

## **Texas and back!**

### **Where's the plaque?**

It was in October 2013.

In the Hardtmuseum Durmersheim the museum team has planned the annual program 2014. The most important event for 2014 was the memory of the outbreak of World War I exactly 100 years ago in July 1914.

On this occasion, an exhibition in the Hardtmuseum was decided, which was to be opened in October 2014.

In our museum archive we have many documents, photos and objects on this subject. In addition, for this exhibition we have asked the public in our local newsletter to provide us with private documents, photos, objects, etc.

The response was overwhelming. From January 2014, we were able to arrange the documents and determine the themes for the exhibition:

1. information about the First World War
2. military organization and recruit time
3. outbreak of the war and the first local soldiers (15 Durmersheimer have already fallen in 1914)
4. fieldpost, letters and postcards - fieldpost of Otto Kränkel and the family Kolb
5. soldier Otto Kary on the western front (a biography and investigations of his grandson Roland Kary - see PDF below)
6. uniforms
7. prisoners of war and forced labourers in Durmersheim
8. objects from the WW I
9. killed in action 1914-1918
10. photos
11. currency and stamps 1910-1920
12. various personalities
13. Durmersheim War Catering Institute
14. war literature and propaganda

#### **And this is where our story begins:**

During our research we found in our documents a photo of a memorial plaque with pictures (Maria von Bickesheim, Bernhard von Baden) and names of the Durmersheim soldiers who died in WK I.

It was quickly clarified what this approx. 180 cm high steel plate, which was probably made shortly after the First World War, was all about.

This plate was in the store of the community in 2007 or 2008. The museum was then asked whether it could be exhibited in the museum. Since it was too big for the museum rooms, it was returned.

**2014: "We need this board for the exhibition!"**

Of course, we wanted to bring this plaque into the exhibition in 2014.

But it was no longer there!

Our research showed that it had been left by the camp to a scrap iron merchant. He had handed over the plate to an antiques dealer at the time.

From there all traces are lost, until ..... we received an email from the town hall on 14 September 2016 with a message from Mrs. Cynthia Bell from Granbury/TX: "Are you interested in this Plaque?"

We were confused and excited. "This is our plaque! With Maria of Bickesheim and Bernhard of Baden! And with the names from Durmersheim! How did she get it in Texas?"

Of course we were interested in the blackboard and immediately wrote an answer to Cynthia Bell in Granbury/TX.

This day was the beginning of an exciting and crazy relationship between Granbury/Texas in the United States of America and Durmersheim in Germany.

Cynthia Bell had discovered the blackboard with her mother at an antiques store in Fredericksburg, TX. There, the good piece was (erroneously) offered as a French antique, because there are many French place names on the plaque - places where most of the listed soldiers fell. Since Cynthia runs a small art gallery, it was set up there.

Sometime later Cynthia had doubts about the French origin when looking at the names. Cynthia does not speak German, but she suspected that the names could be German. Her paternal grandparents were German emigrants from the Magdeburg area, so that German-sounding words were not entirely alien to her. She researched these names on the Internet.

During the Internet search it came out that the listed names occur in large frequency in the place Durmersheim in Germany. Via the homepage of the municipality Durmersheim Cynthia contacted the municipality Durmersheim. And so the rest of the way picked up speed.

Cynthia Bell wanted the sign to return to Durmersheim! This was a big project, because neither she nor we had experience in transatlantic transports.

Many questions and problems had to be clarified:

How can the board be transported from Dallas/Texas/USA to Frankfurt/Germany?  
Which forwarding agency can do this?  
How does the board have to be packed?  
Which customs regulations have to be observed?  
How much does the packaging cost?  
What does shipping cost?  
Where should the board be installed in Durmersheimer?

We obtained offers from various transport companies and contacted a specialist company in Bavaria that packages industrial goods for worldwide transport.

We were informed by this company that they mostly work together with DBSchenker. They also gave us the address of an American packer in Dallas.

That was a good tip, because there is also a DBSchenker branch in Karlsruhe. So we drove to Karlsruhe to DBSchenker and organized all the details, including the customs formalities. Many thanks to DBSchenker for their active support!

After we had all the facts together, we went to our mayor, Mr. Andreas Augustin. He assured us the full support of the community Durmersheim, also financial help, if necessary.

After we had found the right company with DBSchenker, Cynthia Bell now had to look for a good packaging company in Granbury. She was successful and was able to deliver the blackboard there in October 2016.

Then, on 15.11.2016, it was finally time. With a truck the big wooden box (128 kg weight) was delivered to Durmersheim!  
The commemorative plaque found its way back home after its trip to Texas and back!

But this is only one side of the story.

The other side is the acquaintance with two wonderful friends in Granbury/Texas: Cynthia and Rex Bell. Their decision that the board should return to their home in Durmersheim is a very generous gesture that says a lot about the high character of Cynthia and Rex.

Countless emails and photos, not only over the board, flew from west to east and from east to west. We talked about God and the world, about art and culture, about politics and everyday life in our countries and got to know each other better and better.

On behalf of our museum and the community of Durmersheim we would like to thank Cynthia and Rex from the bottom of our hearts for their generosity and above all for an open heart with much love and empathy.

Maybe the email messages will become less in the near future, but in our minds we will always stay connected.

And whenever we look at the plaque, our thoughts will be in Granbury/TX and at Cynthia and Rex Bell.

We would like to thank the community of Durmersheim very much for taking over the costs and for the installation of the plaque in the war chapel of the old cemetery by the building yard.

Since the end of 2018 we have brought the plaque to the Hardtmuseum. On the one hand you can show it there on our visitors' Sundays or during group visits more observers.

The second reason lies in the climatic conditions in the Kriegerkapelle, which are not favourable for the steel plate.