



New Metropolitan Clubhouse Will Be Ready May 15



Formal Opening 12 June 1928

Construction cost \$20,000.00

4165 Lakeside Drive

A Brief History of the German-American Club

1903 - 1970

Presented by Henry von der Heyde, on 22 Oct 1983, from his recollections and information from his early Jacksonville friends; Arnold Mohlman, Oscar Seewald, Jr., and Louis Welbrock.

The Germania Club of Jacksonville was organized on 25 Oct 1903 with 35 charter members and in 1904 purchased the property in Riverside then known as Wolff's Casino, a one story wooden building. (present site of Professional Insurance Corporation - 135 Riverside Ave) Application for charter and incorporation was presented to the Circuit Court on 6 Jan 1904. On 8 Feb 1904, the 4th Judicial Court of Florida approved/granted the charter. The following group subscribed for the incorporation and undertook the financial assurance of the newly founded club.

F. X. Schreiber

Oscar Seewald

W. Schiller

C. Brickwedel

L. W. Hanne

John A. Schneiders

H. J. Kappher

E. O. Schuman

Charles Wichmann

The club constitution was adopted on 1 Oct 1906. Club membership totalled 215, comprised of 104 active and 111 passive members. Membership dues were \$12.00 per year.

This early club had a large open porch facing on the St. John's River and the members enjoyed many Sunday band concerts here.

Floor plan of original club is attached as Appendix 1

Membership grew steadily during the period 1906 to 1912 and the club had a Manner Corps (Singing Society) of 40 to 50 men directed

by Professor H. R. Novitzky. There were Sanger Fests conducted annually and the German Clubs of Atlanta, Charleston, Jacksonville, Tampa and Savannah played host in their respective cities. In 1911, the 7th Annual Sanger Fest was held in Jacksonville on Apr 16, 17 & 18, at the Ostrich Farm located at the end of Talleyrand Ave, with related activities at the old Duval Theatre and the Morocco Temple.

As membership increased, club expansion was required. Two prominent members, Mr. Oscar Seewald, Sr. and Mr. Johann Toensfeldt, proposed a new club building on the same site and they were the prime leaders in organizing the financing for the venture through the sale of 500, \$100.00 20 year 6% mortgage bonds. (\$50,000.00)

Original Bond #90 is attached as Appendix 2

Mr. J. H. Klutho was selected as architect and Citizens Bank of Jacksonville was trustee (passed to Atlantic National Bank in 1914). To accommodate the larger new building an additional 33 foot wide strip of land had to be purchased, which then brought the property dimensions to 100 feet facing on Riverside Ave., 560 feet deep to the bulkhead at the river's edge and thence 120 feet to the channel. During construction of the new building, club activity was conducted in a small wooden building behind Mr. Seewald's residence on Anheuser Busch property adjacent to the new construction.

The new club was dedicated on 19 January 1913 and enjoyed by approximately 1000 members. The grand opening spanned 6 days (20 - 25 Jan 1913) featuring a bazaar with auctions, dancing and special musical entertainment. Regular programming thereafter featured dancing every Wednesday evening and 4 formal balls a year; New Years Eve, Masquerade (pre-Lent), Easter and Club Anniversary (annually in Oct). During a ball, two bands were employed, one on the ballroom stage and another positioned in the balcony. No dances were held during Lent.

The new club was an eloquent 3 storied stucco building, with terra cotta tile roof and trim featuring a beautiful main entrance arch of ornamental glass and metal, and immediately became a city landmark. Floor plans of 1913 Germania Club attached as Appendix 3.

The club prospered and in 1916, three far-sighted members; Mr. J. M. Welbrock, Mr. F. H. Hanne and Mr. E. A. Riker, proposed the purchase of the property here on Lakeside Drive. The proposal was approved and the purchase was made for \$6000.00.

Upon United States entry into World War I and the ensuing emotional turmoil (1917-1919) relating to anything German, club membership dropped drastically to 65 members. Not able to maintain the large clubhouse on Riverside Ave., the small membership took a rented hall for its club functions; the 3rd floor of the Herkimer Building at 136 East Bay Street. (This building recently renovated, and now the Baywater Square next to the City Hall). With the move the club name was also changed to the Metropolitan Club. The rent was \$25.00 a month, however, the club treasury was secure with \$20,000.00.

The magnificent club building on Riverside Ave. was put up for sale and purchased by the labor organization and renamed the Labor Temple on 2 Oct 1921. The Labor Temple defaulted on 5 June 1923. At this juncture, the Seminole Milk Co. became owner on 22 Apr. 1924 until bankruptcy in 1928, when Foremost Dairy took over the building. Foremost Dairy found the building too small for their operation in 1932 and the building eventually (1934-1936) passed to Reverend Witty, wherein he established the Faith Temple. At this time, some bond holders released their bonds as a donation to the church. In 1938, Reverend Witty addressed a letter to the remaining bondholders offering 10% on the \$1.00 for their bonds. Sometime later, in the 1940's, the building was purchased by the Insurance corporation and the club was releived of its building.

Returning now to the stouthearted membership of 65 and their struggle in the early 1920's. The rented hall as a club was not the best of facilities and the Ladies Section held their meetings

in individual homes, rotating the meetings between each member's residence. Also during this period, some of the younger male members organized a group within the club known as the KEP- the Knights of Everlasting Pleasure. This group had their New Years Eve party of 1920 in the now demolished Seminole Hotel.

The 15 members of the KEP agreed to a membership limit of 25 and the minutes of this 26 Jan 1923 meeting are attached as Appendix 4.

The KEP were restless and anxious for a new club. With a 25 member group, their vote could provide the necessary majority to convince the older reluctant members to build a new clubhouse "out in the country" here on Lakeside Drive. The spark for action came at a bar-b-q held at Clara and Alfred Fisher's farm on the river south of San Jose in 1926. On that occasion, Mr. Arthur Arnold, from atop a picnic table, rallied his KEP colleagues to press the issue to build a new club house on this "country" property. Unanimous support of this action brought about the construction of this Lakeside Drive club at a cost of \$20,000.00.

The formal opening was held on 12 June 1928.

Floor plans of 1928 Metropolitan Club attached as Appendix 5.

Many events and improvements have taken place in our club since its opening in 1928. First was the completion of the Sons of Herman Lodge Room upstairs. The room had no floor and the Lodge bought the flooring material, Mr. August Hillman laid the floor and Henry von der Heyde painted it.

In September 1929, the concrete bowling alley, located outside on the north side of the building, was completed.

During the period 1929 to 1932 correspondence between the club and the Sons of Herman Lodge completed the agreement for Lodge members to become members of the club without paying an initiation fee but paying their club dues a year in advance. For years Lodge members could attend their Lodge meetings in the club designated

lodge room but they had no club privileges. With the new agreement, 15 new club members were added to the rolls bringing the membership total to 80.

To promote the growth of the club, a determined membership drive was instituted which resulted in increasing the membership to 125. The award trophy cups for 1932 and 1933 were won by Henry von der Heyde for obtaining the most new members each year; 15 in 1932 and 10 in 1933.

In early 1930's, club name changed to German American Club.

It was during these depression years that club members were permitted to pay their dues every 3 months. Mr. John Butzer was appointed collector and he travelled among the membership on his rounds. The club paid Mr. Butzer 10% of his collections for his services.

On New Years Eve 1933, the Officers and crew of the North German Lloyd Training ship "Oldenburg", berthed in Fernandina, were guests of the club. Many members enjoyed a visit to the ship before its departure.

Club profit for the year 1933 was \$375.93

During 1934 a number of major improvements to the club were initiated which were done with personal time and money contributed by the members involved in the projects. The initial project was enlarging the kitchen and building the bar, which replaced the crude and rustic sawhorse and wood plank arrangement- present Wine stube alcove. Mr. N. H. Nissen, an excellent woodcraftsman, built the bar.

Also in 1934-35 was the construction and enclosing of the side porch (south side of building) by Mr. Michael Barr and Mr. Alfred Miller. This enlarged the dance floor area by moving tables and chairs into the new area.

To facilitate movement from the new addition to the dance floor, the windowless arches in the wall were removed in 1935, by Mr. Barr and Mr. Miller, and replaced with the present posts.

The next major project was the modification of the Club caretaker's quarters. As originally constructed, there was no kitchen on the 2nd floor. The caretaker had to use the club kitchen. To correct this problem, the pool room was walled off to half its size and in the newly created space a living room was built and a kitchen was installed in the original sitting room, thus providing the caretaker full living facilities in a complete apartment on the 2nd floor. Participating in this modification were Mr. Carl Rieker, Mr. Emil Schneider, Mr. Dick Lampe and Mr. Henry von der Heyde.

On July 18, 1935, a SKAT club was organized with approximately 20 members. Mr. E. A. Riker was President and Mr. Henry von der Heyde was Secretary/Treasurer. Early members of the club were:

John Butzer
Alfred Fisher
Conrad Mangels
Alfred Miller
N. H. Nissen
William Seiler
Max Vietze

Further club improvements continued through the late 1930's consisting of:

- * Paneling the Entrance Hall and Men's Meeting Room
- * Carpeting the Entrance Hall and Ladies Meeting Room
- * Enlarging the Ladies Cloak and Restroom area by converting part of the garage space
- * Reenforcing the property shore line with broken concrete slabs obtained through the efforts of Mr. William Seiler
- * Donating and planting of azaleas by Mr. Arno Silge and ligustrum by Mr. August Hillman
- * Setting of the Flag pole by Mr. Herman Schiller
- * Building of the first dock by Mr. William Maierfeldt and Mr. Ernie Reifsynder

* Placing of awning over front entrance walkway

* Laying of back lawn by Mr. Carl Reiker, Mr. Emil Schneider and Mr. Henry von der Heyde

On 8 April 1940, the Officers and cadets of the Danish Training ship "DANMARK" were entertained by the club.

As World War II (sometime in 1942 or 1943) deepened, the club name was again changed to Metropolitan Club and membership dropped sharply.

In the early 1950's, proposals were made to build a swimming pool or a tennis court. Still another proposal was made by Henry von der Heyde to enclose the back porch. This proposal met with approval by the club members and the project was completed and named after Mr. von der Heyde.

Also in the early 1950's, the club name was changed back to the German American Club.

During the 1966 Anniversary preparation, 4 ladies were recognized for their 35 years of devoted service in the club kitchen. The ladies so recognized were: Mrs. Henrietta Foyt, Mrs. Emilie Schneider, Mrs. Helen von der Heyde and Mrs. Alfred Wesch.

A further major improvement was made in 1969 when 2 large air condition units were installed over the rear porch for the ballroom, another unit was put in for the Bar area and Men's Meeting room and a window air conditioner was installed in the Ladies Meeting room.

In 1970, a destroyer, built in Bath, Maine for Germany and christened the "ROMMEL", was on shake-down cruise and visited Mayport Naval Station. During the ship's visit, the German officers and crew were hosted with a dinner by the club.