



## **Gerstacker's Louisiana: Fiction and Travel Sketches from Antebellum Times through Reconstruction**

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# Gerstäcker's Louisiana: Fiction and Travel Sketches from Antebellum Times through Reconstruction

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A global traveler and adventurer, the German author Friedrich Gerstäcker (1816--1872) first arrived in Louisiana in March 1838, paddling the waterways leading from the wilds of the northwestern part of the state near Shreveport south to cosmopolitan New Orleans. He returned to the state in 1842, living for a year in the areas of Bayou Sara, St. Francisville, and Pointe Coupée -- then considered the most beautiful garden and plantation land along the Mississippi River. In 1867 he briefly visited Louisiana again, observing the devastation wrought by the Civil War and the turmoil of Reconstruction.

No mere armchair tourist, Gerstäcker fully engaged himself in exploring Louisiana -- its landscapes, peoples, and Peculiar Institution. He was in the unique position of being both an insider and an outsider, and his sojourns in the state served as the basis for travel books, short stories, and novels. Gerstäcker was a remarkable raconteur and a highly popular author. During his lifetime and beyond, his writings conveyed the tenor of southern life to a German-speaking audience. Now, compiled and translated into English by Irene S. Di Maio, they offer a window on nineteenth-century Louisiana across several decades of growth and upheaval.

Gerstäcker's aim as a writer was to inform and entertain, especially through humor, drama, and suspense. His works -- including his fiction -- sustain an almost ethnographic level of detail. The stories, travel sketches, and novel excerpts included here comment on slavery and its aftermath, ethnic and racial diversity, transcultural relations, and immigration and multilingualism. Gerstäcker's impressions of Louisiana remain relevant and deeply engaging

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