

The Carpathia Chronicles

(including updates by editor 2020)

Part I: Genesis

The first part of this multi-part series that tells the story of Carpathia's founding and early years of growth up to the building of the Elmwood Street hall. By Richard W. Gerhardt

**"Von deutscher Erde sind wir abgeglitten, Auf diese Insel weit im Völkermeer,
Und wo des Schwaben Pflug das Land durchschnitten, Wird deutsch die Erde und er weicht nicht
mehr."**

Müller-Guttenbrunn

The date was January 5, 1913. In the German community of Detroit's East Side, the wind howled through the streets, adding a chill to the already bitter cold Sunday afternoon. But inside Beecher Hall on Michigan Avenue, a roaring fireplace provided warmth for 57 men who had gathered in response to an advertisement published in the "Detroitter Abendpost", a prominent German newspaper. The ad called for the creation of a German-Hungarian Singing Society and anyone interested was invited to attend. Now, they sat in the room, listening attentively to the man who spoke; the man responsible for the summons, Peter Schock.

Schock considered himself an "Ostschwabe", or "East Swabian", having migrated from Austria-Hungary's eastern frontier to Philadelphia, before making his home in Detroit. He had been witness to the all too often harsh treatment of his fellow Schwaben by the numerous singing societies and other organizations prospering in Detroit's booming German ethnic community of the time.

They were referred to as Ostschwaben because they came from Austria-Hungary's eastern-most region along the Danube River, in the Pannonian Basin, a land considered to be frontier by residents of Vienna and Berlin. Because of the strong political influence of the Hungarians over that part of the Hapsburg Empire, the language of the Ostschwaben came to include many words and expressions native to the Magyars. This, combined with the fact that the Ostschwaben dialect developed as an amalgam of several South Western German dialects, made it significantly different from the "Hochdeutsch", or "High-German."

Few things kindle human resolve more than not being fully appreciated as an equal and, according to writings by Schock's associate Peter Gänger, "...Schock would not have been Schock had he not mustered his entire oratory skills to remedy the unpleasant situation which had befallen the Detroitter Ostschwaben". It was no wonder that, on this memorable afternoon, with unanimous consent and enthusiasm, a new Singing Society was created with Peter Schock as its first President. The Society called itself the "German-Austrian-Hungarian Singing Society", and within days, established a constitution and elected its first board of directors. The Society carried that name until June 22, when it merged with the already established "Deutsche-Ungarische Fortschrittsbund", or "German-Hungarian Progressive Union". The "German-Hungarian Singing Society and Progressive Union", (GHSSPU) was born that day with Schock, once again, as President.

Despite the merger, singing remained the focus for the Schwaben, and Beecher Hall served as the focal point for meetings, practices, and gatherings. Mr. Joseph E. Schmitz was retained as chorus director. This turned out to be a good move, because the talented and capable Schmitz molded the untrained collection of voices with notable results. His talent and enthusiastic love for music were responsible for

building a mixed chorus that was on par with the other singing societies in the area. The performances were given an added boost of professionalism by the well-trained, rich, tenor voice of Fred U. Schreiner, who became a longtime member of the group. The chorus quickly gained in notoriety, not only within the German community, but also in American cultural circles around the Detroit area. As a result, membership grew rapidly, and the Society was forced to move out of Beecher Hall in September to a larger facility at 514 Gratiot Avenue.

By the fall of 1913, the GHSSPU had hundreds of members, most of them Ostschwaben, and on October 26, they established an all-female chorus with 24 members. Also under Schmitz direction, the ladies chorus became well respected and soon received high praise by the Abendpost's chief writer Maximillian Markus.

The mixed chorus' rapid growth during this time period must have contributed to the rift that existed, almost from the beginning, between the Ostschwaben and their Hungarian Progressive brothers. The union was doomed from the start, first of all, because of the language and cultural differences between the Swabians and the Hungarians. Contrary to what the "Reichsdeutsche" believed, the Schwaben were, apparently, more German than Hungarian after all. In addition, both groups had differing interests, with the Schwaben focused mostly on singing. The chorus' rapid success and expansion seemed to leave the German-Hungarian Progressive Union behind, and in February 1914, barely 8 months after their merger, the two groups split. This event necessitated another name change, since "German-Hungarian Singing Society and Progressive Union", would no longer be appropriate. Happily, simplicity won the day as the name "Carpathia Singing Society" was chosen. This name won favor among members because most could claim origins in the vicinity of this Eastern European mountain range.

Carpathia continued to grow in membership and success throughout 1914. Good financial management by the Society's Board of Directors, still under the leadership of Schock, made it possible to pay several of the officers. At a meeting on July 12, the treasurer, as well as the recording-, correspondence- and finance secretaries, were granted a yearly allowance of \$5.00. The hall manager of the time, Mr. G. Brenner, also received a monthly stipend of \$10.00. This financial success continued, and by 1915, Carpathia began offering insurance coverage to its membership. Because insurance was less common at that time, it was not unusual for many German organizations to offer similar benefits.

In October, 1914, war broke out in Europe and the Carpathia Singers rallied to the cause of providing relief for widows and orphans of German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers. The Society sponsored several benefit concerts, employing the help of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and some well-known soloists of the era. The first concert netted \$898.50, and the money was channeled to the needy in Europe through the Red Cross. The Society continued these benefit activities until 1917, when the United States entered World War I. Since it was illegal to provide aid to enemies of the U.S., Carpathia was prohibited from holding any more benefit concerts.

It remains the custom today, that all German ethnic organizations have their own flag, and in the spring of 1915, Carpathia held a large flag dedication ceremony, or "Fahnenweihe". The event was massive and included all the clubs within Detroit's German Community, as well as Ostschwaben from Cleveland. Among those that gave speeches during the banquet, following the dedication, was Detroit Mayor, Oskar B. Marx, Professor Emil Albrecht, State Representative Hermann Köhler, and many more. To show their appreciation for the support received from Cleveland's Ostschwaben at the Fahnenweihe, Carpathia visited the city in June of that same year, with 138 persons. This cemented a lasting friendship between the two cities that continues today.

By 1915, the Carpathia Singing Society had added a theater group of its own, which also proved highly successful at raising money for the needy victims of war. Similar to the chorus, Carpathia's largely untrained amateur actors were fortunate to be under the leadership of the once professional actor, William Vollmer. Under Vollmer's capable tutelage, the drama company developed sufficient skills to perform some truly substantial theater plays. Performances quickly became a highlight of the Societies' events calendar. The group won high praise from both audiences and the press, and in later years, went on the road, with performances in Cleveland. Carpathia also added a children's chorus that year, and the group of 15 gave its first performance on October 10.

Carpathia's growth continued and the club was again forced to look for a larger home. On July 1, 1915, they moved into the old home of another prominent German singing society, Concordia. The Concordia Home was located on the corner of St. Antoine, Catherine (Madison), and Gratiot Avenue, and provided the now 500 Carpathia members with several years of residence. But, not long after moving in, it became apparent that the Concordia Home could not keep pace with the rapidly growing membership, and the idea of building a Carpathia Hall took root.

In the Fall of 1915, traditions of the homeland were recreated with extraordinary detail, as Carpathia held its first Weinlesefest (Grape Harvest). Concordia Hall was artfully decorated and looked like a veritable Weinberg (Grape vineyard). The Weinlesefest was such a success, that a repeat of the event was demanded the following year. However, by 1920, the prohibition law robbed the Fest of its original character.

In 1916, the idea of building a Carpathia Hall was entertained by more and more club members and, at a meeting on October 26, the issue was discussed in great detail. First, there was the problem of raising enough money to build the new facility. Second, it was argued that coming prohibition would seriously impede the proposed hall's income potential. Also, because of the war, there was increasing hostility among the general population in the U.S. against Germans. But, once again, the initiative and enterprising spirit of President Peter Schock led the way. For Schock, no problem was insurmountable once he put his mind to it. He dedicated himself almost exclusively to the cause of building a Carpathia Hall. That this goal was finally realized in such a grand and imposing way, can be largely attributed to Schock's tenacity and leadership.

On November 11, 1916 Carpathia purchased two adjoining lots on the corner of Joseph Campau and Berlin Street for \$8,250.00. However, this building site was later recognized as unsuitable and sold. A year later, in October, 1917, the Society purchased another lot at 3500 Elmwood Avenue. The architect, Henry Kohner, was retained to design the building. It took two years to complete the preliminary work and much of that time was dedicated to raising the \$93,000 needed for construction. In that regard, Carpathia's Theater Group was a major contributor. On June 15, 1919, they performed C. A. Gramer's comedy "Ein Glücklicher Familienvater" at the Cleveland Social Athletic Hall. To augment the fundraising effort, Carpathia borrowed \$35,000 on April 13, 1919, as a mortgage for the building of the new hall. Schock and 6 other board members were so committed to the building project, that they personally signed for an additional \$10,000.

Finally, on August 17, 1919, the cornerstone was laid in a ceremony involving not only all the German organizations in the Detroit area, but Ostschwaben from Cleveland and Chicago as well. Two choruses sang at the huge banquet celebrating the event. The keynote speaker was Henry Pfeiffer, whose moving oration made an unforgettable impression on those present.

Construction itself took less than a year, and on Sunday, April 18, 1920, Carpathia Hall opened for business. One month later, on May 15, a dedication ceremony was held amidst a grand celebration of over 1500 people. According to Gänger, guests were speechless upon arrival at the new hall, because "the grandeur of the building went far beyond their expectations". Carpathia's mixed chorus, now 144 voices strong, accompanied by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, gave an awe-inspiring performance.

The story of Carpathia's early years, in many ways, reflects the story of the Ostschwaben as a people. Tough, hardworking, loyal to their German origins, yet unique in many respects. In the homeland, the Ostschwaben were isolated from their German roots, living peacefully among other ethnic groups with which they had little in common. Their determination transformed a wasteland frontier into the breadbasket of Europe.

Peter Schock typifies this Ostschwaben character. Rejected by the Germans with which he felt a kinship, and not at home with other ethnic groups, Schock established a singing society that became one of the most successful. But, he did not stop there. Schock pushed on, surmounting all obstacles that lay in his path, to build a Ostschwaben hall that was among the most impressive of its time. Today, that same Ostschwaben character lives on in all of us, even among the younger, American born, generation. The perseverance and determination, undaunted by difficulties and the prospect of hard work, is what gives the Ostschwaben true greatness of character. This is still true today, just as it was in 1913. _

The Carpathia Chronicles

Part II: Early Days on Elmwood

Part two of this historical series recounts the glory days of the Carpathia Singing Society at the Elmwood Avenue hall. By Richard W. Gerhardt

**Sie singen von Lenz und Liebe, von seliger, goldener Zeit,
Von Freiheit, Männerwürde, von Treu' und Heiligkeit:
Sie singen von allem Süßen, was Menschenbrust durchbebt,
Sie singen von allem Hohen, was Menschenherz erhebt...
(von Andreas Nikolaus)**

Carpathia Hall, at 3500 Elmwood, was the grand achievement of Peter Schock and the Detroiters Ostschwaben. In only 7 years, they built the Carpathia Singing Society from the very humblest of beginnings in 1913, into a 1400 member organization with an impressive new home. So impressive was the new Ostschwaben hall that many first-time visitors marveled at its grandeur.

Carpathia Hall was situated at the corner of Elmwood Avenue and Preston, in the heart of Detroit's East Side German community. Visitors entered the hall from the main entrance on Elmwood. A wide staircase ascended from street level to a large first floor lobby. The lobby had a hardwood floor, as did most of the rooms in the building. On the right side of the lobby were rest rooms and the cloakroom. To the left, two sets of double doors led into Carpathia's main hall, where all of the big events were held. Straight ahead, another wide staircase ascended to a landing, then turned left and split to feed two doors that led into the second floor dining room.

The main hall was designed to function as a theater as well as a dance hall. A high, two story ceiling accommodated the balcony which formed a horseshoe along three of the room's four walls. In front, centered on the fourth wall and forming the focal point of the main hall, was the stage. Built to be a fully functional theater stage, it sat approximately four feet up from the floor. The stage was equipped with several layers of curtains, a rope and pulley system for backdrops, and lighting. A director's pit was sunken into the floor directly in front and centered on the stage. The pit was used by the chorus and theater directors to give instructions to the performers on stage. Musicians accompanying the performance were usually situated on the floor in front of the stage. With chairs arranged theater style, the main hall could easily accommodate over 1500 people. For dances, chairs were placed along the perimeter of the room and the hardwood floor was ideal for dancing.

At the back of the main hall, off the second floor balcony, double doors led into a spacious practice room that was used by Carpathia's chorus's. From the practice room, another set of double doors led into the dining room, which could accommodate over 200 guests. Both rooms were often rented for private parties and wedding receptions. Adjacent to the dining room was the kitchen, which also serviced the main hall via dumbwaiter.

The basement stairs were accessed to the left off the main entrance. At the bottom of the stairs and to the left, was a large meeting room where Carpathia's board of directors conducted business. In later years, the room was used by the Youth Group and a nickelodeon in one corner provided dance music for the mostly first-generation American born teens.

To the right, at the bottom of the basement stairs, was a small bar where visitors could purchase drinks or pay for bowling. Six full-sized bowling lanes were open to the public. In addition, the bowling alley was furnished with six pool tables and a billiard table.

Another room off the bowling alley was the members lounge. Equipped with a bar and furnished with tables and chairs, Carpathia's men spent many hours engaged in cards, smokes, and drinks. Admission to the room was reserved for Carpathia members only and this rule was strictly enforced. Inappropriate conduct was not tolerated and, occasionally, some of the larger male members were utilized as bouncers.

The new Carpathia Hall opened for business on Sunday, April 18, 1920, and the May 15 dedication celebration crowned this achievement with 1500 attendees. Yet, despite Carpathia's success up to this point, much work was still incomplete and more money was needed to pay the mortgage. Fortunately, the Society was able to count on dedicated members and friends, such as nationally known philanthropist, Dr. Carl E. Schmidt. Schmidt, a German-American from Oscota, Michigan, first loaned, then donated \$2,000 to Carpathia's building effort.

A review of the Society's finances at the general meeting on June 13, 1920 revealed that a total of \$81,859.60 had been raised for the building project. Finance Secretary, Jacob Ruttinger, reported that expenses to date were \$80,870.60. However, by the time all the interior finish work had been completed, the total cost of the new hall, minus furnishings, came to approximately \$93,000. On July 15, the building committee was dissolved and management of the new Carpathia Hall was turned over to its board of directors. This, in effect, completed the first phase of Carpathia's evolution, and members looked back on their accomplishments with great pride.

The completion of the new hall allowed Carpathia to move forward, from the framework of a small organization, into one with a much broader existence in the public eye. Schock and the Society's other leaders recognized this as an opportunity to advance German cultural ideals in America. With a natural emphasis on their Östschwaben heritage and traditions, Carpathia pursued its primary charter of nurturing German music and song. But, this could now be done on a grander scale than was previously possible. The advancement of German culture in America was not only an important charter for the Society, but a very difficult one given the political climate of the time. Carpathia fought the ever-increasing negative public sentiment against German art and culture, by presenting ever larger, more spectacular productions. As American public opposition to the Germans increased, Carpathia members worked even harder to make their clubhouse and later, Carpathia Park, a place of congeniality for all.

At the end of World War I, Americans rallied to the cause of helping middle Europeans hardest hit by the ravages of war. This movement was enthusiastically embraced by Carpathia, because it gave the Society a chance to use its theater and music for charitable purposes. Members were turned loose to wholeheartedly present their culture through the mediums of theater and song.

To this end, Carpathia spearheaded the idea of creating the United Singers of Detroit, in close association with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. In this matter, Peter Schock, once again, proved to be a leader with extraordinary vision. Carpathia's involvement in the founding of the United German Singers not only furthered the Society's goals of promoting German culture, but it also brought Carpathia significant recognition from the outside world. In fact, Carpathia's leadership role was one of the significant contributing factors that finally caused Detroit's Reichsdeutsche (High Germans) to acknowledge the Society as a legitimate German association. The other undeniable fact was that, with 1470 members, Carpathia was the strongest association in the area and could no longer be ignored. In

flattering recognition of the Society's leadership role, Peter Schock was named first President of the United German Singers.

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At this point, it seemed as though nothing could stand in the way of Carpathia's success and prosperity. With so many performances at home, in Cleveland, and Chicago, the Carpathia Singing Society became well known in cultural circles. In the years that followed, the Elmwood Avenue hall was the site of many great concerts and plays, featuring famous soloists, musicians, and actors. At the General meeting on June 11, 1922, a change in the leadership of the Carpathia Singing Society took place as Peter Schock stepped down as president. From that time on, Schock remained in retirement from the activities of the Society. Instead, he devoted himself to his business and private affairs, through the hardships of the depression, until his death in 1939. In Schock's place, longtime Vice-President, Jakob Noll, was elected Carpathia's second president.

The accomplishments of Schock and the Carpathia Singing Society during these early years were both remarkable and plentiful: the building of the grand Elmwood Avenue hall; the rapid growth of the organization into a 1400 member society; the countless outstanding performances given by Carpathia members; the great and noble effort to promote German culture in America and help fellow countrymen in need. Yet, of all these accomplishments, Schock's greatest achievement may have been to restore pride to a people once rejected by their Germanic brothers. It is very important that we not allow Schock's effort to go to waste. We can do this through our own personal recognition and pride in our ancestry and culture. Don't we owe that much to Schock and the Carpathia members that built the club?

Special thanks to Margaret (Schock) Callewaert, Barbara (Brenner) Knight, John Shemmel, Bill Lutsch, and Evelyn (Wilhelm) Till, who's first-hand knowledge of the Elmwood Avenue hall has been invaluable.

The Carpathia Chronicles

Part III: Glory Days

Part three of this series remembers the glory days of the Carpathia Singing Society during the Roaring Twenties. By Richard W. Gerhardt

**"Von deutscher Erde sind wir abgeglitten, Auf diese Insel weit im Völkermeer,
Und wo des Schwaben Pflug das Land durchschnitten, Wird deutsch die Erde und er weicht nicht
mehr."**

Müller-Guttenbrunn

Detroit's East Side German community was in its heyday during the 1920's. The large German immigrant population supported a multitude of German restaurants, German churches, cultural clubs, and other businesses along Gratiot Avenue. The neighborhoods consisted of mostly two-story wood frame houses, built on narrow lots with small front yards. Yet, they were always kept neat and clean. The German influence is still evident in such names as Heidelberg Street, a residential street not far from Carpathia Hall which became known in the 1990's as the "Heidelberg Project". The general area around the intersection of Mack Avenue and Gratiot was home to a surprisingly large number of German halls and clubhouses. Among those within walking distance of one another were the Germania Hall, Saxon Heim, Deutsches Haus, Fortschrittsbund, Concordia Hall, and Carpathia to name a few. The German population was large enough that all of these establishments thrived and were able to maintain a large degree of independence from one another.

The Carpathia Hall, located at the corner of Elmwood and Preston, just east of Gratiot and west of Vernor, also prospered during this time period. Despite the fact that Carpathia took a second mortgage on their new hall in January, 1922 in order to pay building contractors, the Society's cash flow remained in the green. Later, the two mortgages were combined into one with a \$200 per month interest payment. An inventory of the Society's assets on September 9, 1923, by Franz Hill, put the total value of the Elmwood Hall at \$145,442.00. Combined, the two mortgages stood at \$105,150.00, and Carpathia's equity was \$40,292.00. Detroit city tax on the hall for 1924 was \$1,502.17, with a real estate tax of \$20.97.

In addition to the usual expenses of mortgage and taxes, it was not long before Carpathia incurred further costs for upkeep and renovation. On June 24, 1923, it was decided that the original 4-lane bowling alley should be renovated and an additional two lanes added. A committee was formed to oversee the work and Brunswick-Balke was retained as the contractor. A year later, the basement was again upgraded; this time, with a new ventilation system. By September, 1923, it was time to purchase a new piano and the Society's leadership agreed to the terms of \$250 down and \$25 per month until the total cost of \$500 had been paid. The old piano was fixed and sold. A complete set of new kitchenware was purchased for \$321.52 on March 8, 1925. At the same time, new silverware, embossed with the name "Carpathia", was purchased at a cost of \$158.

But, despite all these expenses, Carpathia's new hall prospered. "Carpathia had three floors and it was always packed!" recalled Ms. Francis Fay, daughter of Carpathia's second president, Jacob Noll. "There was always something going on there. They had concerts and plays and bowling..." The bowling alley and billiard room was a favorite hangout of men in the German community. It's where longtime Rheingold President, Frank Bessel, spent many a Sunday afternoon. "They had a billiard table down there, not pool, but real billiards. It was the only one around and I really liked that." recalled Bessel, who had come to Detroit from Pittsburgh in 1928.

In fact, beginning in the early 1930's, Carpathia even hosted weekly Tuesday night wrestling matches. Among some well known wrestlers of the time were Adam Weissmüller, brother of Johnny Weissmüller, an Ostschwabe who became famous in his role as Hollywood's first Tarzan. "They used to set up the ring in the middle of the main hall," said Barbara Knight, daughter of George Brenner, Carpathia's first manager. "Weissmüller used to wrestle at the Carpathia quite often until, one time, he hurt his back during a match and never wrestled after that."

Another source of income was hall rental and the upstairs dining room was frequently reserved for weddings and private parties. In 1923, the estimated 100 – 200 capacity dining room could be rented for \$185, including dinner. Although this fee reserved the room – until 1a.m., it was common in those days to celebrate well into the night. For this reason, Carpathia charged \$5 for each additional hour the room was used. Even the cloak room was considered fair game for rental and, in 1923, the Society received \$400 from Martin Kopler for a one year lease of the cloak room.

In addition to the catering business, special attractions, and the numerous concerts and plays sponsored by Carpathia, the Society hosted a number of dances throughout the year, including the spring "Bauernball" and the "Weinlesefest" in the fall. In 1922, members paid a modest entrance fee of 25 cents to these dances, while non-members paid 40 cents. As is still the case in the 1990's, the Carpathia of the 1920's hosted a yearly summer picnic. Each year a committee was formed to select and rent a picnic ground until the purchase of Carpathia Park in 1925. The summer picnic of 1922 cleared \$330 after expenses. Occasionally, special parties were held exclusively for Carpathia's members. Among them was the family evening of December, 1923, in which men pay \$1, while Ladies got in free. Special invitations were sent out for the Membership Evening held on November 27, 1924. Admission was 50 cents per person and included dinner and beer.

Carpathia was also active in supporting the cultural events of other German organizations in the area. Among the clubs Carpathia was most involved with was their old friends at the Fortschrittsbund, the Siebenbürger Sachsen, Landwehr Verein, Bürgerbund, Deutscher Unterstützungsverein, the Washington Verein in Saginaw, and the Wyandott Verein. Carpathia often supported these other organizations through monetary donations and by sending representatives to their functions. For example, Carpathia board meeting minutes from the spring of 1924 indicate the approval of a \$50 donation to the Fortschrittsbund for their hall dedication. The Society also participated with it's flag in the Deutschen Unterstützungsverein's parade and Fahnenweihe on Aug. 3 of that same year. To support their friends in Saginaw, Carpathia went so far as to host a "Bunter Abend" and Ball on May 24, 1924 to raise money for the Washington Verein's building fund. Carpathia was also involved in the "Mack Avenue Carnival" of '24, which ran a full 10 days from January 22 - 31.

A tradition which has fallen out of practice today, is the use of a "golden nail", along with the organizational flag at dedication ceremonies and other, more formal, events. A golden nail with "Carpathia" engraved on it was specially made for the Fahnenweihe of May 30, 1924, and was nailed into the flag of the hosting organization along with nails from other participating groups. A Carpathia golden nail was also used at the Fahnenweihe of the Deutsch-Unterstützungsverein and the Fahnenweihe of the Deutschen U.B., District 612 on September 21. It was customary for Carpathia to donate \$25 to the hosting organization at these types of events.

The job of running Carpathia was taken very seriously and this was reflected in the organization's structure. An 8 member Board of Directors, or Directorium, was at the top of Carpathia's leadership structure. Unless a special meeting was called, the Directorium met monthly and approved even the

smallest of expenses incurred by the Society. The Directorium also heard nominations for new members and was responsible for the hiring of the Society's employees, as necessary.

Separate from the Directorium was another committee that ran the daily operation of the Society. This committee was chaired by Carpathia's President and included the Vice President, Correspondence and Recording Secretary, assistant Secretary, Insurance Secretary, Finance Secretary, Treasurer, Entertainment Chairman, and Wirtschaftsvorsitzender. These were all nominated by the Directorium one month before the General Meeting, where they were voted on by the membership. This "working board" met frequently, usually every other week, or even weekly to discuss issues pending. In fact, it was not unusual for this committee to meet on holidays, if necessary. For example, meeting minutes indicate, the board met on December 25, 1922. In addition to the two committees, Carpathia's leadership also consisted of, 6 trustees, and 3 auditors.

Because being a Carpathia leader was considered an important position, many of the Society's officers were paid yearly or even monthly. In 1924, Carpathia's President received a monthly reimbursement for expenses of \$15.00. In addition, the Finance Secretary, assistant Secretary, Correspondence and Recording Secretary., Insurance Secretary and Wirtschaftsvorsitzender, each received \$50.00 per year. Despite these incentives, board positions were not always filled at the General meetings and the vacancies were sometimes left in the hands of the Directorium. As is the case today, the Wirtschafts-Chairperson was a particularly difficult position to fill because of the heavy workload and responsibility. Nevertheless, those assuming leadership positions in the Society were expected to take their responsibilities seriously and negligence of duties was considered unacceptable. In two separate instances, board meeting minutes from 1924 indicate that one of the trustees, as well as the Entertainment Chairman, were sent letters relieving them of their duties. At the monthly business meeting of September 14, 1924, all trustees were sent letters reminding them to "live up to their responsibilities".

Not only were leadership responsibilities taken seriously, but membership in the Society also carried with it certain expectations. As is true today, prospective members had to be sponsored by a Carpathia member, but all members were required to speak German. As previously mentioned, nominations for membership were brought before the Directorium and a one month review period followed before a new member was accepted. New members received membership cards which had to be shown before entering all Carpathia functions.

As a Carpathia member, certain rules of conduct were strictly enforced and misbehavior in the hall was not tolerated. Board meeting minutes from 1923 – 1924 reveal that specific and separate instances of membership misconduct were taken up by the board and, in both cases, membership was revoked. In one case, a Mr. Köhler, who failed to appear in his own defense at the board meeting of March 25, 1923, was publicly accused at the General Meeting and subsequently stricken from the membership list. In April, 1923, a special meeting was held to discuss severe misconduct in the basement Members Room and the following entry was made in the minutes:

"This meeting was called to bring order to the member room. Due to improper and uncalled for behavior of several men, it was decided (or resolved) that Mr. Gustav Meyers will stand every Saturday and Sunday by the door, with a list of names in hand, and not let those members into the room. Joe Reis (one of the trouble makers) will be sent a letter requesting his appearance in front of the board at the next meeting."

Although the apparent intolerance of misconduct by members and leaders reflected the general attitude of Carpathia's members during that time period, the strict enforcement was, no doubt, necessitated by the times. The years from 1920 through 1933 were most notably remembered as the Prohibition Era. Although the 18th Amendment banned the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcohol in the United States, a massive underground bootlegging industry flourished in the Detroit area, providing a variety of alcohol products to the German community. Large amounts of beer were smuggled across the waterways nightly from Canada to secret drop off points like the Dodge mansion, the Grosse Pointe War Memorial, and Mt. Clemens. Carpathia members and guests were prohibited from drinking alcohol in most of the clubhouse but, for 25 cents members could still enjoy a glass of beer in the safety of the basement members room.

"They ran a blind pig down there. That's what it really was," remembers Phil Jaeger with a smile. Phil was a young boy in those days who, along with his brother Nick, set up bowling pins every night in the basement of Carpathia Hall (no automatic lanes in those days). "They used to have a member standing guard at the door to the members room. There was a buzzer he could press in case the police showed up unexpectedly. You had to be a Carpathia member to get in there and that's where they would drink." One privilege of Carpathia membership was that each member received a key to the members room. The key was required for entrance. Forgetting your key three times meant you would no longer be allowed into the most popular room in the Hall.

Meeting minutes from 1924 indicate that Carpathia regularly purchased large quantities of beer from the Tivoly Brewery believed to have operated in Mt. Clemens. A \$1,000 discount was offered by the brewery if Carpathia could pay its bill in full. The board approved a mortgage note to cover the cost which was signed by board members including President Jacob Noll, Frank Orth, George Rack, John Ruck, and Joe Bichler. Carpathia was active in its opposition to the Prohibition law and on February 10, 1924, established a committee to work with the "Liberty Bell" toward the repeal of the 18th amendment,

Another benefit of being a Carpathia member in those days was the availability of health insurance through the Society. Mr. Franz Orth was Carpathia's first Insurance Secretary, well before the construction of the Elmwood Hall. Orth built the insurance operation into a substantial enterprise within the Society. In fact, in 1924, enough money was in the insurance coffers to provide the Society with a temporary loan.

Two types of insurance were known to be available to Carpathia members: health insurance and death insurance. In 1924, health insurance premiums were raised from \$6 per month to \$8.50. Under the policy, ailing members were first required to be examined by the Society's doctor. Based on the doctor's prognosis, the Insurance Secretary presented the claim for benefits to the Directorium who gave final approval of the claim. Premiums for death insurance ran \$1.50 in 1924 and were also subject to approval by the Directorium. In early 1924, death benefits were increased from \$300 to \$500, then raised to \$700 in December.

Carpathia prospered both culturally and economically throughout the 1920's and the 1930's. Looking back over the years at incomplete images formed by old meeting minutes and the faded memories of others, it is easy to imagine an ideal world of German culture and success. Doubtless, this is an incomplete picture. Club life presented the same difficulties to members and leaders as it does today. Yet, in those days, there must have been an expectation of unending cultural growth and expansion. After all, Carpathia and the rest of the German community had known nothing else but growth and

prosperity. The coming decade would prove this expectation to be a false one but, for the time being, German cultural success was enjoyed by all of Detroit's Germans.

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The Carpathia Chronicles

Part IV: Carpathia Park

In Part IV of this historical series, the story of Carpathia Park is told from its purchase and development into the summer retreat enjoyed by Detroit's Eastsiders during the latter half of the 1920's and '30's. By Richard W. Gerhardt

Perhaps it's the smell of Bratwurst cooking on an open grill; perhaps it's the taste of a good German beer on a hot summer day; or, maybe it's just being outside in the open air. No doubt, all of those things combine to make a summer picnic enjoyable and Carpathia has made this kind of outdoor, summer fun a part of their tradition since 1917. By the early 1920's, Carpathia often held picnics over four to six consecutive Sundays during the summer. In fact, it seems the primary restriction that prevented the club from partying outdoors every weekend of the summer was the availability of adequate picnic facilities.

Planning for Carpathia's summer picnics began during the winter months, when the Directorium named a committee to locate and rent picnic grounds for the summer. The formation of such a committee was typical of the way special tasks were handled in the Carpathia of the 1920's. The picnic committee investigated suitable facilities and reported back to the Directorium, who had the final word on all club expenditures. An ad appearing in the *Detroit Abend Post* in August, 1919, invited the general public to the third annual Carpathia summer picnic. The picnic was held on August 24, at Henkel's Wood (Wald), located near the intersection of Van Dyke and 8 Mile Road. Those without automobiles, were advised to use the Harper - Center Line street car to get to the picnic .

Although the picnic of '19 was only a single day event, Carpathia board meeting minutes from the early 1920's indicate that picnics on 5 consecutive Sundays were typical. On one particular Sunday during the summer of 1925, Carpathia was even joined by the *Deutsch Ungarischen Fortschrittsbund* (German-Hungarian Progressive Union) for a joint day of outdoor festivities. It seems that suitable outdoor facilities were not always easy to come by, since an indoor picnic was held at Carpathia Hall on June 29, 1924.

Judging from the club's apparent passion for summer picnics, together with the sometimes difficult task of securing suitable outdoor sites, it is not surprising that Carpathia investigated the possibility of purchasing property of its own. In fact, the indoor picnic of '24 must have caused a stir with members, because that same day, a committee was formed to look at a 6 acre parcel in Macomb County for possible purchase as a permanent Carpathia picnic site. The committee, which consisted of President Jacob Noll, Peter Geiszler, William Remsing and Ignaz Berger, drove out to the site of unspecified location and gave their report to the monthly business meeting on Sunday, July 13. However, the parcel was deemed unsuitable for purchase by the club.

Less than one year later, on March 29, 1925, another property was brought to the attention of Carpathia's leadership by club member Michael Schadlbauer. The Board decided to send the picnic committee to take a look at the 25 acre parcel, located on 16 Mile Road, between Ryan and Dequinder. Committee members who made up the first official Carpathia delegation to visit the property included Frank Hiel, Richard Swoboda, John Weber, Adam Tillinger, Jakob Strobl, Frank Krego, Michael Schadlbauer, John Merle, and Martin Vogel. What they found must have impressed them because a special meeting of the Directorium was called for Thursday, April 2, to consider the committee's findings. At that meeting, the directors approved the purchase of the land and the property was bought for \$600

per acre, with \$2000 down, and a biannual payment of \$300 plus interest. The parcel was named "Carpathia Park" and, within the month, plans were made to develop the property into a modern, summer retreat.

The meeting of the Directorium on April 23, 1925, dedicated itself to the task of planning the layout of the new Carpathia Park. The property was relatively narrow and deep, rectangular in shape. The rear acreage, furthest from 16 Mile Road, was wooded, and it was decided that the area just in front of the woods should be developed as a picnic ground. To access the picnic ground from 16 Mile, it was necessary to build a road into the property. The road, still called Carpathia Blvd. today, measured 60' from curb to curb. A sidewalk was also planned 15' from the curb. The Directorium placed a \$4,500 limit on the construction of the road and sidewalk.

Also included in the initial planning for Carpathia Park, a caretaker's house was to be constructed at the entrance to the picnic area 25' from the sidewalk. But, the focal point of the picnic ground was the dance pavilion. Measuring 40' by 80' with a covered roof, the directors wanted construction to begin immediately. No doubt, it was a great asset to have Jakob Strobl as a member of Carpathia's Directorium. The Strobl brothers were well respected builders, known for such familiar landmarks as Peter's Funeral Home at the corner of Mack and 7 Mile on Detroit's East side. The Directorium authorized Strobl to order the lumber, the Carpathia membership was rallied, and construction on the pavilion began the following Sunday.

Nick Jager remembers the dance pavilion very well. "My dad was caretaker of the park for a while and my brother and I spent the whole summer out there one year. The dance hall was all wood and very large. It had a roof over it and there was a stage at one end where the bands would set up. When they had doings, the sides were all open, but there were doors all around that could be closed when nothing was going on."

Elizabeth Usleber's father, Adam Zellinger, also had the job of Carpathia Park caretaker for several summers during those early years. "There was a small, three room cottage for the caretakers and we used to live out there all summer long. There was something going on out there every weekend!" recalled Usleber with a smile. "During the week, my dad had to get the park ready for the next weekend. There was a lot of work to do. He would clean up and rake the grass. My mom would tend to her garden." Although there were no concession stands at Carpathia Park, Elizabeth remembers that her mother would sometimes cook sweet corn from her garden and sell it on Sundays.

To help finance the purchase of Carpathia Park, the front acreage of the property closest to 16 Mile was divided into lots and sold to the membership. The Director's meeting of April 23, 1925, set the price range of the lots from \$300 to \$700, with 10% down and 1% per month at 6% interest. One month later, in May, 1925, the down payment was reduced to 5%. The size of the lots is not known, but the Directorium stipulated that houses be built 150ft. behind the lot line.

The enthusiasm of all Carpathia members for their new park was evident in the swiftness with which the club moved from purchasing the land to planning and developing it. In fact, by the end of May, Carpathia ambitiously planned the opening of the park for June 21, 1925. This was to be no small-scale event, but a grand opening, complete with dedication ceremony, rivaling in scale the dedication of Carpathia Hall five years earlier.

Getting the park ready for the big event required a great deal of planning and organizing. Members were assigned tasks, which they carried out conscientiously. Jakob Strobl was heavily involved, not only in the construction aspects of the project, but also in the cutting and clearing of unwanted trees and brush. Food needed to be ordered and cooked; signs were made and put up; written invitations were sent out to all the Detroit German organizations, as well as Ostschwaben clubs around the country. Two buses were rented for the day to shuttle people from the last street car stop at 8 Mile and Van Dyke to the park and back.

When opening day arrived, Carpathia Park was ready, and the celebration was indeed a grand event. The day began at 10:00 a.m. at Carpathia Hall, with a parade of cars, decorated in flowers and ribbons, which made its way out to the park. Schwaben from the provinces of Batschka and Banat came from all over the United States and this large concentration of Swabians attracted considerable media attention. This was aided by the fact that Detroit Mayor John W. Smith gave the keynote address in English. In addition, Peter Gänger, the former editor of the Schwaben Volkspresse in Temeschvar, Hungary, gave the keynote address in German. The media attention brought by these two well-known, public figures, was said to have underscored the importance of the Schwaben in America

The day's formal program was begun by Carpathia's male chorus, who sang several songs including "Der Wald". However, it was the Carpathia ladies chorus which received the greatest praise for their strength in performance. Both chorus' were directed by Professor Nikolaus. The dedication of the park was the highlight of the formal program and occurred amid much fanfare. Following the program, the Peter Karls Orchestra played dance music until late in to the night.

The following day, on June 22, Carpathia's leadership seized the opportunity to bring the large number of out-of-town Ostschwaben together in a conference at Carpathia Hall. Several things happened at that conference which advanced the longtime ambitions of Carpathia's leaders to unify all Schwaben in America. First, four other Schwaben clubs in Detroit united with Carpathia to form the "United Banater und Batschkaer Schwaben". Peter Schock, honorary president and founder of Carpathia, was named as the Unions president. In addition, the convention discussed details of the unification of all Ostschwaben in North America. A preparation committee was established which drafted a mission statement and goals for this national union. Each region of the country had its own representatives. The Detroit region, which included Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, and Elyria, OH., was represented on this committee by Peter Schock, Jakob Noll, and Peter Gänger. When the organizational work had been completed the "Coalition of the Eastern Germans in America" was established and, once again, the champion of Ostschwaben in America, Peter Schock, was elected president. At that time, the Union included 7 cities in the U.S. and 1 in Canada.

From 1920 until 1933, prohibition was the law of the land in the United States. Just as with the operation of the hall, prohibition affected the way alcohol was handled at Carpathia Park, but it never slowed things down too much. "They used to have beer taps set up in the woods. Half barrels of beer were hidden in trenches dug by members and covered with leaves," remembered Phil Jager with remarkable clarity. "There was a small shack at the entrance to the park. A club member was always there standing guard. On one wall of the shack was a board with a row of nails sticking out where the guy could hang his hat. The last nail was loose and could be pushed in. It was connected to a buzzer which would go off in the picnic area. If the cops came, the guy would push in the nail, which would sound the alarm and give members a chance to hide their glasses and bottles before the police got back there." Although these precautions worked most of the time, Jager recalls at least one occasion when things did not go quite so smoothly. "One time, while my dad was caretaker, we were staying at the (caretaker's)

house and the Feds came in the middle of the night. They went back into the woods and busted up over 50 half-barrels of beer hidden in the ditches."

In the years that followed, Carpathia Park became a significant summer attraction for, not only many of the Detroit area Germans, but non-German's as well. Carpathia members used the park as a tool in their continuing fight against the ever-increasing, anti-German, public sentiment. Members went out of their way to make non-German's feel welcome and Carpathia Park was known by all of Detroit as a place where good times were found on summer weekends.

Special thanks to Phil and Nick Jager, as well as Elizabeth Usleber (Zellinger), who's memories of Carpathia Park have been invaluable in writing this report. _