German-American Friendship  
— for the Price of a Stamp

by Paul R. Phillips
Information Officer, Public Affairs Field Center, Kassel

"Larned, Kansas, and Witzenhausen, Germany, have established a contact that promises to ripen into one of those community friendships that is the objective of the UNESCO Town Affiliation program". The Daily Tiller and Toiler, Larned, Kansas, March 24, 1952.

"Within the past few weeks an active exchange of correspondence has developed between Witzenhausen and Larned, Kansas, which will soon tie a strong bond between these two cities separated by a great ocean." Werra Nachrichten, Witzenhausen, Hesse, Germany, April 5, 1952.

These words from the local newspapers in an American and German town are only a few among the thousands that have appeared in the press in recent months about the newly-found friendship between Germans and Americans who are making international relations a matter of personal concern. Although the stimulus for this town-to-town and person-to-person exchange of "diplomatic notes" originated with the Larned UNESCO group, the people of Larned are now having trouble matching letter for letter with their enthusiastic correspondents in Witzenhausen who live in northern Hesse but not many miles from the Soviet Zone of Germany.

About two years ago a housewife member of the Larned UNESCO group wrote the letter which tied the first bond between the 724-year-old town of Witzenhausen and the city on the Kansas plains. The housewife received her inspiration for the project through an organization known as "Operation Democracy." This organization’s main purpose is to facilitate direct contacts between American and European communities to promote friendly understanding and cultural exchanges. Small UNESCO groups, like the one in Larned, have taken it upon themselves to put into practice this program of carrying "the man-in-the-street Voice of America" to the communities of Europe. If the Larned-Witzenhausen exchange-of-correspondence project can be taken as an example, the program has already achieved great success in accomplishing this purpose.

The Witzenhausen group has taken its task of developing its new American friendships seriously. Werner Grosskopf, the dynamic manager of Witzenhausen's Adult Education Association, has made his office the clearing-house for the community's letter exchange with the citizens of Larned. When the project began in earnest in the spring of this year, Mr. Grosskopf collected names of persons in Witzenhausen who wanted to exchange news and ideas with the townfolk of Larned. He soon had collected the names of more than one hundred persons, young and old alike. These names he sent to Mrs. Edwin Doll, the housewife in Larned, for distribution to those in her community who were interested in making German friends. At the same time Mrs. Doll sent Mr. Grosskopf a list of names of people in Larned who wanted to exchange letters with the "buergers" of Witzenhausen.

Within the past several months the letters from Larned have been arriving in ever increasing numbers in Witzenhausen. So that all those in Witzenhausen receiving letters can share with each other their contents, Mr. Grosskopf has organized meetings twice a month for reading the incoming mail. Characteristic of the deep sense of purpose behind these biweekly meetings of the "Letter Club" are the invitations to the meetings sent to all members. For the meeting of June 30 the invitation showed a map of Kansas, with the adjoining states of Oklahoma and Missouri, and with a big black dot labeled "Larned." Opposite the map was a square label "Witzenhausen." Between the black dot and the square were drawn a number of lines, symbolically representing the bonds of friendship between the people of the two communities.

The invitation to the August 2 meeting was equally impressive as an indication of the value attached to the "letters from America" by the Witzenhausen group. This time Witzenhausen was represented as a medieval castle and Larned as the Statue of Liberty. Between the
castle and the Statue of Liberty were again drawn lines representing the bonds of friendship between the two communities. On the invitation was written, in part, the following:

"To all friends of the 'Letter Club' — Please bring your letters from Larned and be prepared to discuss how we can increase our correspondence in the future. In order to increase our knowledge about the United States, we will as usual see several films about America."

The invitation ended with the following words: “The constant exchange of good-will and ideas will bring the nations of the earth closer and closer together. Cooperation is the best way to common understanding, to become good friends, and to maintain peace.”

The several newspapers that appear in Witzenhausen have made an important contribution to making the "friendship through letters" program a success both in Witzenhausen and Larned. Articles have appeared regularly during the past several months, giving progress reports on the project’s latest developments. On two occasions articles explaining the program and its purposes, the UNESCO organization in Larned that sponsors the American side of the operation, and describing Larned with text and pictures have covered more than a third of a page in two of the local papers. Since only one page in these two papers is devoted to local news daily, such coverage gives an idea of Witzenhausen’s interest in their friends in Larned.

The Larned newspaper, The Daily Tiller and Toller, has been less interested in the letter exchange project than its counterparts in Witzenhausen. Periodically articles have appeared in the Larned newspaper reviewing the UNESCO group’s progress to bring Germany and America closer together through direct contacts. At other times the newspaper has published lists of names of persons in Witzenhausen who are still looking for correspondence partners, and has featured the beautiful old town of Witzenhausen both in words and pictures.

The project recently produced an unexpected development which has served to tie the two communities more closely together. Earl Kruger of Larned, presently stationed in Wiesbaden, Germany, with the US Air Force, made a three-day visit to Witzenhausen to meet the persons with whom his neighbors were exchanging letters. He was treated like a long-lost relative and for three days was shown all there was to see in and around the picturesque city of Witzenhausen.

A special meeting of the “letter club” was called and the “Kansas ambassador” spent an evening with Larned's Witzenhausen friends answering questions about his home town. His trip to Witzenhausen was covered thoroughly by the local press and was written up also in the Stars and Stripes, the Army newspaper in Germany, and in the Wiesbaden Post, the Air Force local newspaper.

While Earl’s visit brought something of Larned to Witzenhausen, the Witzenhausen group is working on a scheme to reciprocate by sending a tape recording of their voices, in greetings and in songs, to Larned. With the help of John Healy, director of the Eschwege America House and the center’s tape recorder, a “talking letter” will be sent to Larned together with several of the folk songs common to the Witzenhausen area as sung by members of the letter club.

This plan and the many others which are being developed by the groups in Witzenhausen and Larned to foster mutual understanding indicate the desire of the two communities to make their recently established friendship one of long duration. Judging by the activities of the past few months, the two towns should enjoy a long and close relationship.

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Earl Kruger (second from left), from Larned, stationed at Wiesbaden, visits Witzenhausen’s landmarks with Werner Grosskopf (left), leader in letter exchange idea.