

The German-American Central Society (GACS) of Peoria, IL



Three clubs comprise the GACS: Harmonie-Concordia Singers, Damenchor Germania, and Sportverein Peoria. The GACS is the umbrella organization of the three clubs that owns and operates our two properties: the Lindenhof, our German Hall; and our Hickory Grove Park, site of our four German Fests.

Peoria had its start in 1680 as forts constructed by French explorers. One still sees evidence of this history in its city names along the Illinois River valley: Creve Coeur, Marquette Heights, LaSalle, etc.

During the mid-1800s, German immigrants poured into the Peoria area and became the largest ethnic group in Peoria County. Along with the farming, trades, businesses and religion they brought to enable the community to grow and prosper, they brought their rich traditions in social clubs. These social clubs were a focal point in the lives of many ethnic Germans in the area and included gymnastic clubs, veteran associations and singing clubs, among others.

German social clubs were numerous in the Peoria area during the second half of the 19th century, but many of these clubs faded into non-existence during the Great War, when celebrating one's German heritage was not as popular as before the war. Our GACS was formed in 1928 to make it possible for the remaining clubs to consolidate under one society allowing the clubs to survive, and thrive as they do to this day hosting fests, dinners, trips, etc.



Our **Harmonie-Concordia Singers'** club traces its roots back to 1850 manifesting itself under various names of both men's and mixed choruses. The name Concordia originated in 1857. A division occurred in 1968 resulting in the formation of the Harmonie Singers. The two clubs reunified in 2008 as the Harmonie-Concordia Singers and sponsor the Rathskeller Brummers band as well as the men's choir, and numerous fests, dinners and activities.

Peoria's first Turnverein, or gymnastics club, was founded in 1851. **Sportverein Peoria** was founded in 1927 also with the same tradition of gymnastics. Soccer eventually became its predominant sport, with the addition of marksmanship, archery, running and golf to round out the club in its current form. Sportverein Peoria also hosts the annual Sommerfest in June, a food tent at the Peoria Oktoberfest and its December Appreciation Dinner at the Lindenhof.



Damenchor Germania had its start in 1932, providing the ladies an outlet for their singing talents. The Damenchor hosts the Wurstfest in February and serves the food and sells German articles at all of our Hickory Grove Fests and the Peoria Oktoberfest.



The GACS owns and operates two properties: The Lindenhof, our German Hall, and our Hickory Grove Park. Our original German Hall, purchase in 1952 was located near Peoria's city center and eventually became too small for our needs. We purchased our current German Hall, formerly a dance studio, in 1997 and are now frequently filling it to capacity for club events and our Friday night dinners that are open to the public. We purchased the Hickory Grove Park in 1942. The men spent countless hours manually clearing trees for the first soccer field. Over the years we have added a kitchen, bathrooms, covered dance floor and a gazebo for a band stand. We host four German Fests at the park annually, in addition to its regular use for soccer practice and games, and for a bow and crossbow league. Hickory Grove is also used for other club activities and is rented to other organizations as well.



The GACS, along with the Peoria Park District hosts the Peoria Oktoberfest at the Peoria Riverfront Park each year on the third weekend of September. Thousands of happy fest-goers enjoy our Peoria Gemütlichkeit with German bands, food, Bier and related activities. Each of our clubs also provide food or German articles for sale to our visitors.

We members of our German-American Central Society and its three proud clubs are honored by your visit to our web site, and sincerely hope you will enjoy some German culture on this site and at our many events.

Heil deutschem Wort und Sang! Paul Bishop, President, Harmonie-Concordia Singers