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LINCOLN COUNTY POSTSCRIPT:
NOTES ON ROBERT A. WIDENMANN
BY HIS DAUGHTER, ELSIE WIDENMAN

with comments by

BRUCE T. ELLIS

RUNNING through most of the published accounts of New Mexico's bloody "Lincoln County War" are implications of extra-territorial intrigue—pointers to the beginnings of vague trails leading beyond the borders of Lincoln County to possible command posts in Santa Fe and even Washington. The trails are difficult to follow; material for their mapping is for the most part little more than partisan assertion, secondary inference, and unverified rumor. Unacceptable as hard evidence, its chary treatment by historians has brought the often repeated charge that the full story of the war has never been told.

Another, although minor, obstacle to an agreed-upon final assessment of the war has been uncertainty about the roles of some of its known participants. One such debatable figure is Robert Adolph Widenmann, whose record as the supporter of the murdered John Henry Tunstall has assured him his small measure of fame. But it is a fame not unclouded by doubt.

Historians have not known precisely what to say about Widenmann, although they quote his many letters, reports, and court depositions at length. The strange mixture of fact and histrionic fancy in these writings, as well as shadowy areas in some of his actions both before and after Tunstall's death, make him less easy to classify than most of his contemporaries. Robert N. Mullin calls him "one of the most illusive and controversial figures in the Lin-

coln County War," and Frederick W. Nolan states that "his actions and accounts are so contradictory that it is difficult to assess exactly what his contribution to events was."¹

Tunstall himself seems to have liked and trusted Widenmann fully, his published letters giving little support to Fulton's statement that he may have had reservations about his friend's judgment.² Widenmann's place in the estimation of Alexander McSween, Tunstall's business associate and fellow victim in the war, is ambiguous. On one occasion he criticized Widenmann's "laziness, youthful pomposity, lack of discretion . . . and poking his nose where it does not belong," and on another recommended him as a "competent and responsible man who would discharge his duty without fear or favor."³

Charges that Widenmann was in bad repute in Santa Fe during the six months or more that he spent there before he joined Tunstall in Lincoln have yet to be proved. Scurrilous articles about him in the *Weekly New Mexican* of March 23 and 30 and July 27, 1878, seem to be the sole basis for this charge—but the paper, at that time the loyal organ of the Santa Fe Ring (which it insisted did not exist), would have had nothing but abuse for anyone alleging the Ring's machinations in Lincoln County, as Widenmann persistently and vociferously did.

In September 1962 Widenmann's daughter, Miss Elsie Widenman of Stony Point, New York, visited Dr. and Mrs. Adin P. Brooks in Santa Fe. During her visit she gave to the Museum of New Mexico a leather briefcase that had belonged to John Henry Tunstall. It had been in her father's possession for more than half a century. Also during her visit, at Dr. Brooks' request, she dictated and signed a brief statement of what she knew or had been told about those aspects of her father's life that were related to his Lincoln County experiences. Although she placed no restrictions upon the use of this statement, its preparation for publication, with reference-supported commentary, has been delayed until the present time. Miss Widenman, aged eighty-nine, is still living in Stony Point. Her brother, mentioned in her statement, is now dead.

My father was Robert A. Widenman, who was associated with John H. Tunstall for several years before the latter was killed at the start of the events which became known as the "Lincoln County War."

Widenmann knew Tunstall only about fourteen and a half months, including two and a half months in Santa Fe and about a year in Lincoln. Although several variations of his name appear in the records, of which Keleher says that "Widenmann" is correct,⁴ his daughter gives her father's and brother's names and signs her own with a single terminal *n*. In 1962 she told Mrs. Brooks that the family changed the spelling of its name during World War I, in an attempt to counteract community anti-German hostility. Her father's predilection for secrecy and the use of firearms (see later) may have added to the neighbors' suspicions.

I was born at Nanuet, Rockland County, New York . . . on November 20, 1885. There were two older children who died in infancy. I have one younger brother, born in 1890, A. Robert Widenman . . . who left home when he was about 15 for schooling and then because of his work and later marriage. . . . My mother died in 1905, and my father and I lived together until his death at Haverstraw, New York, April 17, 1930. . . . We lived most of this time at Haverstraw.

While my father never talked to me very much about the events in New Mexico, I did become aware, in a general way, of the main incidents and of the persons with whom my father had dealings during the period he spent in that state. But I have very little knowledge from him of exact details which would throw much light on the course of those events. I learned from my grandmother (my father's mother), who lived in Michigan, a little about the early times before I was born. My father had been sent to Germany for his education by his father, who had come from that country. I believe, but do not remember for sure, that my father first met young John Tunstall in England or Europe, at that time.

As recorded by Tunstall, the two young men first met in Herlow's Hotel, in Santa Fe, in August 1876.⁵ In the two and a half months before Tunstall left Santa Fe for Lincoln on November 5, 1876, they seem to have become good friends. Widenmann apparently stayed in Santa Fe for another three months or so and then went to Lincoln; Mullen says that this was in mid-February 1877.⁶ According to Fulton, McSween informed Tunstall's father in a letter dated February 23, 1878, that "[your son] met Mr. Widenmann in Santa Fe and took a strong liking to him. Mr. Widenmann being 'hard up' as they say here, John invited him down to share his hospitality until something turned up. Mr. Widenmann accepted the invitation."⁷ On March 23, 1877, Tunstall wrote his father from Lincoln merely that "my friend Widenmann has come down to this country. I was very pleased to see him."⁸

When my father returned to Michigan [from Germany] he was restless and not content to settle down there and enter business with his father, who was then in the lumber business and operated a saw mill and lumber yard. Finally my grandfather bought a paper mill in or near Atlanta, Georgia, and turned it over to my father to start him on a life career. But that did not last long and word came that he had sold the paper mill and left Georgia.

Nolan mentions two different records of Widenmann's birthplace and date, one having it Ann Arbor, Michigan, on June 25, 1852, and the other, his death certificate, as Georgia (place unspecified) on January 25, 1852.⁹ Mullin says that he was born in Ann Arbor on January 24, 1852, and adds that "when away from home for some strange reason of his own he attempted to conceal his family connections and sometimes claimed Atlanta as his home."¹⁰ That he so informed Tunstall is shown by the latter's letter of August 17, 1876, in which he told his father that Widenmann was a "Southern American" and in another of April 20, 1877, that Widenmann's parents "are German and live in Georgia." Tunstall also says in this letter:

[Widenmann] has a very varied experience he has been engaged in a banking business, a chemical factory, he held a very nice position in the Bremen Steamship Co., of New York and has run a ranch in Colorado for a year and a half, he is a very smart fellow and as nice a dispositioned man as any man I ever met, he stands six feet and is very broad, he weighs 175 pounds and he is 25 years old. Should anything happen to me you will find that he can put you up to all the points necessary to pick up all my business so as not to lose anything; you would all like him immensely.¹¹

It is possible that this letter more accurately reflects its writer's youthful credulity than Widenmann's actual expertise in the world of business. If Miss Widenman's account of places and time periods is correct, it would appear that Widenmann adjusted his background somewhat, to impress Tunstall. Notably missing in his *vita* is the Georgia paper mill fiasco. Also, his word to Tunstall that his parents were living in Georgia differs from Miss Widenman's placing of the family in Michigan when and after young Widenmann returned from Europe—and when he sold the paper mill, evidently without parental consultation.

The paper mill episode is not mentioned elsewhere. According to Keleher, Mullin obtained information that after his return from Germany Widenmann "lived for some time in New York City, then drifted West, finally arriving in Lincoln in mid-February, 1877."¹²

Tunstall's high evaluation of Widenmann's business acumen led to his giving Widenmann his power of attorney, which the latter used after Tunstall's death in an abortive effort to settle the young Englishman's estate. Both Nolan and Fulton note that his handling of the matter was disastrous;¹³ the family in England recovered nothing.

Some time later the family learned that he was in New Mexico and associated with John Tunstall on a ranch in Lincoln County. It was thought, but again I do not know for sure, that father had invested part of the proceeds of the Georgia mill in the projects (store and ranch) in which Tunstall was involved.

There is no evidence that Widenmann made such an investment—or in fact had any money to invest. Tunstall wrote that when he first met him, Widenmann was “dressed in a very shoddy suit of clothes, a flannel shirt and no collar, wretched boots and no sox”¹⁴—which, while suggestive of poverty, is not conclusive; in New Mexico at that time a mere lack of collar and socks was not a gauge of a man’s financial standing. How he had funded his six-month stay in Santa Fe is unknown; as previously noted, McSween told Tunstall’s father that Widenmann had been “hard up.” The derogatory *New Mexican* article of July 27, 1878, charged that “he ‘done’ many persons in this place by mythical remittances from Europe, which of course, never arrived.” However, also as previously noted, the two young men were together in Santa Fe for two and a half months, during which period Tunstall met and talked at length with several prominent citizens including his host, the proprietor of Herlow’s Hotel, where Widenmann also stayed. It could be expected that Herlow especially would have warned Tunstall if Widenmann’s reputation in Santa Fe was as bad as the newspaper later asserted. For the full time of Widenmann’s stay in the city, no mention of him or his alleged misdeeds appeared in the *New Mexican*. Strangely, the paper also failed to mention Tunstall’s presence, despite the freedom with which he made it known that he had money to invest.

Widenmann’s appointment as deputy United States Marshal for Lincoln County in early 1878, by United States Marshal John J. Sherman, Jr., was not necessarily a testimonial to his good behavior. No knight in shining armor himself, Sherman later deputized Lincoln County Sheriff William Brady—whose sheriff’s posse had murdered Tunstall on February 18, 1878. Brady was assassinated on April 1, and then Sherman, after lamenting that for some time after Brady’s death he had been unable to “find a reliable deputy . . . who will risk his life,”¹⁵ appointed George W. Peppin, probably after the latter had been made Lincoln County Sheriff by Governor Axtell on May 28. It was Peppin’s sheriff’s posse, supported by Colonel Dudley’s troops from Fort Stanton, which on

July 19 burned McSween's house, killed McSween and three of his adherents, and looted the Tunstall store.

There is only scanty published mention of Widenmann's short term as deputy. Regarding one episode, Fulton says that "Widenmann, who had secured an appointment as a deputy United States marshal, was on the lookout for the Jesse Evans gang."¹⁶ This would have to have been before February 12, 1878, when, warrants in hand, he encountered the gang, and the statement implies that Widenmann had sought the post on his own initiative. According to Keleher, he was appointed "through his father's acquaintance with German-born Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior."¹⁷ This need not mean that Schurz dictated the appointment. Widenmann may simply have applied for the post from Lincoln when the Evans gang was beginning its rustling of Tunstall's stock, and have offered Schurz' name as a credential. Although unsuccessful in serving his warrants on the rustlers, Widenmann nevertheless seems to have conducted his duties with such zeal that he made himself a nuisance to the Murphy-Dolan-Riley interests, who apparently complained to Santa Fe. The *Weekly New Mexican* of March 23, 1878, noted that:

This man Widenmann was appointed a deputy United States marshal by Marshal Sherman to take a company of United States troops from Fort Stanton and arrest the worst of the band, dead or alive; unfortunately he failed to do so, and the life of Tunstall . . . has been lost. . . . He has forfeited the confidence of Marshal Sherman and all good men here, and has been removed from office.

Widenmann's removal, capitalized by Governor Axtell in his biased "Proclamation to the Citizens of Lincoln County" of March 9, 1878, was temporary. The *Cimarron News and Press* of April 4, 1878, as quoted by Fulton, reported that "Mr. Sherman, learning the facts, reappointed Widenmann."¹⁸ The reappointment must have been made after March 9 and have been of short duration, for as noted above, when he died on April 1, 1878, William Brady was both sheriff and deputy United States Marshal.

My grandfather learned from newspaper accounts of trouble in Lincoln County, and later was informed (I am not sure how) that father had been killed. Some months later, one stormy night, my father walked into my grandmother's home in Whitmore Lake, Michigan. He was dripping wet and had nothing with him except one small parcel, and apparently no money. At that time he told her that he had a few personal belongings belonging to Tunstall and that he wanted to take them to the Tunstall family in England; that he wanted to give the family a personal report of how John had lost his life in New Mexico, as he had been near by at the time he was killed and could give such details as would be of interest to the family. My grandfather was then dead and had been swindled out of his lumber business shortly before his death, so my grandmother had very little and could not finance a trip to England for my father. He worked for some time, probably in or near New York, and when he had accumulated enough, he went to England to report to the Tunstall family and turn over to them the few personal articles he had brought from New Mexico which had belonged to John. I do not know why the leather case (which my father called a saddle bag) was not taken to England along with the other few articles.

Widenmann must have obtained money for his fare to London without having to work "some time" to accumulate enough. Including his stopover in Michigan, his journey from New Mexico to London was accomplished in three months or less.

What "personal articles" of Tunstall's he may have had is conjectural. Nolan states that the J. H. Tunstall letters, diaries, and photographs used in his book had been saved by Mrs. McSween from the looting of the Tunstall store in Lincoln.¹⁹ Although there is no record that she turned these over to Widenmann for transmittal to London, she may have done so; she was in Las Vegas, New Mexico, on October 18, 1878, and on that date wrote to Tunstall's father that Widenmann had left Las Vegas for "Washington City and your place some days ago."²⁰ It is not certain, however, that she met Widenmann in Las Vegas. (It also is not certain that

Widenmann stopped off in Washington, D.C., on his way from Michigan to London. If he did, he may thus have been able to acquire his steamship fare, from Schurz.)

When the McSween tragedy occurred Widenmann was in Mesilla and evidently did not return to Lincoln before leaving New Mexico, via Las Vegas, forever. From Mesilla he wrote to Tunstall's father that "your dear son's effects and trinkets, which I had gathered together to bring to you, have been stolen, as also everything I had, even to my clothes."²¹ He thus may have taken Tunstall's briefcase with him to Mesilla, and possibly also Tunstall's Colt revolver, which later was in the possession of the family in London.

My father was not well received by the Tunstall family. I was told by my grandmother that they blamed my father for having persuaded John to leave England and go off to the wilds of New Mexico, and said that if it had not been for my father their son would have been safe at home in England, and alive.

The family in Michigan, long after the event, may have settled upon this satisfactorily simple explanation of a matter which they never understood, and about which their son was uncommunicative. What basis there may be for Keleher's statement that "Widenmann failed in efforts to get John Partridge Tunstall in London to advance him money for promotional schemes"²² is unknown. He seems, at first at least, to have been "well received," as is shown by the elder Tunstall's letter of January 10, 1879, to the Marquis of Salisbury, announcing Widenmann's arrival and his readiness to testify before the British Foreign Office.²³ Nolan states his inability to substantiate charges that "Widenmann was eventually kicked out by the J. P. Tunstall family."²⁴

My father returned to New York, and not long after was married and then the children began to come along. They lived for a while in Brooklyn, and then moved to Nanuet in the suburbs because of the ill health of one of the older children, who later died.

This conflicts with Keleher's statement that after Widenmann's marriage in Philadelphia in 1881, he "thereafter lived in Ann Arbor, where he was associated for a short time with his father in the hardware and general merchandise business."²⁵ According to Miss Widenman, as has been noted, the elder Widenmann had died before his son visited the Michigan home in 1878 on his way to London. Mullin, too, says that "following his visit with the Tunstalls in England he again returned to Ann Arbor."²⁶ If he did, and if Miss Widenman's account is to be credited, his stay in Michigan must have been short.

By the time I was old enough to have an interest in such things, the events of Lincoln County were less important to my father than current happenings related to his various jobs and enterprises. He often changed his work, doing one thing and then another. At one time, I believe, he was associated in some enterprise with or for Mr. Carl Schurz, who had been Secretary of the Interior at the time of the Lincoln County War, and who had been a close friend of my grandfather. By the time I was old enough to want to know about these things, my father would not talk about them. I was never quite sure why. But while he talked very little, I do know that they continued to influence his life and that he was continuously and constantly aware of the shadow they cast. He had had high respect for John Tunstall and I suspect had probably been closer to him than he had to almost any other person. John's death was felt and regretted by my father as long as he lived, and he often referred to him in glowing terms. He also spoke favorably of Dick Brewer, another of those associated with Tunstall, and who was later killed. He always respected Carl Schurz, but was very bitter about S. B. Elkins, who was in some way connected with the deals for selling stolen or poor quality beef to the Indian Agency.

Miss Widenman's recollection of her father's bitterness towards Stephen B. Elkins is of interest. Elkins' name appears but seldom in surviving Lincoln County War records, most often in allegations made by Montague R. Levenson, self-appointed champion of the

Tunstall cause and violent critic of the Santa Fe Ring. Although most of these are charges of pressure exerted by Elkins, in Washington, against the Tunstall-McSween operation and an investigation of Tunstall's murder, in one instance (reported at secondhand) Levenson links Elkins with a Mescalero Agency beef contract.²⁷

Much more prominent in the records, including Widenmann's own angry letters from New Mexico, is the name of Thomas B. Catron, Elkins' long-time associate. Catron's exact part in Lincoln County affairs is still a matter of dispute; most of his early files were destroyed when his Santa Fe law office burned in 1888. Westphall, using records that escaped or postdated the fire, tends to be exculpatory in his assessment of Catron's involvement.²⁸ On the other side, there is no lack of accusation that his involvement was major, but data on the matter are inferential rather than precise. Keleher writes that although "no man was better acquainted than Tom Catron with the details of the so-called Lincoln County War . . . [he] preferred not to reminisce."²⁹

He also preferred, evidently, that no others reminisce. In 1892, according to Westphall, he asked Elkins, then Secretary of War, to have the United States Attorney General in Washington keep under cover a report made during the Lincoln County troubles which might reflect adversely upon his actions at that time. Elkins assured him that this would be done. In the following year, Catron asked Elkins to find the report and destroy it.³⁰

Widenmann apparently believed that for reasons of his own Elkins, too, wanted the Washington files sanitized. Nolan states that in a letter to his sister in 1927, Widenmann confided that he once considered writing a full account of the war, and had discussed the project with Carl Schurz. But

Schurz told me that most of the records appertaining to the case in the War Department as well as those of the Dept. of Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs had been removed by the Secretary of War in the term of President Garfield, [Stephen] Elkins. . . . I must add to the above that until the Cleveland administration came in Schurz and I were under a close system of espionage [as] we well knew, and had we made any move, we would have undoubtedly been put out of the way.³¹

In this letter, Widenmann was in error on at least one point: Elkins was not in Garfield's cabinet, but had been made Secretary of War by Harrison in 1891 as a reward for securing the latter's nomination for the 1889-1893 presidential term and successfully managing his campaign. Although he had left New Mexico in 1877 to become a wealthy and politically powerful figure in Washington, he continued his important western land grant, mining, and banking interests, in some of which he and Catron were closely connected. In 1879, Levenson accused him of still being "the brains of the 'Santa Fe Ring'."³² He died in 1911. An editor's note appended to Nolan's quotation of Widenmann's 1927 letter, quoted above, states that "recent investigation by Victor Westphall indicates that many of Elkins' papers were destroyed by his family."

Carl Schurz, as President Hayes' reform-minded Secretary of the Interior, was detested by members of the Santa Fe Ring of the war period. It was on the basis of reports sent to him and others sent direct to Hayes by McSween, Widenmann, Levenson, Indian Agent Godfroy, Special Investigator Angel and, on other New Mexico matters, Frank Springer, that Ring-connected Governor Axtell was ousted. Godfroy quit his post under pressure, and after Axtell's successor, Governor Lew Wallace, took office and sent in additional reports, District Attorney Rynerson was not reappointed. Shortly after Axtell's replacement by Wallace, United States Attorney Catron resigned.

After leaving Washington in 1881, Schurz moved to New York City and continued his ardent championship of civil service reform. He supported Cleveland and opposed Blaine (whom Elkins had helped nominate) in 1884, and continued his support of Cleveland in opposition to Harrison (Elkins' nominee) in the presidential campaigns of 1888 and 1892. Thus Schurz' actions after he left office would not have lessened the antipathy to him by Elkins (and Catron) because of his earlier role in the Lincoln County War. Schurz died in 1906.

I do know and well remember that for many years my father lived in fear of his life. He said he knew too much about things

and about who was to blame for this and that, and that the surviving members of the Dolan-Murphy gang were still after him as they sought to protect the reputations of persons who later had become very influential. I remember quite well that for many years my father was always armed. He carried a six-shooter and used to practise the quick draw and shooting at a target in the shape of a man. In fact, he also taught me and my brother to handle guns and to shoot accurately. My father would never sit at night near a lighted window or allow his silhouette to be seen at a window or door when it was dark outside. It was not until after Elkins died (about 1913) [1911] that he said he no longer felt fear of retaliation and stopped carrying his gun at all times. I never knew just why he feared "them." All he said was that he knew too much and that "they" wanted to shut him up for good. Part of his reticence about talking of those early events, I had always felt, was due to his feeling that his survival hinged on his keeping still. I do know that he often saw or corresponded with Carl Schurz about those matters. At one time, we, at home, tried to get him to write out all these things, and he did make a start, but later abandoned the effort, possibly after conferring again with Schurz.

The simplest explanation for Widenmann's thirty-three-year obsession with skulking pursuers and the "quick draw" would be that it was a case of sheer dramatization—a compulsion to inject some remembered Lincoln County excitement into what would otherwise have been a rather dull life in Haverstraw, New York. Other reasons for his reported phobia which might be suggested seem less plausible.

According to the record, he had occasionally been in real danger in New Mexico and had been badly frightened. Keleher surmises that "he was not a fighting man in any sense of the word," and that at the time of Tunstall's assassination he was "pretty much of a 'scared kid'."³³ Later, during his three and a half months in hiding, John Middleton's advice to him not to return from Mesilla to Lincoln because "I don't want you to go like poor Tunstall and Mc[Sween] has gone"³⁴ could have done nothing to ease his mind.

No matter how vivid it may have been at the time, however, this fright should not have kept him trembling for more than thirty years.

Alternatively, if it was the danger of a lethal follow-up by "them" because he "knew too much" that worried him, one wonders what knowledge he could have carried with him from New Mexico, beyond what he and others already had proclaimed, that would have made him a marked man until 1911, when Elkins died. Tunstall and McSween had openly charged the Santa Fe Ring with criminal action in Lincoln County. But they had been murdered not to "shut them up for good" because of what they knew about the Ring, but basically (with some irrational trigger-fever factors involved) to remove them from the scene as a matter of business expediency. Widenmann, as a minor factotum in the Tunstall-McSween enterprise, was no real commercial threat to the Murphy-Dolan-Riley interests, however annoying he may have been.

Far from being "after him," the "surviving members of the Murphy-Dolan gang" evidently took no interest in him after he left New Mexico. Murphy died at about the time he left. Dolan, finished as a trader but still enjoying Ring approval and support, died twenty years later, his passing noted in a long, eulogistic obituary in the *Daily New Mexican* of March 2, 1898. Riley, emerging from the war in better shape than Dolan, survived as a successful Colorado stockman until 1916, his frequent visits to New Mexico receiving laudatory notices in the *New Mexican*.

Miss Widenman's statement that her father once started to "write out all these things" but never completed the attempt leaves the matter of his memoirs a bit hazy. Nolan mentions and quotes from but does not locate "an account written in later years by Robert Widenmann of the troubles which developed between the two factions."³⁵

My father had a small trunk in which he kept personal articles and some clothing. This he always kept locked and I never saw the contents until some time after his death in 1930. It happened

that some years before he died I moved to a new house and my father went with me. This house was small and we had stored some furniture and several old trunks in the barn of the house we had vacated, with the permission of the new occupants. Father's old trunk was one of those stored there. After his death I went to sort out the furniture I wished to keep and found that trunk. I was surprised to find the lock was broken, so I could open it easily, as I had before known that father kept it locked. I found in it two items which are of interest now. One was a piece of brown wrapping paper all folded and with a string which had been used to tie it up. It was labeled in my father's handwriting: "My New Mexico papers, to be destroyed at my death." But the wrapper was empty and no papers or documents found in the trunk. I do not know whether my father had at some time gone to the barn and broken open the trunk and removed the papers, or if someone else had stolen them. But why remove the papers and leave the wrapper and string? The other item of interest was the old leather bag, a sort of travelling secretary or dispatch case, with a brass plate labeled: "John H. Tunstall, 1869." I have kept this bag carefully ever since, and know that it was something that my father had had for many years and was probably among the few things he had brought from New Mexico, although I cannot swear to that as that was before I was born. I have talked with my brother about what to do with it, and we both agree that it ought to be in some museum concerned with New Mexico history. I therefore brought it with me from New York on my current visit in the West, and am offering it to the New Mexico Museum at Santa Fe. . . . There is nothing else of my father's which I have which I am reasonably sure he used in those early days. He did carry guns and had a saddle and used a horse when I was young, but I think those were items he had acquired in New York after the New Mexico events. My grandmother had told me that when my father showed up on his return from New Mexico he had only one small hand parcel containing mainly things which had belonged to Mr. Tunstall, and I believe that this leather bag was part of that parcel, although I do

not now remember that my grandmother had specifically mentioned it, nor do I recall that my father ever actually told me how he happened to have it.

(signed) *Elsie Widenman*

As Miss Widenman states, her narrative adds little to what has already been published about events in Lincoln County while her father was there. It does supply details on her father's life both before and after his New Mexico sojourn which either differ from or are missing in previously published accounts.

These details hardly change—in fact may serve to underscore—the doubtful characterization given Widenmann by recent writers. That for most of his seventy-eight years he held a private view of life that prevented his ever becoming a pillar of society seems evident in his early restlessness and unwillingness to “settle down” in Michigan, his reportedly poor showing in Georgia (the facts of which are unknown, however), and later his frequent changes of work, “doing one thing and then another.” He had been uncommunicative or evasive with his family in Michigan, and probably misleading with Tunstall. The one solid plateau in his career seems to have been the year in Lincoln when his fortunes, joined to Tunstall's, looked promising. Although his loyalty to Tunstall both before and after the latter's death appears to have been sincere (the two young men had many things in common, including a tendency towards hyperbole), how much that was influenced by a sense of opportunism is a question.

He obviously valued his relationship with Carl Schurz. Mullin says that Widenmann's letters to Schurz from Lincoln County “carried considerable weight” because of Schurz' friendship with Widenmann's father.³⁶ There probably was more to it than that. Schurz, in Washington, badly needed all the information he could obtain from New Mexico, and Widenmann, despite his nervousness, was a good observer and an effective writer, with a gift for succinct statement when not discussing his own real or supposed perils. Some of the most telling passages in his letters, reports, and

newspaper articles are not self-serving, but reveal a capacity for clear perception of, and moral outrage at, iniquities directed more at others than at him.

Widenmann's postwar contacts and correspondence with Schurz, mentioned by his daughter, do not appear to have left any mark on history. It is likely that on Schurz' part the continued contact was a matter of tolerant understanding, and on Widenmann's an unwillingness, or inability, to admit that what had so concerned him and Schurz in far-off New Mexico and given him importance in his own and others' eyes had died with the last gunshot of the Lincoln County War.

Tunstall may have well summed him up when he wrote of him: "Widenmann's leading traits are obstinacy and contrariness; he will hold a point longer and fight harder to keep it than any man of his age I ever met."³⁷

NOTES

1. Maurice Garland Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, ed. by Robert N. Mullin (Tucson, 1968), p. 61 n. 10; Frederick W. Nolan, *The Life and Death of John Henry Tunstall* (Albuquerque, 1965), p. 238 n. 22.

2. Fulton, p. 111.

3. William A. Keleher, *Violence in Lincoln County, 1869-1881* (Albuquerque, 1957), pp. 260, 67-68.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 106 n. 6.

5. Nolan, pp. 161-62, 182 n. 3.

6. Robert N. Mullin, "Chronology—Lincoln County War Matters," NMHR, vol. 32 (1957), p. 73.

7. Fulton, p. 132.

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9. *Ibid.*, p. 182 n. 3.

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11. Nolan, p. 210.

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14. Nolan, p. 261.
15. Keleher, p. 185.
16. Fulton, p. 92.
17. Keleher, p. 106 n. 6.
18. Fulton, p. 155.
19. Nolan, p. 336 n. 7.
20. Fulton, p. 304.
21. Nolan, p. 387.
22. Keleher, p. 107 n. 6.
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25. Keleher, p. 107 n. 6.
26. Fulton, p. 61 n. 10.
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28. Victor Westphall, *Thomas Benton Catron and His Era* (Tucson, 1973), pp. 75-96, 122-34.
29. Keleher, p. 57 n. 7.
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31. Nolan, pp. 369-70 n. 6.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 342.
33. Keleher, p. 260.
34. Nolan, p. 386.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 328.
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