

EXCHANGE STUDENTS

Two high school exchange students, an Australian and a German, discuss the things that surprised them in each other's country.

By JULIE KUSKO

POSSIBLY, many Australians think of themselves as extremely sophisticated citizens in a land of bustling skyscraper cities.

But to other countries Australia is still back in the days of being a British colony, a deserted outpost with a few shanty towns.

That's the impression 17-year-old Sydney girl, Jane Sydenham, came home with after two-and-a-half months in Europe.

Jane spent most of the time with a German family in Oberursel, near Frankfurt.

She was one of 20 students from New South Wales and Victoria who, last year, were given travelling scholarships.

The scholarships, awarded through the Society for Australian-German Student Exchange, give high school students a chance to study and live in another life-style.

"The German people I came into contact with," said Jane, "both in the town and at school knew very little about Australia.

"Every time you said you were from Australia, they said, 'Oh, yes, the country of sheep. What is it like to live on a farm?'"

"They were stunned when I told them I had never seen a sheep, let alone lived on a farm.

"At school, one boy had films on Australia," said Jane. "But they were all about the outback, not a sign of a city. Everyone was amazed when I said I live in a city of nearly three million people, more than twice as big as Munich, and showed them pictures of Sydney, with the skyscrapers, the Opera House, the Bridge.

"They were curious about us and wanted to learn everything they could.

"They associate Australia with England. They hear about it when they study English history, but always think of us as a colony.

"When the subject of World War II came up among the family I was staying with, they were astounded when I told them how many thousands of men we had lost. They didn't know we'd taken part."

Back in Australia, Jane had Friedelotte Bredt, of Solingen, Germany, staying with her and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. G. H. Sydenham, at their Bellevue Hill home for two months.

Seventeen-year-old Friedelotte was one of the first two German students to come to New South Wales on a similar scholarship.

She was not ignorant about her host country.

"Two years ago," she said — her voice with hardly any accent, "we had an exchange



Jane Sydenham, left, and German exchange student Friedelotte Bredt, at Jane's home in Bellevue Hill, Sydney.

and have most of the afternoon free. And here the school has more discipline."

Jane found the situation reversed when she went to school in Germany.

"I was immediately aware of the comparative lack of discipline," she said. "Very long hair was common among the boys, and boys and girls smoked in the

While Friedelotte revelled in the sport-orientated, and outdoor activities of Australia, Jane loved the cosy German indoor life with music.

"The German people," said Jane, "are very proud of their country and its culture. Maybe because I was living with a musical family, it seemed to me they love cultural activities. They go to plays, concerts, operas, far more than we do."

Jane was also impressed by the unfussy hospitality.

"There's no waiting on you or fussing," she said. "I immediately became one of the family. You help yourself. Anything that belongs to the family belongs to you. That goes for friends, too. They accept you as one of them, rather than as a guest."

Would the girls visit each other's country again?

"Yes, of course, we'd love

corridors. In class they'd talk, eat, and play card games.

"When I told that to some German people living in Australia, who had been educated in Germany, they were horrified," she said. "Apparently the system has done a complete about-turn.

"In Germany school began at eight each morning, so we travelled in darkness. Monday to Saturday we had six periods a day, each 40 minutes long.

"The short time we were in school restricted deep and lasting friendships with fellow students, and limited extra activities such as sport, choir, and debating.

"But the free afternoons did allow time for hobbies or musical activities.

"The German education is broader, fuller, a large number of subjects are compulsory — and students are more advanced in their study of languages.

"Each pupil sits for about nine tests a year in each subject. They can take part in deciding their marks for their reports — their opinions are sought and respected."

AUSTRALIA — a few shanty towns

student from Australia at our home near Dusseldorf. Since then, I have been very eager to come here.

"Before, I knew only that it was a huge country, and we had heard of it in school through geography and biology classes, learning about the plants and animals, but not about people.

"The weather is beautiful. The winter is so hot. I have been to many European cities and spent a little time in London, but Sydney is the best town I have seen."

Friedelotte has discovered that she is related to a famous Australian — Henry Lawson.

The Bredt family is related to Bertha Marie Louise Bredt who married Lawson in 1896.

As well as doing the usual touristy things like visiting the Barrier Reef, which she thought "wonderful," Friedelotte also went to school.

It took a little getting used to.

"In Germany we start very early in the morning

"Australian students become insulated. They have little chance of visiting, living, or studying in other countries. And German students, although a lot travel around Europe during holidays, don't go anywhere else."

Since the society was formed, in 1967, by the current federal president, Mr. Fritz von Einem-Joesten, businessman in Victoria, about 100 Australian students have been awarded travelling scholarships.

"They are selected from high schools and colleges, country as well as city areas, in N.S.W., Victoria, and the A.C.T.," said Tony.

"Generally, those selected are not the leaders of the school in sport, or intellectually. Usually they are opinion leaders, perhaps a member of a debating or music club.

"The Australian students

money, almost up to the closing of the plane's doors.

"Many companies have donated money. If they give \$1000, we name a scholarship after the company or an individual. Unfortunately, not too many Australian companies have come forward — mostly they are companies with German connections.

"Private individuals have donated scholarships, too. Dame Zara Bate donated one in 1968 in memory of her late husband Harold Holt.

"The students are always in their second to final year at high school. They leave in mid-December and come back mid-March. We worked out this was best with the Education Department. This way they don't miss much of the vital final school year.

"The Education Department supports the scheme, sending out application forms for the scholarships, giving us premises to interview applicants.

"Qantas and Lufthansa, the German airline, who fly the students, have been a great help, too, organising group charter travel and guided tours in stopover cities.

"When students return home, they are full of enthusiasm. They talk to their school friends, their families, and give some public talks. Not only does it encourage more people to travel, it encourages more students to apply for the scholarships.

"This year in N.S.W. nearly 600 applied."

GERMANY — education is broader

to," was their joint verdict. Until they do they'll keep writing to their honorary families, and the friends they made during their stay.

And the vice-president of the N.S.W. branch of the Society for Australian-German Student Exchange, Tony York, said: "That is exactly what we encourage and hope for.

"We aim to develop goodwill between the two countries. To do this, we must get at the grass roots of the two communities, the young.

speak German — and reasonably well.

"Children of German parents in Australia are ineligible.

"They can be from wealthy families, or those not so well off. It doesn't cost the family anything except the child's clothing, presents for the host family, and some pocket-money for souvenirs.

"It costs the host family nothing either, except the daily food.

"We work on \$1000 for each student. This is why we are continually raising