

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A LODGING

Four Decades of the Stiftung Weltweite Wissenschaft

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The translation, provided by Prof. Dr. Jocelyne Kolb, Smith College, has been printed with pages corresponding to the German original so that the two texts can be read side by side. No translations have been provided for the captions to the illustrations.

EARLY HISTORY

Rothenbaumchaussee 34 is the site of an apartment building that was erected sometime around 1890 for people with a high standard of living. Its façade, shown on the cover, has survived the passing of time with hardly any change; but behind the elegant and well-known façade, many transformations in space and structure have taken place that do not meet the eye.

Among the archives of Eppendorf's Department of Construction are plans showing a certain Mr. H.C. ORTH as having commissioned the building; they contain the handwritten entry "April 89" on which the dating above is based. The land register does not reveal the name of the first owner, but it records an initial payment of 1218.75 goldmarks. This is the first and smallest of the charges and mortgages registered for the house. We will return to this point later, but for the moment it should be noted that pfennig appear in the mortgage sum for the last time. If one considers that at the time of the entry a glass of beer cost 10 pfennig, then it becomes clear that such precision reflects not eccentricity, but the financial detail customary of Hamburg at the time.

The first owner mentioned by name in the land register is the "Union Kühlhaus GmbH in Altona Neumühlen," whose distinctive building at the entrance to Hamburg's port had become a landmark. It was torn down and replaced by a home for the elderly that greatly resembles the old cold storage facility. In 1937 the company acquired the building in the Rothenbaumchaussee and sold it in 1957 to a person who converted the apartments – one by one, as they became vacant – into rooms for a hotel-pension (the Impala). This was the last phase during which the house had no elevator.

FOUNDATION PHASE

Six years later, after difficult negotiations that stretched out over nearly three years, the University of Hamburg acquired the building with the purpose of creating a Gästehaus that would serve both as a lodging for visitors and a meeting place for colleagues at the University. Why so, had been articulated in 1961 at the end of his term by the rector HELMUT THIELICKE in his distinctive and memorable style: "the University of Hamburg must have a place where members of the faculty can mingle as they would in a club and where above all they can make the spontaneous and chance contacts that provide the spice of humanity; it should be a place that permits us to accommodate our guest professors in worthy fashion, where we can meet them and put an end to their sometimes helpless peregrinations. We simply must offer a half-way adequate equivalent to the hospitality that we ourselves – often to our embarrassment – enjoy abroad."

Approximately half of the estimated 2.4 million deutschmarks required for the acquisition, renovation, and furnishing of the property were provided by a grant from the Volkswagenwerk Foundation through the mediation of the ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT-Foundation. Since the Volkswagenwerk Foundation has existed now for 41 years, the Gästehaus counts as one its earliest beneficiaries. The City of Hamburg contributed only a quarter (financed from lottery income), and the remainder was pieced together by the University from its own capital and from donations. The actual costs were some 700,000 deutschmarks higher than expected, and the missing funds were covered by further contributions from Hamburg industry and by a loan from the Wohnungsbaukasse.

The Stiftung Weltweite Wissenschaft oversees the Gästehaus and was founded in 1963 expressly for that purpose. The managerial staff reports to a board of three, the first members of which were Professor DR. DR. K. SCHUCHARDT (Chairman), retired Senator DR. W. DUDEK (Treasurer) and DR. R. MÜNZNER (Vice-Chairman). The current board consists (in the same order of office) of Professor DR. JOBST B. MIELCK, DR. K. KLAUS KRÄMER, and Professor DR. WOLFGANG WALTER. The board's work is monitored by an advisory committee headed by the rector or the president of the University. At present its members – besides DR. DR. h.c. JÜRGEN LÜTHJE – consist of Professor DR. MICHAEL GEWECKE, Professor DR. HASSO SCHOLZ, Professor DR. HORST SEELBACH (till 31.12.2002), and Professor DR. BARBARA VOGEL. For 40 years, the members of the board and the advisory committee – all of whom, with the exception of the president, serve in an honorary capacity – have guided the Gästehaus through phases of development that at times have been very difficult.

That development is the subject of the following text. The transformation of the apartment building into a Gästehaus was completed in 1965. The top four floors of the building housed 38 living units, most of them single rooms that could be rented to foreign scholars. The ground floor's rooms were then as now suitable for festive events as well as for lectures and seminars. A part of the basement was renovated to accommodate foreign students from the Stiftung Akademische Auslandsstelle (AKA – Stelle). The AKA – Stelle had met in rooms of the dormitory at Werderstraße 82 until those rooms needed to be sold to help finance the cost of the Gästehaus; that is the reason why the AKA – Stelle was granted the use of Gästehaus rooms under special conditions.

THE UNIVERSITY CLUB

THIELICKE's call for a club-like arrangement was taken literally, and the University Club was founded in December 1965. The Club rented rooms on the ground floor of the Gästehaus that were equipped for the operation of a restaurant. The chance to have lunch with colleagues was so appealing that the Club soon had 250 members, but membership dwindled along with the number of lunch guests.

The restaurant was therefore closed in 1977 at the end of the summer semester, and the Club itself was dissolved on 31 December 1978. The two events are related, because the life of the Club was linked principally to the possibility of meeting for lunch. As the residents of the Gästehaus seldom frequented the restaurant, their rent could not justifiably be used to subsidize the lunches.

Despite the expenditure of 292,000 deutschmarks between 1965 and 1983 to maintain the building and replace furnishings, this was not enough to repair the damage and deficiencies caused by wear and tear. The living conditions in the Gästehaus did not keep pace with the high expectations of the tenants.

COMPLETE RENOVATION

During these years KLAUS HANSEN was the Foundation's treasurer. He was principally in charge of the University's living arrangements, and it was thanks to him that the restaurant operation was liquidated so even-handedly. He died on March 3rd, 1982, at the age of 42, after a short, grave illness. It was he who conceived the first plans to renovate the Gästehaus.

In 1983 the need for repairs to the building had escalated staggeringly; a mortgage of 125,000 deutschmarks had to be recorded in the land registry merely to cover the cost of eliminating hazardous damages. Yet despite these vigorous measures, the living conditions in the Gästehaus continued to deteriorate. Both the board and the advisory committee seriously debated selling the property and, with the proceeds, acquiring a smaller building where the University's Gästehaus would be maintained on a more modest scale. After sales negotiations were initiated, however, it became evident that the property's market value exceeded expectations by far. A decision was therefore taken to renovate the apartments completely and to use the building as collateral for a loan of several million marks. The financing plan was drafted and implemented by KLAUS HANSEN'S successor on the board, OTTO DYLINGOWSKI, based on an earlier draft of Mr. HANSEN'S. After discussions by the board and the advisory committee and consultations with the architects SCHIEFLER and DENKER, the architects revised the plan to the point of practicability. Two entries in the land register totaling 2,901,700 deutschmarks offer evidence of the project's daring, which was undertaken by the Stiftung Weltweite Wissenschaft on the initiative and with the support of the University's president at the time, DR. FISCHER-APPELT. Construction began in the fall of 1984 and lasted until 1986 because of the need to accommodate tenants still living in the building (an essential part of the financing plan mentioned above). Loyal tenants have included Smith College as well as Indiana University and Purdue University with their study abroad programs at the University of Hamburg. Smith College moved in as early as 1964, even before the transformations were complete.

After the building was renovated, two further universities from the United States – Cornell University and Ohio State University--joined Smith College, Indiana University, and Purdue University in using the Gästehaus as the base of operations for their foreign-studies programs. This contributed to a healthy mixture of stability and fluctuation among the residents of the Gästehaus.

Early in 1986, the British Council moved into rooms where the restaurant had been before. This lent a solid foundation to the new structure of the Gästehaus that had been introduced along with the renovations. At present the Gästehaus rents out 6 apartments with two rooms and a dining area, 3 studios, and 43 one-room apartments – all of which enjoy great popularity and are regularly occupied.

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR
SCHOLARLY EXCHANGE (IBZ)

The ground floor remains as it was and serves as an International Center for Scholarly Exchange (IBZ) with a well-equipped room for lectures and a club room where refreshments can be served. There are three further club rooms that have been decorated in an expansive and tasteful manner thanks to a donation by the Universitäts-Gesellschaft of Hamburg and the work of an interior decorator.

The interior decorator donated his services to the Universitäts-Gesellschaft and not only designed the furnishings but also helped acquire them at a moderate cost.

The ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT Foundation supported the IBZ with a grant of 500,000 deutschmarks despite the fact that the club-like nature of the Gästehaus was not retained. The developments related above show that the serious attempt to establish the equivalent of a “Faculty Club” at the University of Hamburg did not succeed and had to be abandoned after thirteen years.

Since 1985 and in its new guise, however, the Gästehaus has proved stable. The managing board has taken the lessons of the past to heart and makes sure that the Foundation’s activities cover all costs, which are considerable on account of the debts and repairs, that can at times be very expensive. Even though the building was restructured and renovated between 1984 and 1986, it was not restored. Restorations throughout the building and in the garden have begun in stages as part of a plan for the building’s complete repair.

Given this situation, it is not possible to grant the wish of university departments – which in principle is justified – to use the Gästehaus rooms at no charge. One can however apply to the Hansische Universitäts-Stiftung for grants in support of academic events. Only the president of the University may use the rooms of the IBZ free of charge for representational purposes. Under these circumstances, the Foundation depends on financial compensation. Interested parties outside of the University have fortunately been identified so that the rooms of the Gästehaus are in use when they are not in demand at the University. Naturally the University and other Hamburg institutions of higher education are given priority whenever their requests are received in good time.

The Foundation attempts to preserve the “spice of humanity” invoked by Professor THIELICKE through the events it offers each semester. In January, for example, a Hamburg museum or similar cultural institution is introduced by its director. During the summer semester, a concert is presented by graduates of the Conservatory of Music and Theater. Once during the semester, residents of the Gästehaus speak to a smaller audience about their field of scholarship. The foundation invites guests from the University and the city to all events; ideas for extending the list are gratefully accepted on the assumption that a variety of lively exchanges will stimulate further metamorphoses at the Gästehaus and benefit both the University and its guests.

Up to this point, the text, with a few modifications to update the content, appeared in the January 1995 issue of “Uni bb” (26, Nr. 1, 45 ff).

FINANCIAL REFORM

*A*t the end of 1995 an external event occurred that provided a strong impetus for still more metamorphoses. The tax authorities rescinded the charitable status previously granted to the Stiftung Weltweite Wissenschaft. The reason given was the discrepancy between academic events like the ones mentioned above and the business of lodging guests. As a consequence, hardly any donations could be accepted.

Equally problematical was the financial structure of the Stiftung Weltweite Wissenschaft as derived from the contract of 1965 between the University and the Foundation concerning the management of the Gästehaus. Given an apparently harmless stipulation that the notice period of one year should be observed, investments could not be realized.

In connection with the plans for refurbishment, then, and given that the improvements increased the value of a property owned by the University without increasing the Foundation's worth, the Foundation wrote over the major part of its funds to the University. At the treasurer's initiative, a new lease agreement was concluded for a term of 30 years effective 1 January 1996, thereby eliminating this precarious situation and putting the foundation back on stable footing, formally and financially. The opening balance sheets of 1 January 1996 prove this to have been the case.

NEW INVESTMENTS

1995 was a significant year for the Foundation. The withdrawal of American university activities from Hamburg began with the discontinuation of the "Cornell Abroad" program, leaving only Smith College in the Gästehaus as one of the "loyal tenants" mentioned earlier. Simultaneously and for a number of different reasons, the demand for accommodation in the Gästehaus declined during the winter months. This trend had to be countered and a series of measures undertaken, the most visible of which will be enumerated first.

Figure 1 shows the new and more attractive entrance. If one looks closely, one sees that the façade has a new glow – something particularly impressive at night when the portal is illuminated. The effects are practical as well as aesthetic, since the lighting contributes to the building's security. What one does not see on the picture is a flag-pole from which flies a white flag emblazoned with the words "Gästehaus der Universität Hamburg." This along with the restoration of the building's rear façade could be undertaken only after the finances of the Foundation were in order. During this phase in particular one notices the influence of the architect UWE HOHAUS, whose advice throughout the years has been nothing short of inspiring.

"CAMPUS AT THE IBZ"

After passing through the portal (whose tympanum provided the model for the Foundation's logo pictured in *Figure 2*), the visitor encounters a glass door at the end of a short stairway. Decorative glass images original to the house have been framed in the glass doors. If one turns to the right, one enters the IBZ.

This institution and its name – which in its entirety is "Internationales Begegnungszentrum der Wissenschaft" or "International Center for Scholarly Exchange" -- are derived from a memoir written in 1960 by DR. HEINRICH PFEIFFER, then the General Secretary of the ALEXANDER von HUMBOLDT Foundation. As the visitor remarks instantly on entering the "Berliner Zimmer" (Berlin Room), this is the core of the Stiftung Weltweite Wissenschaft. The door to it is always open during the business day, as are those of the office and the club rooms.

From there the visitor faces the mural shown in *Figure 3*, which fills the entire back wall of the room. The painter DIETER WIEN, who was engaged by the Foundation's treasurer to paint a work he calls 'Campus,' has freely grouped the University's main buildings around a square whose perspective makes the "Berliner Zimmer" appear larger than it is. The painting contains many carefully selected details among which, for example, one can derive its origin in the Fall of 1998. It admirably fulfills its function, which is to convey the bond between the Gästehaus and the University, and has transformed the "Berliner Zimmer" from a neglected room into the central focus of the IBZ, thereby adding not a little to the appeal of the Gästehaus.

THE “LANGUAGE CARPET” IN THE IBZ

The same holds true for the Sprachenteppich (‘language carpet’), of which a fragment is shown on *figure 4*. The history of the language carpet is more complicated than that of DIETER WIEN’S painting. When the Foundation’s managing board was looking for new carpeting for the lecture room of the IBZ in 1997, they were shown a carpet on which portions of SAINT-EXUPÉRY’S “The Little Prince” had been reproduced in elaborate handwriting. This stimulated the idea of laying a rug in the hall of the IBZ on which could be read - in as many languages as were likely to be spoken in the Gästehaus – a short and not particularly well-known Latin saying. At the suggestion of RUDOLF HAAS, the phrase VERITAS FILIA TEMPORIS’ can now be read in 45 further languages. By contributing to the translation exercise, all pertinent departments of the University gave real meaning to the term ‘alma mater’.

The writing on this carpet of 1.24 by 11.30 meters is arranged so that when one walks on it, half of the writing appears right-side up. The other half – which appears upside-down – appears right-side-up when one reverses one’s step. On *Figure 5* one can see how the languages spoken east of Rome are arranged above the Latin phrase and the Western languages beneath it. This corresponds to the ordering of maps in the Middle Ages, where Jerusalem, in other words the East, is placed at the top. This explains why we still use the term “orientation” today.

One discerns the organizational principle even more clearly in Figure 5, where the Albanian rendering of the proverb is clearly discernible above the Greek.

The original legend hangs beside the door to the “Berliner Zimmer”. Because of the reduction necessary for this part of our documentation, the imprint would be infinitesimal. I therefore refer explicitly to HANS-JÖRG RÜSTEMEIER as the artist responsible for the carpet’s design.

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LODGING

Since 1999 we have invited artists to exhibit their pictures in the lecture room and the hall of the IBZ, something as pleasurable for the guests as it is useful to the artists. For various reasons pictures from one exhibition or another have remained in the Gästehaus as mementos.

The picture on the cover and *figures 1, 3 and 4* are from a series of postcards that guests receive in an information folder when they arrive (and of which additional copies are for sale) along with a “Tea Treatment.” The concept of a “Tea Treatment” is adapted from the hotel business and designates a small number of tea and Nescafé sachets that guests can prepare in their apartment to accompany the packages of tasty cookies that are likewise provided.

In the memoir by the General Secretary of the ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT Foundation referred to earlier one reads the following sentence: “The romantic vision of the scholar sitting on a wobbly chair by the light of one lone bulb,

poring over his work while his wife brews coffee on an upside-down iron – that image subsists only in a certain type of novel. Scholars themselves know that excessively ascetic conditions such as these are apt to have a negative effect on their work.”

To be sure, conditions in the Gästehaus have always been better than those depicted here, but the managing board – as mentioned earlier – constantly seeks to improve them further still. Such improvements include not only a television in every room, but also internet access through the University’s server. Substantial improvements of this kind have benefited not only academic guests, but also those tenants only indirectly associated with the University and whose presence has arisen from the need to make full use of the building. These “externals” include or have included the CARL DUISBERG Society, the Dresdner Bank – which as one of our banks also provides service for guests – and several judges from the International tribunal for the law of the sea.

By dividing up several apartments that were difficult to rent and introducing new furnishings, four apartments were renovated and redesigned at considerable cost between 1999 and 2000. In order to improve the living conditions, eight apartments with very thin walls needed to be equipped with sound-proofing, which occurred in 2001. The plan to redesign apartments, already successfully inaugurated, will be carried out as the Foundation’s resources permit.

In 2000 it was announced that the British Council would move its entire German activities to Berlin. Notice that the Hamburg branch would be discontinued followed swiftly, and after 14 years, the Foundation lost its valued ground floor tenant. So as not to lose rental income, the foundation urgently needed to find an interested party with some connection to the University. Fortunately it was possible to acquire the University itself as successor to the British Council, and on 1 June 2001 the research group Narratology moved in, a group founded by 8 professors from the Department of Language, Literature, and Media Studies.

METAMORPHOSIS IN PERSONNEL

Developments like those described here clearly make greater demands on personnel than was the case before. The managing board responded to the new needs with a metamorphosis in personnel, starting with the appointment on 1 February 1998 of the Americanist KURT REHKOPF as Secretary of the Foundation and followed on 1 August 1999 by the recruitment as general manager of ANNA-MARIA KARL, who holds a degree in hotel and restaurant management. Thanks to the combined commitment of these two people and the team that they gradually gathered around them, the Gästehaus enjoys increasing recognition within University circles and beyond. On the initiative of the general manager, a "Social Hour" has been added to the program of lectures, concerts and evening discussions. It takes place once a month in the IBZ and is as useful as it is popular, furthering as it does not only contact among the residents, but also between the residents and the Foundation.

SPONSORS

The Foundation and its Gästehaus are financed principally by rental revenues. They owe a good deal to their promoters and donors as well, however, above all to the University and to the ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT Foundation. The latter is mostly to thank for the electronic improvements in the apartments and the office, which have increased the interior value of the house considerably. The insurance company Hamburger Feuerkasse has made a donation in kind of smoke detectors for every room and in so doing substantially improved the building's safety. We are indebted to the Hamburg Savings Bank (Hamburger Sparkasse) for resources permitting us, among other things, to improve and update the technical equipment of the lecture room. The Dresdner Bank and the Beiersdorf AG company made contributions financially and in kind that have allowed us to improve the living quality in a discreet but effective manner. Incalculable are the many small donations from the anonymous participants at our events, which help to preserve the "spice of humanity" alluded to at the beginning.

PROF. EMER. DR. WOLFGANG WALTER

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We also have a Homepage (www.uni-hamburg.de/gaestehaus) and await your visit there.