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German-American Club

VDAC Youth Meeting & Educational Trip to the East Coast, USA

July 31 – August 14, 2009



Reported by Rosemarie Kelle - President German-American Association

Ostwestfalen-Lippe e.V. Bielefeld/Germany-Youth Team VDAC

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*This journey was commissioned by **Youth Team Member Rosemarie Kelle** for the **Federation of German-American Clubs** and well organized by **Mid-Atlantic Receptive Services, Virginia, USA.***

Accompanying our group was the excellent team of: Guide, Mr. Michael Manning and Driver, Mr. Eric Stein on a well-equipped Conestoga Coach.

Attendants: 36 young people, ages 14 through 18 and 3 chaperones

The Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic coast of the USA was the focal point of our tour, in order to become acquainted with the history and settlement of North America. Contrasts abound in the gigantic metropolises of New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. each with enormous cultural offerings of museums, monuments, and historic sites. We traveled from The Atlantic Ocean, through the green hills of the Appalachian Mountains and Pennsylvania's rolling Amish Country.

After an exciting journey beginning with a false alarm bomb scare at Frankfurt airport, a four-hour delay because of technical problems, missing suitcases, etc., we arrived on a rainy evening in Boston, Massachusetts. We did have the sun in our luggage and the accommodating city of Boston welcomed our group the following morning with a

radiant blue sky. We trod the footsteps of the American Revolution on the 5 kilometer Freedom Trail marked in red, linking sixteen historical places with one another. The Boston Tea party of 1773 was the prelude for the American War of Independence. The narrations and stories we heard in Boston will accompany us on our journey as we learn how they tied in with American history.

Our next visit was to New York City, the Big Apple, an overwhelming and fascinating glittering metropolis. We visited Wall Street, the most important financial district in the USA, the Empire State Building, Rockefeller Center, Times Square lit with hundreds of neon signs, and Central Park, a green quiescent zone in the middle of the bustling city. We saw the impressive Statue of Liberty newly arriving immigrants first saw arriving in New York Harbor. Ellis Island made us aware of the cumbersome life circumstances of those arriving in New York for the first time.

In NYC, a meeting with the young people of the Children's Aid Society was very important to us. The initial reserved meeting with new people was quickly overcome when we were greeted with a large hello and warm welcome. Next, we were off on the subway for Madison Square Gardens, where a surprise awaited us. We left with a better understanding of ourselves and our new friends and are looking forward to seeing them again this September in Germany.

On we traveled the next day to a completely different world in the Pennsylvania Dutch Country. Here the Amish people strive to live without modern conveniences as they did hundreds of years ago. This is a nice place to arrange a future youth meeting.

Our route continued on through green hills to Oakland, Maryland, for a two-day youth meeting with common inspections, nature activities, and a large Barbecue at Swallow Park NP. The small town has approximately 2,000 inhabitants, but is very important to the surrounding area of Garrett County because of the location there of the large Southern Garrett High School. The already existing exchange program is to be replaced with Homestays and further meetings.

The trip continued along the 172 kilometers of the famous Skyline Drive through the breathtaking beauty of Shenandoah National Park. We stopped at Luray Caverns to see stalactites and castle-tower-similar stalagmites, formed from dripping rock deposits. Some areas of the cavern are up to ten stories high. Nature has made the caverns into a miracle fairy tale world. Our next stop was Charlottesville and Monticello, the famous domed home of Thomas Jefferson. We continued to the small town of Colonial Williamsburg where the past becomes alive. Smithies, shopkeepers, and inns have been restored to reflect colonial times. In neighboring Jamestown one witnesses the everyday life of the first permanent English settlement in the new world.

A leap into the Atlantic Ocean from the golden sands of Virginia Beach was a welcomed relief from the approximate 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit). We took a Dolphin Watching Cruise observing dozens of playing dolphins. Our journey is slowly coming to the end. Touring Norfolk and seeing the enormous Battleship U.S.S. Wisconsin and an outstanding Nautical Museum, (Nauticus), we headed next for the beautiful city of Baltimore, the charming maritime city of Annapolis and finally off to Washington D.C.

We saw 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, an important seat of world political power, the address of The White House, home of the US President. Not far down Pennsylvania Avenue is the powerful U.S. Capitol Building, seat of the Senate and House of Representatives. Next door is the Library of Congress with the world's largest collection of books, magazines, photography, film, and much more. Another visit then took us to the TV station of the German Wave. We experienced an overview of how television is made. Some museums of the Smithsonian Institution and the State Department followed. Next we saw the German American Heritage Foundation museum, planned as a cultural center for the German Americans in the center of Washington, D.C., from the outside. A marvelous conclusion was our Farewell Dinner Cruise on the Potomac River in front of the beautifully lit up scenery of the Capital City.

The shared view of our exciting histories and cultures, the natural beauty, and the American Way of Life left a lasting impression. Our meetings, discussions, common activities with completely different youth groups and the recognition of things we have in common and the differences sharpen our senses to see beyond one's own nose and makes us want to know more.