

MY MEMORIES OF THE BLACK FOREST



by Anna Hartenfels

March 5, 1984: The winter wonderland. We had 6 to 7 inches of snow overnight. The snow laden branches of all the hemlocks around my house bent low. The scenery is breathtakingly beautiful. The temperature is 6 degrees above zero. The sun is shining bright. When our President, Mr. Herbert Luber, comes up for the weekend, he can go skiing on "corn" snow. Mr. Luber is the person who suggested that I should put on tape my experiences and recollections of the history of our Black Forest Colony.

The story begins in the year 1936. Our founder and the father of the idea was Mr. C. K. Froehlich. We are honoring him with a monument in our own cemetery. Mr. Froelich was connected with the North German Lloyd; he was head of their travel department and toured sometimes as a guide with groups through the Black Forest in Germany, realizing early that there would be coming a time when traveling to Europe would not be possible anymore. Mr. Froelich was President and a member of several German societies in New York City and well known. He conceived the idea that with the support of enough people one could search for a suitable tract of land, lending itself to be built up as a vacation land or seidlung (settlement).

So about 50 people in three buses traveled through the countryside, toured Greenwood Lake, on to Sullivan County, to Glen Spey. On the road there were seen many "for sale" signs on houses and small farms, etc. The depression years were not over yet. Some participants decided to look into these possibilities, lost interest in our project and dropped out. Staunch supporters stayed on, and one of the greatest help to Mr. Froelich was Mr. Edgar Zecher. He became the trust[ed] treasurer and trusted co-founder. We honored him so after his death in 1976.

The gathering center for German immigrants and German soldier affairs was Yorkville and especially East 86th Street. I was working as a graduate infant nurse for a family living on Gracie Square that was connected with the German agency for graduated nurses. Walking one Saturday evening on 86th street, I noticed in a store window a large sign, Deutsch-Amerikanische Siedlung Gemeinschaft, inviting landsleute to join a fruehlingsfest held that evening in the Turnhalle, a well-known restaurant on Lexington Avenue and 82nd Street. I mentioned to my companion that I would like to go there and look in. Arriving, we were greeted by a group of our nurses, and, of course, I felt at home. It was a happy gathering--music and dancing. I only remember Dr. Heinz Taeschlein of the members; he was strutting around in his leiderhosen. I was invited to come to the next meeting held in a restaurant on 86th Street the following week. Mr. Froehlich spoke of his vision, Mr. Zecher [spoke] of plans and directions to be taken concerning rules and regulations to be enforced (for instance, only one dwelling to be erected on three acres of land available in the Black Forest, a Bavarian style, and no business would be allowed in the Colony). Here I want to copy an acknowledging article of our Black Forest Colony in the Lumberland Master Plan of August 8, 1983, page 8. It reads: "The Town also contains a model development of rural housing, known as The Black Forest Colony. Originally founded as a retreat for German-Americans in the late 1930's, this development is located on a 1920-acre site that was formerly a part of the scenic MacKenzie Estate established in the 1880's. [The building of] Year round Bavarian style homes has proceeded slowly and carefully. A minimum of three acres or multiples of three acres is required for each of the 400 lots, with 800 additional acres to be reserved for community park purposes." This foresight was always admired when we had dealings with the Planning Board in Glen Spey or the authorities in Monticello.

After listening to the speakers during the first meeting I attended, I felt confident that I could support this idea. I applied for membership, paid \$3.00 and was accepted. Also, I paid \$200 for three acres of land, \$12.00 dues for the year 1937. I remember well saying to a lady sitting next to me that I will probably never see the property I bought. My receipt reads, "Siedlung. Identification Number 22, 1936-37. Deutsche-Americkanischen Schwartzwald Seidlung Gemainschaft, 23 East 81st Street; signed by Edgar Zecher; made out to my maiden name--Miss Anna Kestler.

The nurses of the Agency had graciously offered their townhouse to Mr. Froehlich for meetings and a mailing address. Quite a few of the nurses became members also and bought land--to mention only two who built houses, Mrs. Guggemos and Mrs. Groener. The others who were either getting too old or were returning to Germany after the War could not hold on to their properties. Some members bought their land and deeds. Here I would like to mention the houses built on land originally bought by these nurses: Hentschel, Dittmer, Frauenhoff, Groener, Hartenfels, Rupnick, Georgoulos and Kaupp (this last mentioned land has no house). Burrafatos own Mr. Froehlich's original property now.

Then came the time for deciding to purchase the MacKenzie Park property of approximately 2,000 acres for the price of \$25,000. \$10,000 was to be paid at close of sale on September 27, 1937; \$5,000 in 1938; \$5,000 in 1939 and \$5,000 in 1940. It was a struggle to get the monies together. Selling of land was slow. The depression years were just ending. Again, I have to mention the help given by the nurses. I also remember Mrs. Mehrer who helped with a loan toward the mortgage payments; so did Mr. Hans Ostermann and Mr. Jacob

Seifferth. It took us eight years to pay back Mr. Ostermann's loan.

Maybe I should mentioned here that Pepe Huber was the first member to have a small cottage built by Inella Brothers during the period before our mortgage was paid off. I don't remember the year. He sold his boat for \$500 and paid Inella \$500 for his Waldheim.

Mr. Hasslinger, who was our second president but who had lost interest and dropped out, came visiting one weekend. I heard him say, "Mr. Huber hat sein haus auf sand gebaut." (Huber built his house on sand.) He seemed to have had grave doubts about whether we would be able to hold onto our property. This is Dabulis' house today.

In the meantime, I met and married Mr. Ernst Rauh and then on Easter 1938 had the opportunity to see the property I had to buy. On the property were three bungalows that could be occupied. The first and second bungalows each sheltered three families. In the third bungalow, which we call today the Clubhouse, army cots were lined up against the wall and gave overnight lodgings to quite a few people. A kitchen with cooking facilities was available; our dishes we washed in the brook. The men built a small narrow wooden bridge across the Mill Brook where there is today the Freund Bridge. Next to it is a much used and enjoyed swimming hole. Our lake was built much later.

The relationship between the members were cordial and friendly. Many parties were held, especially on holidays. Zechers, Mehrers and Tiefels came up on one Thanksgiving weekend and had to shovel their way up to the second bungalow. Over a foot of snow had fallen. Paul Mehrer was ever ready to take pictures. The snow was piled up high. Mrs. Tiefel had prepared the turkey ahead. She put it overnight on the porch, covered with a wash basket. I don't know what

they ate for dinner; a fox had his during the night.

Past the second bungalow at the first curve was a great big gate the width of the road. One post can still be seen at the entrance to the upper part of our cemetery. It even had a lock on it. We had engaged George Knight as the caretaker. He was helpful. The big hill was much steeper than it is now. Many people could not drive their autos up. On the top of the hill about 50 feet to the right, a clearing took you to a high iron tower--a fire watch. I climbed up too, but only once. The steps were all loose and rusty. On the main road, about the same distance in, stood a great big water reservoir. We rented it to the Pythian Camp for \$600 a season for several years until they got their own water supply. Rattlesnakes built their lairs in the crevices after the roof collapsed, and we had to fill it [the reservoir] up with dirt. It is on the Heisler property or land. We have many rattlesnakes to contend with all over. We did not dare to take walks without our "bergstocke" which Mr. Froehlich had imported from Germany. The hunt went on for many years. In most of the houses you could see a dry rattlesnake skin attached to a wall.

Of course, the main attraction was the Iron Bridge over a deep ravine, and it is still our main attraction. On the other side [of the ravine] was the road leading down to the Taeschlein property--today Mr. Luber's home. During the great flood in 1955 the road and another bridge over the Mill Brook was washed out, also a big garden the Taeschlein sisters had with loving care planted and tended. I learned a lot from Anna Marie, the oldest. She gave me cuttings and rooted flower plants which to this day grow around my place.

Now we come to the hardest part: the administration, guidance, formulating the ground rules for regulations and by-laws to form the corporation and the club--

all in the hands of inexperienced men, members of the Board of Directors. Diverse opinions brought on arguments which could not be avoided or easily solved. Conflict of interest and character clashes were not conducive to a tempered relationship. The meetings were quite loud at times. Our Minutes tell the story. Expenses accumulated--lawyer, advertising, printing, postage, etc. So the members were each offered three additional acres of land called "reserve acres" for \$300, to be paid in three notes of \$100 each. For every new member brought in, a note would be cancelled. Sixty shares at \$100 each were issued. Fifty-five were sold to members. Five shares probably will never be sold since a share can only be sold with the consent of 100% of the members (stockholders). What a "stupid" stipulation. The original shares of stock were dated September 27, 1940, after we had paid the mortgage in full and had clear title to the Black Forest property acquired on September 21, 1940. The stipulation on the issued deeds that the yearly dues will be \$27 a year was equally shortsighted. No one could foresee that \$27 a year would never cover all the running expenses for the maintenance and repairs of roads, etc. Three dollars of the \$27 was club dues.

Several years passed; America had ended the war. Understandingly, the township wondered why a German group bought the property. Are they giving signals via the tower? We were told later that the FBI, hidden in the woods at our entrance, took pictures of everyone entering or leaving. They must have taken some pictures of me too. I was the only one living in the Black Forest during the week. I had no car. I walked with "Bruni," my German short-haired pointer twice a week to the store in Glen Spey, which was at the same time the Post Office too.

On one summer Sunday, three or four cars with two agents each descended on the

different places, found everyone working hard to cultivate a section of their six acres. When they came to our place back there finding Ernst Rauh digging deep for a foundation, asking questions (especially whether we dealt with imported wines), then hearing that we had a winery but made and handled domestic wines only, they stopped further questions and even drank some of our wine with us [that] we offered. We never heard from them or saw them again (This place is today owned by Mr. Eberle).

Here comes to my mind our most unforgettable character--Emil Silberhorn. Our "Rubezahl" or Rip Van Winkle. He was an artist in his trade. He could paint with his left hand as well as with his right. He finished my knotty pine rooms; they still are shining after over 40 years. He only worked from early spring until late fall, hibernating in our forest in the winter. Before his little bungalow was built, he slept even in the coldest months in his hammock outside. He was often awakened by scavengers at night cleaning out his pots and pans. Later on he had always a herd of deer around his house, and called them by their names. Visitors came from all over and were greeted and welcomed by the sound of a great big ship's bell. Most of them brought food for his animals. He himself lived on noodles, eggs, bread, coffee and cigarettes. He had no car.

We had no electricity until 1949, no telephone until 1952. Weekenders [especially the ones on the Lower Road] brought blocks of ice on the way up, fetched water in large metal milk cans in the old school house, which is today our Town Hall and had no complaints. That was the way to live if you want to spend a weekend in the country [in the late 1930's].

Now, I go back to the Sunday of the visit of the FBI Agency. All members were

American citizens, but Emil. He told the agents that he was a runner during the First World War and was trapped or blocked by collapsing trenches, but was found and rescued. [When asked] why he is not an American citizen? He feels that he loves America as you would love your wife, but Germany is the Mother he still loves. They made no trouble for him. His English was so interwoven with German; it must have amused them. A lively period in the annals of the Black Forest history was ended with his death in 1961. His place is owned by the Kobetitsch family now.

The month of March could not end before it gave us the snow storm of 1984 in the Northeast. It was on March 28, [and lasted for] two to three days. It never stopped snowing for three days. Very lightly by day and night is constant snow. We had 6 to 7 inches of snow. Another winter wonderland, but with much destruction elsewhere, especially in North Carolina. This storm was followed on April 4,5 and 6 by the rain storm of 1984 with much flooding in New Jersey and in many counties of New York state. Again, we escaped damage except one small part of our main road which was washed out, and with the help of Danny Alekna and his big machine it was repaired the same day. Of course, I could not help but to remember the big flood of 1955. I had about eight persons invited to a kaffee klatch. It started to rain heavily all afternoon, but nobody seemed to worry until late afternoon when I almost had to ask two elderly ladies from Rio whether it would not be safer to leave before the roads get too muddy. Others followed, but not Mrs. Huber and her guest. When I finally could go with them to the Huber bridge to see them safely home, I was relieved; I hurried back. The rain came down in buckets. We got the tail end of Hurricane Diane combined with a cloud burst. I could not sleep a wink all night. The fury of wind and water, the terrible noise of the Reis and Scholz

bridges breaking up. I'll never forget. Seven bridges were washed away. The Iron Bridge abutment was weakened and undermined. Everyone after my place was marooned. I never had so many people stop in; some stayed for several days. There was no way to get back to Port Jervis except via Forestberg to Middletown and from there by bus to New York. I cooked big pots of lentil soup. One visitor went into the woods and came every day back with the choicest mushrooms; she knew every kind by name. Afterwards a meeting was called to plan actions and ways to repair the damage. An appeal was made and answered that the members should donate money and time. These times of teamwork and sacrifices knitted us oldtimers closer together and helped to overbridge many an after-effect of heated differences of opinion.

Now again going back to the 1940's, we could not sell any land since we got no new members. Expenses, taxes, etc. accumulated. So, again the members were asked to give a loan of \$160 each; these monies are still on our books.

When after the War the Steuben Day Parade was held again, we decided to participate. Mr. Hans Ostermann used his talents and artistry to build with the help of the members a float with a Black Forest house. You see pictures of it on the walls of our Clubhouse. Members in Black Forest costumes marched. The following year we marched again. Both times we paid \$250, but did not get one new member. Advertising in the New York Staatszeitung brought us one new member, Alfred Scholz and his wife Erna. It was a Saturday afternoon; I was washing our car across from the Clubhouse. When a car drove slowly by from the back, stopped and told me that they read about the Colony in the Staatszeitung and were interested, but they did not see or meet one single person. They were on their way back to Brooklyn. I was glad to offer my help. Their house is owned today by the Freund family.

I recall saying once to a younger member that we have supported the Black Forest all these years. He answered, "Yes, but you have also enjoyed the Black Forest these many years." True, but a readiness of all members to worry, work and sacrifice will reveal that we nurtured and nursed our land, so we truly possess it and are entitled to enjoy it. I have heard it said by others [that] "No one has enjoyed the Black Forest as much as Anna." I can say "yes" to that anytime.

Traveling from and to the City took much longer during those years. Our directions read, ". . . from Port Jervis to the bridge in Pond Eddy, 12 miles." Since the only town road went right through Sparrowbush, at 30 miles an hour, it took a good time longer than today. Then it continued, ". .. from Pond Eddy take the Lower Road to our entrance opposite a lake." The Lower Road attracted in June many sightseers when the mountain laurel and rhododendron were in blossom. The tops of the trees seemed to grow together and give an unusual tunnel-like effect. The beauty of it was forever destroyed by the flood of 1955.

The trip back to New York, especially after a holiday, could take as long as four to five hours. From Glen Spey a narrow road running through the woods with many curves took you slowly down to Route 97. Parts of it can still be seen to one side of the Mongaup Road. From Port Jervis, Route 6 to Route 17 [was] so narrow with many curves [that] traffic was repeatedly stalled. No Quick Way; no Thruway. When Route 97 was built from Pond Eddy to Barryville, the State paid us \$600 for stones removed from our Quarry.

I have been elected as a Trustee to the Board of Directors for about 25 years; I still am [a trustee]. This has given me the opportunity to observe that these men are conscious of their responsibility to our membership. Working out their problems honestly, decisions are done in a considerate calm manner. For legal questions we have Robert Onofry, Esq., of Port Jervis, who is thoroughly acquainted with our setup. Our young members can take solace that one of their own, Bob King, our Treasurer, was initiated by being on the Board with his father-in-law, Edgar Zecher; his wife, Sigi, imbued with Black Forest air since birth [the very day we made our last payment on the mortgage]. I can still see her sitting in her kindergarten looking serenely at us. She is our very competent secretary. The administration of our Black Forest is in good hands, which bodes well for the future.

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Anna Hartenfels - An Oral History

As recollected and recorded by her in March of 1984.

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piano. Soon I won't be able to play because my fingers will be arthritic. . .

. [tune], [tune], [tune], [tune], [tune], [tune], [tune: Rhonda by Mozart].