

German Friendly Society Sustained

German Customs

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The German Friendly Society was founded in Charles Town in 1766, 10 years before the Revolutionary War. Englishmen made up Charles Town's largest group of settlers; Germans were the second largest group.

The purpose of the German Friendly Society was to serve as a social club for German-speaking men, to sustain German customs, and to do good works. Among the good works was provision for widows and orphans, providing loans to members, and taking care of stranded German sailors.

The senior officer, who was called "steward" but today would be titled president, was Michael Kalteisen, a highly respected military officer. Kalteisen served as commander of Fort Johnson until the day of his death at age 79.

Among the group's first rules was that members must be German born (or his parents must have been born in Germany), or speak the German language, although English could be spoken during the meetings. The restrictions did not last long. Soon there were French, English, and Dutch names on the rolls.

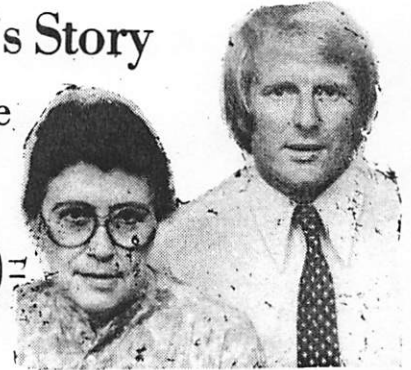
It was a well-to-do group of members who not only paid their dues but made additional contributions to the society. Within 10 years the society's treasury exceeded 3,000 pounds sterling. When a number of the members lost property in a disastrous fire in 1778, the German Friendly Society was able to assist every member to rebuild.

In May, 1780, Charles Town was captured by the British. The German Friendly Society suspended its meetings for the entire two years of the British occupation.

When the society reconstituted itself after the war, it added a new dimension and direction. The group decided to provide for what was called "child welfare work" by raising funds to educate children. The first reference in the society's minutes reads: "It was agreed that Mary Sigwald's two youngest children shall be schooled by this society."

South Carolina's Story

The making of a state



In 1802 the society decided to hire a schoolmaster to instruct the children of its members. The Society School was to operate in the society's house on Archdale Street. The membership agreed that a well-trained schoolmaster would deserve a good salary. Besides reading, writing, and arithmetic, it was desired that the children be instructed in Latin and German.

The Society School gave two-week vacations at Christmas and Easter. Just before the two holidays the students had public examinations. Not only the parents but every member of the German Friendly Society was expected to hear the children recite.

The first teacher hired was Marlborough Hamilton. Hamilton's contract provided that he be paid extra for each student exceeding 23 and that if the number of students went above 35, an assistant would be hired. The records show that Hamilton did good work but he only stayed one year. When the number of students exceeded 35 and an assistant was permitted, Hamilton had insisted that Mrs. Hamilton be the assistant. The school committee thought differently, and stipulated that only male teachers would be

hired. When Hamilton resigned, Henry Martin took his place. Martin died less than a year later.

Moses Sanford was next hired, and under his direction the school grew and prospered.

In 1828 the society decided to add a school for girls. By this time the society had refined its school plan and was ready to make improvements. The trustees were increased in number and given more responsibilities. Other languages were added to the English, German and Latin offerings. The school also bought "apparatus" for teaching mechanics, pneumatics and electricity. It was the best-equipped girl's school in Charleston but it only lasted a few years.

The headmaster over both the boys' and the girls' school resigned in 1830 and the school was not able to survive. In 1833 the equipment was sold to the Charleston city council for an apprentice's library.

Some historians say that the German Friendly Society's school was the forerunner of the Charleston public school system.