



**From the Black Forest to
the California Desert:**

The Life and Work of Fritz Faiss

September 2019 - April 2020

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Greeting from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Visitors,

Welcome to the German-American Heritage Foundation and Museum in Washington, DC. While GAHF was founded and chartered in 1977, our museum will be celebrating its tenth anniversary next year. During the years that we have been calling Hockemeyer Hall our home, we have told countless stories of both famous and lesser-known German-Americans including entrepreneurs, scientists and inventors, Hollywood producers and actors, lawyers, architects and many others whose vita may have slipped through the cracks of history.

This exhibition, curated by Sarah Marsteller, is a first for us in many ways as we have never before dedicated an entire season to an artist, nor have we featured paintings, drawings, or encaustics. Dealing with original art has not only been a premiere, but an exciting challenge and discovery, and we are delighted to give our members, friends and visitors a detailed look at the works and life of such a versatile and prolific artist. Fritz Faiss was a fascinating and well-rounded character who did not allow his personal hardships, including his incarceration in a forced labor camp and the difficult winter of 1945/46, to dampen his creativity and spirit.

Faiss' works may not be as famous and recognizable as Kandinsky's or Klee's - he was a student of both - but his style is just as unique and showcases his own development as a person and an artist whose roots reach from the Wilhelmine Empire through the Weimar Republic and the years of World War II into the second part of the 20th century and his arrival as an immigrant in the United States. The Roman poet Horace is credited with calling "a picture a poem without words", and I believe that these beautiful and vibrant works fit the bill.

All the works on display will be available for purchase once the exhibit concludes in the spring of 2020. If a particular painting catches your eye, we strongly encourage you to talk to us. In conclusion, I want to thank Sarah Marsteller for her dedication, countless hours of hard work, as well as her boundless energy and enthusiasm.

With warm regards,

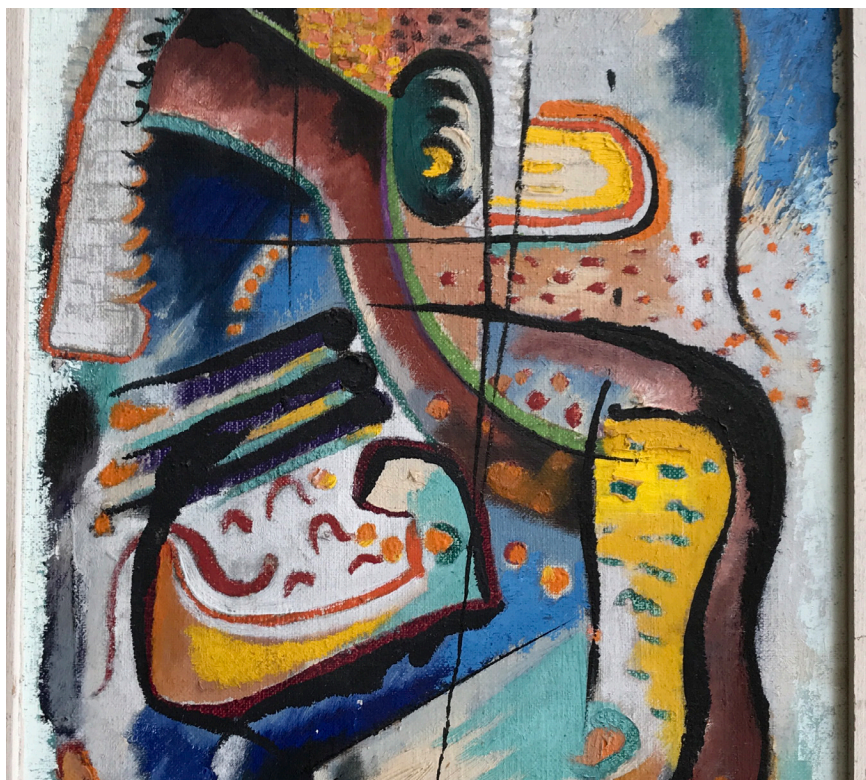


Katja Sipple
Executive Director

The Exhibit

By Sarah Marsteller, Curator

While the name Fritz Faiss may be recognizable among the art community, for most of the general public he is an unknown figure. Despite his relative anonymity, his story is one that deserves to be told. Being targeted by the Nazi regime, surviving a concentration camp and the Second World War, and beginning a new life in the United States at the age of 46 – only to feel constrained by the system and be told that he cannot teach what he desires – shows Faiss' immense strength when many of us would have lost the will to continue fighting. On the book jacket of his story *Hackney Jade and the War Horse*, Faiss writes, "the wonder of being alive is payment enough for all of life's annoyances." Though the struggles that Faiss had to endure can certainly be categorized as more than mere annoyances, his wonder at being alive is very apparent through his artwork. Faiss' unique blend of Expressionism, Realism, and Abstractionism make his pieces truly special; despite having passed away in 1981, with this exhibit we intend to keep his legacy alive while bringing attention to a relatively unknown German-American.



Excerpt from "Destroyed in Forms", 1947

Born in the Black Forest in 1905, Faiss' pivotal years were nothing short of tumultuous, and his personal story is detailed further in the following brochure pages. The majority of the biographical information provided in these pages comes from newspaper articles written about his work, art exhibits, and life, press releases penned by his late wife Janet Wullner Faiss, as well as some radio interviews. Today, Faiss' legacy can be seen in the permanent collections of museums in both Europe and the United States — the Pasadena Art Museum, the San Diego Museum of Art, the Pinakothek Munich, the Staatgalerien of Berlin and Stuttgart, and many more — as well as in collections owned by private individuals around the world, including not only Germany and the United States but also France, Mexico, England, Turkey, Sweden, Australia, Denmark, and others.

As is always the case, this exhibit would not have been possible without the help of multiple people and organizations. Although a full list of acknowledgements can be found on the back cover of this brochure, there are a few people I would like to mention by name here. First and foremost, I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Kathryn Wullner Thomas. Dr. Wullner Thomas — sister of Janet Wullner Faiss, who passed away in August of 2017 — was instrumental in our museum receiving these amazing works of art. She reached out to us to see if we would be interested in receiving some of his pieces as a donation, as per her sister's and Faiss' wishes, and throughout the production of this exhibit she has remained supportive.

Secondly, Kristen Gonzalez from the National Gallery of Art has provided both invaluable advice and resources as well as donated immense amounts of her time to this project. Last but not least, our treasurer Hardy von Auenmueller traveled from his home in Philadelphia to Wisconsin, where Faiss' works were stored, in order to transport the art pieces personally to our museum in June of 2019.

I hope you find Faiss' works as inspiring and thought-provoking as I do, and even return to this showcase for second and third viewings with family and friends. Beautiful and provocative art is meant to be shared, and we are honored to be able to share these works with you.

Happy visiting!



Drawing from "Hackney Jade and the War Horse"

The Early Years



Fritz Wilhelm Faiss was born March 6, 1905 in the small town of Furtwangen, located in southwestern Germany in the Black Forest. As a young boy, and one of fourteen children, he quickly became interested in art; he would often travel around the countryside with his bicycle and sketchpad, letting himself be inspired by the scenery of the region. Throughout his career, nature remained a prominent theme among his pieces. Faiss was a self-described loner, and much of his childhood was spent in solitude due to frequent illnesses. Due to these circumstances he developed an appreciation for the creative inspiration that stemmed from his seclusion.

As a young adult — between 1922 and 1928 — he studied at the Bauhaus, the German school for art founded in 1919. Simultaneously, he studied at the *Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart* (State Academy of Fine Arts Stuttgart) and worked as an assistant professor there between 1924 and 1928. During this period of his life, he became acquainted with many contemporary artists of the day, such as abstract artist Adolf Hölzel and his inner circle.

While there are many biographical gaps in Faiss' story from this early period of his life, Faiss also underwent training as a medical doctor. Despite Faiss stating that he was forced to give up his medical practice by the Nazis during the rise of Hitler, his death certificate states “doctor” as his profession. Therefore, it is believed that Faiss used practicing medicine as a way to ensure he was able to financially support his artistic endeavors.

As early as 1937, Faiss' art was labeled *entartet* — degenerate — by the Nazis. Though the Second World War had not yet started, when the Nazi Party came into power in 1933, not only Jewish Germans but also academics, Communists, Socialists, and those seen to be anti-nationalism were targeted. Faiss, whose paintings were viewed as spreading modernist propaganda, would have fallen under that category.

However, to understand Faiss' background and how his work grew into something despised by the Nazis, it is important to understand the environment in which he grew up and gained his foundation as an artist. His training at the Bauhaus, which was a new endeavor at the time of his study there, along with the political instability during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) and the fundamental ideology behind German Expressionism all influenced the themes seen in his work.



Brücke in Köln, 1932
Bridge In Cologne, 1932

The Bauhaus and the Expressionist Movement

The Bauhaus was founded by Walter Gropius in 1919 in the German city of Weimar; originally intended as a school to celebrate the union of art and design, it combined multiple forms of art instruction. Over the fourteen years it was open and under the leadership of various directors, it developed a curriculum that focused on the design of artistic objects intended for mass use. The intent behind the Bauhaus, in addition to being a quasi-artists guild for the modern-day world, was that students would learn to create objects with function first and foremost; minimalist, but still appealing to the eye. As such, it was movement away from traditional values and forward into modernism – a concept deplored by the Nazis.

The students were taught basic fine art techniques in their introductory courses by some of the most well-known artists of the day, such as Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, who joined the school in 1922 – and under whom Faiss himself studied at the Bauhaus – and then were able to put these theories into practice. They learned “practical” art skills such as metalworking, cabinetmaking, typography, textiles and weaving, and later architecture. The flight of many influential Bauhaus teachers and directors from Germany to the United States during the Nazi’s regime - including Gropius, who went on to teach at Harvard - demonstrates why Faiss’ mere association with the Bauhaus would have made him suspicious to the Nazi regime.

However, in those early years during which the Bauhaus flourished, these new forms of art being explored meant that non-objective (abstract) art could thrive. In an interview with KRHM-FM Radio in 1965, Faiss said, “The idealism of the young generation was the most enjoyable phenomenon of that particular period between 1920 and 1933, when Hitler came into power.” In stark contrast to this short-lived period of artistic freedom and exploration, the full ascension of the Nazis to power in 1933 ensured the suppression of abstract expressions of art; Faiss’ association with the abstract art scene meant he became a target.



Composition, 1923

Modern Abstract Art – Kandinsky's Influence

One of Faiss' teachers, the Russian painter and art theorist Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) is often called one of the fathers of modern abstract art. Born in Moscow, he spent his childhood in the Black Sea port of Odessa, now in Ukraine, where he studied at the renowned Grekov Odessa Art School before enrolling at the University of Moscow for a degree in law and economics. In 1902, he met German expressionist painter Gabriele Münter who was at the forefront of Munich's avant-garde. Together they co-founded the expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), which was named after Kandinsky's 1903 painting with the same name depicting a small cloaked figure on a galloping horse running through a rocky meadow. The rider's cloak is painted in a medium blue while the shadow is in a darker shade of blue with additional shadowy blue shapes in the foreground. The rider and his white horse feature prominently in the painting, yet both lack clear definition, and the horse's gait is disjointed and unnatural.

Even as a child, Kandinsky had a passion for colors, and he later used color as a separate and autonomous artistic element in his paintings that allowed people to fully experience art on a spiritual and emotional level. While *The Blue Rider* uses a more monochrome color palette, his later works feature a kaleidoscope of colors including vibrant reds, yellows, and oranges. In 1911, he published *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, a short book that explored his feelings about color and its effect on human emotions.

When World War I broke out, Kandinsky returned to Russia where he married and was involved in art education and museum work. He painted little during that time and put his energy into creating the Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow whose members eventually rejected his style as too individualistic and bourgeois.

Thus, the invitation to attend the Bauhaus in Weimar came at an opportune time and led to one of the most productive periods of his life. As a signee of the "Founding Proclamation of the Union of Progressive International Artists", he taught basic design, Bauhaus theory, and conducted painting classes and workshops which he supplemented with his own color theory and Freudian psychology. Together with Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger and Alexej von Jawlensky, he formed *Die Blaue Vier* (The Blue Four) in 1923.

After the dissolution of the Bauhaus, Kandinsky moved to Paris where he created his final two compositions which synthesized all the elements of his previous work. They became two of his most famous and recognizable works. Kandinsky died in Neuilly-sur-Seine, a Paris suburb, in December 1944. However, his artistic influence lives on, and helped shape artists such as Jackson Pollock, Joan Miro, and Andy Warhol.

The War and Its Aftermath

Despite ending his studies in 1928, Faiss continued to experiment with multiple mediums, such as woodcuts, stained glass, and later on, encaustics. However, the Expressionist-influenced style seen in Faiss' work, that was condemned by the Nazis, caused his studio to have been destroyed twice by 1933 and he lost many of his pieces. In 1937 Faiss' work as an artist was officially declared *entartet*; his passport was revoked and he was forbidden from exhibiting his work. His studio was searched multiple times for work that would have been deemed unacceptable. Though he attempted to leave Germany, he was unable to get a travel visa and his family was threatened in the event that he chose to escape.

During the war he was put into a forced labor camp outside of Munich following an interrogation in which Faiss admitted he did not support Hitler or the Nazis. About his interrogation Faiss was quoted as saying, "My ways of expressing specific ideas through art, in my private life, towards groups or individuals, exposed my controversial thinking. During the interrogation, I pointed out that I do not agree with Hitler or his thinking. This was enough to put you into a camp or be killed. It was very easy, very easy to get in; but very, very difficult to get out."

In the Morning, 1943



These forced labor camps had begun to be established immediately following Hitler's ascension to power in 1933; at that time, they were primarily used for unlawfully incarcerating political prisoners, but as the war began and progressed their primary aim changed. During his time in the labor camp he was forced to work in a stone quarry; he also underwent severe medical experiments from which he suffered lasting physical ramifications. Of the 130 prisoners who were interned at the camp, Faiss was one of only three who survived. Faiss' relative fame in the art world caused foreign powers, including the American Red Cross, to intervene on his behalf in order to ensure Faiss' release; others were not so lucky. Though Faiss was reluctant to give details about his time in the labor camp, reflecting on the experience in a radio interview he said the following: "What I brought out of that time of suffering and horror is a spiritual experience that reshaped my whole thinking. And only those spiritual essences are worth the effort of telling."

Following his release from internment, Faiss was offered and accepted a position teaching at the Städelschule Frankfurt, a small and competitive art academy in the Hessian capital. There he lectured on encaustic painting, an artistic process in which dry colored pigment is mixed with heated beeswax and painted onto a heated canvas. The color then seeps into the heated material and is “burned in” with another layer of heat, until the surface is sealed off and the painting becomes essentially indestructible. This “burning in” process is also what gives this specific art technique its name, which comes from the Greek word “encaustos,” meaning to “burn in.” The first documented note of this “punic wax” ancient medium was by Pliny the Elder in the first century; it is currently seeing somewhat of a revival among contemporary artists.

Because of his association with Dr. Hans Schmid of Munich, who at the time of their meeting in the 1930s was the foremost expert on the subject, Faiss was able to modernize the technique by using electricity to heat both his palette and the canvas. After Dr. Schmid passed away, Faiss became the leading worldwide expert on the matter and he held two German patents on the subject. Though the encaustic method of painting was somewhat well-known in Germany and France in the mid-20th century, it was almost unheard of in the United States.

His first exhibition after the war, in Pforzheim in 1947, sponsored by the American government, later enabled him to secure a travel visa with which he emigrated to the United States. Because his passport had been revoked by the Nazis, he needed documentation and references before being allowed to emigrate. Theodore Heinrich, who at the time of the exhibition worked for the American military and convinced them to sponsor the exhibit in Pforzheim, recognized the value in Faiss’ work and was one of the references who sponsored his travel visa, allowing him to move to the United States.



Cloister on Lake Constance, 1943

The United States: An Illusion of Freedom?

Faiss was offered a professorship at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and emigrated to the United States in 1951, at the age of 46. At his admittance in San Pedro, CA on June 5, 1951, Faiss hoped he could leave the horrors of war and its lingering trauma behind. In 1953 he began teaching at UCLA and taught there for five years; later, in 1961, he took a position at Valley State (now the California State University of Northridge), where he remained for twelve years until his retirement in 1973.

While he was able to begin a new life in the United States, Faiss was severely disappointed by many aspects of the American teaching system, specifically at the university level. Despite becoming an American citizen in 1956, Faiss believed that conditions for young artists continued to be better in Europe than in the United States, particularly because they were able to get experience in multiple fields rather than focusing on one medium or style. This belief is reflective of Faiss' expertise in multiple mediums and areas of art, including music.

Though he found relative success as an artist in this country, and was greatly admired by his students, he often struggled to relate with his peers. As a professor at UCLA, he fought to be given more freedom in his lectures. On the cover of the aforementioned *Hackney Jade and the War-Horse*, Faiss, writing in the third person, states, "He was criticized for encouraging individualism in the art...he felt restricted within a system he believes encourages mediocrity. Often loved by his students, he felt merely tolerated by his colleagues." For Faiss, having escaped fascism and survived the Nazi regime, only to find this sort of restricted and uncreative thinking at upper-level educational institutions, which are meant to be bastions of provocative thought, was extremely disappointing. However, though he often had scathing indictments of mass art education, on the whole he appreciated the freedom he was able to exercise in the U.S. with regard to the subject and exhibition of his work.

Faiss' career continued to grow in his 50s and 60s following successful exhibits along the West Coast. His first exhibit in the U.S. debuted in Pasadena in 1952, only a year after arriving in the country. In 1976, Faiss suffered a stroke while in Hawaii with his wife Janet. Following the loss of the use of his right hand, he began to practice painting with his left. Some of the pieces in this exhibit were created using his left hand, including *From Kealakekua Hospital* (1977). Remaining active up until his death in 1981 at the age of 76, Faiss' perseverance following his physical setbacks are an apt metaphor for his life as a whole.

Faissism: Its Origin, Influences, and Significance

The variety inherent in Faiss' pieces — which becomes immediately clear upon seeing the small selection of his works displayed in this exhibit — show the depth and breadth of his artistic skill. Faiss' use of color, his mastery of different mediums, and his unique life experiences combine to create his unique style of Faissism. Though it is clear that Faiss' work is influenced by a variety of styles, including Expressionism, Realism, and the abstract, his work as a whole cannot be restricted by categorization into one of these specific styles.

Faiss' use of color is noticeable throughout so many of his pieces; he was greatly influenced by Goethe's color theory — so much so, in fact, that he published his own book on the subject. Faiss' use of elements of Goethe's color theory, such as his usage of complementary colors, can be seen in pieces like *Bridge in Cologne* (1932), *The Girl* (1947), and *The Golden Hills* (1967).

Faiss did not set out to create pieces following a specific theme when he sat down to make them. In his KRHM-FM interview, Faiss said about creating a work of art, "If you have a preconceived idea, you work actually on the intellectual level. This means artistic death." Rather, he worked freely and let the themes of his work become apparent as the work progressed; the common motifs therefore portray his particular feelings at certain times of his life.

Faiss embraced addressing difficult topics within his art. In an interview Faiss stated, "It is a strange thing that when I came to [the United States] in '51 many people tried to avoid the daemon. They want to straighten things out; and there is only one side: a bright side. But no darkness on the other side. People reject... the double-sidedness, the light and dark qualities which are actually here and should be kept alive." Faiss indeed embraced both the lightness and the darkness, and these contrasts can be seen throughout his body of work.

Faiss' predisposition to look towards the inner self when creating his art is reflected in the following statement taken from the same KRHM-FM interview: "Many colleagues ask me on and on about new ideas. 'What should we paint? Should we take now geometric forms or cartoon characters, or should we stick to old movies or posters or what should we do?' All of this is no question for a creative-minded artist at all. He paints, creates, out of his inner self. Art is an inner experience." For Faiss, who was often critical of his colleagues, the subject should come to the artist rather than be sought out beforehand.

Some of the most memorable statements made about Faiss by his peers reflect his respect and status in the art world, as well as his image as a loner, his mastery of multiple techniques, and the inability to place him within one specific art movement. Dr. Theodore Heinrich, who curated Faiss' Pforzheim exhibit, is quoted as saying the following in 1954: "There is a constant thread of lyricism through his work... This singing quality... betokens a fundamental and healthy relation between the artist and the world in which he lives."

In 1933, Professor Dr. Hans Hildebrand wrote that Faiss was "...one of the few original contemporary artists of our country... He is the type who lives and works in seclusion, an introvert whose only intention is to create, to work." Arthur Millier for the *Los Angeles Times* complimented Faiss' breadth of skill in 1958, stating, "His monotypes... exhibit an exquisite sensibility rare in contemporary art," and that Faiss was "...a master with few if any peers in the expressive use of this ancient, beautiful, and difficult medium (encaustic)."

When reading what his peers and the public felt and saw when they experienced his work, it is clear that his pieces were and continue to be awe-inspiring. However, one's personal experience with art is entirely subjective. Therefore, we encourage you to draw your own conclusions about his work after getting a varied sampling of his pieces from this exhibit. No matter your personal opinions on Faiss' work, his unique story is proof that amazing art can come from life's worst experiences.

Birds, 1959



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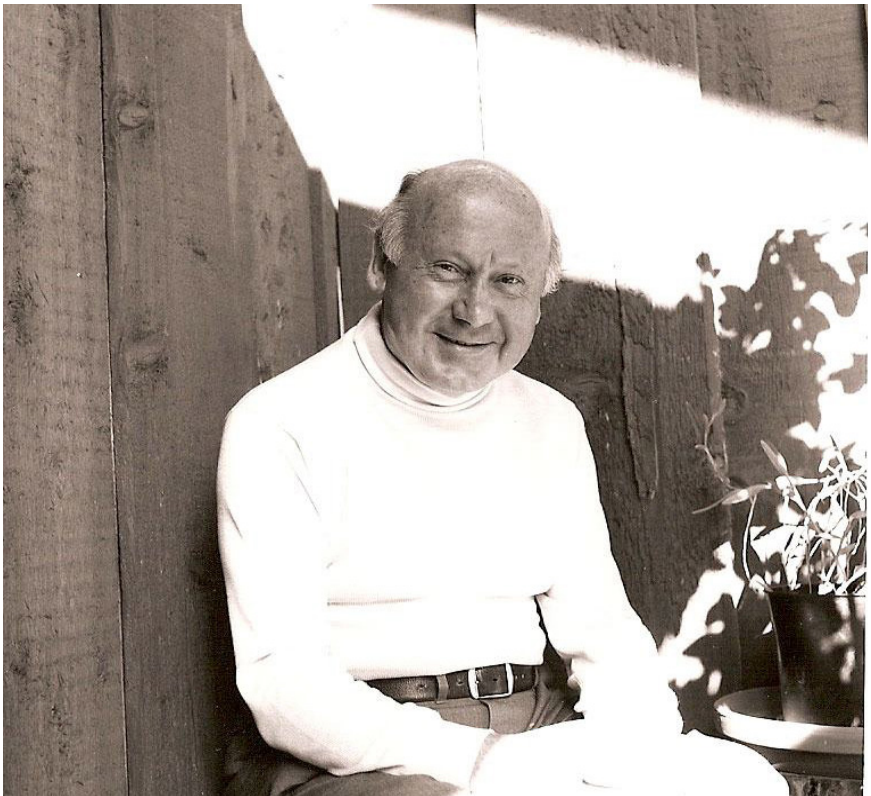
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Paintings by Artist Aicy Karbstein

Aicy Karbstein is a contemporary artist, whose paintings have been exhibited in Maryland and Virginia, and featured in several online groups and galleries. Her positive approach to life helps her paintings express happiness, beauty and harmony. She relies on various techniques to achieve her goals, but she is currently known for her many Representational paintings.



Most of her works are in private collections in the USA and Brazil.

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German-American Heritage Foundation of the USA®

Established in 1977, the German-American Heritage Foundation of the USA® (GAHF) is dedicated to preserving, educating, and promoting the cultural heritage of Americans of German-speaking ancestry. The foundation serves as the only national membership organization for German-Americans. Since 2010, we have been proudly presenting our rich heritage as the first national German-American Heritage Museum in our nation's capital.

We are committed to:

- Sharing a positive image of Americans of German-speaking heritage by focusing on their historical contributions to American society;
- Strengthening the ethnic awareness and diversity of German-Americans;
- Promoting the German language and culture; and
- Furthering German American relations, cooperation, and friendship.

The German-American Heritage Museum™

The German-American Heritage Museum of the USA™ opened in March 2010, in a building once known as Hockemeyer Hall.

Renovations were completed by the GAHF after acquiring the building in 2008. Located on 6th Street NW, in the heart of the old European-American section of Washington, the museum sits in what is now a thriving commercial neighborhood. The Heritage Museum's mission is to collect, record, preserve, and exhibit the rich cultural legacy of Americans of German-speaking ancestry, and make their contributions to American history available to audiences of all ages.

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