

# THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF MARYLAND

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

## VEREINSNACHRICHTEN

JULY 2011 ISSUE #78

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Bärbel Otto

## **WHITE HOUSE INVITATION**

The German Society received an invitation from President Obama to attend an Arrival Ceremony honoring her excellency Dr. Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany at the White House on Tuesday, June 7, 2011. The event took place on the South lawn. Our Society was allotted 40 spots. Due to the short response time (the names and social security numbers were required for advance security clearances) notice was by word of mouth. A large contingent of our officers, directors and members attended. A crowd of over 4,000 guests greeted Chancellor Merkel. Some stories about the event will appear in future newsletters.

## **ANNUAL MEETING: ELECTIONS**

Our members enjoyed a good German dinner at the April 29th meeting, which reported activities of the past year and plans for the future. Shirley Santora was elected a director: six current directors were elevated to "Lifetime Director" status: Merl Arp, Linda Butt, Dr. Mohamed Esa, Dr. Maureen Helinski, Dr. Armin Mruck and the Rev. H.J. Siegfried Otto.

The president's annual report from the meeting appears in this issue of the newsletter.

## **GERMAN FESTIVAL THIS WEEKEND, JULY 23-24**

The 111th Maryland German Festival will be held in an air-conditioned hall at the Timonium State Fair Grounds; Noon to 10 on Sat., noon to 8 on Sun. In bygone years, the festival has suffered heat waves, torrential rains and sweat-drenching humidity, but that won't happen this year. You can leisurely wander from booth to booth and the only thing you'll soak up is the German culture, Bavarian food and beer while enjoying the music of the bands in "surround-sound". Relax amidst the friendliness of happy faces and get the feeling that you've come home to a place where you belong. If you're looking for gifts or just something to take home to remind you of your roots, many vendors will display their wares for you selections. Maryland has the oldest continuous German Festival in the USA. It's put on by the Buergerverein, the umbrella organization of the local German clubs, including the German Society of Maryland. Parking is free and convenient. Visit our booth and identify yourself as a member of our Society.

Make it a family affair. Drag the children and grandchildren along: when they hear the music and see the happy faces of the performers and the crowd, they will absorb the atmosphere and soak up some of the culture that is part of their roots.



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**KALENDER**  
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- July 23-24 German Festival Timonium
- Sept 29 Historical Society Banquet
- Oct. 8 Country Fair St. John's Church
- Nov. 5 Annual Awards Banquet
- Nov. 11 Veterans Day Observance:  
Henry Gunther Memorial

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

You are invited to add articles about your German ancestors to the website conducted by our director, Shelley Arnold; ([germanmarylanders.org](http://germanmarylanders.org)) and to register to visit and participate in the website "Der Wecker", founded by our member, Walt Mathers.

**BYLAW AMENDMENT**

At the annual meeting of members, the bylaws were amended to provide for a category of membership known as "Honorary Member." This designation may be awarded by a vote of our Board of Directors to a person who is deemed to have made substantial contributions in fostering the mission and goals of our Society.

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY SEPT. 29**

Judge Gerard W. Wittstadt, president of The Society for the History of the Germans in MD has announced that its annual dinner meeting will be held in the Adlersaal of Zion Church on Thursday, Sept. 29. The banquet is followed by a presentation on a topic of historical importance. Details are forthcoming.

**WAR OF 1812 BICENTENNIAL**

Our Society is making preparations to commemorate the role played by the Society's members in the defense of Baltimore in the War of 1812. A committee is forming under the chairmanship of Brig. General M. Hall Worthington, Jr. (ret.) to create appropriate events to make the public aware of the deeds performed by German Americans in driving the British from our shores. The importance of the British defeat cannot be underestimated: it is known as "Our Second War of Independence". Had our forces not prevailed, America might still owe allegiance to the Queen of England. America owes a debt of gratitude to the Maryland forces, under German American leadership, which broke the spirit of the British troops and caused them to depart permanently from our country. General Armistead (family name Arnstadt) was charged with the defense of Fort McHenry and General John Stricker with the defense of North Point, where the British army landed. (John Stricker served as vice-president of The German Society of Maryland and was one of our incorporators).

**GERMAN AMERICAN INFLUENCE**

Baltimore's City Council called for volunteers to build ramparts on the eastern edge of what is now Patterson Park to repel the British and the citizens responded. 10 of the 16 members of the City Council were German Americans. History books have not given credit to the role played by German Americans in preserving our independence; our Society aims to correct that situation. We are in need of volunteers to serve on General Worthington's committee. If you have an interest in history, please join the committee. As our members put their lives on the line 200 years ago, we ask our current membership to participate in preserving their memory, which is our heritage.

**PICKERSGILL'S GERMAN RELATIVE**

We learn from a July 4th article by Rob Kasper in the Baltimore Sun that Mary Pickersgill, who sewed the Star Spangled Banner, was related by marriage to the vice president of the German Society of Maryland, General John Stricker, one of the two men in charge of the defense of Baltimore after the British had burned Washington and headed north.

## President's Report 2011

### "Preserve and Celebrate the German American Heritage, Promote and Save the German Language"

All our efforts and activities are guided by our Mission Statement. From it we gain new energy to develop a vision that is creative that challenges our imagination that brings us enthusiasm.

Our traditional annual program has been the frame work for our efforts last year: The Annual Meeting, the Student Award Ceremony, the Great German Picnic, the German Festival, and the Annual Awards Banquet.

New this year was the Henry Gunther Memorial dedication on Veterans Day. The inspiration for this event originated with Ted Potthast, who as editor of our newsletter, treasurer and past president has manifested an extraordinary commitment to the welfare of the Society.

During the last year our Board of Directors has been challenged to gain greater visibility of the Society and become more known in the community.

Mr. Louis J. Grasmick and his wife Dr. Nancy Grasmick gave us seed money to develop a fund raising program that would help to achieve these goals. I have asked the Board and our Lifetime Directors to give an example of leadership by initiating the program. So far eight directors have given \$3710.00, while five more have given a verbal promise. Before we extend our fund drive to the general membership the Board of Directors wants to identify some concrete goals and specific projects.

Our thanks this year go to the following directors for their special effort for the benefit of the Society:

- To Bernard Penner for updating and publishing the Bylaws of the German Society.
- To Maureen Helinski for her leadership in the educational committee and the ongoing work of maintaining our website.
- To Brigitte Fessenden for her leadership in the Sister's City Program between Baltimore and Bremerhaven.
- To Armin Mruck for his work of student exchange between the University of Oldenburg and Towson University.
- To Jim Schaub and Mohamed Esa for their efforts for the Awards Banquet.
- To Shelley Arnold for her effort in Annapolis
- To Dandridge Brooke for his untiring effort to solicit new members for the Society.
- To Mary Upman for her publicity work
- To Tom Werner for his financial expertise.
- To Christel van der Berg for being the secretary of the Board.
- To Merl E. Arp, John K. Aymold, Linda Butt, David Denisch, Eva Kelleher, William H. Kommalan, Michael Nieberding, Betty Niemann, Dennis Tausendschoen, Irma Tillman, Edwin O. Wenck, Gerard Wm. Wittstadt who make up our Board of Directors.

Our thanks go to Bärbel Otto, the office manager of the Society.

We had to bid farewell to three directors: Frederick L. Riedel, Robert K. Fritzsche, and Charles Wunder.

We welcome Father Richard Dimler, Paul-Gerhard Otto, Lauren Rizzo, and Shirley Santora as new Board members.

The strength and vitality of our Society depend on the commitment of our members and their willingness to support it with the gift of their time and their money. I am confident that both will continue for the welfare of our Society that has existed since 1783.

The Rev. H. J. Siegfried Otto, President



## **OUR TAX EXEMPT STATUS**

In 1946 the IRS granted approval to The German Society of Maryland for its tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status. However, in the ensuing years the approval letter was lost. For years we have tried to get a copy from IRS; they could not find our file, but since we have been filing our tax return under 501(c)(3) for so many years, we were told to keep doing so. Now, in the computer age, IRS is able to retrieve and find old files. Our member Walt Mathers, adept in the ways of the internet, was able to press the right buttons and talk to the right person at IRS. The result: we now have in our hands an IRS 501(c)(3) approval, back to 1946. Thanks, Walt. Anyone who needs a copy of it, call our treasurer at 410-828-8137, leave your name and address and you will get a copy in the mail.

## **AMERICA IN FLUX**

The 2010 census data is now being released and it shows some significant changes in our population. Hispanics have become majorities in 82 counties. The USA population increased by 27.3 million in the 10 years and of that number more than half were Hispanics: 15.2 million. The federal census stopped counting European nationalities in 2000, so there are no current statistics on the percentage of German Americans. However a recent newspaper report for Maryland stated that the German American ethnics dropped to 15% from 26% in the 1980's.

## **LEGISLATURE PASSES 797 LAWS**

The 2010 session of the General Assembly passed 797 bills and sent them up for the governor's signature. Among the bills which did not pass was the one which would have given us a German American heritage month. The editorial page of the Baltimore Sun (April 13) commented that this year's session was "unimpressive... hampered by economic and political realities", Our bill was shot down by the realities of politics.

All is not lost, however. We may still be able to petition the governor to issue a proclamation declaring October to be the official German American month in Maryland. And if that fails, we can issue our own proclamation.

## **A MODEST PROPOSAL**

Very few Marylanders know and understand the great contributions to our state and nation made by German Americans. We can start by a program of disseminating pamphlets which tell the story of the important things done by Marylanders with roots in German-speaking countries. Publish the stories in pamphlets of 6 to 8 pages, with pictures and in English easily understandable by children and politicians. Distribute them widely and make sure each state legislator, city and county council members receive a copy; and have the German clubs in the schools pass them out to students.

Recruit all the German organizations to join the program and help write the pamphlets. Part of our fund-raising program might be to sponsor the printing of thousands of copies to libraries and to the public at large.

We have to blow our own horn; nobody else is going to do it for us. We have to educate one another so we have a good grasp of our heritage before we can pass it on to future generations.

## **CONGRATULATIONS..**

to our member, the Rev. Monsignor Arthur W. Bastress, Pastor of St. Alphonsus Church in Baltimore, upon the celebration of his 60th anniversary of his ordination as a priest.

## **"GERMAN BALTIMORE"**

This is the name of a book which is begging to be written. We have read with pleasure Gilbert Sandler's book "Jewish Baltimore", much of which deals with Jewish immigrants from Germany. It details the families, businesses and organizations over the late 1800's and 1900's with copious photos. It gives a flavor which cannot be found in a scholarly book such as Dieter Kuntz's "Maryland Germans." We need a folksy work telling how our ancestors lived their lives. Who will write it? Maybe you.

## **DIGITIZING OUR ARCHIVES**

We have committed to copying 30 years of the history of the German-American community as photographed by Denis Smith, which he donated to our Society. When this is done, there are many other of our Society's records which also need to be preserved and published electronically.



## **SCHAEFER'S FUNERAL PASSES OUR OFFICE; STOPS AT FLOWERMART SITE**

In modern times, our most famous member has been William Donald Schaefer, Mayor of Baltimore, Governor and Comptroller of Maryland. His funeral procession passed our offices of Mt. Vernon Place as it made a stop at the site of the Flower Mart, an event which was very special to him. His hearse was met by another German Society member, Carol Karcher Purcell, Flowermart's Director. Don Schaefer was a loyal member who paid his dues faithfully up to the current year. Our president, The Rev. H.J. Siegfried Otto, visited him at his Charlestown residence a couple weeks before his death.

Five buildings are named after him and a giant statue of him stands in the Inner Harbor.



(2002 photo: members Shaefer and Walsh)

Don Schaefer never missed a chance to shake a hand or kiss a baby and have his photo taken with one. Here, at the 2002 Flowermart, he is shown with our Society's youngest member, Sara Walsh (who became a lifetime member in 2010).

## **INVITATION: ST. GEORGE'S SOCIETY**

Many members of our Society are also members of the St. George's Society. Shirley K. Alger, President of

St. George's Society, invites members of our society to join St. George's, with a special offer: the initiation fee and half the 2011 dues will be waived, so the total cost of joining is \$20. St. George's requires that the applicant be male and have at least one English ancestor. The offer is limited to this year. Call our office for an application form. St. George is the patron of England and is usually depicted slaying a dragon. The presidents of our two Societies have attended one another's annual banquet for more than 150 years. Call our office for an application form.

## **STUDENT AWARD CEREMONY**

The German Society gave \$5,000 in awards to high school German language students and \$3,200 to Maryland college students at its May 15 presentation in the Adlersaal at Zion Church, City Hall Plaza. 50 high school students who had achieved in the highest percentiles in the national German language examination shared the cash grants and 4 college students, competitively selected by our Education Committee, each received a grant of \$800. The students were also offered a free student membership in the Society for one year and have been invited to The Great German Picnic at subsidized rates. Our Society is dedicated to promoting the study of the German language and the awards are our way of rewarding excellence and encouraging young people in their academic pursuits.

## **GRANTS TO STUDY ABROAD**

Our Society received two special requests, one for aid to study in Germany and one for Austria. Alessandra Daniels, high school student from Salisbury, MD, had been awarded a Congress-Bundestag scholarship for studies for a year in Germany. She needed funds for necessities to permit her to accept the scholarship. At the request of Louis Grasmick, \$1,000 from funds which he had donated were allocated to her.

Rachel Trageser, a college student who had been accepted at the University of Salzburg for a semester's study, had no scholarship and was working to pay her own way. Rachel and her family had long been active in the Maryland German American community. She was in need of aid and our directors voted to help with a \$1,000 grant from our education fund. Rachel's parents and grand-parents have served as officers in the Edelweiss Club, Baltimore Kickers and in our own Society.



## **THE GREAT GERMAN FAMILY PICNIC**

Universal acclamation. "Delightful. Outstanding. Wunderbar. Just a great event. Pleased as punch. The best picnic ever! Why didn't we do this before? Let's do it again!" 350 men, women and children, all with smiling faces and all praising the picnic. John Geppi, a member with over 70 years experience in picnicking, proclaimed this to be the best ever. It was a balmy Sunday afternoon with gentle breezes.

The Kurtz-Mason family bent over backwards to make it a success. They had not hosted a truly German picnic before and with their German heritage, they wanted to do it right. The menu varied. Something for everybody. Bingert's sausage helped give an authentic flavor. Kurtz's added their own crisp sauerkraut, roast pork and potato dumplings. German potato salad and cucumber "salat" plus a host of standard American fare. Everyone loved the food. And the service was swift and efficient. No waiting in lines.

The imported German "Spaten" beer flowed freely. Since the German beer cost double the domestic American, the clubs split the cost with Kurtz's and the 5 kegs on tap did not run out until the last picnicker headed for home. The weather was perfect. The view across the Chesapeake Bay was lovely; we watched the giant freighters going up from the ocean to Baltimore and back again.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY**

### **FIRE ENGINES**

For the children (and there were many of all shapes and sizes), the pumping of the fire engines and squirting the fire hoses provided a whole afternoon of laughing, squealing, yelling and being pleasantly boisterous. The girls were content to aim the fire hoses into the bay; the boys delighted in squirting one another. Walt Mathers arranged for the antique fire pumps: one was Austrian and the other German. By sheer coincidence, the German engine was made by a firm called Kurtz (unrelated to the Kurtz's Beach family).

### **DOCKENSPIELERS BAND**

The brass band of 18 musicians and a singer kept feet tapping and dancers hopping the whole afternoon. A bit of oompah, but mostly real German folk songs

fostering the spirit of gemütlichkeit. They drove from York, PA to Kurtz's to make our day. The band members fraternized with us during their breaks; they added a touch of original German American friendliness. The band was as happy as the picnickers. Bandleader Kirk Frey was great.

### **BALTIMORE GERMAN YAGERS**

The newly formed fife and drum corps made its first appearance at an all-German event and its authentic German marches put the crowd on its feet. An older picnicker said it made him want to find some old soldiers and start marching.

### **THE KURTZ FAMILY HOSPITALITY**

Kurtz's Beach has been in the family since the 1930's. In addition to the picnic grounds, it has facilities for weddings and gatherings of more than 2,000 guests. An experienced crew produced a food display which had all of the picnickers raving. The sponsors, our German Society, Baltimore Kickers, Club Fidelitas and Zion Church extend our tanks to the present-day members of the Kurtz family, especially to John Mason, for their hard work in making this an affair to remember.

Thanks to the picnic committee: Walt and Valerie Mathers, Connie Potthast and Bärbel Otto of the German Society; Bill Kommalan of Club Fidelitas and Kathy Kotowski of the Baltimore Kickers.

## **THANKS TO OUR DONORS**

Some major gifts were awarded to the picnicker and over 200 smaller ones, such as T-shirts, steins, etc. Thanks to the following donors.

"Buddy" Butts Fruit Baskets  
Chesapeake Antique Fire Apparatus Association  
The German School, Washington D.C.  
The Embassy of Switzerland  
Albert Kirchmayer, Chocolatier  
German Yagers Fife and Drums  
Baltimore Orioles Major League Baseball  
Riviera Beach Vol. Fire. Dept of A. A. Co  
Anne Arundel County Farmers Co-op, Glen Burnie  
Bob Maythurs & WWTR Radio 1070 AM Westminster  
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany  
Der Wecker German American Internet Forum  
Hourglass Creations of Marley Creek  
Baltimore & Chesapeake Steamboat Company  
Ultimate Oldies Radio  
Lou Filanosky and his pick-up truck  
Tidewater Yacht Service Port Covington Maintenance Center



## **BILL POTTHAST, 79**

William A. Potthast, a member of our Society, died June 1 in Winter Haven, Florida. Bill worked in the family furniture business, Potthast Bros., of which his grandfather was a founder. His artistic bent led him into photography: he established a studio in Winter Haven and became president of the Florida Professional Photographers' Association. Some of his prize-winning works hang in the National Photography galleries in Oklahoma City and in Washington. His son Michael, followed him into the profession and 5 days after Bill's death, Michael was awarded first, second and third place in the professional photographs national contest, the first time such a feat has occurred in the 125 year history of the contest. He is survived by his wife, Alice, 8 children and 9 grandchildren. His sister, Sister Anne Colette Potthast, a Notre Dame deNamur nun and a member of our Society, also survives him.

## **LEO WASTLER**

We have recently learned of the death of Leo Wastler, a long-time member of the Society who resided in Pennsylvania. He was active in the Society in the 1980's and early 1990's. He owned a travel agency and conducted tours to Germany.

## **GERMAN NUN, BALTIMORE MEMORY**

Caroline Friess, an immigrant from Bavaria, came to Baltimore in 1848 to lead a group of nuns, School Sisters of Notre Dame, in the founding of schools for children. Today an institution in East Baltimore honors her memory: The Caroline Center. It is a school which takes uneducated inner city women and turns them into productive citizens by teaching them the skills they need to find a job. The Caroline Center has a near perfect record in finding employment for its graduates. The courses are severe, requiring strict attendance and teaching work habits to many who are unaccustomed to the discipline of being on time and working at a steady pace, i.e. working in the German tradition.

## **PART OF OUR HERITAGE PAUL J. WIEDORFER. 90**

The last surviving Marylander to have won the Congressional Medal of Honor in WWII died May 25. The son of German immigrants, he enlisted in the army

and was in the Battle of the Bulge on Christmas Day, 1944. His platoon was held down by two German machine gun nests; he charged across 150 yards of a snowy field under fire. He attacked the first nest with a grenade and wiped out the second with rifle fire. He single-handedly captured 28 German troops. He was later hit in his stomach by mortar fire and learned of his Medal of Honor while in a hospital in England. Upon his return to Baltimore, a ticker tape parade in his honor stretched from the Washington Monument to the War Memorial Building where he was greeted by German Society member Mayor Theodore R. McKeldin, Jr. and by General George Marshall. He retired from BG&E in 1981. A funeral Mass was held for him at St. Thomas More Church in Baltimore. Sgt. Wiedorfer is indeed an important part of Maryland's German American heritage.

## **SGT. GUNTHER CEREMONY PLANNED**

Our Society has been asked to host a ceremony on Veterans Day honoring St. Henry Gunther, the last American killed in World War One. We are looking for volunteers to serve on a committee to plan the event. Especially if you or a family member are a veteran, we ask you help. Please call our office to volunteer. Sgt. Gunther was the son a German immigrants and he is a part of Maryland's German American heritage. He spoke fluent German. His grave is in Baltimore. At our Society's instigating, a monument was placed at his grave last Veterans Day. The ceremony will be brief. The retired bugler from Arlington National Cemetery who played taps last November has asked to return again. The Baltimore German Yagers Fife and Drums have asked to serve as the color guard. This is one of the ways our Society may fulfill its mission to preserve Maryland's German American heritage.

## **WHERE WILL WE GET APOLLINARIS?**

Apollinaris, the "Queen of Waters" was stocked on the shelves of the Superfresh Supermarkets. It came from the Ahr Valley near Remagen in Germany, in its classic green bottle. H. L. Mencken was a devotee if the sparkling Apollinaris, and used its green bottles for his first batch of home-brew when prohibition began. Superfresh, bankrupt, is no longer. Where can we get our Apollinaris now?