

Utopia

Revisiting a German State in America. A traveling exhibition.

In 1834 five-hundred Germans emigrated to the United States, with an intention to establish their own state. Decades of revolutionary struggles had failed, convincing them that the power of their rulers could not be broken, for the time being. Yet, as passionate democrats, they were determined to establish a new German Republic – in North America. This bold, now almost forgotten, venture of the Giessen Emigration Society, was an event much-discussed at that time.

The Society's founders were unable to achieve their goal they had stated. However they did find the conditions right to contribute to the strong democratic beliefs they found in the fertile United States. Settling in Missouri, they led the hard life of farmers, and began to create a lively intellectual center that exists even to this day. They led in the struggles against religious intolerance, and fought to abolish slavery during the Civil War. They promoted the State's rich viticultural assets, and encouraged further emigration, ultimately achieving a State rich with German heritage, that still exists today.

Beginning on November 1st 2013, the Exhibition opens in the city of Giessen (Germany) which will tour along the route of the former emigrants – from Germany to America: the St. Stephens Cultural Church in Bremen, the German-American Heritage Museum in Washington, D.C. and then complete its tour in St. Louis in the Missouri History Museum from November 2014 to March 2015.

The innovative exhibition **Utopia – Revisiting a German State in America** provides a thought provoking exhibit that encourages discussion of this story and provides a new narrative for future generations. Their founder's ideal was a Utopia. The exhibit's narrative will provide "branches" opening new avenues of thought, giving us courage to look beyond the original plan. Democratic societies need Utopias and the public discourse, in order to initiate changes for tomorrow, today. The Utopia exhibit will be an opportunity to open that discourse.

The exhibit, **Utopia** has a narrative space at its center with the public Archives and Utopia Library. Exhibits are surrounding this "knowledge core" within a second circle: video installations, audio stations, text panels, large photographs, historical objects unfold the story further. Events form the third circle, the outer space. We invite you to travel with us and the exhibition container to unfold the exhibit items in Missouri!

The book, **Utopia** is a comprehensive bilingual publication that both enlarges and deepens the viewers understanding of the exhibit's content and ensures the experience of the topic. For those unable to experience the exhibition, the book will provide an excellent understanding of the history, complete with photos and maps found in the exhibit.

The accompanying documentary, **Utopia** provides a visual opportunity to experience the history, with interviews, and visits to the original sites. Filmed in both Germany and the U.S., it is both an audio and visual tour, to enhance the experience of the Exhibition.

The **Traveling Summer Republic** – a free association of artists and scholars from all over Germany and in the United States, has been researching this unique chapter of the German emigrant's movement, and is interested in the connection of this story to today's societal, cultural and political issues. In 2005 the Sommer-Republik launched their project with their "Island Conference" on the island of Harriersand near Bremen, where a portion of the Giessen Emigration Society had to endure a horrific layover awaiting passage to the U.S.. Since then, there has been a broad variety of events and conferences and they have established a large research archives.

Organizers: Municipality of Giessen with Traveling Summer Republic and local partners. Project Director: Dr. Ludwig Brake, City Archives Giessen. Artistic Directors: Oliver Behnecke (Director and Exhibition Producer) and Peter Roloff (Film Director and Producer). Project Manager U.S.: Dorris Keeven-Franke. Scientific and artistic realization: team of Traveling Summer Republic. Project partners (as of August 2013): German-American Heritage Foundation, Washington D.C.; Goethe-Institut Washington D.C.; University of Giessen; Heinrich Böll Foundation Bremen; Cultural Church St. Stephen, Bremen; Chamber of Labor Bremen; Kultur Vor Ort e.V., Bremen; German Heritage Club of Saint Charles County, Mo.; St. Charles County Historical Society, Mo.; Missouri History Museum, St. Louis; BLG Logistics Bremen; German Emigration Center, Bremerhaven; and others.

Funded by: Transatlantic Program of the Federal Government of Germany; Municipality of Giessen, Cultural Foundation of Hesse; The Prime Minister of Hesse; Senator for Culture of the City of Bremen; Cultural Foundation of Giessen.

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www.utopia-exhibit.net | www.sommer-republik.de | www.mo-germans.com

VENUES & SCHEDULE

1 November – 9 March 2014

Giessen

KiZ (Culture in the Center)

Südanlage 3a (Congress Hall), 35390 Giessen

www.giessen.de

Opening ceremony: 1 November 2013 – 5:00 p.m.

Contribution to Georg Büchner Commemoration years 2012/13.

The KiZ (Culture in the Center) has been recently converted from the city library to a showroom on two floors. It's located in a central square with the Municipal Theatre and the new City Hall. It will open in conjunction with the University of Giessen's exhibit "In the Sight of State Power. The University of Giessen as a center of revolution and repression, 1813-1848". Both exhibits will cooperate.

4 April to ca. 6 July 2014

Bremen: St. Stephen's Church of Bremen (Kulturkirche St. Stephani)

Stephanikirchhof 8, 28195 Bremen

www.kulturkirche-bremen.de

Close to this strong WWII-damaged medieval church the Giessen Emigration Society embarked on the Weser River. The Kulturkirche would play an active role with a big program of events in the three-month exhibition period.

September to October 2014

Washington, D.C.

German-American Heritage Museum

www.gahmusa.org

The museum is housed in the former home of a German businessman and opened in April 2010. The museum is aimed at the political world of Washington DC and German-American interest groups.

22 November 2014 to 29 March 2015

St. Louis, Missouri

Missouri History Museum

5700 Lindell Boulevard, St. Louis MO, 63112

www.mohistory.org

The museum is located on the grounds of the 1904 World's Fair with around 300,000 visitors a year. The museum's mission is "to deepen the understanding of past choices, present circumstances, and future possibilities; strengthen the bonds of the community; and facilitate solutions to common problems".

The exhibition is open to other venues.

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