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The Home of Rudolf Steiner: Haus Hansi

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'Haus Hansi' was home to Dr Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) in the incredibly productive final decade of his life. He lived in this quaint and comfortable house, known as 'Haus Hansi', from 1914 to 1924. The house is set high with good 'street appeal' (Image 1). It exudes the graciousness of a bygone era (Image 2).



Image 1: Haus Hansi, street view (photo: J Paull).

Steiner's decade of residence at Haus Hansi witnessed the transformation of the mostly bare hill overlooking Dornach into Anthroposophy headquarters. The Goetheanum, the Glass House (Glashaus), the Furnace (Heizhaus), the Electrical Transformer (Transformatorienhaus) and numerous other of Steiner's innovative and distinctive organic architectural creations were built in this decade. It was also the decade in which Steiner founded Waldorf education (Paull, 2011b) and laid the foundations for biodynamic agriculture (Paull, 2011a).

In February 1913, the city of Munich refused building permission for what would become the first Goetheanum. Rudolf Steiner declared that "We have no time to waste" (Barnes, 1997, p.116) and promptly took up the offer of land overlooking the small Swiss village of Dornach,

just a short tram ride from Basel. Steiner moved from an apartment in Berlin to build Anthroposophy headquarters on the hill overlooking Dornach.



Image 2: Haus Hansi, living room (photo: J Paull).

The move to Dornach was propitious. Switzerland would remain neutral throughout the two catastrophic world wars that followed. Neutrality meant that the buildings, the documents, and the fabric of Anthroposophy, remained insulated from the maelstrom of destruction which, twice over, engulfed the neighbouring countries.

The house that Rudolf Steiner occupied in Dornach (at Unterer Zielweg 36) is little changed from the time of his residence there - other than the decor. The plaque over the entrance states his time of residence there as 1914 to 1925 (Image 3).

According to the Russian artist, Assya Turgeniev, who engraved the coloured glass windows of the Goetheanum: "this house was called 'Haus Hansi' by Dr Steiner - with permission from the little Hansi Grossheintz" (Turgeniev, 2003, p.62). ('Hansi' being a diminutive of 'Hans', a son of Dr Grossheintz).

The land of the Goetheanum had been donated by dentist Dr Emil Grossheintz (together with Dr Emil Grosheintz, Frau Marie Schief and Frau Marie Hirter-Weber) (Stewart, 2008). Steiner designed Haus Duldeck, the fanciful Anthropop-style house in front of the Goetheanum, as a residence for the Grossheintz family. It now houses the Rudolf Steiner Archive (Rudolf Steiner Archiv).

Haus Hansi predates Steiner's time in Dornach. The house was occupied by architects for the Goetheanum buildings before it was renovated as a residence for Rudolf Steiner and his then new wife Marie von Sivers (Turgeniev, 2003). Haus Hansi occupies a convenient location half way up the hill from the town centre of Dornach and from the tram and train stations of Dornach, and it is a few minutes stroll down the hill from the Goetheanum.

The Russian writer Andrei Belyi recalled: “he had a very light gait. If you saw him climbing the Dornach hill in the morning, you could believe that a slender youngster was approaching. Odd that this young fellow was wearing morning-coat and flapping tails! Only then you noticed that it was the Doctor. Lightly and with agility he ventured up the hill ... when he returned alone he hastened with light short steps down the hill; he seemed to be flying, overtook the slowly walking workers, turned the corner in a flash, and hurried with flying coattails through the front garden of the Viilla Hansi. This is a sight that I have seen countless times” (Belyi in Almon, 2005, p.40).



Image 3: Haus Hansi: plaque over the entrance (photo: J Paull).

Haus Hansi was Steiner’s home for a decade, shared with Marie Steiner and Mieta Waller, a major benefactor of the Goetheanum (Bessau, 2003).

Anna Turgeniev fondly recalled an occasion of Steiner’s hospitality, with his cryptic crinkle, at Haus Hansi: “A Russian samovar [tea urn], which was in Mieta Waller’s charge, dispersed a cosy atmosphere about the room. A plate of strawberries was brought in. ‘I cannot understand Dr Steiner’ said [Marie Steiner], ‘we never have strawberries - he never wanted them - and today as we were going about in Arlesheim he rushes into a shop and buys the prohibited fruit’. Dr Steiner smiled without saying anything and I stifled my laughter, because Bugayev [aka Belyi] had asked for strawberries in the village on numerous occasions and not managed to get hold of any. He was particularly fond of them. Dr Steiner served me with almond milk and rolled a paper serviette into a little stick. ‘If you carry on doing and eating so little you will soon look like that,’ he told me. I took no heed of his warning” (2003, p.80) (Image 4).

Steiner was a voracious reader. Over a lifetime, he collected a library of over nine thousand volumes. His library was mostly in German, over ninety per cent, but included a smattering of books in other languages including English, Dutch and Italian (Image 5).

Steiner designed numerous residences for the Goetheanum precinct. These houses included homes for the medical doctor Ita Wegman, the mathematician Elizabeth Vreede, and the dentist Emil Grossheintz. Steiner's own house, however, was an established house and it predates these and other Anthropop houses that populate the Dornach hill.



Image 4: Haus Hansi, dining room (photo: J Paull).

Although the plaque over the portal of Haus Hansi states that Steiner lived here from 1914 to 1925, that overstates his residence by a year. It remained his home until physically he could go on no longer, at which time he retreated to his workshop studio, which was adjacent to the carpentry workshop (the Schreinerei) and directly across from the site of the Goetheanum.

Steiner withdrew from public life on 28 September 1924, never to return. He took to his sickbed, in the insalubrious, spartan and rustic circumstances of his studio, rather than the comfort of Haus Hansi. To those expecting lectures, he wrote that "the condition of my physical body renders any travel impossible - for a somewhat long period" (quoted in Wachsmuth, 1989, p.578). Steiner remained bed-bound in his studio for the final six months of his mortal life and he passed away on 30 March 1925 (Collison, 1925). As a minister of the Christian Community, Friedrich Rittelmeyer, reflected: "Six months later I was standing beside his coffin. None of us had expected that Rudolf Steiner would succumb to the illness" (1929, p.149).

Marie Steiner von Sivers (1867-1948) stayed on in this house for another decade after Steiner's death. Albert Steffen (1884-1963), president of the Anthroposophy Society after Steiner died, lived in the house from 1936 until his death. The current decor and furnishings owe much to Steffen's taste.

Haus Hansi now is home to the Albert Steffen Foundation (Albert Steffen Stiftung) and it publishes works by Steffen which might not otherwise find a publisher.



Image 5: Haus Hansi, library (photo: J Paull).

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