

Das Blatt

The American Goethe Society's Electronic Newsletter

Barbara W. Alsip, Editor

June 2005

WHAT A YEAR THIS HAS BEEN!

When we held our first annual business meeting last May, we had 24 members. Now we are up to 89, and 25 of those are new members.

Last May we planned five kinds of activities for the newly revived American Goethe Society: (1) book conversations, (2) monthly lunches at German restaurants, (3) a quarterly newsletter, (4) a Web site, and (5) an annual all-day Literaturfest

We have held six book conversations on texts available in both English and German. Although these conversations always engender spirited discussions, we'd like to have more members attend. Books discussed were Gunter Grass's *Crab Walk (Im Krebsgang)*, Uwe Timm's *Midsummer Night (Johannisnacht)*, W.G Sebald's *The Emigrants (Die Ausgewanderten)*, Michael Jürgs *Der Kleine Frieden im Großen Krieg (A Small Truce in the Great War)* or Stanley Weintraub's *Silent Night the Story of the World War I Christmas Truce*, Immanuel Kant's "On Perpetual Peace" ("Zum ewigen Frieden") and Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel (In Stahlgewittern)*.

Saturday lunches were held at the Old Europe, Wurzburg Haus, Cafe Mozart, and the Bistro Europa. A new feature is the "mit Lyrik" part of the luncheon. For each lunch, a theme is announced beforehand, and participants bring short poems to read in German. AGS member Dan Voglesong has taken over the logistics of organizing these lunches. Our Lyriklunches were capped on 21 May with a spectacular presentation on Schiller ballads by Donald Crosby. His captivating recitation of "Der Taucher" kept the audience spellbound.

We published three quarterly newsletters—in September and December of 2004 and in March of 2005. This issue is, of course, our fourth.

Our Web site has been slow to catch on, and we still need to make improvements to it. Its purpose is to inform and interact. So, please bring your thoughts to the "Discussion" section of the site.

Our Faustfest last October was a great success. We have already chosen a theme for 2005. This Schiller Year we'll have a Schillerfest the last weekend in October (28-29). We will use the same format. That is, Friday evening there will be a dinner reception at the Embassy. On Saturday, we will be at the Goethe-Institut from 10 am to 4 pm. In the morning, there will be audio-visual presentations. After lunch, there will be a discussion of Schiller texts; dramatic readings of Schiller plays will take place concurrently. The program will end with a lecture by the outstanding U.S. Schiller scholar, Professor Gail Hart from the University of California at Irvine.

Four activities that we did not plan last May have become part of our regular offerings. We have monthly dramatic readings in German. Beginning last summer, we have read and discussed Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, Kleist's *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*, Dürrenmatt's *Der Besuch der alten Dame*. Starting in June we will read Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*. A social hour afterwards—conducted in German—takes place at a nearby, smoke-free restaurant.

Our membership growth has made possible the addition of two lectures. The first in March was on Immanuel Kant (2004 was a Kant Year). The second in May related to the National Gallery special exhibit on recent acquisitions in prints, drawings, lithographs.

We've begun having refreshments after book conversations and lectures. In May we continued our new tradition of having Waldmeisterbowle after the business meeting and program. We've added special events suggested and organized by members. After Gounod's opera *Faust* at GMU in April, Bonnie Becker suggested a "Faustfest Finale," at which we met for dinner and discussion after the opera. Sherie Day organized the docent-led tour on the National Gallery exhibit mentioned in the paragraph above.

Following up on our member profiles...most recently the AGS board, we now begin a new series, starting on page 2.



HORST VON OPPENFELD: PROFILE OF AN AGS MEMBER

Horst von Oppenfeld was born in 1913 in Berlin and was raised on his parents' East German farm. He worked in a farm accounting firm, in a farm machinery factory and as the manager's assistant on other commercial farms. He studied for two semesters in a technical agricultural college and managed the family farm.

Drafted in 1939, Oppenfeld served in an armored reconnaissance battalion. The unit broke through the Maginot Line and across the Meuse River near Sedan, then went on to Calais and Cognac, some miles north of Bordeaux. After the armistice between Germany and France, the division next moved back across France and towards Moscow. By December 1941, snow and exceptionally cold weather caused havoc. Winter clothing, in accordance with Hitler's personal orders, had the lowest supply priority. "Our soldiers," he had argued, "will be home by Christmas." Some time later the Germans had to retreat, leaving equipment behind.

Oppenfeld was next posted to North Africa. In mid-February 1942, Oppenfeld became the aide of the 10th Panzer Division's first General Staff officer, Lt. Colonel Klaus Count von Stauffenberg, a man of "professional brilliance and charming human qualities." Regardless of how tense the military situation was or the long working and waking hours, Stauffenberg was never unfriendly toward Oppenfeld. In a battle with the British 8th Army, Stauffenberg lost one eye, one arm, and two fingers of the remaining hand. Military surgeons gave him first aid and sent him to a military hospital by plane, and Oppenfeld never saw him again. Fifteen months later, on July 20, 1944, when Oppenfeld was in a U.S. POW camp in northeastern Kansas, he heard that Stauffenberg had placed a briefcase with a bomb under Hitler's desk, but the bomb did not kill Hitler. Stauffenberg and several co-conspirators were shot immediately and some 200 other resistance leaders were persecuted and killed.

Life in the POW camp was pleasant enough. Oppenfeld took courses at Kansas State University. After two and a half years in the POW camp, Oppenfeld was repatriated in 1946. The family farm having been expropriated, he went to Berlin to seek work.

Here he met Judith Pownall, an American personnel officer with the American Military Government of Berlin. They later married. She resigned her position in 1948, and they came to the United States on one of the

last transport ships. They settled in New York, and a daughter, Anna, was born there in 1950. Oppenfeld enrolled at Cornell University in Ithaca, where he

studied for his MS and Ph.D. He accepted a two-year appointment to the University of the Philippines, which stretched to eight years, thanks in part to a grant from the Asian Development Foundation, funded by John D. Rockefeller, III. In the Philippines, Oppenfeld initiated and guided research on farm management, land tenancy, marketing, and rural credit. His teams introduced more productive varieties of crops and breeds of swine and chickens. He succeeded in bridging the gap between small farms and the university and in making the Philippines self-sufficient in rice. A son, Rolf, was born in the Philippines in 1955.

Oppenfeld next worked for the World Bank, which had sought experts to conduct an economic assessment of the Australian Territory of Papua and New Guinea in 1963. Although the territories were rich in natural resources such as gold, copper, nickel, and fish and forestry products, no more than eighteen people had completed high school, and half the country's two million population had no contact with the outside world. Through the work of the panel of experts, coffee became the first profitable cash crop, and the experts' report, *The Economic Development of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea* was published by Johns Hopkins Press in hard cover.

The family moved to Bethesda in 1964 and Oppenfeld spent 15 years on the Bank staff and 18 years consulting. As a consultant, he worked for the UN Development Program in New York, the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Rome, the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau and the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit in Frankfurt, and the Turkish Development Foundation in Ankara. Thus international finance and development clearly dominated his career. In addition to the technical aspects, Oppenfeld was instrumental in improving peoples' lives and income.

When the Berlin wall collapsed, Oppenfeld returned to his home village in East Germany after a 47-year absence. A friendship with five budding entrepreneurs, who had established a farm business and a service corporation, gave him an opportunity to invest and become a shareholder in these corporations. He visits there at least twice a year, without having to share the full burden of responsibilities, and he enjoys the home village in his advanced retirement age.

COMING EVENTS

AGS Event

Wednesday, June 15: Dramatic Reading.
Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*. Dolley Madison
Library, McLean, VA, 7:00pm. (See also Summer

AGS

Events Notice)

Other Events

Thursday, July 7: Fairfax Symphony, "German
Band," Nottoway Park, Vienna, VA, 7:30 pm.

Friday, August 19: "Alt Washingtonia" (Bavarian
Folk Dance), Lake Accotink Park, Springfield,
VA, 7:30 pm.

Friday, August 26: City of Fairfax "Alte
Kameraden" German Band, Lake Accotink Park,
7:30 pm.

CULTURAL NEWS FROM GERMANY

Art Museums at Frankfurt. The director of
Frankfurt's Schirn kunsthalle, Max Hollein, was
chosen by the British journal "Art Review" among
the five most important museum directors
worldwide. Another art site, the Museum for
Modern Art, was awarded the prize for best
exhibit of the year internationally. The Frankfurt
museum landscape demonstrates the crucial role of
private sponsors. It seems that public funds are
available only AFTER private funds have been
assured. Director Hollein spends more than a third
of his time on "Kontaktpflege" (networking).
(Source: *Die Zeit*, 3.3.05)

"Schillerjahr." Schiller had the most
performances in German theaters in April. A
sample week showed 22 Schiller performances
overall. Of the other classics,
Goethe scored 9, Lessing 8, Kleist 4. For the first
time, Schiller's hardly-ever-performed translation/
adaptation of "Turandot" (by Gozzi) showed up in
two theaters yet! The most Schiller-intensive place
was Chemnitz (Saxony) with three Schiller dramas
on the schedule of the sample week: *Die Räuber*,
Die Verschwörung des Fiesko zu Genua, and
Maria Stuart.

The first weekend in March saw a "marathon
reading" of Schiller texts that lasted 24 hours, held
at the Berlin Academy of Arts. Invited readers
were celebrities among actors, artists, singers,
writers, and politicians such as former Federal
President Richard von Weizsäcker, Environment

Minister Jürgen Trittin, Interior Minister Otto
Schily, writer Rolf Hochhuth, and artist Klaus
Staeck. The event was attended by a total of 5,000
Berliners.

THE BOOK CORNER

Our president is especially happy about the
rediscovery of the author on whom she wrote her
first book: Franz Fühmann. Two recent new
editions of his caught the attention of a *Zeit* critic.
One, his children's book, *Die dampfenden Häuse
der Pferde im Turm zu Babel*, (published by
Hinstorff) is a "Sprachspielbuch about
Schopenhauer, Schiller, Morgenstern, and all the
rest", and inspires the judgment: "We announce
the resurrection of the dead DDR-poet Fühmann
...habemus poetam!" The other, *Prometheus. Die
Titanenschlacht* (published by Büchergilde), is
"the most subtle, knowledgable, and fantastic
renarration of myth in literary history."

Titled "Den Ritter leicht gemacht", *Die Zeit* was
"pleased to announce" Goethe's youthful drama
Götz von Berlichingen in an illustrated version for
children "voll Ironie und zeichnerischer Komik".
Published in the series "Weltliteratur für Kinder"
by Kindermann-Verlag, Berlin. In the same series,
Schillers *Wilhelm Tell* is also available. The
publisher's name, by the way, is the name of the
author/ narrator Barbara Kindermann.

TRAVEL TIPS

Two big Schiller exhibits in Germany this year are
at the Schiller Nationalmuseum in Marbach/
Neckar and one in Weimar (Thüringen). The two
exhibits will travel to each other's site during the
year. The one in Marbach, from 23 April to 9
October, is titled: "Götterpläne und
Mäusegeschäfte". The one in Weimar is titled
""Die Wahrheit hält Gericht - Schillers Helden
heute" and is at the Schiller Museum. The exhibit
runs from 9 May until 10 October.

**For further information, please contact the
following officers:**

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John Loth at jloth@cox.net or 703/242-8840.

Farewell to a friend: As you will see by the letter on
page 4 from our editor, Barbara Alsip, this issue of Das

Blatt will be her final one. We regret her departure, will miss her greatly, and remain ever grateful for her work on Das Blatt, on the AGS board without which we could never have re-launched the American Goethe Society, and most especially for her boundless optimism, sense of humor, people skills, and her

Waldmeisterbowle recipe. We wish her well in her new life. [A farewell Luncheon in her honor is planned for July 18. See Summer Events Page for details.] –
Irmgard Wagner, AGS President.



June 2005

My dear friends of the American Goethe Society,

It is with regret that I must tender my resignation as vice-president and newsletter editor of the American Goethe Society, effective July 2005, as I am moving out of the area this summer.

I cannot convey how much my association with you all has meant to me. I accepted my post with some trepidation: After all, I am a heritage German-Austrian with no formal training in German language and literature and no speaking competency, other than the "household German" I learned as a small child.

But that mattered not to you, as you treated me with kindness, in fact, as one of your own. And I, in turn, have made many friends.

And my, hasn't it been fun? I shall look back with joy on so many things: the book conversations, our splendid Faust-Fest, the luncheons mit Lyrik, the Waldmeisterbowle. For Irmgard and John, I shall remember all those Board meetings that we've had over the past year. Perhaps it's a good thing that we did not keep count of them; there were so many!

Please know that I shall always remember you with fondness. I won't be moving all that far away, and who knows? I may see you at one of the American Goethe Society activities during the coming season.

Herzlichen Dank und Auf Wiedersehen,

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