, 45, 48 and 50 for the year 1832 are missing which might have contained this article. It is not known whether the article was by or about Ignatz Hülswitt.

¹⁰ Bistumsarchiv Münster, Kirchenbuch No. 8 (Tote 1822-1832). His age is wrongly given as 37. This church book entry received public notification in the *Westfälische Merkur* No. 26 on Tuesday, June 31, 1832 under 'Todesnachrichten' (death notices). In addition here Hülswitt's profession was given more precisely as *Privatsecretair*.

¹¹ Although a newspaper article in the *Westfälische Nachrichten* on May 22, 1964 suggests that the last descendant of the oldest family in Lüdinghausen, Mr. Bernhard Hülswitt, had died at the age of 80. Another article in the *Westfälische Nachrichten* back in 1954 informs that the book printers Buschmann of Münster are related to the Hülswitts of Lüdinghausen.

¹² **Hülswitt, Tagebuch**, p. IV „Vorbericht“.

¹³ Jewitt's account has been published several times over the years starting back in 1807. This comparison is based on Hilary Stewart's well researched publication: **Jewitt, John R.**, *The Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt, Captive of Maquinna*, annotated and illustrated by Hilary Stewart, Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987. The first translation of Jewitt's book into German was published in Leipzig in 1928, one hundred years after Hülswitt's book.

¹⁴ **Hülswitt, Tagebuch**, p. 35.

¹⁵ **Jewitt, Adventures and Sufferings**, p. 183-184.

¹⁶ **Hülswitt, Tagebuch**, p. 167.

¹⁷ **Jewitt, Adventures and Sufferings**, p. 184.

¹⁸ **Hülswitt, Tagebuch**, p. 34.

¹⁹ **Jewitt, Adventures and Sufferings**, p. 184-185.

²⁰ **Hülswitt, Tagebuch**, p. 4, 7.

²¹ *Rotterdamse Courant*, 2 November 1819. The author wishes to thank the *Gemeentearchief Rotterdam* for this information.