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The fountain was paid for in Goldmarks and has generated oft-repeated tales, or rumours of a more provocative sort. Like the sparkling jets it spouts — it's mythological pair of Tritons, the son of Poseidon, it's Mediterranean Nereid nymphs, it's mermaids and Hippocampus sea horses — the true story of the fountain is hard to grasp.

One story bandied about is that the fountain was deconstructed

during the Nazi era because its benefactress, Marianne Pauline (nee Theriot) Mende, was the widow of a Jewish merchant, Ferdinand Wilhelm Mende (who died in 1857). But most official sources say the fountain was dismantled only twice: to make way for the new Gewandhaus in 1970-82 and for the construction of underground parking beneath Augustusplatz in 1996-98.

A more scurrilous story, however, took hold from the pen of the globetrotting author and "raging reporter," Egon Erwin

Kisch, who died shortly after World War II. Kisch speculated that the widow Mende had a guilty conscience about how she'd earned her money, namely, as the madam of a bordello. Few lend credence to this story today, but back then it made for "hot copy".

And although Frau Mende willed the city of Leipzig 150,000 Goldmarks upon her death in 1881 for the construction of the fountain, it's costs had risen to nearly 190,000 Goldmarks on completion in 1886. Hence, the city made up the difference with the legacy of businessman-banker Franz Domi-

nic Grassi, a contemporary of her husband. Thus, the tale nicely completes the circle of an era when Leipzig was a trade city of immense riches and generosity.

These days, it is generally accepted that Marianne Mende was a woman of wealth and refinement, who wished to bestow beauty upon the city she loved. Her fluid, bountiful bouquet to the public is still a marvel to behold. Stand there in the mist of its spray and be reminded of bygone days of opulence—and romance.

Barbara Hobbie

WÄCHTERHÄUSER - GOOD AS GOLD

You have probably seen the yellow banners with the word Wächterhaus draped down the facades of some of Leipzig's grand old dames. Perhaps you've wondered what this is about?

The Wächterhäuser (House Guardian) scheme was formed in 2004 to preserve and rehabilitate some of the, around 2,000 historic buildings, particularly in Leipzig's east and west, whose existence is otherwise threatened.

In November last year the Leipzig Haushalten Association won a heritage building (Denkmal) gold medal award for its Wächterhäuser scheme. The initiative breathes new life into Leipzig's otherwise empty, listed heritage buildings by putting them to practical and creative uses. Individuals or organisations who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford to pay market rents, occupy the properties and become guardians of the houses

in lieu of rent. In doing so they protect and maintain these jewels of the late 19th century, whose looks may have faded, but whose good bones still prevail. The Haushalten Association makes this win-win situation possible through agreements with the owners of the buildings.

Doreen Lasche of the Haushalten Association enlightens us further ...

In November 2008 the Haushalten Association won a Denkmal Gold Medal. What does that mean for the Association? The Denkmal Gold Medal was awarded by a jury of the European Trade Fair for Conservation, Restoration and Old Building Renovation in November 2008. We were surprised to receive the honour and to be awarded one of the 10 medals. It really benefited press releases afterwards.

Have you achieved everything now? Is there still room for

improvement? We are right now developing new concepts in ways to preserve buildings under heritage protection. In addition to the expansion of concepts, we need to organise the workload professionally among the eight association members and the two employees of Haushalten.

How does 2009 look for the Wächterhäuser scheme? Right now we are planning to open more guardian houses in Leipzig. A new concept of house preservation will be established in spring for one of the houses.

How big is your business at the moment? How many staff, buildings and house occupants? A year ago we moved into 39 Lützner Straße to establish an "education and competence center of house preservation". It is supported by the City of Leipzig and the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs.

We have eight association members, including two employees at the office, two employees for securing work at the houses and two volunteers. There are 12 Wächterhäuser in Leipzig at the moment, with approximately 200 users.

How can one become a guardian (house occupant)? What are the selection criteria? To become a guardian, one has to sign onto our list of interested people via email. As soon as there is a new house available everyone on that list is informed about appointments to visit the premises. We don't have a waiting list in the classical sense, because the floors of any newly available house are allocated according to the best concept given for using the premises. The

association values feasibility, social or cultural commitment and also the fit with other house users' concepts.

What do the current guardians do? They work in various ways: culturally, socially or they dedicate their time to start-up businesses. The guardians' occupations are diverse — from table tennis with culture, to theatre, art and catering. Creative ideas are to the fore. You can visit the following website for more details: <http://www.haushalten.org/de/waechterportraits.asp>

How is the project financed? All house guardians become paying members of HausHalten e.V. for the duration of their occupancy. The membership fee proceeds are used to finance the Association's organisational structure and support re-utilisation by contributing to building expenses.

What is currently the greatest challenge for the organisation? There is the challenge of successfully establishing a new model of house preservation by this spring!

Are there other similar projects elsewhere? Do you want to extend your scheme to other cities? Halle/Saale and Chemnitz do have the "Wächterhaus" concept in their own associations. We are hand-tight now, and are having intensive conversations with Erfurt, Görlitz and Dresden, as well as with other German cities.

What has been a personal highlight for you? The opening of the Wächterhaus at 109 Eisenbahnstrasse was very spectacular in the summer of 2008.

Kim Rupp-Gregory



This Wächterhaus by night shows off its prime location at 109 Eisenbahnstrasse. Photo Credit: Christiane Eisler.