

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF MARYLAND

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VEREINSNACHRICHTEN

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CHRISTKINDLMARKT NOV. 24-25 AT ZION

The weekend after Thanksgiving has become a Maryland tradition for the Christmas Market put on by Zion Church and the Baltimore Kickers. at the church's Adlersaal. Hans Steffen places the orders for traditional Christmas confections imported from Germany: cookies, Stollen, candies, German coffees packaged in brightly decorated cans, all kinds of Xmas decorations to make every home a bright and happy Christmas delight for children of all ages. Members of the church and the Kickers produce crafts to spread the spirit of the season. Beautiful wreaths are on sale, but they sell out early, as well as magnificent window lightings and ornaments. The garden entrance is packed with visitors who may enjoy a lunch of sausages washed down with warm Glühwein to take away the chill. The event opens at 10 am Saturday and after church services on Sunday, lasting until 4 pm. Members of our Society are always found among the crowd, supporting the fund-raising efforts of the church and the Kickers. It has the makings of an authentic German Christkindlmarkt; if you have visited Germany in the Christmas season, this will revive your memories. Mark your calendar to spend a few cheerful hours at the market to start you into the spirit of Christmas. Bring your family, neighbors and especially the little ones so they can hear the wonderful German Christmas music and get a taste of their heritage.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Looking back over the past several months it struck me that we had an amazing streak of unity within the German-American community in which our Society was involved.

First, many of the activities of the Star-Spangled Sailabration in June involved representatives of local German-American organizations interacting in unity with the German government, and in particular, it's Navy.

Likewise, we were quite active in the planning of the Great German-American Picnic at Kurtz's Beach officially sponsored by the Buergerverein and attended by many members of its member clubs.

At the German Festival in July we had our Culture Booth in unity with the Buergerverein and its many member club's culture, food and beverage stands.

The Ecumenical Service unified our Society with the Zion Church and the service demonstrated the unity and cooperation of several religious orders.

Several of our board members attended German Unification Day at the German Embassy in recognition of the unity between East and West Germany.

Most recently, we arranged for a bus that we shared with local club members and the Lancaster Liederkrantz to attend the Friendship Garden activities in D.C. in celebration of German-American Day as jointly recognized by the U.S. and German governments.

I am pleased to see so many examples of cooperation and unified involvement by our Society and within the German-American community and the German Embassy. I expect that this will continue and encourage you all to stay involved.

Thomas A. Werner, President

KALENDER

- Nov. 24-25 Christkindlmarkt-Zion Church
- February Fasching - Buergerverein
- April 5 Annual Membership Meeting

Visit the German Society's website:
www.germansociety-md.com

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 be found on our web site.

For more local German-American events, check the web site of the Deutsch-amerikanischer Bürgerverein von Maryland: 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) and to register to visit and participate in the website "Der Wecker", founded by our member, Walt Mathers.

ESA GIVES SEMINAR IN SWEDEN

Prof. Dr. Mohamed Esa, a member of our Society's Board of Directors and a Professor of German at McDaniel College, recently presented a seminar on German in Gotenberg, Sweden. Following the seminar he traveled to Israel to visit his aged father. Dr. Esa came to the USA as a citizen of Israel. He is a long-time resident of Carrol County, MD. He has served as chairman of our Annual Awards Banquet Committee for the past half dozen years.

GENERAL JOHN STRICKER: PRESERVING HIS MEMORY

John Stricker was an incorporator and a vice president of our Society. He fought in the Revolutionary War and as a general of the army in the War of 1812, he won the title "Hero of the Battle of North Point." As our President's letter pointed out in the last issue, Stricker's role in the Battle of Baltimore has been eclipsed by the other segment of the Battle of Baltimore, fought at Fort McHenry, because it resulted in The Star Spangled Banner. The government has poured many millions of dollars into Ft. McHenry and nothing into

commemorating the battle of North Point, which is where the British General Ross was killed, causing the enemy to quit and go home.

Our Board of Directors has made a commitment to take action to publicize the role of General Stricker in the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812. We are forming a committee to work on this project and urge our members to volunteer for the committee. President Werner will appoint a chairman of that committee. If you would like to serve on it, please call our office at 410-685-0450. The committee is charged with determining what we shall do: commission a statue of Stricker; issue medals; print publications; hold ceremonies -- it's the committee's job to get the job done and without delay. The committee needs people willing to work.

CONGRATULATIONS to our members Brian and Dawn Linke on the birth of their first child, Elise Maive. Brian is a 7-foot chef who is an expert in German cuisine.

\$1,000 TO DORCHESTER COUNTY

Two young members of our Society, recent graduates from Dr. Esa's program at McDaniel College, established a German language course at Dorchester High School. The school also sends a number of students to Germany each year for a cultural and educational exchange. The students pay their own way, supplemented by fundraisers during the year. The teachers who accompany them must also pay their own travel expenses. In order to encourage the program, our Society will contribute \$1,000 to help offset teacher expenses. Most counties in Maryland do not even offer German as a course of study, so we consider it especially important to support those who do.

DENNIS F. TAUSENDSCHOEN

President Werner announced that Dennis F. Tausendschoen had resigned from the board, citing health reasons. Dennis was recruited to our board by past President Dr. James Schaub, who recognized his talents and interest in our Society when he was a volunteer at several of the Society's functions. He was always willing to step forward in times of need. The Society congratulates Dennis on his retirement and thanks him for his many hours of hard work.

EVENT AT FRIENDSHIP GARDEN

Our Society played an active role in the ceremonies at the German American Friendship Garden on the Washington Mall just north of the Washington Monument. We sponsored a busload of members from our Society and from the Lancaster Liederkrantz group. It celebrated the 25th annual German American Day, first announced by President Ronald Reagan in 1987. Our director Gerhard Meinzer served as master of ceremonies: Gerhard is also president of AGAS, the Associated German American Societies of Greater Washington. Our President Thomas A. Werner lead a group of our own members who attended with the banner of our Society. Proclamations honoring German Americans were presented by the Governors of Maryland and Virginia and the Mayor of Washington. An anticipated proclamation from President Obama did not arrive in time for the event, but was later received. President Werner read the proclamation from Governor O'Malley. The Deutschamerikanische Bürgerverein von MD was also represented. After the ceremonies the bus transported the group to a lunch at the Old Europa Restaurant for a repast of excellent German food. From there the group went to the German American Heritage Museum where its director, Rüdiger Lentz explained the museum's goals and commented on the current exhibit of Trachten, featuring magnificent Dirndls mounted on manikins. A tour of the museum ensued. One of the artifacts on display was a bust of Handel made by renowned Baltimore sculptor and artist, William P. Didusch presented to the Washington Saengerbund for its victory in a songfest held in Baltimore in 1903 at which 6000 singers competed and the principal speaker was U. S. President Theodore Roosevelt. A trophy also won by the Saengerbund in 1906 was on display.

WILL OUR SOCIETY STILL BE ALIVE 100 YEARS FROM NOW ?

Our Society has survived for 229 years and is thriving. However, we look at our membership and see a graying population. Obviously, we need to inspire the youth to take up the cause if the Society is to outlive the membership list which is published annually in our banquet program. We are doing a good job in our goal of preserving the culture of the German-speaking countries of Europe, whence came many of our ancestors...and some of our present members. We are fighting a good fight in aiding young people studying the German language, even though

outside forces are causing schools to drop German. It is an uphill battle.

At one time Maryland had more than 100 German organizations. Nearly all went broke and out of existence. If our Society can somehow protect and expand our treasury, it will stay alive. History shows that countries which ceased to exist did so for one chief reason: they went broke. We will stay around for so long as we remain solvent: if we go broke, our Society will expire. Today we are quite solvent.

REPORT FROM SUMMER SCHOLAR

The high school student who was awarded the Society's Gerhard Meinzer summer scholarship, Leah Dignan, sent us the following report:

"After a 9 hour flight and a 3 hour bus trip, I arrived at Passau (Bavaria). All I wanted to do was sleep. As soon as I climbed out of the bus I was overcome with Passau's beauty. I was taking in the surroundings, the quaint architecture, the 3 rivers (Danube, Inn and Ilz) merging when I met my foster sister. She and her entire extended family welcomed me into their lives.

I saw castles, the Alps, historical buildings such as Mozart's Geburtshaus in Salzburg, but the aspect of the trip I value the most are the simpler things. I was fully immersed in the German culture, and loved it. My host mother cooked authentic German meals for me. I visited cafes and went to my host sister's school every weekday. The girls in the school were some of the warmest people I have ever met. They welcomed me into their daily activities, such as swing dancing classes, fencing, overnight school trips and even family birthday parties. I am still in contact with many of the people I met.

My trip to Passau was fantastic, but the best thing was not a castle or any other tangible object. It was the simple fact that none of them changed their lives in my presence. I had the distinctly unique opportunity to live within German culture in its entirety. I will never forget the 3 weeks I spent in a small town on the Austrian border and the people who call it home. I feel I have left a new German family behind and am beginning new lifelong relationships. "

Leah Dignan was part of a group of American high school students who spent 3 weeks attending classes in German high schools in a program sponsored by the AATG. Gerhard Meinzer, one of our Directors, provided funding for Leah's scholarship.

TREASURE TROVE DISCOVERED

The Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland has discovered buried away in its storage room an abundance of old copies of its "Report". The treasure contains issues, several more than hundred years old. That Society has offered to donate to our Society several hundred copies, allowing us to share the gift with our members. At such time as our Society authorizes mailing funds, each member of our Society will receive a copy, a gift of the culture and heritage of Maryland's German American history. The books will likely be shipped before Christmas, permitting a few hours of interesting holiday reading.

The historical Society hopes it may encourage our members to join them. Many of the older issues describe prominent German Marylanders of bygone eras. Many articles travel afield, describing the achievements of "the German element" in America. An article in Report #15 in 1901 describes the murder of two Germans in Cecil County, John Norden and Severin Hack by the Tickhattomitta tribe of Indians in the year 1663; and how Pinna, the chief of the tribe negotiated with the colonial court to avoid punishment of the murderers by proving that the killings were revenge for murders of Indians, including Pinna's own brother, by Englishmen. He offered a peace treaty between the colony of Maryland and his tribe, which was accepted by the court, leaving the murders of the Germans unavenged. Not every article offers such excitement, but each issue will tell the story of the early life of Germans in Maryland. (In the 1600's, the colonists referred to those from today's Germany as "Dutchmen"). Watch your mail for your copy of The Report.

HENRY GUNTHER REMEMBERED

Several members of our Society appeared at the grave of Sgt. Henry Gunther at 10:59 on Nov. 11th to honor him. Gunther was the last American killed in World War I at 10:59 on 11/11/18, one minute before the war ended. He was a Baltimorean from a German family who spoke fluent German; he lived on E. Pratt St. opposite Patterson Park, where his mother was instrumental in arranging a memorial to the American soldiers who died in that war. When our members arrived at the grave, they found that others had been there earlier in the morning and had placed many flowers and an American flag at the site. Valerie Mathers placed a bouquet on the grave on behalf of our Society.

RUCK FAMILY HONORED

Our Society honored the Ruck family for its service to the community at our annual Awards Banquet held on Nov. 3 in Zion's Adlersaal. The Rucks' roots were in Bavaria; Leonard Ruck established a funeral business which is now operated in a 4th generation. The ceremony especially commended Michael J. Ruck for his many accomplishments and contributions to the educational, charitable, civic and religious life of Maryland. Michael was nominated for the honor by The Rev. H. J. Siegfried Otto, our past president and lifetime director. Pastor Otto recited Mike's numerous achievements, a few of which are as follows:

- Graduate of Calvert Hall College High Schools and Bellarmine College, Kentucky.
- Chairman, Calvert Hall Annual Giving Campaign
- Certified Funeral Service Practitioner
- President of Ruck Family Funeral Homes
- Awards from Baltimore City and County police and fire departments and member associations
- Calvert Hall College Hall of Fame, 1995
- Recipient Christian Life Award, Central MD Ecumenical Council
- Invested, Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre
- Knight of St. Gregory the Great, Papal Honor
- Cardinal William Keeler Community Service Award has served on every board and held every office of the MD State Funeral Directors Association
- Trustee of the National Foundation of Funeral Directors
- National Funeral Directors Association: served as a member of and chairman of numerous committees and as its spokesperson
- Member and President of the MD State Board of Morticians (licensing authority)
- Member Notre Dame Council Knights of Columbus
- Trustee, Calvert Hall College High School
- President, Police Assistance & Relief Fund, Balto Co.
- Trustee, Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- President, the Basilica Historic trust, 2002 to present
- Member, Central Maryland Ecumenical Council
- Member, Board of Financial Administration, Archdiocese of Baltimore
- Member, John Carroll Foundation
- Member,, Stella Maris Advisory Board
- Member, Cathedral Foundation Board

The Ruck family attended the banquet and Pastor Otto congratulated the entire family for their contributions to our community.

BÜRGERVEREIN CLUBHOUSE ?

Ever since the Deutsches Haus was razed to make room for the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, the German clubs of Baltimore had no place which the Buergerverein could call a German center. Some clubs meet at the Kickers Clubhouse on Broadway; some in the meeting facilities of Zion Church. There is now a movement afoot to explore the possibilities of the clubs joining together to acquire a common clubhouse. The Baltimore Kickers clubhouse has a "for Sale" sign on its front porch. Although it has served the Kickers adequately for many years, the parking situation in the area has become critical, making it inconvenient for its members. The Buergerverein has asked several groups, including our own Society, to contribute funds for legal expenses to explore how the various clubs could form an entity which would be able to make an acquisition of property, should the opportunity present itself. There is nothing presently on the horizon; the clubs are exploring the feasibility of such a project. Our Board of Directors has authorized a contribution of up to \$1,000 for the exploration.

GERMAN SOCIETY OFFICES

Our Society has maintained an office for most of its 229 years of existence. Historically our Society operated a social welfare program, aiding the needy among the German community. In modern times, various government agencies, state and federal, have assumed the welfare role, effectively pushing The German Society out of the welfare business. For years our office was open to the public, even if only for two days per week, and we had a stream of visitors who would come to make inquiries, often of a genealogical nature. About 15 years ago, our office was moved to its present location at #15 Mt. Vernon Place. It is not open to the public.

OUR RENT INCREASED

We have recently received a rent-increase notice, raising the monthly rent to \$800. Considering the location and the luxuriousness of the office space, that sum is not unreasonable; however some of our directors have requested that the board make a cost-benefit study, as well as a complete review of our needs for office space. A rental of nearly \$10,000 per year is the single major expense of the Society. There is also the question of affordability; our income has plummeted due to the low interest rates available on our investments and the fact that we cannot increase our dues to cover expenses. Once our needs are assessed, we will have a clearer view of our future course of action.

NEWSLETTER CHANGES

You may have noticed that our newsletter has not contained any photos for quite a while. The reason is because our editor is having problems coping with the requirements of our printer which needs electronic photos; formerly we would cut and paste photographic prints, interspersed with text. The method of turning out the newsletter will move to a committee process. Pictorial pages will be handled by one or two of our members. Eventually we hope to engage editors who are able to mix photos into the text. We contemplate that the next issue of the newsletter will be pictorial, displaying photos of the Society's events during 2012. If you have the ability to do so and would like to volunteer, please call our current editor, Ted Potthast at 410-828-8137.

OUR MEMBERSHIP LIST

Although our Society does not publish our membership list to the public, it has been our practice for the past 20 years to print the names of our members in our annual banquet program. It was recently pointed out that our members do not know who are their fellow members. We anticipate that we will soon make copies of the membership list available on a "members-only" basis. Since our newsletter appears on the internet, we will not print the names in the newsletter for all the world to see. It will likely be distributed via a special mailing to the membership. The policy of putting the names in our annual banquet program was initiated for archival purposes, to insure that our membership records would be available for future generations.

SUMMER SCHOLARSHIP

The Board of Directors approved a summer scholarship for 2013 to send a student to study at a high school in Germany. To qualify a student must attend a high school in Maryland, have completed two years of studying German, be between the ages of 15 and 18, be nominated by a member of the German Society of Maryland and approved by his or her German teacher. Deadline for submitting applications is February 1, 2013.

Application forms may be obtained on our website: www.germansociety-md.com/education.htm

Winner will be selected by our Education Committee. Funding via our German Language and Heritage Fund.

OUR SOCIETY IN 1908

The report of the Society's Agent tells much about how our Society functioned in 1908. We were largely a welfare institution. The history of our Society, published in 1909 contained our Agent's report:

"The payments for relief of the poor was made in the following manner: (monthly disbursements totaling \$5,634.60). Included in the above are 208 orders for groceries and provisions, 47 for coal and wood, 2 for shoes and 1 fare to Germany, 5 for fare to Philadelphia and 1 for fare to Washington.

Relief was extended to 30 families with 116 children and 129 widows with 522 children, 12 married couples and 12 widows without children and 25 men; in all 250 adults and 638 children.

64 new applications for relief were made at our office, all of which were carefully investigated and considered by our Executive Committee. In 1 case a false address was given and the parties could not be found; in 3 cases it was found that the applicants were not entitled to our assistance and in 60 cases relief was given according to the needs of the applicants as far as our funds would permit.

350 visits were made during the year to parties whom we regularly assisted, and in 14 of these cases assistance was discontinued; 8 of our regular pensioners died. A number of men seeking employment were referred to persons who applied."

Should our country ever go broke (as has happened to many other countries in history), perhaps our Society will one day be back in the business of providing aid to those in need.

WURZELBACHER VS. KAPTUR

An interesting congressional race to watch in the 9th district of Ohio: Samuel "Joe the Plumber" Wurzelbacher vs. incumbent Nancy Kaptur. The plumber achieved some notoriety in the 2008 presidential race: he espouses "common sense". (Joe the Plumber lost.)

WHAT IS A GERMAN AMERICAN?

During the lunch after the Oct. 6 event at the Friendship Garden at the Washington Mall, a participant from Richmond had the floor and was proclaiming that German Americans were those who were born in Germany and moved here. The rest were German-ancestor Americans; not the same. Interesting. Most German Society members were born in the USA and many have some Irish, English or Italian blood in them. What is the test for being German American? Do you have to have more than 50% German in you? Maybe you just need a drop of German blood and the rest - perhaps a state of mind.

LOSSES: STIEFF & SCHELLHASE

Our community notes the loss of two prominent German names: Rodney Stieff and Frieda Schellhase who passed away in early November. The Stieff family was active in our Society for many years. Rodney Stieff headed the famous Kirk-Stieff silversmith firm and supervised all aspects of the business. It was the oldest silversmith firm in the country. He died at age 87. Frieda Gause Schellhase worked alongside her husband at the well known German restaurant, Schellhase's, in the 400 block N. Howard St., which closed in 1980. It was known for its sour beef and dumplings, oysters, wiener schnitzel, cold beer and Maryland rye. Frieda died at age 91. The restaurant had been a haunt of H. L. Mencken, where he often played the piano with his musician friends. The German Society mourns the loss of the scions of these two outstanding German families which carried on their family traditions.

CONDOLENCES

Our long-time member RUTH ROEDER SEMON died July 17, 2012. Our Society extends its sympathy to her husband. Bernard Semon, also a member. Bernard and Ruth attended many Society functions over the years. Bernard attended our recent Awards Banquet. We will miss seeing Ruth at our annual membership meeting, at the German Festival, our summer picnic and many of our other activities.

**HAPPY THANKSGIVING TO OUR MEMBERS
FROM THE PRESIDENT AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

JUDGE GERSTUNG REMEMBERED

Judge Robert H. Gerstung, a stalwart and faithful member of our Society, died in 1994. He was recently recalled in an article by Dan Rodricks in the Baltimore Sun as "the most quotable of the Baltimore City District Court judges of that time." "Bobby" looked the part of a mid-century German; he wore his hair in the "whiffle" style, stood and walked erect, strode in leather cavalryman's high boots and burst forth with an incredible sense of humor. The article read: "To a man who on the day he was scheduled to move out of town heaved a trash can through his neighbor's front window, igniting a huge brawl: 'Sir, you don't spit in a crocodile's eye till you cross the river.'" "Gerstung was smart and skilled in pithy judicial commentary. He knew how to be sarcastic without saying the thing that would end his judicial career. In fact he was a regular feature of the "baby judge school", the judiciary's education program for new judges, and he delivered a lecture entitled "I Wish I Hadn't Said That". Gerstung's courthouse did not have metal detectors at the front door, as all courts do today. Aware of the dangers of deciding the fate of evil-doers, he had his own security system: a police revolver tucked hidden under his judicial robes. Many of his old friends within our Society look back upon him with fondness.

AN IRONIC TWIST OF FATE

We read in a Baltimore Sun obituary by Jacques Kelly (9/14/12) the story of Heinz Reifenberg, a Jewish citizen of Leipzig, Germany who fled the country to escape the Nazis, went to England and joined the army. The Brits advised him to change his name in case he were captured. He selected Ronnie Harold Russel. In 1947 he came to Baltimore and eventually started selling cars, building a thriving business. His firm, now owned and operated by his sons, hold Mercedes Benz and Volkswagen dealerships.

CHURCH-STATE IN GERMANY

When German taxpayers file their returns, if they are members of a church, they may elect to pay a church tax which the government turns over to the church entity. The churches last year received more than \$4 billion, which is the principal support of the churches. According to an article in the Washington Times on Sept. 24, the church tax can be as high as 9%. Apparently a taxpayer can avoid the church tax by simply not belonging to a church, or refusing to admit

it on his tax return. The subject became "news" when the Catholic bishops announced that believers who refuse to pay the religious tax won't be able to receive the Eucharist, become godparents or receive a church burial. Opting out of paying the tax is one reason for the decline in church membership in Germany, and stories of empty churches.

MENCKEN AND CAPTAIN KOENIG

We learn from an a posting on Der Wecker that our late member, Henry L. Mencken met with Kapitan Paul Koenig, who brought his submarine U-Deutsch-land to Baltimore in July, 1916. Koenig offered Mencken a free ride in the sub on its return trip to Germany, but Mencken declined. No reason given. Koenig would have to run the British blockade at the mouth of the Chesapeake to get back to Bremerhaven. When Kapitan Koenig died in September, 1933, he was mourned in Baltimore with an overflow crowd at services held at Zion Church. An 80th anniversary ceremony is planned for 2013, in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the submarine's 1916 visit to Baltimore. The Arion Gesangverein, which sang in 1933 will sing in 2013.

OUR SOCIETY IN 1865

Our member Walt Mathers searches old newspapers on the internet for info of interest to our readers. He stumbled upon this ad in an 1865 Baltimore paper: "GERMAN INTELLIGENCE: No. 55 Thames St. F.P (Fells Point) under the supervision of the German Society. All persons desirous to employ German Mechanics, Laborers or Servants, as well as all such Germans seeking employment will apply in person or by letter, post paid, to the agent of the Society, H. G. Wellinghoff, 55 Thames Street, who will gratuitously give all desired information." (It seems we were an employment agency in those days.)

SANDY REMINISCENT OF WWII

Christel van der Berg, our Society's secretary, saw on TV people in N. J. and NYC whose homes were destroyed by fire, wind and floods. They stood before their former homes crying. Christel lived through the bombings in WWII in Germany. She recalled how, after coming out of an air raid shelter, she would see people standing where once stood their homes, filled with tears. The devastation of Sandy brought back those war memories.