Goethe House Restored

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THE STONE CHERUBS in the small baroque garden seemed surprised to see so many gentlemen in formal black suits, for the occasion was as cheerful as the May sunshine. Some of Johann Wolfgang Goethe's most distinguished admirers were meeting to take official notice of a fact which Frankfurt residents had noted with satisfaction for weeks: The Goethe House, resurrected with love and money, was standing again.

To be sure, it stood alone. The high gothic houses on the other side of the Großer Hirschgraben, which once threw long shadows across Goethe's birthplace, had not yet been resurrected from the flames of the Hitler war. Grass was growing on the rubble.

But the poet's house, a harmony of pink sandstone, tan plaster and grey slate — graceful as a sonnet — rose out

* Front cover photo of bust of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe by Claude Jacoby, PRD, HICOG.
of the ruins like the hope of free men for a new Germany. The spirit of Frankfurt's most famous son, bombed out like so many of his countrymen, once more had a place to lay his head.

At the dedication ceremony in the sunlit music room the speakers struck Goethe chords. Johann Georg Hartmann, who had pushed the restoration project through the Frankfurt City Council and spearheaded the gathering of funds for the work, could report with pleasure a job well done and invoke Goethe's hope of peace and understanding in the world. Underlining Frankfurt's paternal pride in Goethe, Mayor Walter Kolb picked up the Goethian sense of cultural heritage. For President Theodor Heuss of the Federal Republic Goethe's insistence on intellectual freedom was of top importance. He pointed out that the Frankfurt Goethe House has a double task so long as the Goethe House in Weimar is surrounded by a regime of un-Goethian compulsion.

Speaking for the Allied high commissioners, John J. McCloy, US High Commissioner for Germany, noted that Goethe was international in spirit and, as a private citizen, interested in the political life of his country — two qualities which Germans of today could well emulate.

Outside, beyond the range of Goethe words and Haydn music, the curious residents of Frankfurt peered up at the many-windowed facade of the new-old house with the golden monogram of Goethe's father, Johann Casper, over the door. From the wrought-iron cage windows of the ground floor scarlet geraniums nodded back.

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IT WAS THE SECOND TIME that the house, so appropriately named "The Three Lyres," had been rebuilt. In 1755, when the poet was only six years old, his father had it completely renovated. Today it is known that to save the overhanging upper stories that he loved he evaded the city building code, reporting the complete rebuilding as a simple repair.

Aside from the overhanging facade, the house differed little from the houses of other well-to-do Frankfurt citizens. If the ceilings were a shade too low for the taste of the time, the fine broad staircase retrieved the lost elegance.

It was a comfortable house in which the lawyer's son grew up, studying with his father and with his tutors, browsing in the fine library and in his father's collections. The living room on the ground floor adjoined the kitchen, agreeable in the winter months when the kitchen was the best-heated room in the house, and on the way out to the tiny garden one could catch a glimpse of the copper pots and pans gleaming on the kitchen walls.

On the second floor, clustered around the stately hall, were the fine drawing rooms, warmed against winter chill by great tile stoves; in the west wing, the music room where Goethe's mother played the harpsichord to father Goethe's flute.

The third floor held the studios for housing the art objects and flora which Johann Casper Goethe so assidu-
ously collected, and the family bedrooms, while on the fourth floor, up under the roof, was the heart of the house, the study where — at the old inlaid, ink-spattered desk — Goethe wrote the first draft of "Faust," "Werther," the book that made him famous, and "Goetz von Berlichingen."

The sunny rooms, the fine craftsman’s work of the furniture, the broad staircase of the house all radiate well-being and leisure. It was a pleasant, cultivated life in the lawyer’s household on the Großer Hirschgraben.

Goethe lived in the house until he was 26. Some years later, in 1796, his aged mother sold the house, and part of the furnishings were dispersed. But because Goethe was already famous, all the belongings of the house — the chairs, the clock, the backgammon board — were carefully preserved by their new owners and their children, so that when the house was made a museum in the middle of the last century, it was possible to find every single object and return it to its place in the house, just as it had been in Goethe’s youth.

At the outbreak of World War II all the furnishings were removed from the house and dispersed in 12 safe storage places in the country around Frankfurt. Samples of all wallpaper and woodwork were taken and placed together with detailed plans and drawings of the house, outside and in, a precaution taken with all historic buildings in Germany. Students at the Frankfurt School of Applied Art helped with drawings of door latches and other small components. When the empty shell of the house went up in smoke in the last years of the war, the soul of the house was safe.

Nevertheless, it took determination to rebuild it. While the war still raged, a Frankfurt construction firm made a gift of Reichsmarks 300,000 for the work, but progress in the hunger-wrecked first years was slow. By 1947, however, the rubble had been cleared and the foundation repaired. In that same year the Frankfurt Hochstift society, administrators of the property, won City Council approval to continue the work, and with private contributions and enthusiasm the work was continued.

With currency reform the reconstruction took an upswing. More gifts flowed in, one of the largest being DM 150,000 donated by Mr. John J. McCloy from the HICOG Special Projects Fund. A Goethe stamp for the Goethe year 1949, the 200th anniversary of his birth, brought a rich harvest. Money and encouragement came from Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, Albert Schweizer, Fritz von Unruh and others. Thornton Wilder gave all his German royalties.

Under the supervision of architect Theodore Kellner, the plans and drawings became stone and plaster. Because only perfect restoration was good enough, masons had to be found who could cut and set stones, roofers who could fit slate shingles exactly as it was done in the 18th century.

By early spring of this year all problems had been solved; the house was finished, and the furnishings could be brought back out of storage, none the worse for their extended hibernation. The men who had worked so long and so hard for the restoration could throw open the doors to present and future generations of Goethe friends.

For the restorers, special admirers of the greatest German poet, the task had had an inner justification. When Goethe, as a lad of six, had helped lay the cornerstone of the house, he had said, “I wish that this stone may be preserved unchanged until the end of the world.”

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Text of Mr. McCloy’s Speech, translated from German, follows:

It is an honor to participate in this occasion. In behalf of the Allied High Commission, I thank you for this opportunity to do homage to the genius of Goethe. In this building we have an instance not only of reconstruction but also of rededication to what is finest in the spiritual heritage of Germany.

Ladies and gentleman, I hope that you will read in the words which I am expressing today on behalf of my two colleagues as well as on my own, the sentiments which our three countries and with them all the civilized nations of the world harbor toward one of the greatest sons of Germany. We see in this citizen of the former free German Reichsstadt (imperial city), Frankfurt-on-the-Main, a man whose life and whose works bear the mark of genuine Germanism. We appreciate in him that he has given to the German language a brilliance, a fullness, a richness and a purity as no one before him — all which still radiates to the present day. We salute him, moreover,

Sunny and spacious drawing room on the second floor, warmed against winter chill by great ornate tile stove.
a universal genius which belongs not only to his own country but to the entire world.

Like his fatherland, humanity can be proud of him as one of the most perfect and, as he described himself, universal figures — as one of those rare and most precious flowers, which actually constitute a justification of mankind. He consciously addressed not only the German people but all of mankind. For that we tender him our admiration and our devotion.

I do not propose to say much more about Goethe. There are others here who are far better qualified to talk about him. I should, however, like to say a few words about the meaning which Goethe has for the world today.

IN THESE DAYS OF CHALLENGE to free men and free institutions we have great need of our best minds and finest talents. I think it is appropriate to remember that Goethe, the man of letters and of science, was not above entering the arena of practical political administration. He wrestled with the problems of balancing a budget, passing on plans for building bridges and roads, running a school system, reconstructing old copper mines, supervising the theater and building factories.

Nor was this active participation merely a hobby. It stemmed from the deepest conviction of the man who characterized the highest human developments as being helpful and kind, who found that the answer to the central problem of existence lay in the dedication of the individual to working unselfishly for the good of the community.

In these days when there is need to rise above narrow nationalism it is also good to remember Goethe’s cosmopolitanism and his internationalism. You all know how he valued the contributions to world culture of all races and all thinkers and condemned those who could only see literature and life through national prejudices. Without surrendering his loyalty to the German part of his heritage, he described the highest degree of culture as that in which one “feels the weal or woe of neighboring people as if it had happened to one’s own.” To see, and to feel, what is common to us all, Goethe would say, marks the highest man.

TODAY, THE NEED FOR SOLUTIONS which transcend nationalism is clear. Our success in working out such solutions — whether in the Schuman Plan, a united Europe or in western defense — depends on how clearly we see, and pay attention to, the common elements of humanity which lie deeper than national boundaries and cultures.

These are times when the issues of freedom and the individual are again at stake. It would be superfluous to elaborate on Goethe’s dedication to these ideals. Let us remember, however, that Goethe put freedom on the same plane as life itself. For that reason totalitarians, in his own country or elsewhere, have never been able to evoke his name successfully.

Nowadays we hear much talk of a Vertrauenskrise (lack of confidence) and that disillusionment and cynicism are widespread. Therefore, to have an event such as this for this house, rebuilt from ruins, is a triumph of faith and belief. I hope this occasion will serve as a reminder, particularly to the young people of Germany, that there are values and ideals in which we can believe and upon which we can build a strong, human and free world.

May all of those who seek the unification of Europe and who from far and near will make pilgrimages to this building, achieve in his spirit a universal form of thinking and acting, remembering his promise and prophecy: “A new day beckons us to new shores.”

Gibney Preparing Labor Union Film

Sheridan Gibney, prominent Hollywood screen writer, has been in Germany preparing a documentary film on German trade unions. The film will be the first of a series designed to acquaint foreign countries with the development of free trade unionism in Germany.

The documentary will deal in part with the development of UGO (now Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) in Berlin as a free trade union federation which separated from the Communist-controlled FDGB.

Mr. Gibney was formerly president of the US Screen Writers’ Guild and won an “Oscar” award for his scripting of the “Life of Louis Pasteur.” He also wrote the screenplays of “Our Hearts Were Young and Gay” and “Anthony Adverse.”

Beckmann Etchings Displayed

A small memorial showing of early etchings of Max Beckmann, German-American artist who died in New York last December, were exhibited recently at Frankfurt’s US Information Center.

Mr. Beckmann, who was born in Leipzig Feb. 12, 1884, was considered one of Germany’s outstanding exponents of expressionistic art. During the past 10 years he taught fine arts in St. Louis and at the Brooklyn Art Museum.