

**THE HISTORY
OF THE
HOUSTON SÄNGERBUND**

BY THEODORE G. GISH

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While I am not a member of the Houston *Sängerbund*, I have enjoyed a relationship, both personal and professional, with the organization for nearly a quarter of a century. Kae Velmeden first introduced me to the *Sängerbund* when she was a student at the University of Houston in the early '60s. For many of the intervening years, Kae and Heinz Velmeden were instrumental in guiding my association with the club.

For a "non-singer," the performances of the *Sängerbund* at a *Sängertag* have always been a particularly moving experience for me. I first actually heard the club, not in Houston itself, but in San Antonio in the '70s. Another memorable performance was at a rainy *Sängertag* in Houston in the old *Liederkrantz* building a few years later. The *Sängertag* in Houston in 1983, on the occasion of the club's 100th anniversary and the tricentennial anniversary of the first German colony in the New World at Germantown, Pennsylvania, was also a special event. Finally, the *Sängerbund* gave me a particular sense of joy and pride when it sang the song *Willkommen* from *Texas Fahrten* (the musical which I had uncovered in New Braunfels) at the Houston meeting of the *German-Texan Heritage Society* in 1986.

Especially during the last decade, my participation with the club has included several projects of the *Sängerbund's* German Cultural Committee, the hosting of the meeting in 1983 of the historical organization, *the Houston Salon*, and the 100th anniversary commemoration of Washington Cemetery in 1987.

My relationship with the *Sängerbund* has deepened during the last few years, because of my friendship with Rodney Koenig and Asta Grona, two relatively new members of the club. Both Rodney and Asta were students in a course on the "Texas Germans" which I taught at the Goethe Institute, and both have been instrumental in the writing of this history.

In my nearly a quarter of a century relationship with the *Sängerbund*, periods of time have elapsed when I did not visit the club.

Still, when I returned, *Sängerbund* members have always treated me like a friend, and I have always felt like one.

The *Sängerbund* has contributed financially to this project over the last few years. In 1988, after Asta Grona became seriously ill and was placed in a convalescent home in Fredericksburg, her family has twice made generous financial gifts in her name to the Institute of Texas-German Studies at the University of Houston. Because of her relationship with the *Sängerbund* and also our friendship, it seemed fitting to use part of this financial support to underwrite the publication of this history.

In this sense, this volume is dedicated to the past and present members of the Houston *Sängerbund*, but especially to Asta.

While Asta certainly brought her own special uniqueness to her association with the *Sängerbund*, she possesses much of the typical ethnic background of the membership. Asta was born in 1906 in San Antonio, as one of four daughters of Felix Grona and Dina Ernst Grona. Because of her father's health, the family moved to Fredericksburg, where there were a number of other Grona relatives, when Asta was seven. After a few years, however, the family returned to San Antonio. In San Antonio, the father continued his work as a mattress maker, while Asta's mother developed a floral and nursery business. After graduating from Herff High School in San Antonio, Asta attended the University of Texas, where she obtained a degree in home economics, and a teaching certificate. Asta then taught home economics for several years in Hochheim, Belton, Quero, and San Antonio. In 1937, Asta made a permanent move to Houston, where she was active in various businesses, including work at the Houston Ship Channel and with the Hogg family interests, as an artist in a lithography business and as an interior decorator.

Asta considers that she had a very "German" upbringing. Both her father and mother were associated with the Sons of *Hermann* in San Antonio and her father subscribed to the *Fredericksburger Wochenblatt*. The family spoke German well into the time that Asta was at the University of Texas. She remembers, in fact, always wanting to speak German when she returned home from college. Asta also fondly remembers the German customs at Christmas and Easter, the Christmas cookies and the making of *Kümmeleier* at Easter. Asta also attended German summer school when she was little. The summer school had

German spelling bees, and Asta even remembers that she once spelled *Vogel* incorrectly with an *f* instead of a *v*!

Although Asta joined the Houston *Sängerbund* relatively late in her life, her enthusiasm for the organization and the joy with which she sang as an alto in the *Damenchor* was unbounded. She also exhibited the same amount of enthusiasm for her other German-American interests. She was a very active member of the *German-Texan Heritage Society*. The other members of the "Texas German" class can likewise fondly remember Asta's enthusiasm for the course, the contributions she made about her own personal family heritage, and the refreshments that, unbidden, she brought to the class!

Other members of the *Sängerbund* have contributed to this history in various ways. During the last five years, the Officers and Directors have been very supportive, particularly when the project seemed, at one point, to be stalled. Over the years, I have received historical "tidbits" informally from numerous members of the club. While this information may not have found its way directly into this history, it has certainly provided me a background sense for the writing of the history. I also owe a great debt of gratitude to the countless authors of the existing written documents of the *Sängerbund* from 1905-85 to which I have had access.

Two members of the *Sängerbund* have been particularly helpful with this project. Edward Kasparik solicited the cooperation of several long-time members who provided indispensable oral histories about the *Sängerbund*. Edward himself, needless to say, gave his own personal recollections and the others are listed in the history itself. Edward also painstakingly read the final draft of the history. I could not have asked for a better editor! As a friend, Rodney Koenig has supported this project, as my other Texas-German activities, with both kindness and enthusiasm. Rodney has been especially helpful in providing me the access to the *Sängerbund's* archival material. He has also coordinated the collection of data for the *Appendix* of the history. Rodney too read draft sections of the history.

The University of Houston, finally, assisted this project in several ways. Ute Ritzenhofen, from the University of Mainz and the University of Houston's first graduate fellow in Texas-German Studies, conducted and then transcribed a number of the oral histories. Although this task was quite a challenge for a young German in the early months of her

first visit to the United States, Ute performed the job admirably. The University of Houston has also made available the necessary technical assistance for the history's publication. Dr. Barry Brown, Director of the University's Foreign Language Laboratory, provided the expertise and the facilities for the camera-ready page production, while the history was printed at the University's Printing Plant.

In conclusion, I would like to dedicate this volume to one other individual, my father-in-law (now deceased), Raymond Rudloff. Ray grew up as a St. Louis German-American, in the same generation as Asta. I especially enjoyed watching the rekindling of Ray's own ethnic heritage as he visited the *Sängerbund* with me on numerous occasions. There were many other such moments of mutual ethnic rediscovery for Ray and myself. The most memorable, however, occurred in Germany several years ago. While my in-laws and my wife and I were driving along the Rhine, we stopped on the road across from the "Lorelei" cliffs. Without any hesitation, and without ever having done anything like this before, Ray and I spontaneously burst forth with the immortal song by Heine! *The Lorelei*, I should add, is the also the first German song I ever heard. For even though my mother is not German, she learned the song in high school and she would sing it to me when I was a young child. Consequently, this spontaneous singing in Germany - with the memory of my mother's singing - remains one of the peak moments of my own ethnic awareness, and a personal testimony to the communal power of das *deutsche Lied*.

Theodore G. Gish
Houston, Texas
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INTRODUCTION: GERMAN SONG IN TEXAS

The many thousands of German immigrants who helped significantly to settle Texas in its formative years around the middle of the 19th century and then again in the decades after the Civil War, brought with them a cultural heritage unique in its variety and richness. The record of German "material" culture in Texas, especially much of the stone masonry of public buildings in cities such as Austin and San Antonio or the pioneer *Fachwerk* architecture throughout the German regions of the state, is, quite literally, still a visible reminder of this heritage. Less directly accessible, but no less important, is the intellectual and spiritual impact which Texas Germans had upon the cultural, the religious, the educational, and the political development of the state. In the larger cities, such as Galveston, San Antonio, Austin, and Houston and in the smaller towns and villages in the German areas of the state, immigrants fostered German-language newspapers, dramatic groups, literary and political societies, Casino clubs (culturally-oriented social clubs), Sons of Herman lodges, *Turnvereine* (gymnastic clubs) and *Schützenvereine* (marksmanship clubs). Many of these institutions have eventually died out (e.g., the long-living *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung* published its last German edition in 1957) or, if surviving, often bear scant cultural resemblance to their origins. The German singing societies in Texas, however, still play an important cultural role in the German-American communities of the state and remain, culturally, intact in many ways.

The singing societies of Texas were patterned after the *Liedertafeln* singing societies which had developed at the beginning of the 19th century under the leadership of Friedrich Zelter in Berlin and Carl Zollner in Frankfurt. In addition to the recreational, social, and spiritual function of choral singing, for the immigrant the native song had, additionally, a therapeutic value which should not be minimized and which has not changed to the present day. Moritz Tiling in his book, *German Element in Texas*, called das *deutsche Lied* "an invisible passenger" on the journey to Texas and added:

It accompanied (the pioneers) westward on their dreary march across the broad prairies, where many of the prospective settlers fell by the wayside from exposure and exhaustion, and established itself with the sturdy pioneers on the beautiful banks of the Comal and Pedernales, to cheer them in their daily toil and brighten their evenings at the fireside.

German singers and German song also accompanied the general settlement of Texas. The first piano was purportedly brought to Texas in 1834 by the Kleberg and the von Roder families¹ who settled the farming community of Cat Spring. In the first account of Texas published in English, Mary Austin Holly (a cousin of Stephen F. Austin) also commented in 1837 on the Germans who "sing in concert" in Galveston. There are similar comments, as will be seen, from the early days of Houston. There are also numerous vignettes of musical life in the pioneer German settlements in Texas such as the remark of the New York journalist, Friedrich Law Olmstead, about the community of Sisterdale (which Olmstead visited in the 1850s) where the immigrants sat upon "barrels for seats to hear Beethoven's symphony on a grand piano."

German singing societies, both in Germany and in the United States, have traditionally sung folk songs, popular songs or art songs, available in printed songbooks, the *Kommersbuch*. Nevertheless, a number of musically talented Texas-Germans have provided Texas singing societies with indigenous songs with uniquely Texas themes. None less than Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, the Commissioner-General of the *Adelsverein* is purported to have written the first Texas *Lied*, on the occasion of the founding of New Braunfels. Numerous "occasional" songs were written for the annual meetings of the state singing conventions, but only a few of these have survived. G. J. Petmecky, of the Austin *Sängerverein*, for example, wrote a *Texas hoch*, while Adolf Douai, the Director of the San Antonio singing society and editor of the *Freie Presse für Texas*, wrote a *Männergesang*. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, the author of the German national anthem, wrote his *Texanische Lieder*, in part, to honor the immigration of his friend Adolf Fuchs to Texas. An accomplished amateur musician, Fuchs set some of the *Texanische Lieder*, as well as his own poems, and those of Goethe, Uhland, and Wieland to music. The most ambitious composition of

¹ Flora von Roeder, a descendant of this family, is an active member of the *Damenchor* of the *Sängerbund*.

"Texas" songs was for the *Singspiel, Texas Fahrten*. The only pioneer Texas-German "musical" ever written, the work chronicles the adventures of four young Germans as they take up the settlers' life in the Republic of Texas. The New Braunfels civic and cultural leader, Hermann Seele, wrote the text for *Texas Fahrten*, while the music teacher and singing society member from La Grange, C. Wilke, wrote the music. The twelve songs of the work include several with "German," "Texas," and "American" patriotic themes; Anglo, Indian, and Mexican songs; and an *Alamolied*. The diversity and number of these songs make them, by far, the most unique collection of indigenous German songs in Texas.

There is no direct knowledge as to how and where the first German "singing society" began in Texas. Because of the presence of the piano in Cat Spring (which, however, was destroyed during the War of Independence) there is some belief that this first society began in Cat Spring or in the nearby village of Millheim (originally Muhlheim) or in the early '40s in Galveston whose population at that time was variously estimated at one-third to one-half German. In the same year that the city of New Braunfels was founded (1845) a quartette was formed which sang regularly at one of the member's cabins. The first informal singing group of the other principal German settlement of Texas, Fredericksburg, was also a quartette, formed in 1849, three years after the founding of the city. The first actual singing club of Texas was the *Germania* society which began in New Braunfels in 1850. There were 47 charter members of *Germania* whose purpose, according to its constitution was "Durch Übung in der Kunst den Geschmack zu bilden und reineren Lebensgenuss zu fordern." ("By artistic endeavor to develop good taste and to foster a greater sense of the enjoyment of life.") Each weekly meeting of the club was a formal rehearsal and once a month there was a public rehearsal. Members missing a meeting were fined five cents, and if several meetings were missed, the members faced the possibility of expulsion. Drinking and smoking, furthermore, were not permitted during the meetings.

In the latter half of the 19th century - particularly the decades of the '50s, the '70s, and the '80s - and sporadically into the 20th century, German immigrants established approximately 100 singing societies in nearly 60 Texas towns and villages, especially in the area around Austin and San Antonio. A number of cities have sponsored several

singing groups. Not surprisingly, San Antonio, the Texas-German "capital" has had over the years nine such groups, Houston eight, New Braunfels seven, Fredericksburg four, Austin and Galveston both three. Several cities have been able to sponsor more than one club at the same time (e.g., San Antonio and Houston both currently have two clubs). For a number of societies a *Damenchor* was a subsequent addition, while in some cases societies were "mixed" from the beginning. While many of the clubs have died out, often because the villages which once sponsored them have ceased to exist, active singing societies still exist in Austin, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, New Braunfels, Fredericksburg, and in a number of small Texas-German farming communities. In the past few decades, a few new societies have also been established in Texas.

Often the clubs have borne conventional names. There have been, for example, a number of *Sängerbund*, *Liedertafel*, *Liederkrantz* (song circle), *Frohsinn* (good spirits), *Concordia*, and *Echo* societies. But there have also been more imaginative designations such as *Zeitvertreib* (pastime) in Seguin, *Fortschritt* (progress) in Bulverde, *Frosche* (frogs) in La Grange, and *Salamander* (a salamander is slang for a part of a German student drinking toast) in Galveston.

The two primary state organizations of the German singing societies are *Der deutsch-texanische Sängerbund* (The German-Texan Singers' League) (*DTSB*) and *Der west-texanische GebirgsSängerbund* (The Texas Hill Country Singers' League). The *DTSB* was founded in 1853, *Der west-texanische GebirgsSängerbund* in 1881 and both are currently active. Two other regional organizations, *The Gillespie County Singers' League* and *The Comal Singers' League* operated before and after the Second World War, but neither is currently active.

The *DTSB* began informally in October, 1853 when the club German/a invited the recently formed societies in Austin and San Antonio, and the Sisterdale quartette to a *Sangerfest* in New Braunfels. Torrential rains and swollen rivers and creeks impeded the visitors on their journey to New Braunfels. The Austin group, for example, lost most of their personal belongings, including their songbooks, trying to ford the swollen Blanco river, but they did manage to save their society banner. Despite the weather, however, 72 singers participated in a successful *Sangerfest*.

Over the years, the *DTSB* has understandably undergone a number of organizational changes. The League did not meet during the Civil War period, nor did it meet during the two World Wars, and there were also no meetings from 1923-26. Beginning in 1870, the *DTSB* also decided to meet only biennially. By 1883, the League further decided to hold its *Sangerfeste* only in Austin, Dallas, Galveston, Houston, and San Antonio. In 1946, after the hiatus of the Second World War, the *DTSB* went from the two-three day *Sangerfest* to a one-two day *Sängertag*.

Throughout the *DTSB*'s history there have also been a number of significant developments. For a number of years, beginning with the 1877 convention in San Antonio, an orchestra was an integral part of the *Sangerfeste*. The high point of this embellishment was reached in Houston in 1913 when the entire symphony orchestra of St. Louis was brought to Texas. Professional singers, such as opera singers from New York and Berlin, occasionally also enriched the proceedings. As these musical additions suggest, the *Sangerfeste* around the turn-of-the-century became very elaborate affairs in which non-German citizens, public officials, and the merchants of the host cities also enthusiastically participated. The events of the 13th *Sangerfest* in Galveston (1881) were very likely the most elaborate of any festival. During a period of five days (rather than the customary three) there were torchlight processions and marches, accompanied by the Fire Department and the Militia; addresses of welcome by civic officials; various dinners, picnics, and a grand ball; and two concerts (rather than the usual one) performed in a specially built pavillion with a seating capacity of 5800.

As the years progressed, an increasing number of societies became affiliated with the *DTSB*. By 1885, for example, there were 22 member clubs. (This figure, incidentally, was reduced only slightly during the First World War.) To insure the continuing interest among subsequent generations, the League in 1872 decided to establish singing schools for German-American children and for a number of years these schools were conducted in many cities and towns in Texas. In 1913, the *DTSB* founded a quarterly magazine, the *Sanger-Zeitung*.

The German *Gesangvereine* in Texas as elsewhere in the United States had to withstand the difficulties associated with the two World Wars as well as the inevitable twin processes of assimilation and acculturation. These factors, understandably, caused a reduction in the number of singing societies, as did the disappearance of once thriving

farm villages in the German regions of the state. In 1988, for example, the *DTSB* reported eleven member clubs. This state organization as well as the Texas *Hill Country Singers' League*, are still, however, actively functioning bodies.

The following historical account of the Houston *Sängerbund* will provide the reader with further information on the relationship of this Houston singing society to other societies in Texas and to the wax and wane of the German singing movement in the state. This account will also demonstrate how the Houston *Sängerbund* has continued for 106 years to provide its members with *deutscher Gemutlichkeit und deutschem Gesang*, all the while successfully accommodating to the fortunes of the German ethnic presence in the city of Houston.

THE HISTORY OF THE HOUSTON SÄNGERBUND

I. THE BEGINNINGS

German immigrants to Houston played a substantial role in the development of the Magnolia City during its formative years. Even before the Alien brothers advertised Houston as a city in the summer of 1836, the very first settlement within the present city limits, in an area south of Buffalo Bayou and west of Highway 59, became generally known as "Germantown" because of the predominantly German inhabitants of the area in subsequent years. Like elsewhere in early Texas, the impact of Germans upon the cultural and especially upon the musical life of the city was impressive. It can be argued that the young Rhineland businessman, Gustav Dresel, who lived and worked in Houston from 1838 to 1840, was merely being patriotic when he noted in his diary that Houstonians "love German singing very much." But many years later, the historian David McComb expressed much the same opinion when he wrote in his *Houston: the Bayou City* (1969) that "those with the greatest interest in music were German immigrants." The city's first musical concert in May, 1840, with solos on piano, violin, and French horn, was, in fact, under the direction of Emil Heerbrugger, a German. Concerning this concert, the Houston *Morning Star* wrote in October, 1840: "a serenade by some Germans under the direction of Mr. Heerbrugger, the most accomplished musician that has ever visited the country," was "as sweet and delightful music as ever broke the slumber of mortals."

Whether these particular German singers, or a similar group, provided the beginnings for the first German "singing society" in Houston is not known. According to the very sparse historical record, actual German singing clubs developed in Houston several decades later than elsewhere in Texas. It was not until 1879 that two delegates -but not any singing group itself - from a Houston *Mannerchor* of the city's *Turnverein* appeared at the annual *Sangerfest* of the *DTSB*, held that year in Austin. The *Mannerchor's* participation at the next meeting of the *DTSB* in 1881 in Galveston is the first recorded appearance of Houston singers at a state *Sangerfest*. Represented with 13 singers, the Houston *Mannerchor* performed on this occasion as a triple quartette under the direction of a Professor G. Duvernoy. Since the

Houston *Turnverein* was established in 1854, it is, of course, possible that this *Mannerchor* existed much earlier than the 1880s.

While this *Mannerchor* did not participate in the 1883 *Sangerfest* (held for the first time in Dallas), there was a *Liederkrantz* from Houston with 16 singers. Shortly after the Dallas meeting, the *Mannerchor* ceased to exist. The Houston *Sängerbund*, with Professor Carl Zeuss as its musical director, became the city's second German singing society, and Professor Duvernoy now directed the *Liederkrantz*. Although the two societies were somewhat competitive, they worked together for the success of Houston's first *Sangerfest*, in 1885. Duvernoy was put in charge of the musical arrangements, while Zeuss and Vincenz Juenger (the *Sängerbund's* President during 1907-08 and the club's secretary for many years) supervised the preparations for altering the large public hall in the market house into an artistically decorated *Sangerhalle*.

Houston's 19th century *Liederkrantz* (a different organization from the club of the same name, founded in 1925) unfortunately had only a brief existence. With a gradual decline in membership (e.g. only 8 singers were at the 1894 *Sangerfest*, while the *Sängerbund* had 36), the club ceased attending the meetings of the *DTSB* in 1896, and presumably was dissolved at about that time. Three other singing clubs also existed for a short while in Houston. A *Houston Frohsinn* participated in the 1896 *Sängertag* in San Antonio and in the 1898 meeting in Galveston. After an absence of several years, the *Frohsinn* again participated at the 1909 *Sängertag* in Galveston, where it was listed as a new club. But this was the last appearance of the *Frohsinn* at the meetings of the *DTSB*, and it too apparently ceased to exist about this time. The *Minutes* of the *DTSB* also list the participation in 1906, 1909, and 1911 of a Spring Branch (Hillendahl) *Liedertafel* (the minutes of the *Sängerbund* itself mentions the *Liedertafel* in 1906) and in 1914 of a *Magnolia Mannerchor*, but after the respective entries, these two groups were also no longer heard from.

I. TURN OF THE CENTURY

The *Houston Sängerbund* was founded on October 6, 1883, the 200th anniversary of the founding of Germantown, Pennsylvania, the first

German colony in the New World. After it was organized as a club the following spring, the first formal meeting of the *Sängerbund* took place on June 1, 1884. At that time, there were 24 "active" (singing) members and 50 "passive" (non-singing) members. The first officers were Charles G. Heyne (President), Carl Suhm (Vice-President), Adam Meiser (Secretary), Carl Zeuss (Secretary and Musical Director), and Julius Rolke (Librarian).

There is no direct documentation of *Sängerbund's* first two decades. But the oldest available *Minutes* of the *Sängerbund* meetings, from 1905-1913 and written in German *script*, offer some notion of the club's early activities and growth. A few newspaper articles and announcements (especially in the German-language newspaper, *Houston Deutsche Zeitung*, published by the club member August Haxthausen and available from 1898-1913) provide additional glimpses into the *Sängerbund* at the turn of the century.

Particularly in the early years, the *Sängerbund* had several homes. Originally the club met in the spacious quarters of the Turner Hall which occupied the entire block bounded by Prairie, Caroline, Texas, and Austin. In 1887, the *Sängerbund* moved into a building at 31 Main Street, where Professor Zeuss also had an English-German school. By 1890, the club had moved again, to Dumler Hall. In 1898, the club moved into what was called the *Sängerbundhalle*, at the corner of Preston and San Jacinto. This building remained the club's residence until the move to Milby Street, where the *Sängerbund* was located as early as 1915. Like its other locations in the early years, the club leased the *Sängerbundhalle*. Because the club wished to have its own facilities by its 25th anniversary in 1909, it purchased a lot in the "Brook Smith, second addition" in 1908. The club, however, was not able to build on this property.

As mentioned earlier, the *Sängerbund* began to participate regularly in the annual spring *Sängertag* of the *DTSB*, when it co-hosted the 1885 meeting in Houston. Moritz Tiling gave this glowing account of the meeting in his *German Element in Texas* :

When the opening day of the Sangerfest arrived everything was spick and span. The city was gaily decorated along all the principal streets, Main and Preston, Congress and Travis Streets, however, wearing the most gorgeous apparel. The public spirited merchants along these thoroughfares seemed

determined to outdo each other in promoting the spirit of the occasion, and had draped their house fronts in the gayest attire.

The following singing societies took part in the Sangerfest: Salamander and Mendelsohn Societies from Galveston; Beethoven and Mendelsohn Societies of San Antonio; Mannerchor from Austin; Frohsinn from Dallas; vocal section of Giddings Turnverein; Liederkranz of Victoria, and the two Houston Singing Societies. . . . A chorus of mixed voices was also organized that sang in two of the concerts.

To the official musical program a matinee concert was added by the music committee and this proved to be so successful that henceforth all Saengerfests offered three concerts to the music loving people of Texas. This addition of a third concert was necessary, as the *Sängerbund* (the *DTSB*) constantly received new additions to its membership, having now twenty-two singing societies on its rosters. The three concerts of the fifteenth Sangerfest were given before crowded houses on April 28th and 29th, followed on April 30th, by a Volksfest at Volksfest Park, and on May 1st, by a Military Day, with a promenade concert and competing infantry drills, in which companies from Galveston, Brenham and Austin participated. The amusement and entertainment was provided free of charge for everybody and the Sangerfest proved a gratifying success throughout. Prof. Duvernoy the "Festdirigent" was presented by the Sangerfest directorate with a fine gold watch, in proper recognition of his valuable and efficient services, while Messrs. Zeuss and Juenger also received official recognition for their artistic work in decorating Municipal Hall.

During the early period of its existence, the *Sängerbund* was the host for the *DTSB* in Houston on three other occasions, 1894, 1902, and 1913. Partly because 1913 was as Tiling points out "the centennial of the great uprising of the German nation against Napoleon's rule and the beginning of the wars of liberation," the 29th Sangerfest was in many ways the state organization's most lavish affair up to that time. The Houston *Sängerbund* even published a quarterly magazine (the *Sanger-Zeitung*) to inform the other singing societies in the state about the annual meeting. Augmenting the performances of the 21 singing societies in attendance at the 29th Sangerfest, were the concerts of

the 55 member St. Louis Orchestra and the singers Marie Rappold, prima donna soprano of the Metropolitan Opera Company, and Carl Schlegel, baritone, of Berlin and New York. A chorus of 300 Houston school children also sang in German and 5,000 in English on the occasion of this *Sängerfest!*

At the beginning of this early period, an average of two to three "active" and an equal number of "passive" members joined the *Sängerbund* each month, while by 1910, the averages were two to three times these figures. Although others, of course, dropped out or were dropped for non-payment of dues, the membership continued to grow during these years. In 1908, for example, there were 176 members, while five years later there were 406 members.

The *Sängerbund* also visited other clubs during these early years, such as those in Galveston, Spring Branch, Brenham, and Austin. For the 25th *Stiftungsfest* (founding celebration) in 1908, the *Sängerbund* invited the singing societies of Galveston, Brenham, Bellville, La Grange, and Schulenburg to Houston. In addition also to singing at the annual state *Sängertage*, the *Sängerbund* gave concerts in Houston, as it has throughout its existence, on numerous occasions throughout the year. A discussion concerning the sale of tickets for these concerts reveals that the Germans in Houston in its early days might occasionally disagree on matters of music (or perhaps, especially on matters of music)! For in 1906, it was agreed at the general meeting that "the club should make known at the next meeting the names of those German businessmen who publicly refuse to buy tickets for the next concert on April 1st." The reason for this was to indicate to the members of the *Sängerbund* "those businessmen and so-called 'Germans' who oppose and attempt to harm the *Sängerbund*."

The *Minutes* during these years indicate the periodic purchase of property, in addition to real estate purchases. In 1905, for example, the club bought a piano and in 1912, it bought a grand piano. The financial report for 1912, however, indicates that the request for a bass fiddle was turned down! In 1908, the *Sängerbund* also received two song books from the German Emperor through the diplomatic representative of Imperial Germany in Galveston.

During this early period, the club also developed interests in dramatic and *Turner* activities, both of which, like singing, were characteristic cultural activities of German immigrants throughout the

United States. A "dramatic club", founded within the structure of the existing *Sängerbund* became quite active during these early years. The *Houston Deutsche Zeitung* in 1900 describes, in fact, an evening of both music and drama at the *Sängerbundhalle*. The singers of the *Sängerbund* performed, Professor Schmidt's *Kapelle* provided the music, the drama group performed a one-act play *Ein bengalischer Tiger oder Der weise Othello* (*A Bengal Tiger or The White Othello*), and a dance concluded this already full evening. In 1902, the same newspaper reports further of the performance "on the world-renown stage" of the *Sängerbund* of *Der Viehhändler aus Osterreich oder Stadt und Land* (*The Cattle-Dealer from Austria or City and Country*), a farce by Friedrich Kaiser "with the guest appearance of Gustav Heilig, the well-known Texas-German journalist from La Grange in the title role." In the *Sängerbund* archives there is also the playbill for a performance in 1911 of the "historical comedy" *Ganse-Gretel* (*Gretel the Goose Girl*) by Phillipp Walburg-Kramer. This play, like the others, is the typical melodramatic fare of long-forgotten minor writers, so often favored by the audiences of those days. Nevertheless, the number of major roles (13) and the makeup of the playbill itself both suggest a considerable amount of sophistication on the part of the club's amateur theatrical group.

The *Sängerbund* appears also to have been interested in other sorts of cultural activities during this time. The *Houston Deutsche Zeitung* writes, for example, in 1910 that there was an evening at the *Sängerbundhalle* devoted to music, dancing, the recitation of original poetry, and an address in German by A. J. Rosenthal of Galveston on "The Influence of German Culture on American Intellectual Life." Such lectures to German-American audiences about the positive impact of German culture on the United States were, of course, very common at that time.

Early in 1911, the *Sängerbund* also initiated a *Turner* section consisting of 12 members. By the spring of that year, the club could announce, along with a public musical program (with tickets at \$.25 for non-members!), the performance of a *Schau-Turnen* (a *Turner* Show). These activities, incidentally, were concluded by a customary *Tanzkranzchen* (Dance). The first anniversary festival of this *Turner* section, taking place during the following spring, was a very elaborate affair. There was a "prologue" spoken by Martha Terpe (the sister-in-law of Anna Terpe, the oldest living member of the Ladies Auxiliary) and illustrated by a *Lebendes Bild* (a "living picture", i.e., an allegorical scene depicted by club members) as well as musical offerings by an

orchestra and the *Sängerbund* chorus. These events themselves were only in preparation for the *Turner* activities, which were initiated by a grand march of the *Turner* members to the music of *Turner aufzum Streite (Turners off to Battle)*. After a performance by the student team, *Turner* squads executed a "pyramid" and demonstrated their skill with rods, parallel bars, and the horizontal bar. A *Festball* concluded the evening, led by a polonaise of the *Turner* section and their ladies. As the description of this 1912 program suggests, the *Turner* activities of the *Sängerbund* had become significant enough that the club now listed its members either as *Turner* or *Sanger*. By 1912, the club also gave *Turner* instruction to the male children of German parents. The club's *Turner* members seem to have lived in harmony with the *cliy'sTurnverein*, for the latter organization was willing to loan them equipment.

In addition to its singing, dramatic, and *Turner* activities, the *Sängerbund* also participated in the "German Day" celebrations, which took place yearly in Houston (and elsewhere in the United States) in the decades before the First World War. A number of the club members played prominent roles in the activities of the "German Day" and the *Minutes* book of the Houston "German Day" organization is located in the club's archives.

Der Deutsche Tag, it will be remembered, commemorates the founding of Germantown, Pennsylvania on October 6, 1683. Houston's first observation of this day was in 1889 (six years after it was first celebrated in Philadelphia). The available records of the organization in Houston stop at 1910, but it must be assumed that the celebration continued at least to the outbreak of the First World War. "German Day" was celebrated intermittingly in Houston, as in some other cities in the United States, between the two wars. But as far as is known, it was not celebrated again in Houston, until 1987, when it was reestablished (as "German-American Day") as a national holiday in the United States by President Reagan, as an outcome of the German-American Tricentennial celebrations in 1983.

Many of these yearly "German Day" celebrations were elaborate affairs. As Tiling reports in *German Element in Texas* :

The year 1892 witnessed a German Day celebration of extraordinary magnificence. This year being the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of our Continent, it was deemed

proper that the festivities should be arranged on broad and exhaustive plans. The German-American Citizens' Alliance took up the matter and after a great deal of deliberation, decided in favor of a two days celebration. On October 20, the festivities began with a vocal and instrumental concert in the opera house, and the production of historical and allegorical tableaux, in which more than a hundred ladies and gentlemen participated. On the next day, the first great German Day parade moved through the streets of the city of Houston. The parade consisted of four divisions under the command of Charles Hirzel, and twenty marshals. Eight floats artisitcally built and decorated . . . called for constant applause and unbiased admiration of the thousands of spectators who lined the streets through which the pageant passed. Besides the German associations of Houston all the gun clubs of Harris County and the Uniformed Rank of the Knights of Pythias took part in the parade. For the afternoon a great Volkfest had been arranged in Volkfest Park and thousands listened to the orations. . . .A dance In the Volksfest Park and a ball in Turner Hall concluded this memorable celebration.

Only in retrospect and in the troubled light of the events which befell German-Americans in the First World War could one consider the celebration of these *Deutsche Tage* political activities. The *Sängerbund* itself is a social and cultural organization. The only sort of "political" activity it ever engaged in was to help legislate occasionally against prohibition which it did, for example, in 1911 by contributing \$100 to a political fund. But this sort of political expression was quite understandable, it need not be said, for a German singing club!

III. BETWEEN THE WARS

In an interview in 1931, published in the *Houston Press*, the then President Walter Zeisig had the following to say about the war years:

Before the war the Sängerbund's rolls boasted more than a thousand names. It nearly went to pieces during the maelstrom. There were few of us who cared to stand forth and proclaim we were German members of an organization designed to keep alive German folk songs. Prohibition cut

another great hole in its membership. The old Sangerbund meetings used to include beer and sandwiches with the singing. There were many of the old-timers who refused to believe it could ever be the same after prohibition came into being.

The *Minutes* of the *Sangerbund* are missing from 1913-18, and no other records exist concerning the precise fate of the *Sangerbund* during the First World War. It is known, however, that the Milby Street clubhouse was functioning in 1916, and in 1918 the club had over 600 members. The *Sangerbund*, consequently, seems to have survived during the war, with some cosmetic alterations, just as it did during the Second World War. In this regard, the available *Minutes* do offer a striking linguistic legacy of the war. One of the founding members, Vincenz Juenger, the club's Secretary from at least 1919-24, used English for the *Minutes* until 1923, when he then shifted into German. (For some reason, he also wrote one set of *Minutes* in 1924 in English.)

The first available postwar *Annual Report* by Secretary Juenger, for the year 1919, tellingly reflects the impact of the war and the postwar period on the *Sangerbund*:

. . . the outgoing year will mark the most trying experiences of "The Houston Saengerbund" since its 35 years of existence, and I am sorry to quote the embarrassed conditions of our financial standing.

Not only the world war, but also the various state legislators, especially Prohibition have added to our discomforts. On account of the latter issue, many of our Members withdrew, however, the Saengerbund remains firm in all its endeavors and such members resigning on "Beer Principles" alone, were especially noted.

Our total membership stands at 454 as against 622 for the previous year. We regret the Influenza Wave which included the loss of some of our valued members.

. . . The Saengerbund also lent very active service in all national undertakings, especially Liberty Loan Issues, War Savings Stamps, and Red Cross Contributions, not forgetting a full quota enlistments (in) both (the) U.S. Army and Navy.

The conditions of the club quickly improved, however, and Secretary Juenger's indication in the 1920 *Annual Report* of the "good condition in our Financial as well as Moral standing" is repeated during the *Reports* of the next several years. In 1920, the club was financially secure enough, for instance, to make a donation to "the suffering children and women in Germany."

But inevitably there were changes in the *Sängerbund* in the postwar years. In 1920, Vincenz Juenger noted that along with him the "following founders of the Houston Saengerbund are still in our midst, . . . Suhm, Meister, Dreyer, and Albert Meyer." But since the overall club membership had fallen drastically in the last few years, the *Sängerbund* lowered the membership age from 25 to 18. The club's new monthly membership, consequently, averaged 15 members, and by 1921 there was an overall increase of 34 members (to 488). In 1921, a Ladies Auxiliary is also mentioned for the first time. Already at this time, the *Minutes* note the financial support which the Ladies Auxiliary provides the club.

The *Minutes* do not indicate when the *Sängerbund* moved into its location at 305 Milby Street, which is now called Dokey Hall. Although many older members think the *Sängerbund* purchased this clubhouse in the early 1920s, the wedding of Edward Kasparik's parents is recorded there in 1915. Sylphia Kirmse Busse, who came with her parents from New Braunfels to Houston in 1921 and whose father, Robert Kirmse, directed the newly founded 60 voice Swiss Mixed Chorus in Houston (just as he had done in New Braunfels), described the Milby Street location in a 1987 *Sängerbund Newsletter*:

There was a big entrance hall, on one side was a library room. Across the hall were two big pool rooms with a fire place. There was a bar with table and chairs. A dining room with mahogany tables and chairs where you could eat dinner, sandwiches and drink coffee.

A huge kitchen and a telephone booth with two phones. There was another entrance hall with a ticket office. Then the dance hall with a beautiful floor which was always covered when not in use. A baby grand piano and a beautiful stage with two dressing rooms. It was also equipped with a real picture show. On the outside of the hall was a porch which ran the length of the hall. Upstairs was a meeting room and live-in quarters for

(the married caretakers), They also had a bowling alley operating.

The *Sängerbund* has always had to contend with the upkeep of its clubhouses and grounds and the Milby Street location was no exception. The *Annual Report* for 1921, for example, notes in this regard the financial assistance of the Magnolia Lodge and the Edelweiss Sister Lodge of the Sons of *Hermann*, as well as the once existing *Austrian-Hungarian Society*. Beginning in 1922, the *Sängerbund* also rented out space to a dance studio. It likewise rented its facilities to traveling theatrical groups, such as the *Vienna Artistic Company*. Nevertheless, the club eventually had to sell its Milby Street location to the *Knights of Pythias* in January, 1925 for \$26,000. The *Sängerbund* then rented a clubhouse called Yoeman Hall on Fannin Street, from Jesse Jones for five years (at \$125 a month). The *Sängerbund* in turn, sublet Yoeman Hall to a church group for Sunday usage. The city's Building Inspector, incidentally, examined the building and informed the club that the building was sound enough for the *Sängerbund's* normal activities, but there could be no dancing of the "Charleston"! There was also some discussion at this time of obtaining a "German House" which could be used by the *Sängerbund*, the new *Liederkrantz* (founded in 1925), and the *Swiss Mixed Chorus*, but nothing came of these plans.

Edward Kasparik, a longtime *Sängerbund* member, remembers going to the Yoeman Hall when he was approximately eight years of age:

*Yoeman Hall was right next to Stower's furniture store where Gordon's Jewellery now has its business. There was a hamburger stand downstairs, we kids remembered that, and upstairs they had a big hall, and a big stage up there, and they had plays up there. Leona Beck was in charge those days, and she invited all us children in this play, on Christmas. That was my first dealings with the *Sängerbund*.*

Edward's sister, Frances Marburger, also has memories of her participation in these Christmas plays as an introduction to the *Sängerbund*:

It was 1927, we lived in the north part of Houston, and we had to take a streetcar to the city market. I met Sylphia and Mrs. Beck there, they were young ladies at the time. We went on the streetcar again, way out into the heights, they had some

friends there, and they were going to practice a Christmas play. I was very blond and small, and they thought I would make the perfect angel. We practiced there. That was for the Sängerbund, and about a week later they had the play in Yoeman's Hall.

Edward Kasparik also remembers the Sunday afternoons with his parents:

My mother and father, they took us there. We went there several times after that, that I am aware of, because they had dances and, of course, those days you brought your children along. They started on Sunday afternoons, because almost all the men worked six days a week. So Sunday was their only time off. So they would go there, Sunday afternoons, and they would have some type of games always to entertain the children, since they were right downtown. So, we would play, and then the dances would start later on in the afternoon. We children would have to sit on the side. They had chairs against the walls. We sat there and watched our parents dance. This is what we did. We fell asleep on the chairs. Then we would have to get on a streetcar, after it was over with. .. my brother, at that time, he was just a little baby, so they laid him down on a chair, and somebody had to watch him while they were dancing.

In the postwar years, these dances and the primary club activity of singing, seemed to be very much like they were in the time before the war. Early, in 1920, for example, the club was able to have three dances, the Mask Ball, the Grab Rag Ball, and the Tacky Ball within a few months. The club's singers also participated in the same activities as before the war, such as the annual *Sängertag* of the *DTSB*. Paul Bottler, who joined the club in 1900 and who was a member for 61 years until his death in 1961, became a "poet laureate" for the *Sängerbund* during these years. In 1920, for example, he wrote a poem to C.C. Lieb, the long-time Director of the club, in which he praised his fellow club members in the following fashion:

*Auf den Texas Sangerfesten
Waren die Houstoner stets die besten,
Sangen stets die schwierigsten Chore
Brachte Houston viele Ehre,*

*Man spricht heut' noch mit Behagen
Von den schonen alten Tagen,
Und das Lob vom Sangerbunde
Tont noch heut' von Mund zu Munde.
Man ehrt seinen Gesangesleiter
Ueber'n Staat und auch noch welter.*

*(At the Texas Song Festivals
The Houstonians have always been the best,
They always sang the most difficult choral works
And brought Houston great honor,
Today people still speak with pleasure
Of the good old days,
And the praise of the Sangerbund
Still goes from mouth to mouth.
Its Song Director is praised
Across the state and even beyond.)*

In 1921, Juenger also published his *Das Deutsche Lied* which was dedicated especially to the *DTSB* for the organization's annual meeting that year in San Antonio.

The *Sangerbund* developed other activities in the '20s as well. Sylphia Busse mentioned the bowling alley in the clubhouse on Milby Street, and the club frequently sponsored bowling contests (or "bowling arrangements" as Secretary Juenger described them). Sylphia recalled that a "real picture show," (what Secretary Juenger in 1924 called a "Lebende-Bilder Maschine") had become a great attraction at the club. For a time, movies were shown every Sunday night. But they presumably became too much of a distraction from other activities and in 1923, the *Sangerbund* decided to show them only every other Sunday! Members of the club also liked to read at the clubhouse, and in 1919, the club subscribed to one of the leading Texas-German newspapers of the state, the *Austin Wochenblatt*.

Sylphia Busse indicated in her *Newsletter* account that Mr. and Mrs. Freckmann had provided leadership for the theater group, but that the group, as such, was eventually discontinued. Her sister, Leona Kirmse Beck, however, still directed the children's plays. In addition to the regular choral singing, there was also other sorts of musical events. Syphia recalled, for example:

The latter part of the 1920s, still on Milby St., Leona and Adolph Beck performed the love scene of the Opera "II Trovatore" conducted by Mr. Kirmse with a part of the chorus singing the "Misserere" softly in the background. Leona Kirmse playing the part of Leonora, singing and reaching out her arms to her sweetheart Adolph Beck, who was in prison behind bars, expressing their love for each other. This was accompanied by the orchestra. Leona was dressed in a white long robe with a shawl over her head. A blue spot light was used. This was very effective. A prison scene had been built prior to the performance.

The clubhouses of the *Sängerbund*, understandably, often provided the right setting for similar affairs of the heart, even if there was not always an operatic occasion for its expression! The oldest living member, Anna Terpe, describes, for example, how she met her husband Otto at the original *Sängerbundhalle*:

One day I met a girlfriend and she said "Let's go to the *Sängerbund*" and we went up there. There was a hall upstairs and that's where they had the dance hall. Every Saturday we went with friends to the *Sängerbund* to dance. One day Frank Terpe said, "I'd like for you to meet my brother." I didn't know he had a brother. That's how Otto and I met, he was my husband later. That was at the beginning of 1913.

Anna can also recall the wedding in 1916 of Edward and Henriette Kasparik (the parents of Edward and Leslie Kasparik and Frances Marburger) at the Milby Street clubhouse when Anna was one of "Nannie's" bridesmaids.

Several of the members recall the beach parties of the *Sängerbund*, which the club sometimes undertook with other groups. Edward Kasparik, for example, remembers from his childhood:

*There must have been an excursion boat that used to go down from the turning basin down to Sylvan Beach. Sylvan Beach in those days was a big place to go. They had carnival rides, and things like that. I recall going on this boat, to me it seemed like it was a *Queen Mary*. I'm sure it wasn't. All of the *Sängerbund* people went. They sang on the boat. I remember*

this. And then . . . coming back at night, they had lights up there on the deck, and my parents were dancing and talking.

During this same time, Sylphia Busse also fondly recalled the trips that the *Sängerbund* took on the pleasure boat "Nicholas" to Morgan's Point and how she and her father and sister sang "Anchors Away" and the club enjoyed sing-a-longs. In addition to these beach excursions, and besides the annual *Sängertag* trips and the trips to visit other singing societies, such as the group in Belleville and in Galveston, the *Sängerbund* frequently had a picnic or a barbeque on Sundays at the Spring Branch Gun Club.

Perhaps because Anna Terpe enjoyed the Sundays at Spring Branch so much, she describes the festivities mostly in German:

Yes, die Frauen haben alle ihren Kartoffelsalat gemacht und haben Kuchen gebacken und wir haben es auch verkauft dann nachher. (Yes, the women all made potato salad and baked cakes and we also sold it later on.) Wir haben da games gespielt, wir haben eine Kegelbahn gehabt, bowling alley, whatever they had. (We played games, we had a bowling alley . . .) O, ja, the men played cards, natürlich, that's for sure, they were glued to the table. . . .

When asked about drinking beer, Anna responded:

Natürlich, was eine Frage! Wasser haben sie nicht getrunken, das war zu dünn. (Naturally, what a question! They didn't drink water, that was too weak.) But not me, ich habe Wasser getrunken. (. . . I drank water.)

In the early 1930s the *Sängerbund* moved out of the Yoeman Hall and took up residence for a short time in several locations, including the eighth floor the M and M Building and August Gessner's cabinet shop. The club also met for a few years at the restaurant and dance hall on Waugh Drive of Walter Zeisig who became the President of the *Sängerbund* in 1931. Edward Kasparik became reacquainted with the *Sängerbund*, while working at his uncle Walter's restaurant when he was a teenager:

I had a job there. So I got acquainted with the members of the Sängerbund. They came over and they just sang. It just

fascinated me and interested me very much. They met there once a week. At that time it was strictly just men. It seems that they would come in already at 6:30, something like that, and they would start singing about 8:00.

Finally, in 1935, Frank Mendel loaned the club enough money to purchase the Feagan Street property and to construct the Main Hall. The President of the *Sängerbund* at that time, John Hoiden and his wife, Margaret, co-signed the note for the property and agreed to make the payments, if necessary.

Edward Kasparik describes the circumstances of the move to Feagan Street:

. . .we found out about Feagan Street, where we are, that used to be a dead-end street. The lots down there were up against the bayou. . . they were very cheap. . . Mr. Mendel advanced the money to the club, so that they could start building. The biggest part of the building was constructed by free labor from the members. Because we had a lot of craftsmen, not so many business men, but carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, people who worked with their hands. So this was nothing new for them. I think it must have been about a year to build it. The building has been added to twice, three times.

Anna Terpe also remembers the building of the club on Feagan Street:

Once after a picnic in Spring Branch, somebody said, "I know a nice place on Feagan Street. They have some lots for sale." Mr. Hoiden and Beck and quite a few of the members, my husband too, Otto and Karl Buttner, they got together. We had a picnic on Feagan Street. "Why don't we buy that place?" And a man said, "You can buy the place." The men then said, "All right now, all of you members, we are building a hall, paying it off, and some of the members can do the painting on the outside." And on the inside the labor was donated too. The ladies bought materials for the windows, and the ladies sewed the curtains for the windows, so we helped. And we had many good times there.

A highpoint of the '30s was the visit of the German cruiser *Karlsruhe* to the Gulf Coast in the spring of 1935, and the entertain-

ment of the ship's officers and crew by the *Sängerbund* with a dinner and dance. The club invited the *Liederkrantz* to the event, and both of the German choirs sang. A sense of the magnitude of this event can be seen in the comments of the *Minutes* which indicate that Henke & Pilot (and not the women of the club!) provided the potato salad for the meal, and that the club had to order 36 dozen new beer glasses. Once gain, Anna Terpe vividly recalls the occasion:

Yes, the Karlsruhe, that German Kreuzer. It was a marvelous time. Many families entertained those boys. We were one of them too, and we entertained the boys at the club. And they could sing! If you could have heard them sing, I think the walls were coming down.

The *Sängerbund* also reacted to events in Germany that year by hearing a speech at its "German Day" celebration about the superiority of the German prize fighter, Max Schmelling, and by donating to the Salvation Army-like *Winterhilfe*. The club likewise continued its practice of making available Texas-German newspapers at the clubhouse by subscribing to the *Freie Presse für Texas* from San Antonio. All the available *Minutes* for the thirties are in German, and as the following quote from the *Minutes* of February, 1936, indicate, the *Sängerbund* valiently resisted any linguistic change:

Herr Buchmann war der Ansicht dass das Protokoll in der Englischen Sprache gefuhrt werden soil da wir jetzt viele neue Mitglieder haben welche die Deutsche Sprache nicht verstehen. Herr Gessner war dagegen, er sagte dass wir zuerst zweimal denken ehe wir einmal hopfen. Herr Hoiden war auch dagegen. Herr Stonecipher war der Ansicht dass wir es beim alien lassen da seiner Meinung nach kein einziges Mitglied so gross wie der Sängerbund war.

(Mr. Buchmann was of the opinion that the Minutes ought to be kept in the English language, since we now have many new members who do not understand the German language. Mr. Gessner was not in favor of this. He said that we first ought to look before we leap (literally, we first ought to think twice before we hop once). Mr. Hoiden was also not of this opinion. Mr. Stonecipher was of the opinion that we ought to leave things the way they were since, in his view, no individual member was significant as the Sängerbund itself.)

In line with this thinking, one of the members in 1937 paid to have 300 copies of the *Sängerbundo's* Constitution published in German. During the same year, the club also discussed at some length and in the friendly presence of a County Judge, the ways in which the *Sängerbund* could support the reintroduction of the teaching of German into Houston high schools. (It was pointed out that in 1936, German was taught at two high schools, Sam Houston and San Jacinto, but the students received no credit or recognition for taking the courses.)

In the middle of the thirties, the *Sängerbund* and the *Turnverein* talked about becoming one organization, but this union did not take place. Instead, ten members of the *Turnverein* joined the *Sängerbund* as a group. In 1936, the club made a decision not to have a formal *Turner* group, as had formerly been the case, until the building was paid for. Nevertheless, a *Turner* group did begin to develop and to undertake activities within the club, not, however, without occasional "jurisdictional" difficulties.

Throughout the '30s, as dances became an increasingly more popular (and more remunerative) activity of the *Sängerbund*, the club also wrestled with the problems and costs of the bands it hired. On one occasion, the members discussed whether or not the club ought to sponsor only German dances, because of the belief that perhaps many of the members had learned to dance German dances. American dance bands, however, and American music prevailed. Despite the occasional difficulty with the quality and type of music, these *Sängerbund* dances were a very popular attraction for many Houstonians at the time.

Anna Terpe, Sylphia Busse, and others have testified to the importance of the distaff side for the on-going functioning (and one can also say, the "spirit") of the *Sängerbund*. Beyond their traditional "domestic" assistance, the women of the club have also raised money on their own for the *Sängerbund*. Again it is Annie Terpe who remembers:

O, yes, some of the men said, "We don't want the women in here, because this is a men's club," and I said, "who is going to help the men do all the work around here? We have been doing all the work around here." And we ladies helped the men. We had card parties, and that way we helped the men pay off quite a few things. I had the first card party. I had thirty tables. Every month we had a card party, and within the first month

or two, we turned over \$500 to the men, to pay on the building. That's how we ladies worked and helped with the club.

Although a "women's auxiliary" was mentioned as early as 1921, the Ladies Auxiliary and *Damenchor*, as such, was not formally founded until 1937-38. The *Program* of the 42nd *Sängertag* of the *DTSB* hosted by the club in Houston on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the *Damenchor* provides a good account of the founding of the Auxiliary and the *Damenchor* (which for space considerations has been slightly edited):

Inspired by a surprise performance of a visiting ladies chorus from Dallas during the 1938 Staats Sangerfest, the Houston Sängerbund Ladies Auxiliary organized its own chorus on June 3 that year. Some six months into the 54th year of the Houston Sängerbund, the ladies of the club decided that the time had come for them to assume an identity of their own. Thus it was that the Ladies Auxiliary of the Houston Sängerbund was founded on April 6, 1937. One might imagine that this was a momentous occasion for the wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters of the men singers, who for so many years had worked tirelessly to further the aims and purposes of the club.

The first officers elected to lead the new Auxiliary were Mrs. Margaret Hoiden, President (who had co-signed with her husband the original note for the Feagan Street property); Mrs. Leona Beck, Vice-President; Mrs. Laura Springborn, Secretary; Mrs. Emma Weber, Treasurer. It should be noted that there are two surviving charter members in the club: Mrs. Elsie Nimpsch and Mrs. Anna Terpe.

Under the direction of Mrs. Leona Beck, the Damenchor grew into a chorus numbering about 30 singers. In addition to being Damenchor Director, Mrs. Beck staged many plays for the ladies and Christmas plays for the children of the club. When illness forced her to retire in 1958, her sister, Mrs. Sylvia Busse assumed the direction of the Damenchor for more than 18 years, until she retired in 1986. Mrs. Busse was named an honorary member of the Houston Sängerbund, the only female member of the main body.

After her retirement as Director, Mrs. Beck continued to serve the Damenchor as Pianist for several years. Mrs. Kae Velmeden was then chosen Pianist and upon her retirement, Keith Chapman, a student of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice assumed these duties. Mr. Chapman also assists with the direction of both choruses, and occasionally sings with the Mannerchor.

It is the Ladies Auxiliary, however, without which the Damenchor could not exist. The Auxiliary is the behind-the-scenes force that assists in all functions of the Damenchor as well as plays a major role in the activities of the Houston Sangerbund, including its hosting of Sangerfests.

Even though the men and women of the *Sangerbund* have always worked together harmoniously ("in harmony," in fact, is precisely the phrase that is used in the *Minutes* now and then!) it has not been without humor on both sides. One of the women club members, for instance, somewhat with tongue in cheek, describes the men and women of the club in this fashion:

We meet separately, we have our meetings and they have theirs. The men, they talk for hours and hours; they argue about things. The ladies, we get our meeting done with and we're out. We are waiting for coffee and cake. We always have coffee and cake!

Frances Marburger also recalls that ever since she first joined the *Sangerbund* in the late '30s, the club has performed humorous dramatic skits, depicting the role between the sexes:

We had womanless weddings. We had several of those. It's a play, only men take part. This girl has to marry. It's a man dressed up like a woman. She is very much pregnant. She comes in, in her white wedding gown, with her large stomach. And behind the groom and the bride comes the father with a shotgun. And the preacher is a little bit tipsy and eager to get started, it's so funny!

I don't know where it came from. But as long as I can remember we've been having them. In fact, even two or three years ago we had another womanless wedding. The men loved

to put on women's clothes and try to act like women, they would even put on high heeled shoes. The bride's mother is usually crying. The ring bearer would drop the ring and he couldn't find it. We had so much fun! Especially when you know these people, and some of them are so dignified. And then they put those dresses on and make-up.

Just as the earlier visit of the German cruiser *Karlsruhe* to Texas waters was a major event for the *Sängerbund*, the hosting of the *DTSB's* 37th *Sängertag* by the *Sängerbund* in 1938 was a significant conclusion, not only to the decade of the '30s, but also the prewar era as well. It was the first time in 25 years that the club had hosted the state organization. Ten singing societies participated in this convention. The formal activities took place in the City Auditorium, where the singing groups were joined by the Houston Symphony Orchestra and the well-known local soprano, Eva Kalb. This *Sängertag* was a three day celebration. Houston's Grand Prize Brewery provided a picnic for all of the participants, and there was also a beach party at Galveston. In the evenings, the participants of the *Sangetag* also enjoyed the hospitality of the new clubhouse on Feagan Street.

IV. THE SECOND WORLD WAR

As a German-American organization, the *Sängerbund* was obviously affected in a double sense by the Second World War. But, just as in the case of World War I, the club was able to survive. During these difficult years, the club lost, for a time at least, much of its linguistic definition, including its founding activity of singing in German. Many of the other traditions of the *Sängerbund* however, were preserved, even if there were inevitable accommodations, both to the war itself, and to the normal progress of time.

The few acts of hostility toward the *Sängerbund* were directed against the physical premises itself. Rocks were occasionally thrown at the building and some of the windows were broken. As one member has talked about it: "It wasn't bad, I think it was mostly kids' stuff. They knew that those words up there on our sign, '*Houston Sängerbund*' were German." Nevertheless, a guarded atmosphere overcame the club during the war years. This is also true of the other German singing clubs in Texas as well. In 1940, for example, the Austin *Sangerrunde*

decided to postpone the yearly *Sängertag* of the *DTSB* until 1942 since, as the *Sängerbund Minutes* express it: "da unter den augenblicklichen Verhaeltnissen es unmoeglich ist ein solches Saengerfest erfolgreich zu gestalten" ("since under the the momentary circumstances, it is impossible to organize successfully a *Sangerfest*"). Also in 1940, the *Sängerbund* discussed whether it would be advisable to give addresses at public meetings in German. As it can be seen from the preceding quote, however, the *Minutes* were doggedly maintained in the German language until late January, 1942. This change, no doubt, was not imposed upon the *Sängerbund* from without, rather it was the decision either of the Secretary William Maier himself or of the club as a whole.

There was a good deal of discussion in the summer of 1940 about changing the club's name to an English equivalent. Those urging this move, thought the change should be to "The Houston Singing Society." Others felt that the club could simply ask the three Houston newspapers to explain to their readers what the word "*Sängerbund*" meant. Still others believed there was nothing to be ashamed of and it would be disrespectful to the honorary memebrs to change the name. Nothing was done about this situation immediately, but the change to "The Houston Singing Society" did eventually take place. It was announced, incidentally, in the same set of *Minutes* in January, 1942 in which the change from German to English also took place.

One of the members argued for the name change by stating that "we are all 100% Americans." During these war years, club members displayed other similar, public acts of patriotism. In doing so, as a midwestern German-American had said during the First World War, they may have also "silenced the sadness of their heart." In 1940, for example, the *Sängerbund* put up "God Bless America" signs and in 1941, there was a decision to fly the American flag on holidays. In the same year, members were concerned that during a public dance some of those present (they were identified as being from the *Liederkranzl*) had begun to sing German songs. It was felt that this would not be good for the relationship with the public, especially since the club was trying to encourage newcomers to their dances. It was decided that the next time this happened, *Sängerbund* members should break out with *My Wild Irish Rose*. Also in 1942, the club discussed the possibility of buying Defense Bonds (which the club did later). Again in 1943, the question of German at public meetings came up and the *Minutes* recorded the discussions. The views of the club were well expressed by one member who said: "our Saturday evening is a public affair and on these

occasions no German should be talked and politics should be left out" and by another who stated, "let's talk American and be one of them."

Aside from the genuine feelings of patriotism which prompted such views, this attitude also reflected an understandable reaction to the country's wartime anti-Germanism which some members may have believed was also directed toward them personally. In any event, these linguistic measures had a devastating effect on the club's singing program. In the spring of 1942, for example, members voiced these concerns:

When will we start singing again? The attendance will fall off more and more if we don't sing. Even a minstrel show would help or a musical sketch to stimulate more interest. We should sing part English and part German songs. If the members want to sing again they'll have to come and say so.

In fall of 1944, the club again discussed the resumption of singing, but only "several nice American songs." Finally, in the beginning of 1945, the *Minutes* note that the club now intended to start singing, but it "must build up from scratch again." A month later, the club could, at last, make the decision "to uncover our old singing flags in the clubroom."

In other aspects of its existence, the *Sängerbund* managed to come through the war years relatively unscathed. If the club, as in the past, was occasionally able to provide free beer to members at the beginning of the war, by the war's conclusion, sometimes, understandably, there were shortages. One one occasion, in 1943, the Ladies Auxiliary also has to cancel a spaghetti dinner, since they did not have enough ration points! But during these years, as in the past, the men continued to exist together "in harmony" with the Ladies Auxiliary and the club had its traditional relationship with other German-American groups, including the other state singing societies, and especially the local Sons of *Hermann* and the *Turnverein*. The club members also enjoyed pinochle, *Skat*, and pool contests (in fact, in 1944, according to one member, it had its first pool contest with the Sons of *Hermann* in 53 years). As in the '20s, the club also engaged briefly and minimally in politics, when in 1940, the President urged members to pay their poll taxes and to exercise their vote against prohibition. In the fall of 1944, interestingly enough, one of the candidates in the city mayor's race also spoke before the *Sängerbund* members, urging their support.

The still relatively new clubhouse and grounds on Feagan Street brought the usual housekeeping, maintenance, and rental problems. The club also wrestled during this time, as it had in the past and would in the future, with the "passive" and "active" nature of its membership. No doubt, the club's Saturday night dances, which were open to the public, caused the greatest amount of difficulty during these years. The *Sängerbund* was glad to have the public attendance, since the profits from tickets and food and drink sales helped pay for the mortgage and the operations of the club. But there were numerous problems with the size and unruliness of the crowds at the dances. In 1939, for example, a number of "Bandera" cowboys had to be refused admission, because they were without neckties! The club debated too whether or not to allow "jitterbugging" and how much jazz music should be played. Once the war began, local servicemen also began to attend the dances and on a few occasions, the "Floor Committee" members thought they might have to call the MPs. Ironically, in the late summer of 1945, soldiers caused a minor disturbance at one of the dances by singing German songs which they had learned while they were fighting in Europe!

V. THE POSTWAR YEARS

The impact of the war on the *Sängerbund* continued to be felt several years after the war's end. In 1946, the club purchased another large Defense Bond. It also contributed to the European Relief Fund, and eventually set up a committee for this purpose. The club was also particularly active in sending care packages to destitute relatives and acquaintances in Germany.

In the early years after the war, the club was immediately confronted with the restoration of its singing program. In 1947, as a way of stimulating the resumption of the annual state *Sängertag*, the club joined the Houston *Liederkrantz* in inviting the San Antonio clubs, the *Beethoven Mannerchor* and the San Antonio *Liederkrantz*, to Houston. In 1948, the singers were themselves invited to San Antonio, as well as to Shelby by the *Helvetia Singing Society* there. Eventually the singing program began to prosper again. But the popularity of other club activities occasionally caused friction. Particularly in 1949, for example, some singing members voiced their concern over the role of

pool playing in the club, the pool tournaments which the club sponsored, and the increasing role of the non-active (non-singing) members of the club. President John Doepping assured the members that singing was still "the main subject" of the club, but that "we have to entertain our members while there is no singing. Some of our members can not sing, but they like to hear us sing." Reflecting these remarks, the *Sängerbund* successfully hosted its own first postwar state *Sängertag* during the spring of 1950. From then on, the club participated in the annual meetings of the *DTSB*, just as it had done in the years before the war.

The war's conclusion also brought the desire to have the old club name restored. The members discussed and debated this issue, but the belief prevailed that healing time was needed before the change could be made. Accordingly, the club waited until the fall of 1952 to become the *Houston Sängerbund* again. Also in this year, the *Sängerbund* published the long-awaited English translation by Henry Busse of its *Bylaws*. An amendment passed at the same time established the policy that the active members are to determine the language of singing. In 1974, the *Sängerbund* approved a revised constitution, including an earlier amendment which stipulated that a non-singer could be elected President. In 1977, the club approved a "conflict of interest" amendment which prohibits individuals doing business with the *Sängerbund* from voting or holding a position on the Board of Directors.

The use of German continued to be an issue, occasionally, for the club. To some extent, this may have been because of the war's legacy. A more likely cause, however, and one with which the club has had to deal increasingly, was the changing nature of its membership, particularly with respect to the membership's knowledge of German. In 1949, for example, some members were concerned that the use of German at social events would exclude other members who did not understand the language. In the late '50s, members objected, on the same grounds, to making announcements in German at meetings. In the early '60s, there may even have been a gastronomic reflection of this linguistic problem when a member (who could have been, of course, a native German) complained about having *Knackwurst* every Thursday evening, and wanted "hamburgers and good sandwiches" instead! But with time, the issue of German usage was revolved. As Gunther Pfingston said in his Presidential address in 1973, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the *Sängerbund*:

It says in our constitution, the object of the organization is to cultivate and promote German songs, preserve the German language, to encourage social activities, and to promote good German customs and moral. I think we are doing all of this, except that we do not speak much German around here. Of course, the reason is, is that our membership is not limited to any nationality, nor does it require the command of the German language. And since many of our members are American-born and do not speak German, it would be incorrect to speak German in their presence.

In keeping with the spirit of President Pffingsten's anniversary message, the *Sängerbund* continued to foster das *deutsche Wesen* whenever possible in the postwar years, even when faced with changing linguistic realities. The club held to its practice of having German-language newspapers available to the membership. In 1952, it subscribed to the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung*, the state's longest-existing Texas-German newspaper, while in 1978, it provided members with the *Detroit Abendpost* (since by then traditional German-language newspapers were no longer published in Texas). In the middle '50s, the club revived its practice of showing German-language films. The daily use of German in the club was also such, that in 1953, the club could still advertise for a German-speaking caretaker couple. Particularly in the '50s and '60s, the club also continued to attract German-born members, especially among the wave of postwar immigrants. The '70s saw the beginning of the *Sängerbunde's* association with the *Deutsch-Amerikanischer Club Houston (DACH)*, a new German social club in Houston. The club also began at this time its support of Liselotte Babin's German-language musical program on KPFT

The club's membership in the postwar decades has not been as large as in the time before the war. In 1950, for example, there were 133 members. The *Sängerbund*, nevertheless, maintained all of its activities which had survived the war, and even introduced some new ones. The men and women singers participated in all of the events as they had in the past. In 1953, for example, the singers went to New Braunfels to be part of the 100th *Sängertag* of the *DTSB*. The next two decades were equally busy for the singers of the club. During the '60s, they traveled to San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas for the annual *Sängertage* (and also for the 100th anniversary of the *Beethoven Mannerchor*). Early in the '70s, the *Sängerbund* began its host association with the *Lied Hoch* choir of Gluckstadt which has visited

Houston and Texas on several occasions in subsequent years. In 1971 and 1973, the club also hosted the annual *Sängertag*. Club members likewise enthusiastically supported the pinochle and pool tournaments with the *Elks*, the *Eagles*, and, as in the past, with the *Sons of Hermann*. The club also continued the tradition of Anniversary and Christmas celebrations and other parties and dances. Perhaps as a sign of the changing times, in 1978, Mary Rase¹ became the first editor of a club *Newsletter*.

In August, 1963, the club initiated a new activity by establishing the *Houston Sängerbund Soccer Club*. Gunther Pffingsten, a guiding spirit for the club's soccer team and its founder, describes the way in which soccer, singing, Germans, and the *Sängerbund* became interrelated in his life:

Ich bin 1954 hierher gekommen. . . ich habe ein Jahr in einem boarding house gewohnt und keine Deutschen kennengelernt. Dann habe ich mir ein Auto gekauft. Da war es mit dem Geldsparen zu Ende und ich habe ein bißchen was gesehen. Ganz zufällig bin ich in den Memorial Park, da habe ich ein paar Leute Fußball spielen sehen. Da mußte ich hin! Dann habe ich da angehalten, und da habe ich meine ersten Deutschen kennengelernt. Dann habe ich mit denen etwas Fußball gespielt; und die gehörten zum Houston Sängerbund. Dann haben sie mich eingeladen zum Sängerbund zu kommen und dann habe ich angefangen zu singen. Das alles passierte so um 1958-59.

(I came here in 1954 . . . I lived for a year in a boarding house and did not meet any Germans. Then I bought myself a car. That was the end of saving money, and I traveled around a bit. Quite by chance I went to Memorial Park and there I saw a few people playing soccer. I had to go over there! So I stopped, and I met my first Germans. Then I played a little soccer with them, and they belonged to the Houston Sängerbund. They invited me then to come to the Sängerbund, and that's how I began to sing. All that happened approximately 1958-59.)

Under Gunther Pffingsten's leadership the *Sängerbund* was able to sponsor two teams. Gunther saw this not only as a way of bringing together the Germans who were playing in small groups in the already existing teams in a Houston league, but also as a means of attracting young people to the *Sängerbund* itself. The club's first team played in a

state league and won a championship there. The soccer group's presence in the club occasionally caused friction, however, especially with the older members. But the club overcame these difficulties, just as it had resolved similar problems with the *Turner* and pool player members in earlier years. Unfortunately, the hope of providing a focal point for German soccer players with the club's team was not realized in the long run.

Just as the postwar years brought linguistic and other changes in the traditions of the *Sängerbund*, particularly during the last two decades the club has had to deal with real estate problems it had never before experienced. In the years following the building of the clubhouse on Feagan Street, the *Sängerbund* was able to purchase several lots of land, to the south of the original grounds. In 1969, because of a decrease of membership, the *Sängerbund* leased its clubhouse and part of its grounds to *Der Bier Garten, Inc.* which has since managed the restaurant and beer garden, *The Bavarian Gardens*. Under the terms of the lease, the *Sängerbund* would have access to its property and building on specified occasions, such as its anniversary celebration in the fall of each year. The new clubhouse, which the *Sängerbund* presently occupies and which is adjacent to the old one, was also built and occupied the next year.

VI. THE DECADE OF THE EIGHTIES

The decade of the '80s began with the unfortunate fire on September 5th, 1980 in the old *Sängerbund* hall, under lease as *The Bavarian Gardens*. The several hundred patrons of the restaurant were evacuated without any injury, but the fire consumed most of the roof and the water damage to furnishings and the interior was considerable. While repairs and restoration were eventually completed, the incident caused further property management and lease hardships on the *Sängerbund*.

During the present decade, the *Sängerbund* undertook a number of educational and cultural projects. In 1980, for example, several of the members of the Ladies Auxiliary began evening courses in German at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. While these courses are no longer offered, they were very successful and had as many as 30

students enrolled in them. In 1981, the club created a German Cultural Committee. With the guidance of this Committee, the *Sängerbund* provided valuable financial and ethnic support to local high school and university German programs. The club, for example, gave scholarships to outstanding students of German at the University of Houston, the University of St. Thomas, and Houston Baptist University. The *Sängerbund* also provided financial support as well as judges for the 1982 annual meeting in Klein of *The Texas Association of German Students*. During the same year, the club, furthermore, supported the activities of the Houston chapter of *The American Association of Teachers of German*, it hosted a party for local university German language students, and it sponsored a high school essay contest on the topic of *Das Deutschtum in der Umgebung Houston*. The *Sängerbund* provided this support not only for educational and cultural reasons, but also as a way of encouraging young people to join the club.

The decrease of German immigration to Houston in the last few decades has, understandably, influenced the membership of the *Sängerbund*. With its approximately 100 members, however, the club still has continued to foster all of its traditional singing activities. The *Sängerbund*, for example, had an especially memorable trip to San Antonio for the 34th *Sangerfest* in 1980, where the men sang *Prater Kellermeister*, the women *Lach mein Schatz*, and there was a unforgettable intermission performance by the *Chorgemeinschaft*. In 1982, the *Mannerchor* also appeared on television for the first time.

The club also hosted the *DTSB* on three occasions during the decade, in 1981, in 1983 for the centennial celebration of the club, and in 1988. Biblical misfortunes of fire and flood, in the form of the fire of the preceding year and an especially heavy rain during the convention itself plagued the 1981 *Sängertag*. There were also logistical problems as well. But thanks to assistance from the *Liederkrantz* and what the *DTSB Minutes* of the meeting describe as the "Unternehmungsgeist" ("enterprising spirit") and the "eiserne Nerven" ("iron nerves") of the *Sängerbund's Damenchor*, the convention was still a great success.

As host organization for the 37th *Sängertag* in the spring of 1983, the *Sängerbund* could also celebrate the centennial anniversary of its founding on October 6th, 1883. Since the *Sängerbund* was founded on the 200th anniversary of Germantown, Pennsylvania, the club's own centennial celebration became a part of the tricentennial festivities. In Houston, as in Texas and elsewhere in the United States and in the

Federal Republic of Germany, there were numerous governmental and other commemorative events acknowledging this important historical anniversary of the founding of the first German colony in the New World. The *Sängerbund*, consequently, had a double occasion to celebrate. The *Sängerbund* held its own anniversary party in October. For this special occasion, the club prepared an excellent portable photographic and text exhibit on the history of the *Sängerbund*. The choirs of the club, furthermore, sang on several public occasions in connection with the city's tricentennial observations which were coordinated by the German Consulate-General's office and the Houston regional office of the Institute of International Education.

Heinz Velmeden, who immigrated to the United States in the early '60s and who like Gunther Pfingsten, came into the *Sängerbund* through the route of soccer, was the club's President during the centennial year (as well as the year before and the year after the centennial). Having witnessed, along with his fellow club members, recent times of legal and fiscal difficulties and the impact on the club of inevitable ethnic changes, Heinz spoke for the membership at large when he said in his address in October, 1983:

Looking back and reading about our club or talking to our older members we know that the history of our club is filled with disappointments, near defeats, sorrows, work, work, work, and more work. Indeed, considering World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II, it is almost a miracle that the Houston Sängerbund did survive its first 100 years. Why then did the Club survive? Because the Houston Sängerbund had determined members and their wives, who were willing personally to sacrifice, to work diligently and untiringly weekends and evenings to build, rebuild and be of service to the Club. Financial and cultural defeats knocked many times at the Club's front door, but because of the character and the spirit of these men and women, the defeat was overcome.

At the present time (1989), the club is functioning much as it has during the last decade. Currently, there are approximately 100 members. The men and women singers practice regularly on Tuesday nights (except for the summer months), under the direction of Richard McGinty who has been the *Sängerbunds* Musical Director since 1983 and Keith Chapman who, since 1986, has been the Assistant Musical Director of the club. The *Sängerbund* and the *Damenchor* still sing at

much the same public occasions as in past. The club participates in the annual state *Sängertag*, and representatives from the *Sängerbund* sing in the state's composite group, the *Chorgemeinschaft*. (In the spring of 1989, for example, *Sängerbund* members sang with this state group at the North American *Sangerfest* in Louisville.) Locally, the choirs sing at the annual *German Fest* (held in October since 1986, on the occasion of German-American Day), at the yearly Houston International Festival, on several occasions throughout the year at Lechner's Restaurant, and at other special events. The other activities of the club are also much like those of the recent past. There are still pool tournaments, both within the club as well as against players from the Sons of *Hermann*. The *Sängerbund* also now has a woman player, Gretchen Pflingsten. Soccer continues, with practice on Wednesday nights, under the coaching of Horst Gebert. Dances and other social functions round out, as in the past, the activities of the *Sängerbund*.

Despite the impact of assimilation and acculturation on German ethnicity as well as the inevitable changes in social and recreational habits that have taken place during the last 100 years, the *Sängerbund* still remains an important German-American institution in Houston. Members like Rodney Koenig, for example, were attracted to the organization for the same reasons that members have always been drawn to the *Sängerbund*. Rodney joined the *Sängerbund* in 1985 at the encouragement of his fellow attorney friend, Ted Hirtz (who himself joined over a decade ago). As one of two sons of a Texas-German farm and ranching family, Rodney grew up in the small Texas-German community of Black Jack Springs near La Grange. Rodney attended the local Luck's country school before going to elementary school in the 4th grade in La Grange. Throughout his youth, he also attended the local and predominantly Texas-German Trinity Lutheran Church in Black Jack Springs.

Rodney's father was a member of the Cedar *Mannerchor* near Black Jack Springs. While Rodney himself had not been a member of any singing society prior to joining the *Sängerbund*, he sang (and played the trumpet) professionally with Ray Baca's well-known Czech dance band for several years during high school and college. After moving to Houston with his family, he also sang for a time in the choir of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Houston. But singing itself, understandably, was not the only attraction of the *Sängerbund* for Rodney:

When I was a kid I spoke nothing but German at Black Jack Springs. It tugged at my heart strings when I saw this group of people at the Sangerbund that was similar to the community in which I had grown up back in Fayette County. The club reminds me of my younger days, of neighbors I knew as a kid. I relate to that. I enjoy singing, and I enjoy the camaraderie with other folks of a similar heritage!

It is this marvelous mixture of the German language in song and word, of the "camaraderie," and of the living presence of one's German ethnicity, which has always drawn members of both sexes, of all ages and walks of life, born *huben* and *druben*, to the *Sangerbund*.

In concluding this brief account of the Houston *Sangerbund's* century-long history, it is the author's hope that the organization may have a prosperous and successful second century. May the *Sangerbund* always be an ethnic beacon in Houston and a source of spiritual and recreational joy and pleasure to the untold and unnumbered German-Americans who may yet come its way.