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Editorial Notebook
by Tom Braubury

In Germany's Mecklenburg

D.G. Martin was ecstatic in his phone call Wednesday from the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in unified Germany. The signing of the proclamation of business and cultural friendship between Mecklenburg there and Mecklenburg here had just been concluded in the splendid setting of Castle Schwerin.

"It looked like the signing of the treaty of Versailles," he said. "The thing that really stirred people the most was a real attempt to understand the meaning, if there is any, of this common history."

Charlotte and Mecklenburg in North Carolina take their names from Queen Charlotte—the wife of King George III of England and her birthplace in Germany's Mecklenburg. For more than two centuries, the connection was one of name only. But three years ago Martin — formerly a Charlotte lawyer and now a UNC system vice president—searched out Queen Charlotte's home place there. He found a beautiful countryside, and a people adjusting to life after the collapse of East Germany. When the German Mecklenburgers returned the visit, they found a namesake county with an awakening interest in the world and a strong German economic presence—both evidenced in the Charlotte delegation this week that included representatives of the local German business community and the principal of Bruns Avenue Elementary School, which houses the German immersion magnet program.

At the ceremony Wednesday, Martin said, the Mecklenburg minister of education and culture asked her listeners to think about what Princess Charlotte faced going to a strange country — England—she had never seen, to marry a man she had never seen, to

speak a language she had never heard before. Then the minister recalled the settlers who left Germany to settle in the United States with no clear notion of what faced them, but a determination to make things better.

"She declared that the people from both Mecklenburgs—particularly Mecklenburg, Germany—have to face the same sort of situation with great changes and no certainty of what lies ahead. And only with the same courage and commitment to make things better can we survive in these times," Martin reported.

Then county commissioners Chairman Parks Helms responded. Martin quoted his words: "I came to Germany saying, 'I come from Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.' But now after all that has happened, *Ich bin ein Mecklenburger.*"

That, Martin said, brought down the house with its echo of President John Kennedy's remark at the Berlin Wall: *Ich bin ein Berliner.*

And now? "It's like visiting cousins. If you like them, the friendship that develops has an extra dimension," Martin said. "I think that's what we have here. Mecklenburg in the United States needs to look outside its boundaries. It has some German connections, and is looking for a focal point that stirs the imagination. That is part of why this seems to be taken more seriously than other friendship programs."

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Charlotte's Council For International Visitors
A program of International House

Mecklenburg-Mecklenburg Partnership Established

On January 19, 1994, the State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany, hosted an official delegation from Mecklenburg County, North Carolina to sign a "Proclamation of Business and Cultural Friendship." Parks Helms, Chairman, Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners, led the delegation of Charlotte-Mecklenburgers. The German region is site of the 18th century birthplace of Charlotte's namesake, Queen Sophie Charlotte, who was the wife of King George III of England.

Also instrumental in development of the partnership and representing Charlotte-Mecklenburg at ceremonies in Schwerin, state capital of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, were Dieter Rathke, President, Philipp Holzmann USA & Honorary Counsel, German-American Chamber of Commerce of North Carolina; Eckart Goette, Honorary Consul of North Carolina for the Federal Republic of Germany & President, Goette Interconsult; D.G. Martin, Vice President of Public Affairs for the University of North Carolina System; Daniel Witt, Principal, Bruns Avenue German Immersion School and Catherine Hansen, Associate Director, Charlotte's Council for International Visitors (CIV) & Coordinator, Mecklenburg-Mecklenburg Partnership Program.

Charlotte's Council for International Visitors serves as coordinator in development of the partnership. Business, cultural and educational bonds will be strengthened through this developing relationship. For further information, contact the CIV office.

Im Dezember 1991 erschien im „Charlotte Observer“ ein Beitrag von D.G. Martin, in dem er seine kuriose Suche nach der Namensgeberin seiner amerikanischen Heimatstadt in Deutschland schilderte. Martin war Politiker, Hochschullehrer und Journalist in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. Seine Reise führte ihn über Schwerin, Hamburg, Güstrow, Rostock, Bad Doberan und Neustrelitz endlich nach Mirow. Im Schloss lernte er den Mirower Gerd Zimmermann kennen, der dort wohnte und verantwortlich war für die Restaurierung. Zimmermann erzählte vom eben gegründeten Residenzschlossverein. Martin berichtete davon, dass es in Charlotte Kommunalpolitiker, aber auch deutsche Unternehmer und einen Club von Leuten mit deutschen Wurzeln gebe, die gern Kontakt zur Heimatstadt von Queen Charlotte haben würden. Nach Charlotte zurückgekehrt, berichtete Martin seinem Freund Dieter Radke, Präsident der Philipp Holzmann AG in Charlotte, von seiner Begegnung. So nahm die Zusammenarbeit mit dem Residenzschlossverein Mirow ihren Anfang. Verbindungsmann war dabei Otto Glameyer, US Koordinator der Philipp Holzmann AG Frankfurt a. Main. Im April 1993 reiste erstmals eine Mirower Delegation nach Charlotte. Sie wurde vom Chairman des County Councils (das entspricht in etwa dem Präsidenten des Landtags) Park Helms, der Protokollchefin Catherine Hansen und von Dieter Radtke empfangen. Diese drei wie auch D.G.

Martin sollten sich fortan als verlässliche Partner erweisen.



Nach 1993 kam immer wieder Besuch aus Charlotte nach Mirow. Im Januar 1994 wurde im Theater Neustrelitz eine Partnerschaftsvereinbarung zwischen Mecklenburg-County und Mecklenburg-Vorpommern mit einer Festveranstaltung besiegelt. Einen Tag später, am 19. Januar 1994 unterzeichneten Park Helms und die damalige Kultusministerin Steffie Schnoor in der Bibliothek im Schweriner Schloss den Partnerschaftsvertrag. Die Delegation aus Charlotte besuchte bei dieser Gelegenheit auch Mirow, spazierte über die Schlossinsel, war zu einer Kremserfahrt mit Jagdhornblasen eingeladen, und im Schlossgymnasium gab es eine Kaffeetafel. 1994 war erstmals bei einem Besuch von Mirower Vereinsfreunden nach Charlotte von einer Dependance von Mecklenburg-County in Mirow die Rede. Am 27. Oktober 1997 wurde zwischen Mecklenburg-County und dem Förderverein die Sache verabredet. Ein Jahr später wurde die Dependance im Torhaus eröffnet.

