



Sister Cities of Jasper, Inc.

Jasper, Indiana · Pfaffenweiler, Baden-Württemberg

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Dr. Sabine Jordan's Research of Dubois County and Pfaffenweiler

This is a reproduction of the article, "*Humanist tells tales of Jasper's ancient sister city*"

The Herald, March 22, 1985, by staff writer Gabriella Jacobs

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She knows the *zeitgeist* of centuries, the facts and the feelings of people with a colorful, common heritage.

Dr. Sabine Jordan's research of both Dubois County, USA, and Pfaffenweiler, West Germany, has been helping citizens of both places better understand their backgrounds. It also has helped them become official sister cities.

Jasper's former humanist-in-residence, here for a brief visit, Thursday night spoke to a crowd of about 100 people – members of Jasper's DeutscherVerein, or German Club, and others curious about the place from which their ancestors came. She was welcomed with hugs and smiles, flowers and a specially made Black Forest cake.

Oozing with facts like a beer stein oozing with foam, this woman with a PhD in German literature from Columbia spoke in detail about the place where many Dubois County families originated.

Pfaffenweiler is about the size of present-day Ferdinand. It's near the city of Freiburg, "in the foot-hills of the Black Forest."

"It's off the beaten road. It's not along a highway that armies trampled along. It's protected by a hill and covered with vineyards....it's been there longer than documents attest to, about 1,268 years," she said.

Still standing there are buildings from the early 1500s. Actually, Pfaffenweiler shares its name with what used to be a separate, but nearby village called Ehrlingsweiler. "But the two are as one," says Dr. Jordan. People of both places shared a church and eventually, civic buildings.

The church is dedicated to the memory of St. Columba, an "obscure" martyr on whom evidence has been found outside Pfaffenweiler only in France and Spain.

Pfaffenweiler is in an area once part of the Roman Empire. When the Roman Empire began crumbling, it did so first at the edges. The Rhine valley was one of those edges. Christians were persecuted with regularity.

Dr. Jordan's voice becomes serious as she relates the story.

When Columba was 16, she was among some Christians brought before the emperor and ordered to renounce her faith.

Columba wouldn't, so she was put in an amphitheater with "a lusty man commissioned to rape her," and a she-bear.

The emperor's plan was foiled because the bear protected Columba as she tried to convert her assailant.

The emperor tried to kill Columba again, this time by fire. "But legend has it that the bear scared up a cloud from Africa so it rained and the fire went out."

Eventually Columba was decapitated for being Christian.

“They say that when her head fell, the heavens opened up and she immediately was taken into paradise.”

Why Columba is known only in Pfaffenweiler, France and Spain cannot be found in any documents Dr. Jordan has studied, although there’s been some indication she may have been revered in the Alsace region in the fourth and fifth centuries.

“So the foundation of the church in Pfaffenweiler is at least that old,” Dr. Jordan said.

Dr. Jordan thought that was the end of her knowledge about St. Columba, until she came here.

“I’ve learned from some of you here that Columba is a very old-fashioned name in Dubois County,” she said. Other than at the church in Pfaffenweiler, “it’s not been found anywhere else in the upper Rhine valley.”

At St. Columba’s Church in Pfaffenweiler there are also documents about the time in 1852 when the Jasper priest, Father Joseph Kundek, visited there. Fr. Kundek had gone to Germany, with the approval of his bishop, “on a European recruiting trip” for finding priests and nuns to come back here. In exchange, he gave the Germans news of how the emigrants who’d come to Jasper were surviving. Some of the Benedictines now at St. Meinrad arrived because of Fr. Kundek’s visit, according to Dr. Jordan.

Pfaffenweiler, for a time, also was part of Austria, of the House of Hapsburg. In 1738, though, it was turned over to Baden, Germany, because it was too far away from the rest of Austria to benefit the ruling family. The city now is part of the Freiburg district.

Dr. Jordan also related some information about the many emigrations from Germany to America and Africa in the 19th Century. People left Pfaffenweiler then for two main reasons: there was poverty because the grape harvests and winemaking businesses had been failing, and because the French wanted to employ “good German workers” in Algeria.

Many of the Pfaffenweiler people who went to America came to this area and prospered; many of those who went to Algeria died because of the climate and other conditions, or were denied return to Germany by the French.

Dr. Jordan also said:

*About half the population of Pfaffenweiler was wiped out by plague in the 14th Century.

*Many people who emigrated to Dubois County – like the Eckert and Gutgsell families – did so without permission from the German government. “Some left secretly and lost their property..they took with them only cash and ran away, leaving their houses behind. Selling their houses would have attracted too much attention and they may have gotten caught leaving without the proper papers. Later the state auctioned their houses.”

*Some documents about Pfaffenweiler that were stored in Freiburg were lost when that town was damaged by an air raid in 1944.

”The people of Haysville were right.” Turnip kraut originated in Bavaria, not Baden.

*When she visited Pfaffenweiler in 1983 and told some residents there about the Dubois County connection, “They were stunned. Their image of America is what they see on ‘Dallas’ and ‘Dynasty’ and from John Wayne movies and Hollywood,” she said. “They have a very distorted view of the U.S.” That will change after a delegation from Pfaffenweiler visit here in May.

*When Ruth Reichmann, the Indiana representative for Sister Cities International, told Pfaffenweiler Mayor Fritz Gutgsell about Jasper’s interest in a partnership, he told her, “Let’s do it.”