

A Home for the World

Eighty-five years ago, Harnack House opened its doors to academic guests from all over the world – a unique institution at the time. The Kaiser Wilhelm Society, the Max Planck Society's predecessor organization, thus played a pioneering role in international networking. The House reopened in fall 2014 as a conference venue for the Max Planck Society, following extensive renovation work.

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Although the wine cellar had not yet been completed, Harnack House was handed over for use in May 1929. Around 400 prominent guests from business and industry, science and politics filled the ceremonial hall of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society's (KWG) new clubhouse and guest accommodation. The paint on the walls barely had time to dry, as the building had only just been completed due to a long winter and dwindling funds.

Nevertheless, everybody who was anybody turned up. Industrial magnate Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach acted as host, Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann extended a warm welcome from the government of the German Reich, and US ambassador Jacob Schurman conveyed the best wishes of the diplomatic corps, whose members were well represented in the audience. Even after the VIPs had left and the doors had opened to normal guests, there was still a tremendous onslaught. By midday, the new venue on the Dahlem research campus was practically over-run. The kitchen had anticipated 60 hungry lunch guests from the surrounding laboratories; instead, three times that many turned up to fill their stomachs.

Harnack House filled many gaps in Berlin's science community of the 1920s and was unique in Germany. It immediately became a focal point for the employees of the Berlin-Dahlem research campus, which was built literally on a green field in 1911 and had neither shops nor cafés. It offered reasonably priced lunches every day, as well as sports activities, a tennis court, functional rooms, a library and a newspaper room with comfortable lounge chairs. Starting in 1938, there was also a swimming pool.

However, behind these practical amenities lay a vision of great political and social magnitude. In 1926, Adolf von Harnack, President of the KWG, proposed the construction of an international clubhouse and guest rooms. An expert committee would nominate suitable academic fellows as guests. The Dahlem-based research campus offered strong incentives, as its seven institutes conducted pioneer-

ing work in virus research, biochemistry, molecular biology and, starting in 1937, also in particle physics.

The idea wasn't just scientifically beneficial – it also received political backing, as German foreign policy under Gustav Stresemann had, since 1923, increasingly focused on peace and international understanding. Germany, having lost the war, had been excluded from the international community starting in 1918, and was struggling to reestablish its reputation. With Stresemann's help, Harnack persuaded the German parliament to support the building of the academic guesthouse. German industry, which had recently survived inflation, was also dependent on good foreign relations and had a vested interest in results from basic research. It thus made a generous contribution totaling 1.3 million Reichsmarks.

The driving force in the fundraising effort was Friedrich Glum. The young Secretary General of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society came up with the novel idea of dedicating rooms to individual major donors. The Vereinigte Stahlwerke, a leading player in the European coal and steel industry, financed the building of the lobby, which was called the Bismarck Hall at its request. IG Farben made a donation for the Duisberg Hall. Designed by Munich-based architect Carl Sattler, this room was modeled on a student pub where the institute assistants could enjoy jovial evenings.

Harnack House thus supported its founder's goal of making science a vital component of the state in several ways. Echoing his sentiments, the German and international press acclaimed the newly opened venue as a place where "international understanding could be applied in practice." Even in its first year of opening, the German Foreign Office liked the new building so much that it also accommo-



Intellectually stimulating dialogue: Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian Nobel Prize laureate in literature who corresponded with Albert Einstein, stayed at Harnack House on two occasions in 1930.

dated its diplomatic guests there. With Harnack House, the Kaiser Wilhelm Society had also created a new venue for its own communication. This was modeled on the numerous clubs found in Berlin at that time, where politicians, industrialists and business tycoons, as well as artists and journalists, fostered their network of contacts at official and informal events. Scientists also participated in this scene, but didn't have their own spot.

That changed with the construction of Harnack House. The face-to-face exchange was very much in keeping with the spirit of its founder, as Adolf von Harnack emphasized in his opening address, saying that he had "enjoyed the wonderful experience of establishing close relationships, not just with business and industry, but also with industrialists, not just with banks, but also with bankers, and not just with the trade unions, but also with workers (...)."

The venue's rapid success proved Harnack right. After just one year, Harnack House had recorded 200 overnight stays, including 98 foreign guests. There were actually only 13 rooms, including some family apartments, which had been personally suggested by Harnack, but these were increasingly frequently booked out. When a radio journalist reported on Harnack House in 1931, he mentioned a host of prominent figures who had

BERLINER TAGEBLATT from February 5, 1929



The Kaiser Wilhelm Society for the Advancement of Science is now building a guest accommodation and a lecture venue in Dahlem in the direct vicinity of its research institutes. 'Harnack House' (...) is intended to serve the international exchange of intellectual resources.«

stayed there. Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian Nobel Prize laureate in literature who corresponded with Albert Einstein, visited Harnack House twice in 1930, staying in the room adjacent to Heinrich Wölfflin, the art historian from Zurich. In his radio report, Berkeley professor Thomas Goodspeed lauded Harnack House as "unique as a home away from home."

By 1931, Harnack House had established its place in public life in Germany's capital city. The well-respected newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* came up with a new column providing readers with the latest details on the "guests at Harnack House." In 1930, these also included Munich-based chemist Hans Fischer, who received news of his Nobel Prize while at Harnack House. With his presentation in the lecture hall, Fischer joined the list of eminent speakers who informed experts and laypersons alike about the latest scientific developments. Topics included astrophysics and ornithology, biochemistry and heredity studies; art history, history and jurisprudence were also permanent fixtures in the lecture program.

Harnack House's guests included at least 35 current or future Nobel Prize laureates, among them many from the US. However, visitors also came from South America, China, Japan and even



Center of international understanding: Harnack House filled many gaps in the science community and was a unique venue in Germany.

Australia. The timetable of Hapag-Lloyd's Atlantic ships, which sailed weekly between Cuxhaven and New York, was close at hand in the reception office. The hotel-like routine also didn't change after the National Socialists came to power in 1933. Harnack House remained an international meeting place. It was, however, increasingly under the influence of Nazi foreign policy and race ideology; in the first year after Hitler seized power, the number of guests from the US had already fallen by half.

After the enactment of the Nazi law "to reestablish the civil service" in April 1933, the KWG dismissed most of its Jewish scientists or those of Jewish background at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes in Dahlem, leaving them to face an uncertain future. With them disappeared a significant share of the regular visitors. Only those who held a foreign passport, like Lise Meitner, were allowed to stay and were welcome at Harnack House. The KWG's official invitation policy at Harnack House nevertheless remained loyal to the regime. Secretary General Glum and later Ernst Telschow endeavored to establish good political contacts with the new leadership, and invited key figures of the Third Reich to the clubhouse.

Adolf Hitler visited Harnack House on two occasions, and Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler and Albert Speer were also guests. The public lecture series increasingly contained topics that appealed to the government, above all on race research and eugenics. The experts in these fields at the neighboring Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology conducted research into human heredity studies and eugenics, and trained doctors and lawyers at Harnack House.

Harnack House remained an academic clubhouse until 1945, and starting in 1943, accommodated the bombed-out staff of the KWG. After the war, the US army finally confiscated the intact building in July 1945, turned it into an officers' club and renovated it extensively. Situated close to the headquarters of the Berlin Brigade, which controlled the southwest of Berlin, Harnack House became a piece of America in Berlin and played a significant role in German-US relations until the fall of the Wall.

Harnack House's academic tradition was increasingly forgotten, while the events program was dominated by balls and parties after Eckart Muthesius converted the Helmholtz lecture hall into a dance bar in 1953. The Americans mounted a memorial plaque on its door paying tribute to Adolf von Harnack for fostering German-American friendship. After the withdrawal of the Allies, the building was turned over to the Max Planck Society in 1996, which today uses it as a conference venue.