

# THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF MARYLAND

Founded 1783 Incorporated by Act of the General Assembly of Maryland, Chapter 100 Feb 3, 1818

## VEREINSNACHRICHTEN

FEBRUARY 2016 ISSUE #99

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\* = past president

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Liebe Mitglieder-Dear Members,

It seems just like yesterday when I wrote my president's message back in January 2015. As we enter the new year, I would like to report that The German Society of Maryland is continuing its goal to preserve and promote the German heritage, language, traditions and history through many programs.

**Facebook:** Our new Facebook guru Ms. Nora Malatinszky is continuously adding information and promoting our society through this social media venue. I encourage all of you to go to our page and "Like" us. Just enter the German Society of Maryland in the search area!

**School Visits:** This ongoing program is something we would like to expand and we are looking for additional schools that participate. If you are a teacher and would like to have myself or another director of our society visit your class, please email me at agsmoot@verizon.net and we will be happy to make the time and come see you and your students.

These are just a few ideas on how we are looking into the future to promote our great society and I am always looking for your input. I strongly encourage all of you to visit the [www.md-germans.org](http://www.md-germans.org) website to get up to date details on all the happenings in the German Community.

Best wishes and a speedy recovery to all of our sick and shut in members.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,  
Anton G. Smoot

### 2016 HOLDS PROMISE FOR THE GERMAN SOCIETY

This will be a banner year for our Society, with many landmark events in the planning. After two years of frustration, we will dedicate the bust of General John Stricker, the hero of the Battle of North Point and a vice president of our Society (see page 3). We will be joining the Maryland Historical Society in the commemoration of the visit of the U-Deutschland to Baltimore in 1916.

The Maryland Historical Society expects to convert one of its halls to replicate the interior of the submarine and to tell the story of the courageous captain Paul Koenig's voyage in the world's first merchant submarine, which eluded the British blockade to deliver much needed pharmaceuticals and dyestuffs to America. Our plans include special publicity for the role of General Johann deKalb, the Bavarian born commander of the Maryland-Delaware Line in the Revolutionary War. Though the deKalb name is nationally known, since there are many counties which bear the name, but few Americans know anything about his heroism in battle. Our Society will be cooperating with many other German American organizations to carry out our mission: to promote the German American culture and heritage and promote the study of the language and literature. We also have a serious obligation to inform our fellow Marylanders of our traditions during October, the month our legislature has set aside as German American Heritage Month in Maryland.

Our directors hope to stir in our members an enthusiasm to join in the many activities. Please volunteer when the call goes out for help. Only with the actions of our members can we achieve the Society's mission, goals and our reason for being.

**KALENDER**

April 8	6:00 pm
May 22	3:00 pm
June 26	Noon to 5 pm
July 23&24	

Visit the German Society's website:  
[www.germansociety-md.com](http://www.germansociety-md.com)

For more local German-American events, check the web site of the Deutschamerikanischer Bürgerverein von Maryland: [www.md-germans.org](http://www.md-germans.org)

You are invited to add articles about your German ancestors to the website conducted by our director Shelley Arnold; [germanmarylanders.org](http://germanmarylanders.org)

Listen to German music and announcements of local German American activities on internet radio at [germanamericanradio.com](http://germanamericanradio.com)

You are invited to visit and participate in the interactive website "Der Wecker", founded by our member, Walt Mathers. Google search these 3 words: German American Forum

**SHELLEY ARNOLD, HISTORIAN**

Our director, Shelley Arnold, a historical scholar who is an expert in Maryland's German American heritage, wrote an article published this month in the national magazine "German Life". The 4-page article with excellent photographic illustrations, tells the story of German immigration to early Maryland and the many contributions made by German immigrants to our state. The article alone is worth the price of a subscription for Marylanders of German ancestry. Shelley conducts a website, [germanmarylanders.org](http://germanmarylanders.org) in which she tells the stories of German Americans with roots in Maryland. Members of our Society are entitled to a reduced subscription price for German Life Magazine during the annual subscription drive, by sending your check to the Deutschamerikanischer Bürgerverein. Details will be published in this newsletter in time for the drive.

**JULY 9, 1916: U-DEUTSCHLAND**

100 years ago this coming July the German submarine came to Baltimore. Plans are being made to commemorate the event with ceremonies aboard the nuclear ship, Savannah, now docked within view of the site where the submarine was birthed 100 years ago. Our Society plans to support the events sponsored by the Baltimore and Chesapeake

Steamship Company of which several members of our Society are also members. Details of the weekend event will appear in subsequent newsletters. We urge our members to save that date and plan to attend.

Part of the ballast for the U-Deutschland consisted of iron, offloaded in Baltimore. The iron was melted down to make commemorative German crosses with brass centers. The center medallion was designed and cast by the famous Baltimore sculptor, Hans Schuler. The Schuler family was honored at our 2013 banquet. The crosses were distributed to those contributing to the widows and orphans of German soldiers. Our Society owns such a cross. It is held in our archives.

**CHRISTKINDLMARKT**

The ancient German tradition of the "Christ Child Market" was held in Baltimore on the grounds of Zion Church at City Hall Plaza, co-sponsored by the Baltimore Kickers and the Church. Our Society is a strong supporter of the event. You can plan now for the 2016 event, remembering that it always takes place at Zion on the weekend after Thanksgiving. For the past three years, a Christmas market has also been held at the Inner Harbor running from Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve, the duration of similar events in Germany. Hopefully this tradition will also continue in Baltimore. Many of our members travel to Europe to attend the Christmas markets. The city of Nürnberg's event is more than four hundred years old. Similar markets were held in most German villages and metropolitan areas. Our member, Mia Walsh, took her father, Ted Potthast, to the Christmas markets in Vienna and Budapest as well. Those events were very well attended and included young children and old timers braving the cold weather of Europe in November and December. Hans Steffen reported that the coffee in Munich was hot and the beer was cold in early December.

**"MENCKEN MEMBERS"**

In a lecture by eminent Mencken historian Marion Rogers we learned that H. L. Mencken supported German organizations but never attended any meetings. Mencken faithfully sent in his \$5 dues to our Society. He was too busy writing to go to events but as a strong supporter of the German culture and heritage, he always paid his dues. We have many members today who are in the same position. They cherish the German culture and the German American heritage and wish to support it financially by paying their dues, but for many reasons cannot actively participate in events. Our Society is nevertheless happy to have them among our membership. Their support helps others to get the work done, to carry out the mission of preserving the culture, heritage, and language. We welcome all such supporters. If you can't be active, then be a "Mencken Member." And spread the word. Let the world know our Society exists and is always looking for those to support our mission.

## HENRY GUNTHER MEMORIAL

Preserving our German American heritage is a prime mission of our Society. One way we achieve this goal annually is by honoring the memory of the last American soldier killed in World War I: Sgt. Henry Gunther. He was Baltimore born and raised, living in Highlandtown, a member of Sacred Heart parish and a member of the Santa Maria council of the Knights of Columbus. By agreement among the combatants, the war would end at 11 a.m., November 11, 1918. Henry was killed at 10:59. He is buried in Holy Redeemer Cemetery on Belair Road. Our Society discovered that there was no monument at his grave to tell his story. In cooperation with the Redemptorist Order of Religious, owners of the cemetery, we were instrumental in placing such a marker at his grave. Each year, at precisely 10:59 a.m., our Society gathers at the grave to commemorate his death and preserve his memory. It's part of our heritage as German Marylanders. Some years we have a large contingency, sometimes only a few. What is important is that we honor his memory every year by placing a wreath at the grave. And so is the case this year.

## HISTORY SOCIETY ELECTIONS

Our sister organization, The Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, founded in 1886, elected the following officers for the 2015-2016 year: Dr. Nicholas Fessenden, President; Theodore J. Potthast, Jr., Esq., First Vice President; Bill White, Esq. Second Vice President; Dr. Randall P. Donaldson, Treasurer; Shirley Santora, Secretary. All are also members of our German Society of MD.

## ORIGINAL ECUMENISTS

On November 9, 1989 when the Berlin wall came down, a group of Marylanders hastily assembled to hold a service of thanksgiving for the freedom from communism of our fellow Germans. The instigators were Donald Tillman, president of our Society, Judge Gerard Wm Wittstadt, president of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, and Pastor Siegfried Otto, Pastor of Zion Church in the City of Baltimore. They were joined by Ted Potthast and Harry Gruel in making the event happen. Don and Harry have since departed this life, but the remaining three (Otto, Wittstadt and Potthast) and several other German Society Members have attended every such service for the past 27 years, including the event on Sept. 27, 2015. Two of the original attendees, Irma Tillman and Christel van der Berg, for the first time were unable to attend this year. Irma was ill and Christel had a transportation problem. Both of them are lifetime directors of our Society.

## THE STRICKER BUST

Since the society has been refused a Federal Hill site for our monument to General John Stricker, there have been heated discussions about where the monument should be placed. The suggestions so far are three: The North Point National Guard Armory, Patterson Park, and The Garden at Zion Church. Each site has pros and cons. Patterson Park was recommended because, after the battle of North Point, the British Army marched toward Baltimore. Ramparts had been hurriedly erected in the park to fight the British. When the British saw the ramparts, they became discouraged, turned around, and went home, thus effectively ending the war of 1812.

The North Point Armory site is a stone's throw from General Stricker's headquarters and adjacent to the battlefield.

Zion's Garden is a convenient location, and the Zion property has been set aside for preservation by the Lutheran Church as a Maryland German Heritage site and a German center.

Each site has certain disadvantages. Although the North Point armory site is historical, it does not have easy visibility and access to the public. The ramparts in Patterson Park, although mainly built by volunteer citizens of Baltimore, including free blacks, were also built with slave labor. Anything to do with slavery is today anathema to the Baltimore city politicians; city officials are currently planning to remove all monuments relating to the Confederacy.

Although Zion's garden is centrally located across from City Hall, it has no historical connection to Stricker.

The German Society can retain ownership if placed at North Point or at Zion. If placed in a city park, the society would have to transfer ownership to the city of Baltimore and lose complete control over the future of the monument. The Society will make a selection in upcoming months.

## TODAY'S BALTIMORE

Our Society has maintained an office in the city since its founding, over 200 years. Baltimore was once a city most favorable to Germans. In 1880, 23% of the population was German born and half the remainder has German ancestry. Today the city is not so friendly toward the German heritage. Our request to place the Stricker monument on Federal Hill was rejected. Only a fraction of its inhabitants has German ancestry. The monumental city has changed. The editorial page of the Baltimore Sun on Sept. 13 showed a political "cartoon" of a bruiser of a man, labeled "Baltimore", tattooed with the words "Riots, Murders, Crime, Gray trial, Drugs, Racial tensions, Police tensions, and Guns." Not a very good advertisement to lure people into the city.

## 2015 GENERAL DEKALB COMMEMORATION

On October 22, the German Society commemorated the memory of General Johann deKalb on the south lawn of the Maryland Statehouse in Annapolis. deKalb's statue, authorized by United States Congress is erected in a tiny space which is part of the Federal Park Service and is maintained by the federal government. Baron deKalb was born in Bavaria and served as an officer in the French Army. He came to America to volunteer to serve in the Revolutionary Army under George Washington. He brought with him Marquis deLafayette whom Washington also commissioned as a general, even though Lafayette was only nineteen years old. George Washington appointed Johann deKalb as a major general and put him in charge of the Maryland-Delaware militia, which we know as "The Maryland Line". deKalb led his men while on horseback charging in among the British troops. deKalb's horse was shot from under him. He was shot three times and bayoneted by British troops. British General Cornwallis found deKalb as he was dying and ministered to him, although he died from his wounds three days later. He died as he wished, as a soldier fighting in battle. General deKalb is truly a part of Maryland's German American heritage.

Six years ago, the German Society of Maryland joined with the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland to commemorate deKalb's services to our nation in the war of independence. Each year we assemble in Annapolis, sometimes in a large group and at times with just a few of our members.

The statue was sculpted by Ephraim Keyser, who was the son of German immigrants (Moses & Elizabeth Keyser) in Baltimore. The wreath at the base of the statue was provided by our society and made by Walt Mathers. Mr. Mathers has been our society's contact with statehouse officials in arranging the deKalb ceremonies.

Kurt Wittstadt is a descendent of the sister of Johann deKalb. Many other members of the Wittstadt family are longstanding German Society members including Judge Gerard Wittstadt, a lifetime director and past president of the Historical Society.



German Society members in attendance at the 2015 dedication



The deKalb statue with the Maryland State House in the background.



Kurt Wittstadt, GSM Board Member, Walt Mathers, GSM Member, Anton Smoot, GSM President

## GERMAN UNIFICATION CELEBRATED AT THE GERMAN EMBASSY



Members of our society were invited to a celebration at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Washington on October 6 to commemorate the unification of East and West Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The photo above, taken at the embassy shows (left to right) Dr. Rosemarie Wittstadt, Judge Gerard W.M. Wittstadt Sr., Kurt Wittstadt, Elizabeth Wittstadt, Dr. Nicholas Fessenden, our past president Brigitte Fessenden, and current president Anton Smoot. Other members were also present at the event, Tom Werner, Kay Schneck and Gerhard Meinzer. The event was also attended by the president of the Federal Republic.

## GERMAN AMERICAN DAY AT THE WASHINGTON MALL

Our society chartered a bus to transport our members and some of the Bürgerverein to the ceremonies in the German American Friendship Garden in front of the Washington Monument on the Mall. We joined with organizations from Maryland/Virginia and the District of Columbia to read the proclamations from the governors and the mayor as well as the mayor of D.C. and representatives of the German ambassador. The group of several dozen joined in the singing of both national anthems and to hear speeches by officials of the German American organizations. The Bürgerverein subsidized the bus. A luncheon at the Old Europe Restaurant followed the ceremonies. The event was an opportunity for our society to carry out its mission of preserving our German American heritage and culture. The photographs shown below, taken by our member Gretchen Tyler Sarkin, show our society's banner, the monument, and President Anton Smoot addressing the assemblage. All of our members were invited on the bus trip. Twenty-five members attended as did officers and members of the Baltimore Kickers, the Edelweiss, Club Fidelitas, Zion Church, and the Arion Gesangverein.



### CHRISTEL VAN DER BERG, 2015 HONOREE



Past President Dr. Schaub announces banquet honoree.



President Smoot presents award to Christel van der Berg



Past President Brigitte Fessenden reads Proclamation of Governor Larry Hogan declaring Christel van der Berg Day in Maryland.



Christel van der Berg accepts her award as the Society's honoree for 2015.

**Christel van der Berg came to America from Germany as a war bride. She and her husband, Herbert van der Berg, were active in the German community, being among the founders of the radio program the Edelweiss Hour. Christel served for many years as the German Society's corporate secretary. She has been active in many Maryland German American organizations.**



Society dignitaries gather around Christel van der Berg.

## LACROSSE HALL OF FAME

Diane Geppi Aikens was inducted into the Lacrosse Hall of Fame in October. Diane was an All American player and the coach of Loyola University's women's lacrosse team. She died 10 years ago of brain cancer, having coached her team from a wheelchair while on chemotherapy. Diane was the daughter of our long-time members John and Katherine Meyers Geppi. Her grandmother, Margaret Potthast, was first generation German American, her father an immigrant from Westphalia, Germany and a founder of Potthast Bros. Furniture Company.

## 100 YEARS FROM NOW

Preserving the German American heritage is one of the missions of our Society. This requires planning, and planning makes us look to the future. Since the past is prologue to the future, we also study the past.

### A LOOK AT THE PAST

The German American population of Baltimore City (where our Society was founded), changed from 62% in 1880 to 6% in 2015. Many of the German churches, Lutheran, Reformed and Catholic in the city in 2015 are now African Methodist Episcopal (AME) or Baptist or have been converted to non-church uses. The German singing clubs and ubiquitous German restaurants of 100 years ago have all but disappeared. German was a language taught in most City high schools prior to WWII; now only a couple teach it.

### SEEKING TO PRESERVE THE HERITAGE

So how do you preserve culture, heritage, and traditions under such conditions? It is our job to find the answer. Of the few German groups remaining today, the German Society of Maryland is the one most likely to be standing 100 years from now. Most ethnic clubs disappeared when they went broke. Thus, it is necessary to guard our treasury and try to implement it.

### GERMANS IN THE SUBURBS

The city population in 1950 was 1 million and was the 6th largest city in the USA. In 2015 it is 600,000. Its public schools are 90% black, 7% Hispanic and Asian 3% white. The Germans have fled the city. They are alive and well in the counties. In recent years, German names have served as the executives of all 5 of the surrounding counties. They are the ideal breeding grounds for new German Society members and are our future.

### PLANNING A CITY-COUNTY SOCIETY

Zion Church has been designated as a German heritage site and thus will play a central role in our Society's future. Right across from City Hall, it is convenient to all surrounding counties as a meeting place. Our Society needs to find hubs in each of the counties. The new office in Timonium is a good start.

## OUR OFFICE IN TIMONIUM

Our Society has entered into an historic partnership to share an office with the Bürgerverein and Club Fidelitas at 2300 York Road, just north of the Timonium Fairgrounds. The three organizations formed a corporation, GAV, Inc (German American Verein) to search for offices. After a long search we settled on an 1100 sq.ft. space in an office building. It is the first time any of the German clubs have come together to share space. We will have room for our archives and records and can use it for committee meetings. The selection of this location relieves the pressure upon the three organizations to find and purchase a permanent home. The GAV has not abandoned its goal to find a place where the clubs can hold membership meetings and host community events.

## ROBERT C. KELLNER, 90

Our long-time member Robert Carl Kellner died Sept. 4 at age 90. Born in Baltimore of German immigrant parents, he graduated from Poly, joined the navy, and served aboard a destroyer. Thereafter he enrolled in college where he earned a degree in nuclear physics. After a brief career with Baltimore Gas & Electric Co., he became a research nuclear physicist at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, from which he retired in 1985. He was an active member of Zion Church of the City of Baltimore. Robert is survived by his wife, of 55 years, the former Edith Vogelsang, a son, Hans Kellner, a daughter Martina Sedlak and three grandchildren.

## NEW MEMBER: UTA ALLERS

An immigrant from Hamburg, Uta Allers has used her language skills to translate two books from German to English. Although retired, she accepts assignments in translating documents and is familiar with the old German handwriting script, a rare skill these days. She had done volunteer work at the Goethe Institute and for non-profit organizations. Uta may be reached via our office phone: leave a message.

## STUDENTS: HOW TO JOIN

All students from 1st grade through university postgraduates are eligible to become members of the German Society. Student membership is free. To join, send an e-mail to [germansociety@verizon.net](mailto:germansociety@verizon.net) with the following information: the name of your school, your grade or year and your e-mail address. You should have or wish to develop an interest in German culture, heritage or language.



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### NEW MEMBERS

Uta Allers  
Monika McCormick  
William McCormick  
Nadine Lewis-Reiter  
William J. Santo  
Dolores R. Santo  
Paul K. Schallmo  
Deborah Schallmo  
Frederick G. Sipes, Jr.  
Faye Sipes  
Scott Waldman  
Denese Waldman  
Kurt G. Waldthausen

*“The purpose of the German Society of Maryland is to preserve and promote the German heritage and traditions through educational, social and benevolent programs; and to develop the unity and continuity of the German American community in the State of Maryland.”*

### APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Spouse: (optional) \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Referred by: \_\_\_\_\_

“I hereby apply to be a member of the German Society of Maryland”

Annual dues \$25 Spouse may be included at no extra cost.

The German Society of Maryland  
P.O. Box 22585  
Baltimore, MD 21203-4585

Visit the German Society's website:  
[www.germansociety-md.com](http://www.germansociety-md.com)

Articles from some past newsletters are posted on our website. Dr. Maureen Helinski maintains the site. “Pioneers in Service”, the history of our Society, can now be found on our web site. For more local German-American happenings, check the web site of the Deutschamerikanischer Bürgerverein von Maryland: [www.md-germans.org](http://www.md-germans.org)

This newsletter is published by The German Society of Maryland, an organization founded in 1783 and incorporated in 1818 by Act of the General Assembly of Maryland. It is a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation pursuant to the provisions of §501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The Society is a member of the Deutschamerikanischer Bürgerverein von Maryland, D.A.N.K. (German American National Congress) The United German-American Committee of the USA, Inc. and other civic groups which promote German-American culture and heritage. Please submit items of interest to Theodore J. Potthast, Jr., Editor, at 1819 Leadburn Road, Towson, MD 21204-1830 or fax 410-832-2903.