

# Astor Was One of World's First 'Global Players,' German Filmmaker Says

**Astor:** From page 1

mentary about him. "In his hometown in Waldorf, they know a little bit about him, in the village he is known, but Astor himself? Nobody knows about him. For Germans, these are hidden stories. We just bring them out."

The crew talked with Phil Porter, director of Mackinac State Historic Parks, about the fur trade and then toured both the city's Stuart House Museum and Community Hall. The Community Hall, which now houses city administrative offices, was built to warehouse the tons of furs brought by trappers to Mackinac Island. A large, wood wheel remains on the top floor and was used to hoist the fur bales up for storage.

Mr. Hammermeister set up his camera near the wheel and Armand Horn, who serves on the city's Stuart House Committee, was filmed turning the wheel. The crew also filmed the exterior of the Stuart House, built as a home for Mr. Astor's resident agent, Robert Stuart, and went out on a boat to film some shoreline without any people.

Mr. Christiansen said he likes seeing the nature around the areas where these famous men lived.

"The nature doesn't change," he said, "so to get into the feeling about Astor and his ways, to see the nature of all the places is the more concrete and authentic tone of his time. This gets, for me, a near feeling about his life and his behavior."

"In his hometown in Waldorf, they know a little bit about him, in the village he is known, but Astor himself? Nobody knows about him. For Germans, these are hidden stories. We just bring them out."

*Kai Christiansen, film crew*

Mr. Horn said Mackinac Island has been filmed many times for documentaries.

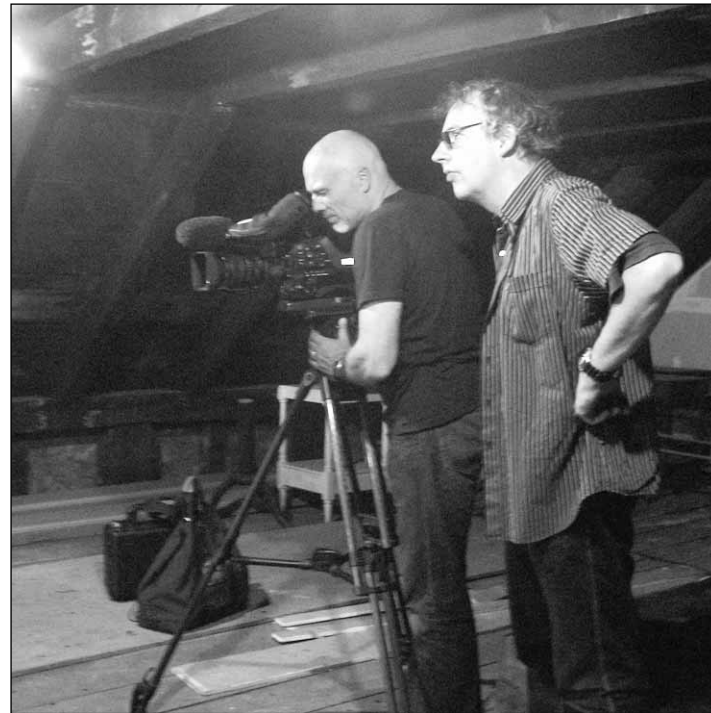
"Something like this for tourism," Mr. Horn said, "you don't see any [results] for about three years. They'll show it in Germany and maybe in three years people will come. That's why we like to do this."

The filming for Mr. Astor's episode in the series was really a journey through America, Mr. Christiansen said, although it did start in Germany. The crew started in Waldorf, which was extremely poor while Mr. Astor was growing up. He left home and traveled up the Rhein River on his way to London, so the crew took a boat trip and filmed part of the way. In London, he learned to make musical instruments and the crew was able to film the instruments he created and a piano made by his brother.

Filming in North America began in Vancouver, Canada, where Mr. Astor's fur trading ship, *Tonquin*, was sunk, then to Astoria, Oregon, which was founded similarly to the fur station on Mackinac Island, and on to Wyoming to film a spot where Robert Stuart stopped while walking across the continent along Indian trails.

Mr. Christiansen said the next and final stop will be New York, where Mr. Astor built what he envisioned as the best hotel in America. The spot is now the site of the Empire State Building. They will also film in Switzerland, where Mr. Astor lived for three years late in his life.

Mr. Astor emigrated to the



**Joerg Hammermeister (left) focuses his camera as Armand "Smi" Horn (not pictured) turns the wheel used in John Jacob Astor's fur trading in the early 1800s. Mr. Hammermeister is filming for a documentary entitled "Pioneers Turned Millionaires: European Entrepreneurs in the Promised Land." One episode of the documentary focuses on John Jacob Astor, and the crew came to Mackinac Island July 10 to film the remnants of his fur trading business. The wheel Mr. Hammermeister filmed is in the back of the Community Hall. Director Kai Christiansen (right) and Suzanne Heinz (not pictured) were also members of the crew.**

United States in 1784 and died at the age of 84 in 1848.

Actors will portray Mr. Astor and others in some episodes in Mr. Astor's life. The best scene to be re-enacted, Mr. Christiansen said, took place on Mr. Astor's journey to the states from London. The ship had hit some bad weather and everyone on the boat was holding on for dear life, he said, but Mr. Astor simply changed into his best clothes. When his actions were questioned by a friend, Mr. Astor said that if the boat sank

and he were to survive, then he would want to save his best clothes.

A great-grandson would later die aboard the *Titanic* in 1912.

"Of course, I think, Astor is one of the first global players in the world," he said. "We would like to show all his reaching or turning points of his career. It is hard to find a man from the 18th century and to describe him because all his life is totally different, even his behavior is totally different."

Mr. Christiansen was inspired to explain Mr. Astor's life through film because of the many different facets of his personality. Mr. Astor wanted to be American, not German, and not British as he learned to be in London, but part of the highest society in America. That was his aim, Mr. Christiansen said.

"On the one hand, he is a luxury man and rich man, and on the other hand he is emotionally cold," he said. "It is a very interesting thing. It's not true that he was not able to give, that's not true, he was able to give to other people. He lived a luxury life; he was the owner of his own theater in New York. It was a luxury life, but he was an extremely mathematical man, so his highest value was the mathematical ranking of his belongings."

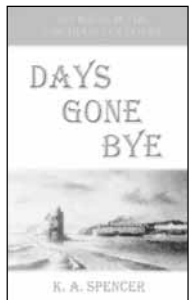
Mr. Christiansen suggested the tightfisted character Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" may have been based on Mr. Astor. The author once met Mr. Astor, he said.

An example of his calculating mind is his business in the fur trade. As soon as the fur trade stopped growing, Mr. Christiansen said, Mr. Astor shut down his business without letting sentiment interfere. Mr. Astor actually shut down his fur business 30 years before fur

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