

Duane Thompson brought a 1938 film back to its place of origin

Old document from Colorado is again back in Stendal

Stendal is privileged to have a visit this week and is enriched with a valuable historical treasure. Duane Thompson and Patricia Mee from Colorado in the USA brought a film to the city about the 600th year celebration in the year 1938 of the Winckelmann High School. In the year 1945, Duane's father had taken the film of Stendal to America.

By Reinhard Opitz

Stendal. After many years it finally became clear: Stendal is a city, and the Gymnasium (in American linguistic usage a sports arena) is in Germany a school. Finally Duane Thompson had a reference point to actively research. On the Internet he looked for "Stendal" and found images of the city. On the web site of the Circle of Friends of the Winckelmann High School he was almost overwhelmed, when he saw the neo-Gothic Brick gables of the Winckelmann School at the monastic churchyard. These were pictures, which he had seen before his eyes since his childhood.

Duane Thompson and Patricia Mee would fulfill a dream this week. They packed their suit-cases at their Colorado home, where they live in the City of Centennial south of Denver and, on the invitation of the Winckelman School Circle of Friends, traveled to Stendal. Yesterday they presented a restored copy and a DVD of the film which Duane Thompson senior in 1945 had brought from Germany, to Deputy Mayor Axel Kleefeldt in the city hall.

"How the film came into the hands of my father, is not known to us", said Duane junior in Stendal yesterday. Since he died in 1971, the circumstances can no longer be clarified. This much is known: As a medic, 28 year old Duane sen. landed in 1944 with the U.S. Army in Normandy and was in Stendal from 12 to 15 April 1945.

"The film was a part of our childhood", remembered Duane of the early years. "we regarded it as a kind toy and very entertaining." Fascinated, he and his brother Joe watched the parade with its medieval costumes, foreign uniforms with horses and swastika flags and, in the background, magnificent old houses such as they had not ever seen. Only decades later did it become more clear to the Thompson's about the historical value of the photographs, and that it concerned the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the Winckelmann High School on 29 October 1938.

Enquiries about the background of the film would concern him for months. "The more I learned about Stendal, the more I became enthused about the city", he confesses. When contact was made with the Circle of Friends, specifically with Hans Basner who maintains the Website, and the city Stendal, it was certain for Duane Thompson: The historical film must be returned to its place of origin. He had it restored at a special laboratory and burned copies on DVD.

In the meantime he put the original on deposit with the federal film archives in Berlin. Since yesterday a copy of the film, including a DVD, is in the possession the City of Stendal. Managing director Andreas Bredow, of the city's open channel television station, announced yesterday that the valuable, seven minute and 45 second film will be included in its project "My Stendal" which will document the city from the 30's up to the end of war.

The couple from Colorado was very impressed by the beautiful old city of Stendal. They also reported this overwhelming impression to Winckelmann pupil Kevin Cebulsky which, on the day before, had led the guests with an experienced and competent tour of the city. Today, on the day exactly 67 years after the procession was captured on the film, the two Americans are going on an Altmark tour of the parade route and to see other things including Tangermünde and Jerichow.

Picture caption:

Duane Thompson (right) presents Deputy Mayor Axel Kleefeldt the film. Sitting on the right is Patricia Mee. Photo: Reinhard Opitz