In the past year, the GEI has made a purchase on the US historic and rare books market which on closer inspection proved to have a fascinating story to tell. The book, a school geography atlas, was published in 1848 by the music and map publisher Holle in Wolfenbüttel, near Braunschweig, and bears the title *Complete School Atlas of the Newest Geography*. It contains handwritten annotations which revealed some highly interesting facts about its erstwhile owner and some events and periods in his life: One of the personal additions to the book was the name of Robert Benecke, born in 1835 in Stiege in the German Oberharz region, who attended school in Blankenburg. In the mid-nineteenth century, both of these places, as was Wolfenbüttel, were part of the then Duchy of Braunschweig.

Robert Benecke first encountered the emerging technique and discipline of photography as a young man; from 1855 onward, he worked in a photographic studio in the town of Nordhausen. His pro-democratic views compelled him, along with many others at that time, to emigrate across the Atlantic, where he settled in St. Louis. Alongside portrait photography, his work revolved around taking images of railways, bridges, buildings and steamboats, which were regarded in contemporary eyes as the epitome of progress. Benecke was one of the first photographers to present impressions from the US Midwest to the general public. Until his death in 1903, he additionally worked as an editor on the photography magazine *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer*. His photographic works are part of collections held by the New York Public Library, the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Southern Methodist University.

This school atlas, now in the hands of the GEI, represents a rarity due not only to its former owner, but also to its value to the Library’s collection; the copy now owned by the GEI is currently considered to be the only existing and available edition of the atlas. Its “homecoming” to Braunschweig after 150 years is a particularly felicitous aspect of this purchase, which was made possible thanks to financial support from the Friedrich E.W. Walz Foundation, to which we extend our warmest thanks.

In order to allow a wider public to gain insights into the historical development of school atlases, the GEI is currently digitising these valuable and rare works. This work is being conducted with funding from the German Research Foundation (DFG).

**LINKS**
- GEI-DIGITAL http://gei-digital.gei.de

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**HOMECOMING: HISTORIC SCHOOL ATLAS BELONGING TO GERMAN-AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY PIONEER ROBERT BENECKE RETURNS TO BRAUNSCHWEIG**

*Sebastian Klaes*