



**AMERIKA HAUS**

**1945 - 1995**

**The First 50 Years**

“The America Houses  
are living symbols of the  
United States' commitment  
to Germany. Their future  
is as vital as their past.”

- Charles E. Redman,  
U.S. Ambassador to Germany

## AMERIKA HAUS: The First 50 Years

Shortly after President Harry S. Truman arrived for the Allies' Potsdam Conference in July 1945, he asked to be driven through the war-scarred landscape of central Berlin.

"A more depressing sight than that of the ruined buildings was the never-ending procession of old men, women and children wandering aimlessly ... carrying, pushing or pulling what was left of their belongings," Truman wrote later.

*"In that two-hour drive I saw evidence of a great world tragedy...."*

Germany's great cities lay in ruins. Meeting halls were shuttered, theaters silenced, and libraries destroyed.

Facing that post-war devastation and chaos, Truman and his key aides worked to revive western Germany, reverse years of Nazi propaganda, and forge an enduring alliance between nations that had been enemies in history's bloodiest war.

Brick by brick, with the Marshall Plan's help, Germans rebuilt their great cities. And book by book, Germany revived its cultural traditions and created a new democratic society with the help of unprecedented U.S. cultural and information initiatives.

Just two weeks before Truman surveyed Berlin's ruins and visited U.S. troops in Frankfurt, soldiers had planted the seeds of that cultural program, assembling the first American library in occupied Germany on July 4, 1945.

That was the initial step towards what some later called the "Marshall Plan of Ideas" - a U.S. public diplomacy initiative that set a standard for later programs around the globe.

In a fitting metaphor, the centers of that U.S. cultural effort became known as America Houses. For a house is built, brick by brick, on a solid foundation - and a home is a place of refuge where guests are warmly welcomed.

The foundations of the America Houses were the small American libraries - some of them assembled mainly with books donated by departing U.S. troops - that emerged in cities across Germany's American sector in the months after the war.

**"Our task is to present the truth to the millions of people who are uninformed or misinformed or unconvinced.... This task is not separate and distinct from other elements of our foreign policy. It is a part of all we are doing to build a peaceful world."**

- President Harry S. Truman,  
"Campaign of Truth," 1950

Those reading rooms, as well as the films, lectures, exhibits and musical performances that followed, filled a vacuum in Germany, where libraries and cultural institutions had been weakened by a dozen years of Nazi censorship, followed by wartime bombings and fires that destroyed 35 million books.

The first American libraries started in unlikely places: a medical reading room in Munich, the corner of Frankfurt's stock exchange, a bomb-damaged building in Berlin and an historic inn in Marburg. In the early years, the U.S. military and the State Department supervised the centers, in 1953, the newly-created U.S. Information Agency took over.

As the libraries expanded with U.S. government aid - reaching a high point of more than 100 reading rooms in the early 1950s - some evolved into cultural and information centers. Aware of the German mistrust of propaganda, U.S. officials took pains to encourage open discussions of ideas in the America Houses.

"The America House is not a house of propaganda. It is a house for free men and women to exchange views, to learn and to reach understanding," said John J. McCloy, the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, at an America House opening in 1950.

That "understanding" came from books and magazines; from visiting American artists, scholars and government officials; from art exhibits and concerts; as well as from student exchange and international visitor programs.

Over the decades, the music performed at America Houses has ranged from the fantasies of Aaron Copland to the avant-garde compositions of John Cage; from the sublime soprano voice of Marian Anderson to the cool jazz of vibraphonist Lionel Hampton.

In the visual arts, the America Houses have organized thousands of exhibitions, from George Catlin's paintings of American Indians to Pop-art posters, from Edward Steichen's stark black-and-white photographs to holographic laser-art images.

Prominent guests of the America Houses have included presidents and poets, Nobel-Prize-winning novelists and Academy-Award-winning actors. Among the guests and speakers: novelists William Faulkner and Toni Morrison, poet T.S. Eliot, architect Mies van der Rohe, photographer Steichen, actor Gary Cooper, dramatist Thornton Wilder and historian Henry Steele Commager.

Many of Germany's leaders - including prominent politicians, scholars and artists from the 1940s through the 1990s - have visited the America Houses or taken part in programs there.

When he helped open the newest America House in Leipzig in 1992, Saxony's Minister President, Kurt Biedenkopf, recalled



AH Munich's "Bookmobile" delivers books to Bavarians in the 1950s.

how he had learned much in his own visits to America Houses in western Germany in the 1950s. Now, the new Leipzig America House is giving that opportunity to residents of the former East Germany who were cut off from American culture for more than four decades.

A half century ago, it did not take long for U.S. officials to recognize that America Houses were improving the West Germans' image of America. In 1953, a U.S. report called the America Houses "a unique phenomenon in the relationship between victor and vanquished," heralding "a new era of cultural exchange."

Hans N. Tuch, a U.S. diplomat whose work in Germany spanned four decades, says the post-war initiatives in Germany "involved the U.S. government for the first time in extensive and long-range cultural, educational and social programs abroad."

The programs opened a window to the United States. McKinney Russell, a former public affairs counselor in Germany, says America Houses "had an enormous impact" on U.S.-German relations. Another diplomat, Terrence Catherman, calls the America House system "the most successful program" ever run by USIA.

Over the last half century, those American cultural centers have evolved just as U.S.-German relations have matured. After expanding greatly in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the number of America Houses and reading rooms gradually declined as West Germany rebuilt its own libraries and cultural institutions, and developed into a stable democracy in the Western alliance.

Even so, America Houses continue their work today in great German cities: Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Cologne and Leipzig. The traveling "bookmobiles" of the early America



Author Gore Vidal at AH Frankfurt

**"If the world is to avoid another catastrophe similar to the one that took place from 1939 to 1945, we must somehow restore the universal community of scholarship, art, science, philosophy and morals as existed in the 18th Century - the century of Goethe and Thomas Jefferson...."**

**"Institutions such as the Amerika Haus have an important contribution to make. They are not, and cannot be, propaganda-institutes of national colors; they are, and must be, pathways through which ideas flow from land to land, and from society to society."**

*- Henry Steele Commager, historian, 1955*

House days have given way to high-tech information services, with fact-packed CD-ROMs and new Business Information Centers that access the latest data on U.S. companies and products.

Those new business centers are among the reasons cited by the American Chamber of Commerce in Germany for honoring the America House system in 1995 with its prestigious Leo M. Goodman Award, which pays tribute to "outstanding contributions to advancing German-American relations."

The America House system is the first institution to receive the award, which had honored eight prominent Germans and Americans since it was established in 1967 in memory of the former chief justice of the Allied Commission in Germany. Other recipients have included the late Sen. J. William Fulbright, founder of the Fulbright academic exchange program, and former German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher.

One reason for the America Houses' success has been the enthusiastic support of federal and local German officials, including every post-war West German chancellor from Konrad Adenauer to Helmut Kohl. Back in the 1950s, Adenauer is said to have told President Dwight D. Eisenhower that the America House system was among America's greatest achievements in Germany.

Four decades later, Adenauer's son, Max - who had helped arrange for a new America House in Cologne when he was city administrator there - agrees with his father's assessment.

"America Houses have played a key role ever since the war in helping Germans learn about America," the younger Adenauer says.

Robert Earle, the U.S. Embassy's Minister Counselor for Public Affairs, calls the America House system "a unique diplomatic asset" that "opens America's door to everyone who would seek to know us in all of our diversity."

That goal will not change, Earle says, but U.S. communication techniques will continue to improve. Today, digital video conferencing is replacing satellite technology; compact discs are storing the contents of thousands of bulky magazines; multi-media computers are making more information available for U.S.-bound students.

"These innovations reflect the tempo of American life," Earle says. "They help us keep pace with the evolution of American business, American campuses, and American foreign policy. An America House should 'feel' like America - swift-moving, adventuresome, deeply committed to the fundamental democratic value of freedom of expression."

And what of the future? The America House staffs will continue to provide information to the individuals and institutions which shape Germany's national policy. But, at a deeper level, Earle says "the America House system represents an enduring bond between the United States and Germany's next generation of leaders.

"The framework in which we now live, after all, is no longer World War II or the Cold War or even the 'post-Cold War.' It is the framework of friendship, and that requires being present, listening as well as speaking, becoming part of one another's life. That has been, and will remain, the America Houses' goal."



*AH Leipzig opening in 1992. AH Director Janet Garvey (l.) greets Saxony Minister President Kurt Biedenkopf (r.) as U.S. Ambassador Robert M. Kimmitt looks on.*

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**"May the Amerika Haus always remain a place where our two nations can meet and move closer to mutual understanding."**

*- Thornton Wilder, author, 1965*

## The Early Years

When a U.S. Army inspector found the American Library in Munich packed with German readers in the bone-chilling winter of 1946, he asked people if they were mainly there to warm up.

One of the German readers replied: "Mostly I am here to warm my mind, which was nearly frozen after ten years of isolation."



AH Berlin Library - Magazine section in the late 1940s

During the Third Reich's dozen years of terror, propagandists sought to portray the United States as a land without culture, a soulless democracy riddled with crime.

When the U.S. military set up its occupation government in 1945, one of its tasks was to convince Germans - in the words of one expert - "that America was more than a nation of lady wrestlers, bloody strikes and boogie-woogie fiends."

At a time when American literary giants such as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and Thornton Wilder were writing, few Germans had been given the opportunity to read their works - or, for that matter, to view some of Hollywood's great films and to study U.S. scientific achievements.

The America Houses gave Germans that opportunity - in a sense, re-introducing Germany to the literature, music, scholarship, science and filmmaking of the United States.

The early efforts were modest but effective. In German cities starved for books, the American military set up small reading rooms. As one America House director at the time put it:

"Spontaneously...many understanding occupation officers - recognizing how starved Germans were for knowledge about the outside world - put together small collections of books from Special Services, army orientation and other sources, and lent them to their local employees and other townspeople.

"The idea grew, and so did the collections."

The first American library for a German audience was opened in Bad Homburg on July 4, 1945, with books provided by the Army's "psychological warfare branch." When that library moved to Frankfurt in September, it had grown to 700 well-worn volumes of educational and reference books.

In August 1945, books provided by the "Office of War Information" formed the first American library in Munich, in a former medical school reading room. West Berlin's library began in a shrapnel-scarred building that winter. Munich's reading room opened to the public in January 1946, and Frankfurt's library was designated as an information center in March.

**"America's  
'reeducation' or  
'reorientation' or  
'reconstruction'  
[programs in Germany]  
yielded enormous  
influence, the final  
results of which are  
still unfolding."**

- James F. Tent, in  
"Mission on the Rhine:  
Reeducation and Demazification in  
American-Occupied Germany,"  
1962

## Community Centers

Tuch, who directed America Houses in Wesbaden and Frankfurt from 1949-55, described those early houses as "community centers" that attracted large numbers of Germans.

"In cities where the entire cultural infrastructure had been devastated as a result of war, the America Houses served literally as community centers until the indigenous cultural and artistic entities had been rebuilt," Tuch said.

Former U.S. Ambassador James B. Conant said it took a while before some Germans understood the America Houses' functions.

"Some visitors came because they assumed that an America House was a travel agency, or a department store, or a bank, or even a hospital. Some came because, as one visitor put it, 'it was warmer here than at home.'

"But the others came too: the correspondent looking for background material for an article on America; the music lover who had never heard American music before; the politically-interested citizen looking for books on comparative political science; the schoolboy trying to improve his English; the emigrant wishing to prepare himself for his future homeland."

Describing the early days of one reading room in Bavaria, another American wrote: "...the local women left their bomb-cracked, coal-less homes to gather around the pot-bellied stove in the Amerika Haus, where they could knit and gossip in comfort while their unemployed menfolk sat around in some corner to bandy about politics, reconstruction, and the good old days. From this 'country-stove,' democratic atmosphere grew many a town meeting and forum after the local town hall was rebuilt...."

The libraries grew rapidly, as the U.S. Army provided "basic libraries" that included great works of 18th and 19th century American literature - such as Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe - as well as the contemporary writers such as Faulkner, Hemingway, Wilder and John Steinbeck.

As early as August 1946, there were 24 American libraries in the U.S. occupation zone of Germany; an average of one more library was opened each month for the next year. While most of the initial America Houses were in the U.S. occupation zone in southern Germany, centers also opened in Berlin and Bremen.

By April 1947, Gen. Robert A. McClure, director of the military occupation government's information control division, con-

cluded that the library program already had helped deepen mutual understanding between Germans and Americans.

At first, the reading rooms were called American Libraries. In June 1946, the official U.S. title became "U.S. Information Center." But that name never caught on with Germans, who preferred the simpler "Amerika Haus." Responding to informal surveys of German users, the U.S. Center directors met in November 1947 and voted to adopt "Amerika Haus," although the term "information centers" also continued to be used.

(The five other suggested popular names were, in declining order of the votes they received: "Haus der USA," "USA Haus," "American House," "Kulturhaus USA," and "Haus des Wissens.")

The number of Germans who used America House libraries expanded rapidly: one study in 1950 found that a fifth of all German youth had visited an America House.

By 1953, a U.S. government report listed 36 America Houses: in Augsburg, Bamberg, Bayreuth, Berlin, Bremen, Bremerhaven, Coburg, Darmstadt, Erlangen, Eschwege, Essen, Frankfurt, Freiburg, Fulda, Giessen, Hattburg, Hannover, Heidelberg, Heilbronn, Hof, Kaiserslautern, Karlsruhe, Kassel, Kiel, Koblenz, Mannheim, Marburg, Munich, Nuernberg, Passau, Regensburg, Stuttgart, Tuebingen, Ulm, Wiesbaden and Wuerzburg.

While some reports list a high tide of 50 or more "America Houses," Tuch says some of those were not true America Houses - centers, headed by a U.S. foreign service officer, that offered cultural programs as well as library services. Under that definition, there were 29 America Houses and more than 100 satellite reading rooms in the early 1950s.

Fortunately, American authors of the time were giving Germans plenty of good books to read: Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949; Hemingway won in 1954 and Steinbeck in 1962. Meanwhile, the German Booksellers Association had awarded its Peace Prize to Wilder in 1947.

In 1953 and 1954, Wilder made highly successful trips through Germany, stopping at several America Houses. He spoke to an enthusiastic university group in Frankfurt, and later wrote that the audiences at Munich's America House had been among the most receptive he had ever encountered.

American literature was only part of the programming at the America Houses. Prominent politicians, leading actors and respected American scholars also traveled the America House circuit, meeting scores of German opinion leaders.

**"The Amerika Haus is not a house of propogando. It is a house for free men and women to exchange views, to learn and to reach understanding."**

*-John J. McCloy,  
U.S. High Commissioner for  
Germany, 1950*

**The Amerika Haus system was "one of the finest accomplishments of America in Europe."**

*- Erik Kuehnelt-Leddihn, journalist,  
in "Commonwealth" magazine, 1953*

## Cold War and McCarthyism

While America Houses still operated as community centers, they began to focus more on information as the Cold War froze relations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In 1948, the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act (Smith-Mundt Act) legitimized public diplomacy, authorizing "the preparation, and dissemination abroad, of information about the United States, its people and its policies through press, publications, radio, motion pictures, and other information media, and through information centers and instructors abroad."

The Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948-49 and the intense drumbeat of Stalinist propaganda were among the factors that led Truman, in his "Campaign of Truth" speech in 1950, to call for "a sustained, intensified program to promote the cause of freedom against the propaganda of slavery. We must make ourselves heard round the world in a great campaign of truth."

While the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe provided the loudest voices, America House programs and libraries also became part of that campaign. The Soviets used propaganda like a sledgehammer, but Americans tried a straightforward approach.

In 1953, one America House director explained that the system had been so successful in Germany "because we have never broken faith with our German patrons. At first, they were suspicious that we were operating propaganda centers.... But we have not sledge-hammered them. We have tried to give them a full and fair picture of the American way of life."

An Office of Public Affairs study in the early 1950s found that many Germans appreciated the straightforward approach.

"Before I visited the America House, I didn't believe that democratic ideals could be realized," one German told an interviewer. "Now, the way the America House is run - that everybody can express his opinion freely, that people can do what they please - has convinced me differently."

Even so, the American centers were not always popular in Congress, and - during the McCarthy era - were sometimes criticized by virulent U.S. anti-communists as being overly fair. Tuch recalls when Sen. Joseph McCarthy's chief investigator, Roy Cohn, visited Frankfurt's America House library in 1953 and asked where the staff had "hidden" books written by communists.

"I said I didn't know of any communist authors in the library," Tuch recalls. "He then asked where I kept the Dashiell Hammett books. I showed him **The Maltese Falcon** and **The Thin Man**.

He then told reporters that this was proof that Communists were represented in the American library."

A few minutes later, Tuch reports, an American reporter "took the heat off" the young America House director by demanding of Cohn: "Sir, when are you going to burn the books here?"

Books were not burned at America Houses. But, as the libraries matured, more books were selected with policy aims in mind. In 1953, a government study of U.S. programs in Germany found that the America Houses followed "well-considered and carefully-phrased" objectives, including:

- Promoting better understanding of the United States.
- Stimulating the interest of West Germans in European integration and in defense alliances with the West.
- Reinforcing cultural, political and economic ties with Berlin, as well as to "maintain contact" with East Berliners.
- Winning German confidence "in our efforts to achieve the unification of Germany on suitable terms."
- Supporting democratic elements in Germany against "authoritarian forces of either the Right or the Left."

In 1953, 54 American and 961 German employees of USIS worked toward those goals at an annual cost of about \$3 million. Those American centers and libraries attracted an estimated 14 million visits by Germans in 1952. In addition, young people using America House facilities - firms, libraries, and childrens' programs - accounted for an additional million visits a year.

That year, a U.S. visitor described the "cross-section of the German citizenry" at an America House one afternoon:

"There are a mother and her teenage daughter on their way to English class. Two tie-less students from the local university arguing a debatable point of economics. A commercial man on his way to the reference room to seek out the address of an import-export firm in New York. A teacher in search of some colorful pictures of the American Southwest to liven up her class."

During the mid-1950s, the U.S. government closed numerous America Houses in smaller cities, but also built big new houses in Cologne (1955), Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Munich (all of which opened in 1957).

Max Adenauer, the Chancellor's son, played an important role in convincing U.S. officials to build a major America House in Cologne, a cultural and convention center.

"Many of us in Cologne - including my father - wanted very much to have an active America House to give more depth to

**The principal impact of America Houses was "in influencing and changing the view of America among German people. Through the medium of the library it was possible to persuade many Germans to regard America positively and often admiringly."**

-Angela Moeller, M.A. thesis (Munich University), 1984

**"U.S. cultural and information efforts in post-war Germany made "a fundamental contribution to establishing a democratic way of life and achieving results which could not have been attained by other means."**

- Philip Hale Coombs, in "The Fourth Dimension in Foreign Policy," 1964

our city," recalls the younger Adenauer, who was then Cologne's city administrator. "It was an important addition."

The America House programs were supplemented by an intensive exchange program that brought more than 10,000 Germans - political leaders, students, trainees and others - to the United States between 1949 and 1954. Similar programs continue today.

Meanwhile, the America House programming grew more imaginative. In Hamburg, librarians prepared "sea-chests" of American books for German sailors shipped out of that port city. Berlin's America House offered a windowless "East Reading Room" - designed for East Berliners who did not want to be observed by their secret police. Soon, a third of the persons who attended the America House came from Berlin's eastern sector.

After the Wall went up on August 13, 1961, Berlin's America House waged its own campaign against the stark barrier that split the city for 28 years. To mark many August 13th anniversaries, exhibits or speakers focused on the Wall's injustice.

Two years after the Wall rose, Americans and Germans suffered another tragedy: the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In 1964, the year after Kennedy's death, an exhibit celebrating the President's life toured the America Houses - attracting more than 16,000 visitors in Frankfurt alone.

1975 program at AH Berlin with Jerzy Kosinski, Jan Myrdal, Guenter Grass and Paul Theroux



## Years of Turbulence (The late 1960s and early 1970s)

In the mid-1960s, as several America Houses celebrated their 20th anniversaries with great fanfare, those houses were becoming a different kind of political symbol.

By that time, West Germany was in the midst of its "economic miracle," and most cities had recovered from the war's devastation. But another, smaller conflict in the Far East - the Vietnam War - strained relations between the United States and some German students, who reflected the same concerns as many young Americans who also opposed the war.

For the first time, protest demonstrations focused on America Houses. In response, America House directors added another mission: establishing a dialogue between U.S. officials and the emerging generation of young German leaders.

Tuch, the chief public affairs officer in Berlin from 1967-70, said the America Houses became the focal point of demonstrations "because we were the most visible symbol of the United States." During two weeks of major demonstrations in 1968, Tuch recalls, the America House "was just about wrecked. Eighty Berlin policemen were injured protecting the house, and demonstrators killed four police horses."

Catherman says anti-war demonstrations near Berlin's America House were "staggering" in 1970 - sometimes drawing 100,000 protesters. "Berlin police stretched barbed wire around the house, and put up mesh screens to protect the windows," he said.

In Munich, anti-war activists occupied the America House auditorium and later planted a bomb that damaged the roof. Glass windowpanes in Hamburg's House were also shattered.

While the massive demonstrations made the headlines, the late 1960s and 1970s also brought earnest discussions of U.S. foreign and domestic policy at America Houses - with special emphasis on the civil rights movement. It was the beginning of a more complex relationship between the United States and Germany.

Parallel with that maturing relationship, U.S. diplomats moved to refocus and consolidate America Houses and change the nature of their libraries. At a time when parts of American culture were becoming pervasive in German life - Hollywood movies, blue jeans, pop music - the America Houses focused more and more on presenting other, deeper aspects of American culture.

**"The interest in America and the interest America shows in the East Germans must be helping to dispel apathy over communism and helping to refute Communist stories that Americans are uncultured, warmongering oppressors of the poor."**

*- Washington Star, 1957,  
in an article about the Berlin  
America Haus*



**"The discriminating as well as the average [German] readers could not help marveling at the world that was again opened up to them; a world anchored firmly enough to afford an essentially generous view of things, meaning wholesome naturalness, tolerance, vitality and humor."**

*- John R. Frey, in "Postwar German Reactions to American Literature," 1955*

Russell, the chief U.S. public affairs diplomat in Germany from 1971 to 1975, says the America Houses and their libraries needed to be refocused and rejuvenated in the 1970s.

"The world had changed greatly, but the physical plant of the America Houses had not," Russell recalls. For example, the seats in some of the America House auditoriums were bolted down for 50s-style lectures, rather than for 70s-style discussions.

"Also, the programming evolved enormously in the 1970s, with more smaller programs aimed at focused German audiences," Russell said. "We sought to give more coherence to our programs."

As part of that new focus, the America House libraries were color-coded and slimmed down. Chief public affairs officers in branch posts (other than Berlin) were moved to the America Houses, no longer working in the U.S. Consulate buildings. And several houses, including Frankfurt and Cologne, were remodeled.

Prominent Americans and Germans continued to take part in America House programs aimed at creating a German-American dialogue. One event at Berlin's America House drew novelists Guenter Grass, Jerzy Kosinski, Paul Theroux and Uwe Johnson for a lively session in 1975 to discuss the image of America presented by European authors. They reached no common conclusion, but showed - in the words of one observer - "the difficulty of passing judgment on a vast, diverse and rapidly-changing society."

Toward the end of the 1970s, U.S. officials placed greater emphasis on Germany's "successor generation" of emerging leaders. More and more programs focused on the younger generation that recalled the Vietnam War more than the Berlin Airlift.

In the 1980s, the introduction of Worldnet enabled select groups of Germans at America Houses to participate in live satellite sessions with a wide range of U.S. officials, scholars, journalists and other experts. And, instead of the old 16mm films, the America Houses began collecting videotapes, which are easier to store and to show to German audiences.

Speaker programs at America Houses have also evolved during the 1980s and 1990s, with increasing emphasis on the contributions American women and minorities have made to the nation's artistic, economic and political development.

Prominent contemporary writers - including Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison, Joyce Carol Oates, Neil Postman, Susan Sontag and Gore Vidal - as well as numerous Native American, African-American, Hispanic and feminist writers and scholars have spoken at America Houses in recent years.

## German Unification (November 1989 into the 1990s)

When East Berliners streamed through the Wall's open checkpoints, hundreds of them visited a place they recalled vividly from three decades earlier: America House Berlin.

In 1957, that house had been built next door to Bahnhof Zoo - on the main S-Bahn line to the east - partly to attract visitors from the city's eastern zone.

Suddenly, with the Wall's fall, America House Berlin came full circle - moving to refocus its efforts to bring America's message to East Germans, who had been fed a steady diet of Soviet and East German criticism of U.S. government and society.

Just as American leaders had impressed Berliners by preserving the city's freedom with the Berlin Airlift in 1948-49, the early U.S. support for swift German unity in 1990 also made friends among east and west Berliners.

While Berlin's America House expanded its programs to reach into eastern Berlin and the former East German states of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, and Saxony-Anhalt, USIS employees also conducted a "road show" of programs in Saxony and Thuringia until the Leipzig America House opened in 1992.

"I was often the first American to set foot in a town or institution in the new states of Saxony and Thuringia," wrote Janet Garvey, the first director of Leipzig's new America House. "There was much to do to combat over 50 years of anti-Americanism that had characterized the Nazi and communist regimes."

These days, concrete segments of the Berlin Wall stand in front of Berlin's America House as a reminder of the successful fight for freedom in the east. And Berlin's House is expected to grow in importance as USIS shifts operations to the new capital in preparation for the U.S. Embassy's planned move there.

Because of changing economic conditions, the Agency was forced to close two America Houses, in Stuttgart and Hannover, in 1995.

But the six remaining America Houses - in Berlin, Leipzig, Munich, Hamburg, Cologne and Frankfurt - are in full throttle, transforming their libraries into high-tech information systems as an entry ramp to the new century, and the second 50 years of America Houses in Germany.

**During the tumultuous week that the Berlin Wall first opened in November 1989, a middle-aged man walked into America House Berlin and handed a dusty book to the librarian.**

**"Sorry I'm a little late in returning this book," the East Berliner said with a grin. "I haven't had a chance until now."**

**The librarian found the book's due date: September 15, 1961 - a month after the East Germans built the Berlin Wall. The man on his first trip back to West Berlin, 28 years later.**

## Today's America Houses

### New Directions: The 90s and Beyond

In January 1994, Frankfurt's America House - which had started 48 years before in a corner of the city's stock exchange - returned to its roots by opening a Business Information Center.

The Frankfurt center was the first step of a wide-ranging initiative, called Information USA, that is transforming the libraries in America Houses across Germany in the mid-1990s.

Robert Earle, the U.S. Embassy's Minister Counselor for Public Affairs, says the goal is "to make sure the America Houses reflect the dynamics and resources of life in the United States, both today and tomorrow.

"By investing in new concepts of service and technology, we can provide German opinion leaders, analysts and the successor generations with much more insight into America than ever before.

"We now have access to major research libraries at our fingertips, and hundreds of periodicals are packed into a few CDs. Further, all of our America Houses are now linked together in a seamless information system. If we don't have the information in Frankfurt, Berlin is a few seconds away."

Business Information Center  
at America House Munich



In a sense, the rapid changes aim to steer America Houses off the back roads of technology and onto the Information Superhighway. Just as they did in the early post-war days, America House libraries - now the Information USA system - are leading the way in advancing U.S. goals in Germany.

Mary Boone, director of information services for USIS Germany, compares the impact of computer technology on today's libraries to the massive changes in the 15th century resulting from Johannes Gutenberg's invention of moveable type in Mainz.

"Just as Gutenberg's invention changed the way that information was produced and disseminated in the 15th century, so the development of computer-accessed information is changing the role of libraries at the end of the 20th century," says Boone, who is now overseeing the creation of the Information USA system.

Books will always be important for individual readers, but many research institutions are shifting their focus away from buying and storing books - bulky and static - and towards new, rapid ways to tap into electronic databases to retrieve up-to-date information that is exactly what the researcher needs.

Instead of quiet nooks where librarians busy themselves filing catalog cards, today's America Houses are using computers to connect with advanced databases.

Boone says the Information USA centers in six America Houses - Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Cologne, Leipzig and Munich - are designed to help provide "up-to-date information from and about the United States for members of the German government, media, and academic communities during a time when dramatic changes in the world's political and economic realities are simultaneously forcing changes in the way government does business."

The Information USA system has three main parts:

**The Reference Service.** Researchers seeking information on particular aspects of American studies have access to reference books, U.S. government documents, periodicals, CD-ROMs and online databases.

**Business Information Centers.** The new business centers combine USIS' information and program resources with the expertise and data of the U.S. Commerce Department's Foreign Commercial Service.

The centers provide specialized business data - including U.S. company profiles, regulatory review information, and industry contact lists. Their goal is to promote and develop the growing economic ties between the United States and Germany.



Online information at AH Frankfurt

Local experts say it was appropriate that the first Business Information Center opened in Frankfurt, one of the first America House sites. The city has developed into one of Europe's most important financial centers, the headquarters of Germany's largest banks and, eventually, the Central European Bank.

Now, within the framework of Information USA, Frankfurt's America House is providing in-depth background on trade and economic issues. But the Information USA system is just one part of the America Houses in Frankfurt and other cities.

**Study in the USA.** Students who are interested in finding out more about schools, colleges and universities in the United States can turn to the *Study in the USA Infothek*, which offers a wide selection of catalogs on CD-ROM and CD-ROM summaries as well as a computerized college selection service.

In addition, trained educational specialists who are familiar with American colleges and universities are available to inform German students about the opportunities and requirements at U.S. educational institutions.

Other programs of USIS Germany and its America Houses:

#### Exchanges

The America Houses cooperate with or provide support for several academic and professional exchange programs in Germany, including:

- The Fulbright Academic Exchange Program, which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 1996. Over 20,000 German

and American graduate students, high-school teachers, instructors, professors, researchers and university administrators have participated in the Fulbright Program since 1952.

- The International Visitor Program, which each year sends about 100 young German politicians, journalists and other opinion-leaders for study tours in the United States.

- Youth Exchange Programs, which help thousands of high school students and other young people to spend time in the United States. The Congress-Bundestag Exchange benefits 800 students a year, while over 10,000 participate annually in the German-American Partnership Program's classroom-to-classroom exchanges.

- Voluntary Visitor Program, under which America House exchange experts also help arrange professional appointments for persons or groups who pay their own way to the United States.

#### Speakers

Following a half-century old tradition, America Houses continue to bring prominent speakers - from the U.S. government, universities, think tanks, the media and the arts - to discuss issues involving Germany and the United States.

In recent years, America Houses have sponsored more than 200 speaker programs annually on such topics as the environment, labor, U.S. foreign and security policy, economic and trade policy and cultural issues. Depending on the speaker, the German audiences range from Bundestag members to youth groups.

#### Worldnet and Digital Video Conferencing

When prominent Americans cannot make it to Germany, USIS beams them to German audiences by means of the Worldnet global television satellite network.

Worldnet programs in Germany include live satellite television interactive dialogues, as well as news programs on politics, culture or science.

Teleconferencing, usually arranged at America Houses, features U.S. officials - such as the Secretary of State and Congressional leaders - and other Americans in video dialogues with select German audiences.

#### Cultural Events and Exhibits

From Hollywood photos to steel-beam sculptures, America Houses are continuing their tradition of excellent art exhibits.

**The America House system and related post-war initiatives in Germany and Japan "involved the U.S. government for the first time in extensive and long-range cultural, educational and social programs abroad."**

- Hans N. Tuch, in "Communicating With the World: U.S. Public Diplomacy Overseas." (1990)

The artwork, music performances and literary readings attract thousands of German visitors to America Houses.

Visiting American artists also are encouraged to develop professional relationships with German counterparts through workshops, seminars and lectures arranged by America Houses.

### American Studies

By encouraging study of U.S. history, society, politics and arts in Germany, USIS' American Studies program helps deepen understanding of the United States.

At the university level, USIS experts work with the German Association of American Studies to help support academic disciplines that focus on the United States. At the secondary school level, USIS distributes 18,000 copies of the "American Studies Newsletter" three times a year to most of Germany's 4,000 high schools, as well as to teacher-training colleges.

### Press and Information

In today's high-speed society, impressions about U.S. policy are often based on small, sometimes misleading, snippets of broadcast or printed news.

To encourage German opinion leaders to base their impressions on what U.S. officials actually said, USIS publishes several products that often include the complete texts of speeches, press statements, congressional testimony and other important information from the United States:

- "U.S. Information and Texts," produced two or three times a week, is an English-language publication with full-text information on U.S. policies, trends and legislation.

- "Amerika Dienst," published weekly in German, includes many of the texts from the "U.S. Information" publication, as well as articles on American culture and society.

- "Sonderdienst" is published in German to provide in-depth information for special occasions, such as Presidential visits, summit meetings, election campaigns and major U.S. initiatives.

**The America House system "had an enormous impact on U.S.-German relations in the years after World War II."**

*- McKinney Russell,  
former Minister Counselor  
for Public Affairs*

## From Munich to Leipzig America Houses in Today's Germany

In Berlin, the blue neon AMERIKA HAUS sign glows from a busy corner near the Bahnhof Zoo. In Munich, the stately bronze sign graces a building near the city's two universities. And in Leipzig, the shiny new America House plaque marks a building in the midst of the eastern German city's revived cultural district. Here are brief sketches of the America Houses in Germany.



Amerika Haus Munich

**MUNICH AMERIKA HAUS**  
(Library opened, 1945; present building, 1957)  
Karolinenplatz 3, 80333 München



The Munich Amerika Haus -- the first one established in Germany -- has its origins in a reading room opened in the summer of 1945 in a medical school building on Beethovenplatz.

As the city struggled to rebuild and clear away the rubble of war, the American reading room developed into a community library; it expanded quickly, especially after opening to the general public in January 1946. Over 300 Bavarians were using the new library each day, when it was touted in a local newspaper as being "bright, clean and well-heated" -- a definite selling point in those days when coal and other fuel supplies were still in scarce supply.

For a short while, the America Haus was housed in the infamous "Führerbau" -- the former Nazi party headquarters in Munich. However, as a U.S. official wrote in 1950, the building's past reputation was soon altered by its new tenant. "Today, the Stars and Stripes has replaced the red and black swastika... Scores of Germans today are discovering the real America (inside the building)." The Amerika Haus, along with its many satellite reading rooms located in other Bavarian cities, soon became popular and enduring symbols of close post-war German-American cooperation.

The Munich Amerika Haus, which moved in May 1957 to its present location, has been the venue for many important cultural and political events over the years. Olympic great Jesse Owens and former astronaut John Glenn are among the famous Americans to speak there, as well as American literary giants William Faulkner, Gore Vidal, and Toni Morrison. Its 500-seat auditorium -- the largest in the America Haus network -- has featured concerts, American jazz performances, plays and seminars on every aspect of American culture and society. The Amerika Haus' modern reference/research center serves Munich's political, business and media communities with the latest online information retrieval facilities, while continuing to make available information about the United States to German professionals and students.

Today, the Amerika Haus continues to provide Munich and the state of Bavaria with the best that American culture has to offer while supplying timely, accurate information on the U.S., its people and society. Growing from a humble reading room, it now offers everything from Study in the USA information to Worldnet television dialogues. As its current director, William Graves, said of this premier Amerika Haus facility, "We can do everything here."

**FRANKFURT AMERIKA HAUS**  
(Library opened 1945; present building, 1957)  
Staufenstrasse 1, 60323 Frankfurt/Main

In 1945, a modest American reading room imported from nearby Bad Homburg opened in a corner of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange.

That small library was so well attended that - just a few months later - the reading room was moved to larger quarters at Taunusanlage 11. The America House itself was officially designated on March 25, 1946.

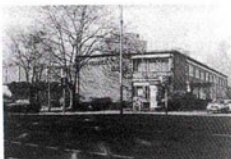
From the start, the America House programs struck a chord with the people of Frankfurt, which became over the decades perhaps the most "Americanized" city in Germany.

"We were the only real community center in Frankfurt," recalled Hans N. Tuch, who directed the America House there from 1949-55. "We had 23 staff librarians, we showed thousands of films, we had programs for children - an outstanding program."

Frankfurt's America House also presented a parade of famous American authors, composers, artists and scholars - including composer Paul Hindemith, actor Gary Cooper, writer Wilder and the Juilliard String Quartet.

Frankfurt's America House counted its millionth visitor in May 1957. When the house celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1966, Frankfurt Mayor Willy Brandt said the center had satisfied the "spiritual hunger" of post-war Germans, and become "an essential element in the beginning of a new cultural life in Germany."

As Frankfurt developed into Germany's financial center, the America House evolved with it, presenting U.S. economists and business experts, converting its library into a state-of-the-art reference facility and opening the first Business Information Center. America House director Helena K. Finn says her center is on the cutting edge of information technology. Frankfurters seem to agree. When the new business center opened in 1994, the Frankfurter Rundschau wrote that the America House "has earned itself a reputation as a liberal venue for events." The newspaper continued, "The anti-Americanism of the late 1960s has long since disappeared."



**The America House system was "the most successful program ever run by the U.S. Information Agency."**

- Terrence Catherman,  
former Minister Counselor  
for Public Affairs

## BERLIN AMERIKA HAUS

(Library opened 1945; present building, 1957)  
Hardenbergstrasse 22-24, 10825 Berlin

Outside the front door of Berlin's America House stand three concrete segments of the old Berlin Wall, spray-painted with graffiti that includes the words: freedom and democracy.

Those two words express America House Berlin's message for 50 years, a period that saw Germany's largest city blocked, divided and then reunited after the Wall's fall.

In some ways, the history of Berlin's America House parallels that of the city itself since World War II.

Late in 1945, American GIs donated books to form a small reading room in Berlin, and asked other departing soldiers to chip in books and magazines. The reading room, at a U.S. control point in West Berlin, expanded quickly.

The shrapnel-scarred center on Kleiststrasse drew 6,000 visitors in 1946. Within a few years, the cultural center and four branch American libraries in Berlin's American sector were attracting more than one million visits a year.

In June 1949, the new America House Berlin moved into a renovated, bomb-damaged building near Nollendorfplatz, which had been traditionally the center of American presence in the city.



By the mid-1950s, the cultural center had outgrown that home, and a new building opened in 1957 next to Bahnhof Zoo - a central train and S-Bahn station that was easily accessible to both West and East Berliners.

After surviving the onslaught of anti-Vietnam war protests in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Berlin's America House thrived as a center serving West Berlin until the Wall opened late in 1989. Then the center's mission shifted to serve all of Berlin, as well as the northern half of what had been East Germany.

When the U.S. military withdrew its last troops from Berlin in summer 1994, the Wall segments were moved from the U.S. Mission on Clayallee to the America House, where they were displayed as part of an exhibit - "America Is On Your Side" - about the post-war U.S. presence in Germany.

Berlin Mayor Eberhard Diepgen, a booster of the America House and its new Business Information Center, predicts that Berlin "will always be the place where the German-American friendship is most evident."



**HAMBURG AMERIKA HAUS**  
(Library opened 1950; present building, 1957)  
Tesdorfstrasse 1, 20148 Hamburg

In this city of seafarers, commerce and publishing, the America House opened its doors on Aug. 7, 1950, near the Lombardsbruecke, in the British zone of post-war occupation.

The bright white building, with its rounded entryway, soon became a busy and well-attended center.

Before the American House opened, American reading rooms had operated at the U.S. Consulate and, starting in February 1950, in an office building downtown.

In its first busy year, the Hamburg America House sponsored 130 lectures, 50 live concerts, 180 recorded concerts, 268 discussions, 12 major exhibits and 720 film showings.

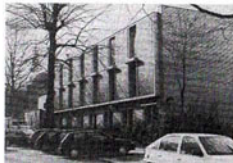
Aside from its libraries for adults and children, the America House sent out "bookmobiles" to other cities and towns in the neighboring states of Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony.

By the mid-1950s, the city of Hamburg - seeking to ease traffic problems - gave the Americans another plot of ground on the Moorweide, where a new America House opened on May 20, 1957.

The center - with its 370-seat auditorium, reference center and two conference rooms - became known for its innovative programs. At one point, America House librarians packed "sea-chests" full of books for German sailors to take on voyages.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary, Hamburg's America House displayed paintings and prints of artist James McNeill Whistler. Then U.S. Ambassador Martin J. Hillenbrand praised the America House system for evolving from what had begun as a one-sided monologue, presenting the United States to a German audience, to a more complex dialogue that helped "bring Germans and Americans together to exchange opinions and ideas."

When Hamburg's America House celebrated its 40th anniversary in 1990, the Hamburger Abendblatt praised the center as "a cultural gem" that had reflected the United States for tens of thousands of Hamburg's residents.



**COLOGNE AMERIKA HAUS**  
(Library opened 1953; present building, 1955)  
Apostelnkloster 13-15, 50672 Koeln

Affixed to the wall of the America House Cologne is a bronze plaque in memory of former German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in his sophisticated home city on the Rhine River.

In a fitting bit of symbolism, the America House stands on the site where Adenauer attended school from 1885-1894. Adenauer later became mayor of Cologne, the first chancellor of West Germany, and a leading proponent of close German-U.S. ties.

In a sense, the history of American cultural centers in Cologne - the largest city in the state of North-Rhine/Westphalia - is closely tied to the Adenauer family and the legacy of the family's tradition in post-war Germany.

As chancellor, Adenauer was a booster of America Houses, and was pleased when one opened in Cologne in 1953. His son - Max Adenauer - helped arrange for a good site for the new America House in 1955, when he was Cologne's city administrator. And Hanna Adenauer, a cousin who was then the city's "Konservatorin," pushed successfully to save an old tree on the America House grounds where Konrad Adenauer had played as a boy.

After the America House opened, local architects and officials praised the building's bright, open spaces, its pleasant landscaping and excellent acoustics.

In 1965, when Cologne's America House celebrated its 10th anniversary, the city's mayor, Theo Burauen, commended the center for its "numerous outstanding programs that have brought together Americans with our citizens and made a valuable contribution to achieving a good understanding between our people."

When vibraphonist Lionel Hampton performed at the America House in May 1981, the Koelner Rundschau called him "one of the greatest Ambassadors of Jazz," who pleased Koelnians with a "jam session and a free-wheeling talk."

Celebrating its 25th anniversary in 1980, a local journalist praised Cologne's America House for reflecting the flair and sophistication of Cologne itself, and for its many years of opening "a window to America."



**LEIPZIG AMERIKA HAUS**  
(First opened, 1992)  
Wilhelm-Seyffert-Strasse 4, 04107 Leipzig

In the historic Saxon city of Leipzig, just a few blocks from the church where Johann Sebastian Bach was once choirmaster, the newest America House opened on June 30, 1992.

A chorus of more than 400 well-wishers - including the governors of Saxony and Thuringia, as well as Chancellor Helmut Kohl's wife, Hannelore - gathered for a garden party to celebrate the opening of the first America House in former East Germany.



In his remarks, Saxony's Minister President Kurt Biedenkopf recalled how, as a young man, he had spent hours in America House libraries in western Germany. Leipzig's America House now offers similar opportunities to young people in eastern Germany.

The effort to open an America House in Leipzig had begun shortly after the Wall fell, but it took two years for USIS officials to cut through the thicket of obstacles.

"We 'hit the road' looking at properties, making contacts, organizing programs and trying to make sense of all the changes that were taking place," recalled Janet Garvey, the first America House director in Leipzig.

When the new house opened its doors for the general public, the line started forming an hour beforehand, and more than 1,000 visitors - from schoolchildren to seniors - streamed through the center on the first floor of the U.S. Consulate building.

Today, Leipzig's America House is busier than ever, as the historic city rebuilds, business expands and both Americans and Germans work to reestablish the close ties which existed before the 1930s.

"We are re-building bridges that haven't been used over the last 50 years," says Greg Lynch, who succeeded Garvey in 1994 as Leipzig's America House director. "We're trying to provide as much fundamental information about the United States to as many people as we can."

*Editor:* Robert Koenig, Berlin

*Design and Printing:* United States Information Service, Bonn

*Photo Credits:* Alain de Garzmeur - 2  
Hans Günter Contzen - 27  
Uwe Frauendorf - 5  
USIS - 3, 6, 12, 16, 18, 21, 23, 24, 26, 28

*Published by the:* United States Information Service, Bonn  
May 1995



**“The diversity of American  
democracy has always found a  
home in the America Houses.  
That is their genius -- the full, rich  
expression of our values,  
struggles, and dreams.”**

*- Dr. Joseph Duffey, Director,  
United States Information Agency*