

One of our proud members, Edgar Brueschke, was kind enough to take the time to translate an article which describes our cultural history. The article, Die Einweihung und Eröffnung der Turn-Halle, was distributed in the Washington Post, a Spokane daily newspaper printed in the German language on January 5, 1897. This article was first discovered by Karl Mattheus, a former president of the German-American Society. Copies of this paper are in the archives of the Cheney Cowles Museum.

Our Cultural Haven

By Edgar Bueschke

A delightful article published in the Washington Post, written in ornate German Gothic script (Deutsche Frakturschrift) describes the great joy that Germans in Spokane felt about the dedication of their very own house. Although it was the inspiration of the German gymnasts, it was also hailed with great anticipation by all the German groups around Spokane that it be a welcoming center for entertainment and performances. Its expressed purpose was to cement a lasting cultural bond among all the German groups.

It does not take much for Germans in general to find a reason to celebrate, but this really was a big deal on the 21st of December 1897, New Years Eve. The article describes in glowing terms and colorful adjectives the evening's celebration events (I am paraphrasing some of the comments). The activities began with members of the local athletic club that put on complex and difficult gymnastic demonstrations such as pull-ups (Klimmzüge) and other gymnastic feats to inspire and entertain. This was then followed by an active and prominent ladies choir performed under the direction of their much loved and respected Professor Carl Teichert, who's directing is described to have been with great feeling and rhythm.

The duet performed by Elisabeth and Emma Haase was praised and applauded for their rendition of "Im Walde". Both ladies have a lovely voice and a wonderful presentation. Also Ferdinand Haase and Eduard Lenser performed with great precision and deep spiritual feelings their rendition of "Treibe Schifflin, durch die Wellen". It was noted that the years have not diminished the splendid baritone voice of their beloved Ferdinand, and no wonder that Herr Lenser has now earned a highly-coveted position in their "Deutscher Sängerkreis".

Of special note was the solo performance of "Besser als Gold" by Fräulein Pauline Loacker whose talents kept the audience spellbound. And Fräulein Laura Lentz, a much-loved young lady and well known in church circles, flawlessly performed a very difficult solo. The little Oskar Haase, a young piano virtuoso, gave a brilliant performance. Mentioned were also a number of other brilliant vocal and instrumental performances.

After the various performances, the ball was officially opened by President Herr Gustav Meese and his very beautiful wife with a polonaise. The more than a hundred couples danced the night away until the wee hours of the morning and it was further mentioned that substantial homage was paid to Bacchus, the Greek God of wine.

As we look back with nostalgic feelings and remember our own special memories within the walls of our Deutsches Haus, we are determined more than ever to preserve our cultural haven.

Somehow, we can't seem to separate the organizational structure of our society from the physical structure of our Deutsches Haus that was then as it is today a symbol of our cultural and ethnic bond. Many feel that one cannot exist without the other, just as many believe the same bond exists between our choir and the German-American Society.

A hundred and seventeen years ago our beloved structure grew out of a strong need and desire for a place to assemble. There were many German groups around Spokane, enough to sustain a daily paper printed in German. Many of these groups and interests no longer exist today except our choir. I applaud the efforts of Karin King and the entire board in their diligent efforts to promote renewed interests in our organization. The support of all of us members is vital in these efforts. It will ultimately be a growing and sustained membership in our organization that will save our beloved cultural haven.

Edgar Bueschke