

Volunteer Historical Researchers Care for Cultural Heritage

Philipp Grieb

Germany looks back on a long and proven tradition of volunteer historical research. Since the second half of the 19th century, there has been a strong movement of growing civic emancipation, efforts to educate broad sections of the population, growing interest in archaeology and museal collections that led to the establishing of associations. Active roles in the associations were played by archive administrators, Gymnasium Secondary school, prerequisite for access to universities teachers - often in their retirement years - representatives of the educated urban upper class who had historical knowledge and professional methods at their disposal. Broad public participation supported the voluntary work with membership and moderate annual fees, and the municipal and regional administrations helped with subsidies from the cultural budgets.

Today, more than 200 historical societies in Germany conduct regional historical research, do documentation,

explain in guided tours and publish about valuable cultural heritage in all thinkable areas.

Such achievements are shown in the city of Straubing on the Danube. The town has a rich history, was a border location of the Roman Empire for around four centuries almost 2000 years ago, and in the Middle Ages was a ducal seat with significance beyond the region. Its historical museum houses many regional findings from prehistoric times and an important Roman section. There is close cooperation between the Historical Society for Straubing and the surrounding area and its museum. The society has been researching, publishing and supporting historical and prehistoric research, excavations (today together with the municipal archaeologist) since 1898. It currently has around 700 members. Some of them are active, highly motivated, frequent researchers and authors, as can be seen in its annual reports of about 400 pages. The documentation of research and



Grieb-Villa Straubing 1949 (Photo: Landpolizei Straubing)

International News



Ground floor foyer before renovation

historical knowledge is in the focus of all activities.

Alfons Huber, chairman of the society for many years, is a volunteer city curator, one of the most prolific authors on historical topics in the city. He is well connected with the city administration, the mayor, the cultural committee of the city council, the management of the city archives and the museum, and the local press. Before his retirement, he was a teacher of history and ancient languages at the Gymnasium, which I attended many years ago.

During an internet search, I came across an unknown Straubing artist "Richard Grieb" with my surname and a note about "excavations at the construction site of the Grieb Villa in 1911", which sparked my interest. Nobody knew of a Grieb Villa. The building was called the "Polizeihaus" since 70 years, it turned out.

Alfons Huber knew where to start the search. After initial discoveries in the city archives, he motivated me to continue and write a report on the history of the building and the Grieb family. A family relation was not to be found, but the main figures of the Grieb family piqued my curiosity.

In the city archives there was basic information, civil register entries of the persons I was looking for, a house file on the building. On the internet I found a partner, Johann Hermann, who had similar interests. He

is distantly related to the family and collected works by Richard Grieb. We shared our findings, avoided duplication in our research, and promised Huber a joint report, with me doing the writing. We both joined the society as new members.

Our documentation is entitled "110 Years of the Grieb Villa in Straubing - History of the Villa and its Builders".



Ground floor reception today



Grieb-Villa today

It describes the life of Anton Grieb (1865-1930), painting master, fine artist and interior designer, the life of his eldest son Richard Grieb (1892-1958), who started architectural work and interior design but then decided to pursue the fine arts, and it tells the history of the villa, which father and son designed 1910 and built in 1911.

The family lived in the mansion for only 10 years and sold it in 1921. The 1st World War 1914-1918 and its aftermath, economic and family reasons were probably crucial. Later, the owners changed several times. During the 2nd World War, the paramilitary Nazi organisation SS confiscated the building. Towards the end of the war, the US Army occupied the villa. In 1946, the US military government began to establish a new German police force, which then used the mansion for over 50 years.

In 2007, Wilhelm Marx acquired the property in urgent need of renovation, converted the area and thoroughly renovated the building to use it as a business and office building. In his efforts, he preserved the character of the historicist house. It now looks more splendid and beautiful than ever before.

Since 2015, a young successful start-up company has been renting the villa to developing safety-critical systems, hardware and software for the aviation industry worldwide. Wilhelm Marx gave the building a new life. Our documentation gives it back its history after 100 years. It comprises approx. 35 pages, 40 pictures and will appear as a contribution to the next annual report of the Straubing Historical Society.