One Year on the Border

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A PASSAGE from Faust was used by a German school teacher to express his estimate of the US Information Center in the northern Hessian community of Eschwege. In an essay on "My Opinion of the America House", the teacher quoted: "He, who brings variety to his audience, presents something to everyone, and upon leaving, all are satisfied."

Located only a few miles from the border of the Soviet Zone, the America House, during its first year, has been practically adopted by the people of Eschwege as their own — so much so that the local newspaper in commenting on US economy moves said the citizens "plead that their America House will not be touched."

Even the Kassel Post, often outspokenly critical of American policies, found words of praise in saying: "They (the America House) have in every way promoted civic thinking, the idea of European integration and, as far as possible, friendship between Germans and Americans."

Speaking at the first anniversary festivities Feb. 6 of the US Information Center in Eschwege, Byron B. Snyder, US Consul in Frankfurt, hailed the America House as contributing to "the strong but imperceptible bridges which are being built by men and women of good will on both sides of the Atlantic."

Also comparing the America House to a bridge County Administrator Gerhard Pforr of Eschwege went on to say that the America House had broken down many old barriers, healed many old wounds, and had become the accepted center of Eschwege cultural activity, indeed living up to the slogan on its printed program "The House of Understanding."

In paying tribute to the first birthday of the Eschwege America House "analogy" seemed to be the key word, for in an impressive article which appeared in the Kassel Post of Feb. 5, the America House was referred to as a "well developed child." The article entitled "One Year America House", which was written in editorial form and which appeared in a column known as "The Town-Crier from the Werra Valley," went on to say:

"On the birthday of this well developed child a word to its parents, America and its taxpayers, is in order: If it should, for urgent reasons, ever become necessary to cut the budget for such cultural activities, then many hundreds, if not thousands, of Eschwege citizens plead that their America House will not be touched. Their argument is that in a city of 25,000 souls, and particularly in one located on the East Zone border, the message of the West finds tremendous reception and favorable reaction and that it is a political pillar against the flood of Communism. It is for this reason that they wish, this now one-year-old child many more birthday celebrations here."

These different forms of approbation, the speeches, the newspaper articles, letters of congratulation from all of the leading city officials as well as the presence in the anniversary audience of officials, organizational leaders and citizens representing all three of the counties of Eschwege, Melsungen and Witzenhausen, in which the America House conducts extension activities, were without doubt dynamic proof of a year of success.

The century-old city of Eschwege is located in northern Hesse, south-east of Kassel in the scenic Werra River valley. From the library windows of the America House the

![Attending Eschwege ceremony were (left to right): John D. Healy, author of this article; Byron B. Snyder, consul, American Consulate General, Frankfurt, and Karl Bartholomaeus, chairman of the county agricultural committee.](image)

Also participating in the first anniversary ceremony Feb. 6 were Joseph Starkey (left), director of the America House in Eschwege, and Paul Lutzeier, deputy public affairs officer of the American Consulate General in Frankfurt.)
visitor can see through the "Iron Curtain" and into the Russian-occupied zone of Germany.

Sometime during the closing months of the year 1951 a decision was made to establish an America House in this strategically located border city. Prior to this decision a one-room, one-man operated reading room had been in existence in Eschwege since 1949, as a branch of the Kassel America House.

On Feb. 6, 1952, a newly assembled staff without house or equipment met in a borrowed room with representatives of the press and announced their plans to establish a US Information Center in Eschwege.

The advisory group continued through the months to pay off large dividends. The participation of the mayor and the county administrator on the advisory group promoted acceptance by the general public of America House programs. Cooperation reached an exceptional highpoint during the week of June 9, 1952. To coincide with the opening to the public of a completely renovated and equipped America House a week of European Unity was presented. Such a program, it was decided, had an especial, timely value because of the current pace of world events, its significance in the entire European picture and the urgent need for it in terms of US objectives on the border. It was planned in close cooperation with the local European Union group, the city and county officials, the adult education center and the two local high schools.

Every event on the week-long program attracted capacity audiences, causing the Werra Rundschau of June 13 to say: "The new auditorium of the America House could have been double the size." At the climax meeting on June 14, representatives of ten European nations composed a panel to discuss political problems of European unity before an overflow crowd of 600 in the town hall.

Press coverage has been amazing, for in one year the America House has appeared favorably in daily articles in papers representing a total daily circulation of more than 120,000 over 1,000 times.

Impressive figures illustrating the success of the America House program between March 1952 and January 1953 were recently cited by Dr. Rudolf Littner, the program director: 88 lectures were attended by 5,851 persons; 48 concerts were attended by 10,582 persons; 32 record concerts were attended by 3,495 persons; six theater performances were attended by 2,569 persons; five puppet shows were attended by 2,282 persons, 1,034 film hours were attended by 104,819 persons; 73 English conversations were attended by 829 persons; 112 English classes for children were attended by 1,916 children; 39 English discussions were attended by 1,235 persons; 11 open-house discussions in the German language were attended by 828 persons; 47 German-American activities (adult and children) were attended by 912 persons, and four quiz evenings were presented before 1,400 guests.

In the library weekly attendance rose from an average of 450 to 1,920 persons and average weekly book circulation from 240 to 960 during the year.

The success of the Eschwege America House is partly due to the fact that the peoples of that important border area are aware of realities and they are seeking in these troubled times a strengthening of bonds with the world to the West. This interest is not only confined to those citizens of Eschwege and Witzenhausen, for on more than one occasion guests have slipped across the border to attend a program and publications, distributed by the America House, have made the journey back.