

Chronicle Unserer Leute

Oregon Chapter of the American Historical
Society of Germans from Russia



Volume 43, Issue 2
April-June 2019



Catherine II, the Great

Empress of Russia

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From the Editor

Welcome to this edition of *Chronicle Unserer Leute*.

Our newsletter continues this year without a permanent editor. If you'd like to help the Oregon Chapter AHSGR resume providing a more thorough and expansive newsletter as we have in the past, we'd love to bring you on board. Just send us an email at oregonahsgr@gmail.com.

If you'd like to just contribute an article or story for a future newsletter, you can also send that along to the same address.



Looking For Volunteers

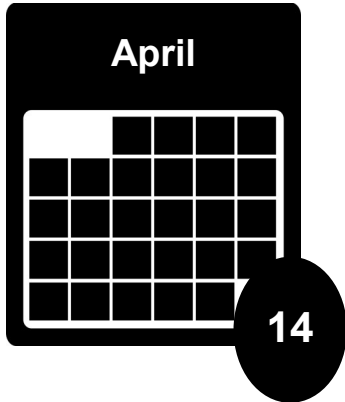
Take a quick peek at the back page of this newsletter. You see all the “Vacant” positions on the board? There's plenty of room for you to join in on the nuts and bolts of keeping the chapter together. The chapter board mainly plans and organizes our programs. We need more people on the board providing their ideas and energy to keep us going.

We've even made it easier by moving board meetings (starting in April) to occur immediately following the monthly programs—so there's only one day a month of commitment.

If you are interested in joining us, please let any of us on the board know, or send us an email at oregonahsgr@gmail.com. We'd love to see new faces—especially yours!



Upcoming Events

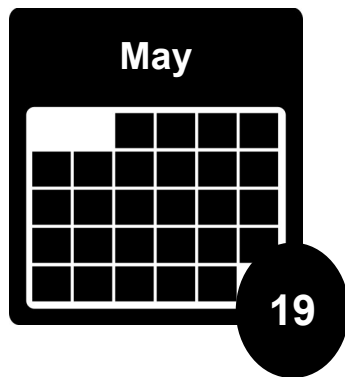


Online Video Resources about Germans from Russia

Sunday, April 14th, 2019, 2 pm to 4 pm

Concordia University Library, Room 301 — 2800 NE Liberty St, Portland

We will show you how to access a large collection of short videos online. These are perfect for sharing at home with our families. We'll also have a special showing of a 25-minute video from Germany related to the Denmark settlers. It has narration (in German) about the settlers' journey from Germany to Denmark and on to the Volga interspersed with folk music performances.

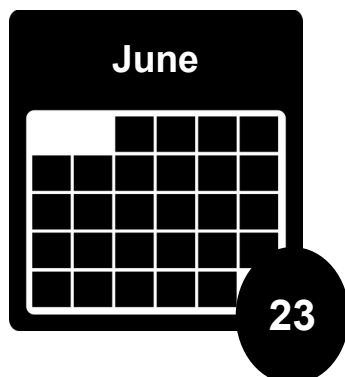


Exploring the Oral History of Germans from Russia

Sunday, May 19th, 2019, 2 pm to 4 pm

Concordia University Library, Room 301 — 2800 NE Liberty St, Portland

For our May program, we are planning on exploring some of the oral history recordings that have been made and archived in the Center for Volga German Studies. Come listen to stories told by those no longer with us and get some inspiration to record your own (or your loved ones).



C. Bauer Family Genealogy and History (Sponsored by GROW)

Sunday, June 23rd, 2019, 2 pm to 4 pm

German American Society

5626 NE Alameda Street (NE Sandy Blvd & NE 57th Ave), Portland

GROW (Germans from Russia of Oregon and Washington) is hosting a program on this Bauer family history. Keep an eye on their website (grow-chapter.webs.com) for more information.

Ruth Morasch Williams

July 27, 1926 — March 19, 2019

We recently lost one of the pillars of the Oregon Chapter of AHSGR. Ruth Morasch Williams passed away on March 19, 2019. Ruth was a long-time member of the Oregon Chapter and few have contributed more. Along with her husband Chuck, Ruth devoted a great deal of time to support the chapter. Ruth served for many years on the board of directors. Our chapter library was named after Ruth and Marie Trupp Krieger, two pioneering women who began gathering information about the German-Russians decades ago. The chapter library served as the cornerstone for the Center for Volga German Studies special collection which is housed at Concordia University. Ruth was a dedicated researcher and helped translate the Portland Volga German church records from German to English. Ruth and Chuck interviewed many of our older members and made video recordings of our chapter meetings. In 2016, Ruth was presented with the Oregon Chapters Lifetime Achievement Award. We are grateful for all Ruth has done for us and we will dearly miss her smile and warmth. *Ruhe in Frieden* (Rest in peace).



Memorial service will be held Saturday, April 13, at 2 pm, at Gateway Church, 13300 NE San Rafael St., Portland, Oregon. Live-streaming will be available at the time of the service via a link from <https://www.gatewaychurchpdx.com/>

In lieu of flowers, expressions of sympathy may be made in Ruth's memory to The Arc Oregon or a charity of your choice.

Rip Van Deutsche

by Michael Amen

In a previous newsletter, I referenced the Volga German's unique speech and behavior and the mystery of the unknown Volga German story; why was there no chest pounding or basic historical acknowledgement that accompanies the ethnic pride we associate with other cultures? My grandfather's hand-written account provided some clues about their treatment in Nebraska, but it was his comment about their speaking a 'different German at home' that caught my interest.

I relayed some of these questions to my son, Adrian, attending German speech classes in preparation for a State Department assignment to Berlin. He asked the staff German historian and received what I refer to as a Rip Van Winkle story of the Volga German's antiquated speech and behavior patterns. A recap of their journey may put it in perspective.

The majority of the first German colonists—some 30,000 people who settled in the Russian area in the late 1700's following Catherine's manifesto, were refugees from central German states. They fled what is now central and western Germany (Hesse, the Rhineland-Palatinate, and northern Bavaria), ravaged first by the Thirty Years' War which ended in 1648, then confrontation between Catholic Austria and Protestant Prussia, and finally the Seven Years' War. By 1763, the average inhabitant of Central Europe, regardless of religious or political allegiance, was under an extreme tax burden, constant threat of injury to person or property and routine conscription into military

service for one side or the other. There was no regret at leaving or desire to return to Germany.

They were promised a land of milk and honey by recruiters and arrived in Russia filled with hope for a fresh start. They could be whatever they wanted as long as it involved farming. They were allowed to maintain their German culture, language and traditions with one caveat: they could keep their religions (Lutheran, Reformed, Catholics, and Mennonites) but must assign one religion per village. The new colonists took their marching orders and were directed to desolate / treeless lands bordering the Volga River, where they gained a new identity as "Volga Germans".

Their unique or clannish behavior was programmed from the start. They isolated themselves from their Russian neighbors because they were convinced by Catherine that all Germans were better than all Russians. The Volga Germans passed along their contempt for old Germany and present Russia to each generation.

Behavior in Colonies?

Most of our ancestors were general working class or Artisans who could not prosper for economic or religious reasons in the economic or religious caste system prevalent in Germany. When they migrated to Russia, they brought speech patterns, mindsets, prejudices and attitudes of 18th century Germany. Even when Volga Germans befriended Russian villagers,

Rip Van Deutsche, continued

fellow colonists often warned: "*Der Russ hot noch 'n Russ im Busem*" —The Russian always has another Russian hiding within (i.e. Russians are two-faced). Such ethnocentric sentiments, expressed in speech and behavior, led to strong feelings of in-group loyalty and ethnic solidarity. They built and maintained an invisible wall.

The earliest German settlements in Russia were agrarian villages. They lived in tightly-knit communities and worked the fields surrounding the home colony.

Their lifetime work attitudes were finely honed in their new villages. Males and females assumed defined work roles. The majority of the domestic work was done by the women, especially cooking and child rearing. Farming was largely a male domain. During the busy times of the agricultural cycle [planting and harvesting], women worked in the fields alongside men. Of course, it was assumed they would return from the fields and put dinner together. Blacksmithing, carpentry and shoemaking were exclusively male pursuits. Baking, pillow-making and midwifery were in the hands of experienced females. Children worked alongside the adults starting at an early age. There is a German-Russian proverb "He who can hold a spoon must work." Child labor was not considered cruel or harsh; it was seen as necessary and healthy.

Writing and formal education were not highly valued and they didn't place much value on book learning. Middle-aged people couldn't

read or write. Many couldn't write their own names. They had been farmers for generations and saw no need for achieving a good command of languages. It pleased older generations when one of their youngsters showed an interest in handwork [a trade].

Mir System

The Volga Germans adopted the mir system of Russian land tenure, in which each male villager, regardless of age, received an equal allocation of land. Historically, the Russians did not think the women had souls and therefore were excluded from inheritance. The German colonists readily incorporated this philosophy. The mir system encouraged large families, especially a large number of sons, as the land was divided among the males regardless of age. In families with only girls, eligible young men would marry into the girl's family and live with his wife's parents. The land was considered communal property and switched hands every few years. The mir system made it nearly impossible for outsiders to move into the Volga German colonies and take up residence. Ironically, they chose another version of the caste system they had left behind in Germany.

Because of the mir system among the Volga Germans, the patrilocal extended family was the basic social unit. The grandfather was accorded a special place of respect and ruled over an extended family household numbering as many as twenty to thirty members, but the basic social unit was the nuclear family. Brothers, their wives and children often lived in

Rip Van Deutsche, continued

close proximity and there was frequent social contact.

Language

The Volga Germans originally spoke German dialects such as the Palatine or Mennonite Low German (Plautdietsch). Each village in Russia was populated by colonists from a particular region but isolated from Germany, guaranteeing they maintained their regional dialects and beliefs.

Their mother tongues were High or Low German dialects, despite having lived in Russia for multiple generations. The Volga Germans lived in ethnic German communities, where they maintained German language schools and German churches. The smaller villages were settled by colonists of a common religion who came from the same area of Germany, so one village might be all Catholic, or all Lutheran. The people often settled together from the same region of Germany and thus spoke the same German dialect.

Behavior In United States

Negatively influenced by the violation of their rights and cultural persecution by first Germany, then the Tsars, the Volga Germans saw themselves a downtrodden ethnic group separate from Russian Americans and having an entirely different experience from the German Americans who immigrated from Germany. They settled in tight-knit communities that retained their German language and

culture. They raised large families, built German-style churches, buried their dead in distinctive cemeteries and created choir groups that sang German church hymns.

During World War I their identity was publicly challenged by anti-Russian attitudes from their new neighbors. This, coupled with their disdain for all things Russian, seemed to be the origin of the frustrating clarification cry: “we came from Russia but we are Germans” and reinforced through the oft repeated line of a poem: *‘Wir Wollen Deutsche Blieben’* (we want to remain German).

The Volga Germans originally spoke German dialects such as the Palatine or Mennonite Low German (Plautdietsch) at home. Depending on their specific dialect, Volga Germans had difficulties understanding standard Germans. After emigrating from Russia to the Americas, the Germans spoke with their German dialects. In the 1950s it was still common for the children to speak in English and the parents and grandparents to use German. Songs in church would be sung in two languages simultaneously.

By the end of the World War II, the German language, which had always been used with English for public and official matters, was in decline. Today, German is preserved mainly through singing groups and recipes, with the Volga Germans in the northern Great Plains and Midwest states speaking predominantly English.

Rip Van Deutsche, continued

Resettlement in Germany

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ambitious reunification constitution, the offspring of German settlers, who in previous centuries settled in areas of Eastern Europe and Russia, were regarded as 'Ethnic Germans' and had the right to German citizenship (Article 116 of the Basic Law). From 1991-1999, some 850,000 went to Germany. With immediate citizenship upon arrival, ethnic Germans received financial and social assistance to ease their integration into society. Housing, vocational training and many other types of assistance, including language training were provided because many did not know the current German language.

Unfortunately, this was not a smooth transition. Historical accounts show the 'ethnic Germans' spoke Russian but there were groups of ethnic Germans who came back to Germany speaking 'strange old (1700's) German with a lot of Russian words mixed in. To many native Germans, the ethnic Germans did not seem German, their social integration was difficult. Because unification costs were high and integration was challenging (old world speech and philosophies), Germany established programs to 'encourage' an estimated several million ethnic Germans still in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to remain there.

SUMMARY

They settled in Russia in villages by religious belief and family name isolating themselves

from Russian neighbors and Germany. They had very little communication in these villages with the outside world; most communication came from visiting ministers of their own faith or Russian bureaucrats.

The idea of frozen in time when you don't have television, radio, traveling salesmen, or traveling teachers, seems intuitively obvious. Time and the clock seemed to have stopped in the Volga villages until Stalinization came along. They succeeded at what they were asked to do but lost everything when they left or were banished from Russia. When they resettled in the United States or attempted to return to Germany they were considered 'odd'.

In retrospect, their odd behavior and beliefs were inevitable. A complete culture, speech pattern and mindset was frozen in time; transported to the United States or other countries including their native Germany. When they arrived in the United States, they were subjected to misguided ethnic criticisms: first 'dirty ruskies' and after convincing locals of their Germanic roots, they were lumped in with Nazis or prejudiced in Germany for being too old school.

The absence of ethnic pride and efforts to blend in explain why by the 1960's, none of my ancestors [the Amens or Claus] spoke German or boasted the significance of their history.

I recalled visits to Hastings, Nebraska as a young man to visit my great grandparents. There was no preparatory talk about Volga

Rip Van Deutsche, continued

German history and my great grandparents, Peter and Kate, spoke no English. I had no memories of these first generation Volga Germans.

In September 2016, I joined my uncle as my official guide to the Hastings he remembered. We toured areas armed with key locations gleaned from my grandad's written memories. I recognized the brick home they built and I posed in front of as a young man. The 'family' Lutheran church stood proudly, in close proximity to the old neighborhood. The cemetery had their head stones; but nothing uniquely Volga German.

I learned during this visit my ancestors' immediately transplanted their Russian clannish behavior and lifestyle when they arrived in Nebraska.

The Volga German side of Hastings was south of the railroad tracks. They further isolated themselves by their previous Russian villages. The members of the Village of Frank settled west of Burlington Avenue and members of the Village of Norka settled on the east side of Burlington avenue. The grocery store, Hoeckhardts, pictured in a recently painted mural, was located in the Southeast section. This section of Hastings, once a Volga German gathering place for laundry, socializing and market, retained no signs of its former activities with the exception of a mural on the side of a building (painted 2013 part of a 'Mid America Mural Project').

There were no remaining traces of my ancestors' existence; but I experienced a behavior which raised more questions. I was stared at in public places, like restaurants, libraries, and downtown streets. There was nothing subtle about it. People

stopped whatever they were doing and would openly gaze. I experienced and understood this crude behavior in countries like Turkey or Syria where I was a stranger in a strange land; but I hadn't encountered it in other Nebraska towns. My instinctive reaction was to evaporate, seek out corner booths in restaurants, scurry back to my hotel room and get out of town. What was it like for my ancestors confronting this day after day?

We ended our tour of Hastings in a delightful little AHSGR center stuffed deep in the bowels of the public library. As we filed through the library, we passed no fewer than 8 patrons, including the librarian, staring at us open mouthed and frozen.

In the AHSGR section, I received some good information from a helpful and sympathetic assistant. She was a transplant from Ohio who acknowledged the staring and said "I got used to it".

I left Hastings the next morning, heading due east. My GPS directed me to Kearney, Nebraska for a pit stop along Interstate 80 at a sparkling Runza watering hole. There was nothing German about the place but thankfully no staring.

I was greeted by a bored high school-age attendant who took my order for two 'Runzas, fresh from the microwave'. Sadly, the most difficult decision was identifying which of the 8 different Runzas met my Kraut Bierock memories. I ignored the Swiss Mushroom, BBQ Bacon, BLT and chose 'the original'.

My explanation to the attendant of the origin of what she called a 'Russian samich' and the difference between these 'hot pockets' and a tray full of homemade kraut bierocks, fell on deaf ears.

I unsuccessfully attempted to drown my sorrows with a plastic stein of Mountain Dew. I left with a full stomach, and an empty heart but determined.

To be continued...

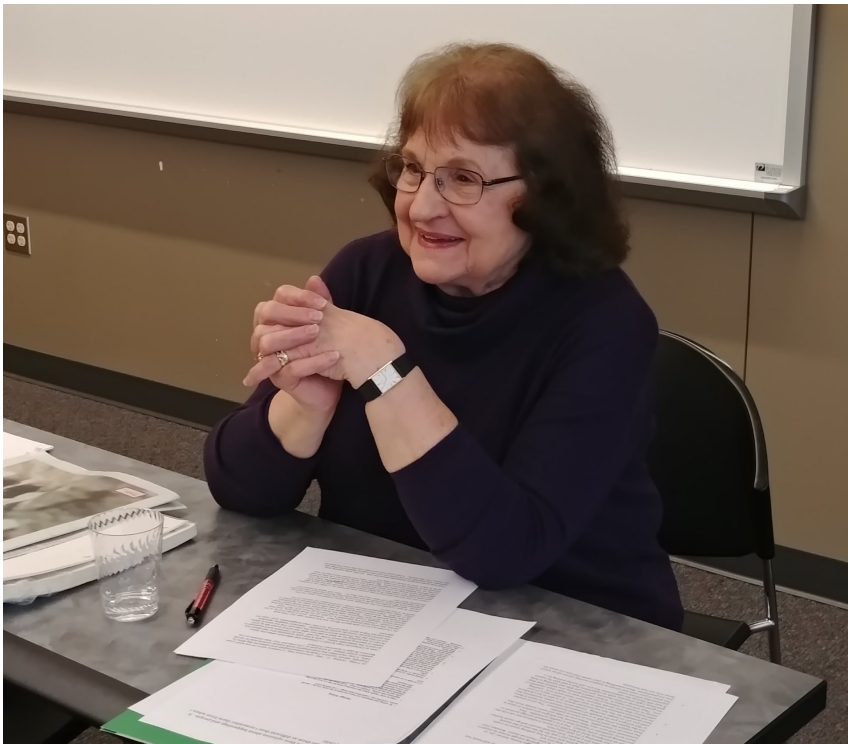
January Program: Memoir Writing

Memoir Writing with Marilyn Schultz

Our January chapter meeting was a seminar on personal writing. It was presented by one of our own members, Marilyn Schultz, who comes well qualified to teach us about writing as she was a high school English teacher for 30 years. She titled her presentation "It's Important to Write SOMETHING." She was very motivating as she talked about the electronic and digital world that we live in today where it is fairly rare to ever receive even a hand-written letter. But, it may be that what endures into the future will be that which we have recorded on paper. A person doesn't have to create a monumental work, but everyone should leave something for their posterity.

Start with something small: tell about an anecdote from your childhood, write about when Mt. St. Helens erupted, record what you remember about the Columbus Day Storm, or describe your interactions with a favorite uncle. Your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren will thank you for it.

As part of the exercise Marilyn had all of us actually get started writing something. We found out that it is not so hard as one might think. As we shared with each other, the diversity of our topics was also inspiring. Let's all think about what we would like our posterity to know about us and our lives and get it down on paper. A big thank you to Marilyn for sharing her expertise with us!



February: Steve Amen

February Chapter Meeting

For our February meeting, we were honored to have OPB's Steve Amen give his presentation titled: 40 Years Behind the Scenes of "Real" News. Steve shared stories of his many years covering news in Oregon and Washington and working on Oregon Field Guide. Steve traces his roots to the villages of Frank and Norka—which we know thanks to his brother Michael's interest in their family history.

Thanks to Steve for coming out and speaking to our group!



March: Obituary Writing Workshop

March Chapter Meeting

Our March Chapter Meeting was presented by our own Lela Miller who led us through the steps of writing our own obituaries! While that may sound a little morbid, it definitely was not. She provided those in attendance with a template for including all the needed details and relationships that should normally be included in an obituary with an emphasis on accuracy. As we filled in our own details we became more aware of how to write an obituary for other family members. Much discussion ensued as she shared both good and bad examples of real-life obituaries. One great suggestion was to print the obituary on the back of the funeral program for everyone to take home after the funeral service. Thank you, Lela!



50th International Convention
of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia

Our Golden Jubilee



An Enduring Legacy

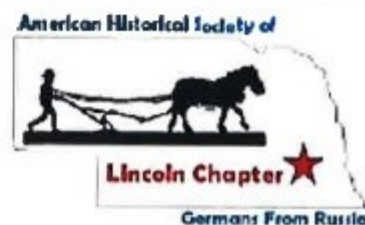
*Come join us as we celebrate the 50th annual convention
of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia*

July 22-27, 2019

Embassy Suites Hotel
Lincoln, Nebraska



**American Historical Society
of Germans from Russia**



AHSGR Oregon Chapter Membership Renewal Form

Membership fees are for a calendar year that renews each January 1st. Annual dues for the AHSGR **Oregon Chapter** membership are \$25.

Membership Year 20____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

I want my Oregon Chapter newsletter delivered electronically. Yes _____ No _____

I want to receive my Oregon Chapter newsletter in the mail (paper copy). Yes _____ No _____

In order for us to serve our membership more effectively, please list all of your German-Russian family surnames and all of the villages that you believe your ancestors are from:

Villages

Surnames

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Annual Dues: \$25.00

Annual Donation: \$

Total Enclosed: \$

Please make all checks payable to **AHSGR OREGON CHAPTER** and send your membership dues and form to:

AHSGR OREGON CHAPTER

P.O. Box 55218

Portland, Oregon 97238-5218

You can also send dues and donations electronically via PayPal to our chapter email address:

oregonahsgr@gmail.com

The Oregon Chapter of AHSGR is a tax-exempt non-profit organization organized under the Internal Revenue Code 501 (c)(3). As such, your dues are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. (Federal Tax ID # 93-1313164)

PLEASE NOTE: Additional dues are required for membership in the AHSGR International Organization. (See www.ahsgr.org for current International membership levels and dues.) Please remit International dues directly to AHSGR Headquarters.

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The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia is an international organization dedicated to the discovery, collection, preservation, and the dissemination of information related to the history, cultural heritage and genealogy of Germanic settlers in the Russian Empire and their descendants.

The Chronicle Unserer Leute (Chronicle of Our People) is published periodically by the Oregon Chapter of AHSGR. Keep up to date with the latest news and events from the Oregon Chapter of AHSGR on our website: www.oregonahsgr.org
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