



SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS

S.A. TRICENTENNIAL  
1718-2018



TRICENTENNIAL CALENDAR

WEDNESDAY

**World Heritage Festival:** Multiple locations, worldheritagefestival.org. Five-day celebration spread across the five San Antonio Missions and surrounding areas. Visit the festival's official website for a complete schedule of events. Wednesday-Sept. 9.

UPCOMING

**Of Clay and Metal:** Mexican Cultural Institute, 600 HemisFair Plaza Way, sanantonio300.org. Exhibit contrasts work of Mexican masters of pottery with art by Isaac Maxwell. 6-8 p.m. Sept. 13.

**Noche de Recuerdos Poetry & Visual Art Showcase:** The Movement Gallery, 416 E. Commerce St., aitscm.org. Visual artists, spoken word poets and performers honor Native American culture. Free. 6-10 p.m. Sept. 13.

**Una Noche Mexicana:** La Trinidad United Methodist Church, 300 San Fernando St., latrinidadchurch.com. Family-friendly traditional celebration of Mexican Independence with food, music and a celebration of culture. 5 p.m. Sept. 15.

**La Danza de las Aguilas:** Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, 1300 Guadalupe St., sanantonio300.org. Dance drama based on the Mexican tradition with focus on masks, costumes and movement. 6 p.m. Sept. 16.

CULTURE

# LIEDERKRANZ KEEPS THE MUSIC ALIVE

Singing group that dates to the 1890s still performing

FROM EXPRESS-NEWS ARCHIVES

San Antonio Liederkranz comes from an old German tradition — the name means “wreath of songs” in German — and it dates back to a time when German-Americans were a major ethnic group in San Antonio and Texas.

In 1892, Father Henry Pefferkorn — pastor of St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, where the homilies were preached in German — organized the parish’s first men’s choir “to beautify the services,” according to a history on the Liederkranz website, [www.saliederkranz.org](http://www.saliederkranz.org).

Although the local Liederkranz started as a service choir for St. Joseph’s, it soon reached out to the wider community, becoming a fixture not only in church but in the German singing-society world and in local popular entertainment. As a full ensemble, an octet or soloists, members sang at beer gardens, park festivals, Protestant churches, club meetings, weddings and funerals. They were on the bill with visiting opera singers and symphony orchestras, performed as a combined chorus with the Beethoven Maennerchor and the Hermann Sons mixed chorus, and sang on local radio. They attended a



Staff file photo

The San Antonio Liederkranz practices at the St. Joseph’s Society Hall in 2004. The group started as a service choir for St. Joseph’s Catholic Church.

hosted state and Hill Country Saengerfest (“singing festival”) days and often took first prize.

Liederkranz performs a capella or more frequently with piano or organ accompaniment. The harmony is a four-part blend; in the German tradition, said Tom Ewing, director since 2000. “The melody is usually in the top voices, unlike barbershop and (other) American arrangements, giving pieces a distinctive tenor ‘shimmer.’”

When Liederkranz celebrated its 25th anniversary, it was 1917, the year the U.S. entered World War I. German street names were anglicized, sauerkraut was renamed “Liberty cabbage” and in some places German-Americans were accused of spying. “After a great deal of discussion,



UTSA Special Collections

Liederkranz members are shown in 1916. Around this time, the San Antonio Light reported that “the society ... underwent a most encouraging era.”

they decided to celebrate the anniversary with a banquet,” said Tom Jaeckle, who helped write the group history in its 1992 centennial program. It was followed by a brief concert, in which members demonstrated their loyalty by

singing every song in English.

Liederkranz also would weather World War II — pitching in with patriotic songs at rallies — as well the slow disintegration of singing-society culture. Clubs closed in the Hill

Country, and even San Antonio Liederkranz was down to 16 active members in the early 1980s.

But during the 1983 Oktoberfest in Munich, Jaeckle met an English-speaking German who was helping to plan the 1,200th anniversary celebration of Sulz am Neckar. Jaeckle left with an invitation to perform the next year.

In 1986, members of the Sulz Liederkranz visited San Antonio during the Texas Sesquicentennial. At the invitation of German President Richard von Weizsaecker, the San Antonio group performed twice more at events in Germany. The group invited him to attend their 1992 centennial banquet, which he did.

“He got off Luftwaffe One, with a big Iron Cross on the side, with an entourage of 40,” Jaeckle remembered. When Liederkranz sang the Pilgrim’s Chorus from Wagner’s Tannhäuser, Weizsaecker sang a long. “He told us that was his favorite piece of music,” Jaeckle said.

Membership increased after the German exchange visits, now holding steady at about 50 active singers.

Nowadays, the Liederkranz sings the ordinary of the Mass in Latin — the “Agnus Dei,” “Gloria,” “Kyrie” and “Sanctus Benedictus” — and leads congregational hymns. It also plays San Antonio archdiocesan events when asked.

A longer version of this report by Paula Allen ran June 15, 2015. Read it at [ExpressNews.com](http://ExpressNews.com).