

Das *Deutsche Tagebucharchiv* - The German Archives for Diaries

Everyone knows the situation: you are moving house or clearing things out, you pick them up and have a look at them and try to decide what to do with them. In the attic and in the basement you find many long forgotten boxes of papers. All too often we discard the handwritten "heirlooms" quickly: we cannot read the handwriting and anyway - who cares about grandma's or grandpa's letters?

"We should not cut short our elders when they want to tell us something and we should not put their diaries into the garbage bin, for they are directed at us: these are the experiences of whole generations and we cannot afford to destroy them, this would be sheer waste. We have to bend down and pick up what must not be forgotten: It is our history."

Walter Kempowski^{*)}

^{*)} **Walter Kempowski** (1929 - 2007) was a German writer. He was known for his series of novels called *German Chronicle* ("Deutsche Chronik") and the monumental *Echolot* ("Sonar"), a collage of autobiographical reports, letters and other documents by contemporary witnesses of the Second World War.

Our history

So that these documents are not lost to history, the *Deutsche Tagebucharchiv* was founded in January 1998 by Frauke von Troschke. She was familiar with the Italian example in Pieve Santo Stefano (<http://www.archiviodiari.it>), founded in 1985 by the well-known journalist Saverio Tutino, and had discovered that Germany had no institution devoted to the collection of personal memoirs. The small town of Emmendingen (15 km to the north of Freiburg, which has a large university) provided office space in the Old Historic Town Hall next to the market place.

Who we are

The *Deutsche Tagebucharchiv* is a registered non-profit association of public interest and is led by an elected volunteer executive board consisting of a president, a vice-president and a treasurer. Basic financing is more or less "secured" on the membership fees, on donations, on the rent-free office space and minor public grants.

The *Deutsche Tagebucharchiv* collects diaries, memoirs and letters, but also family chronicles, family reference books, where autobiography plays a part. We keep in mind how quickly the culture of diary- or letter-writing is disappearing: billions of blog entries are posted, e-mails, text-, video-, photo-messages are sent daily in millions but they are a fleeting medium and will probably not be preserved for posterity. The leisure and concentration needed to write a letter creates a different kind of communication, an intimate conversation with the recipient, not only "messages".

What we hold and what we do

Since the foundation of the *Deutsche Tagebucharchiv* a permanent stream of submissions from all parts of Germany and even from abroad has come in. More than 14.300 documents by about 3.250 authors have been filed and registered. The contents can differ from a very small booklet with drawings up to a box full of letters, even 100 diaries written by only one person. A contract is made with all submitters. An attempt is made to find out as much personal information as possible about the author (date and place of birth, CV, and profession). In Emmendingen all the texts

are read. The reading group consists of 45-50 people (including external readers) who meet once a month to present the texts they have read. The readers have volunteered for this work because of their interest in biography. The group consists of both old and young.

An exact note is taken of the content and a multi-paged questionnaire is filled out for each item - main subject matters: e.g. childhood and youth, education, profession, teachers, parents, conflicts in the family, social conflicts, illnesses, flight and expulsion at the end of the Second World War, experiences as prisoners of war and many more.

A note is also taken of the relevant dates concerning the diary: first the time described in the diary (for example, 1920-1930) and secondly the author's dates (for example she/he was 15-25 years old). And then a note is taken of the place names in the text and what well-known personalities and events are mentioned. (e.g. Olympic Games in Berlin, outbreak of the Second World War). All information that the readers have noted in the questionnaires is collected in an electronic database so that research for subjects and subject combinations are possible. Our major intention is to make all our documents available for scientific research purposes. We are continually improving our computer software to make documents available for full text search. A project is being launched in 2014 to make the results of our readers available for research on the Internet with the anonymisation of family names.

In our special yearly event "Journey through Time" the archives offer the occasion of insight into the content of the documents and the chance to talk about them. More public readings - to name just a few - were for example in response to the 50th Franco-German Elysée Treaty anniversary or an invitation to the *Literaturhaus* in Stuttgart.

Research

Since 2010 the archives have been located in several rooms with a total of 200 sq. We present space and office equipment for undisturbed research work to our visiting scientists and students and also have enough office space for our own staff. We are equipped with more than 10 personal computers and the necessary copying, printing and scanning equipment.

Advisory council

An advisory board representing various scientific disciplines from several German universities supports the activities of the archives and suggests new research projects.

"Museum im Deutschen Tagebucharchiv"

A long-term plan to create a small museum for the exhibition of outstanding documents and special themes will be realized by the end of 2014.

Cooperation at a European level

We drew great benefit from the Italian archives' pioneering role, and currently we are in close cooperation with the French Diary Archives (<http://association.sitapa.org>), which has recently culminated in the joint project of "German-French Autobiography Days" (<http://autobiographie.sitapa.org/activites/journees/ecrire1418.php>) in Strasbourg and Emmendingen in May 2014. Further projects are envisaged... On the occasion of the First World War Centenary both archives published German and French diary excerpts in common brochures

The German Archives for Diaries in numbers (as of July 2014)

stock of texts	ca. 14.600
authors	ca. 3.300
	58 % male / 38 % female / 2 % anonymous / 2 % multiple authorship
type of material	diaries: 10.425
	memoirs: 2.373
	letters:
	1.807 collections (= 122.960 letters)
	cards: 130
script	German script (Kurrent) :4.216
	shorthand: 178
	Latin: 8.097
	typewritten: 4.552
visitors	60 to 70 per month
guided tours	5 per month
salaried employees	1,5
volunteers	80
members of the association	600

Emmendingen, August 2014