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President's Message

Hello Everyone!

Well, time marches on, and here we are at the end of the year looking forward to 2021. I can't say that I'm sorry to see 2020 come to an end. I never dreamed back in March that this pandemic would last this long. What a crazy year this has been! But, I have great hopes for the new year. The news that a vaccine for the coronavirus will soon be available is the best news we have had for a long time. Let's hope that it will soon be available to all of us common folk. I have dreams of one day life returning to normal, although most days that still seems far away.

Another piece of good news is that we have a new Newsletter Editor! I am so pleased to welcome Heather Arndt Anderson to this position. She comes highly qualified, and we very much look forward to her putting her own spin on our quarterly communication. Welcome, Heather! Along with that news, we owe a big thank you to Jim Holstein for filling in while we had no newsletter editor. He does a lot for our chapter, and taking care of getting a newsletter out was really above and beyond. Thank you, Jim!

My husband and I have been fortunate to do a fair amount of traveling (in pre-pandemic days, of course), and one of the best trips we ever took was in the summer of 2016. We were able to visit Russia with Brent Mai and Mila Koretnikov on the first of their Volga German tours where we visited the Volga German colonies, Volgograd, and then on our own we went to Moscow for a couple of days. Several other members of our chapter were also on this trip. Visiting Russia has had a profound effect on me. I love reflecting on the fact that we walked where my ancestors had walked. Having grown up in the cold war, we wondered what it would be like to be an American in Russia, but we found the Russian people to be warm and friendly. We loved our experience.

Before we went, I learned several phrases in Russian (Where's the bathroom? I don't speak Russian. I'm from the US), and I familiarized myself with the Cyrillic alphabet. Their alphabet, like ours, is phonetic, and if you know
the sounds the letters make, you can sound out words, many of which are similar to our words. So, the reason I am telling you all this is because during the pandemic, with a little more time on my hands, I have discovered an app that teaches foreign languages, and I have started studying Russian. It’s not like I’m going to be speaking Russian anytime soon, but it has been interesting, challenging and fun! And, who knows, maybe I will have an opportunity to visit Russia again some day. I suppose I probably should be spending my time learning German, but I have been captivated by the Russian.

I hope that you have all been safe from the virus, and hopefully, by the time I’m writing for the next newsletter everything will have gotten much better with a promise of life returning to what used to be normal.

Thinking of you all fondly and hoping to be able to meet with you again soon,

Carole

From the Editor

Greetings!! After two years of a rudderless Chronicle Unserer Leute, you finally have a new editor. *Es freut mich, Sie kennenzulemen!*

I come to this role as an Oregon chapter member of around 10 years. I admit, I've come to only three or four functions in this time. I've been meaning to be more active (I really have!), but I guess we all have a perfectly reasonable excuse to stay home now, don't we!

Like many of you, my ancestors came from Norka, then settled in Portland after trying their luck (and having a kid or two) in Nebraska. I grew up hearing stories of my Volga German heritage, and have spent the past few years studying our ancestors' foodways and traditions, which culminated in a story I wrote for *Oregon Humanities Magazine* two years ago.

Prior to the pandemic, I was the garden editor at *Sunset Magazine*, but I was let go in March along with all of the other magazine's editorial staff. Now I help my 5th-grade son manage the demands of home-based schooling, and do a bit of freelancing here and there as a writer and recipe developer.

Speaking of which, you might notice a bit more emphasis on cooking in the coming issues, which I hope will be a welcome addition! (Besides, we could all use more knoephla in times like these.) I’ll also be fiddling with the formatting a bit here and there, but don't worry, I generally come from the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" school of editing.

Let the coming year bring opportunity for reflection and gratitude, and I wish you all a healthy winter.

*Machts gut!* — Heather Arndt Anderson
Upcoming Events

Black Sea Genealogy Research Weekend  Zoom Conference
January 23 & 24, Zoom

The AHSGR Edmonton chapter is hosting a conference for Black Sea genealogy researchers. Among the many interesting presenters will be Dr. Ann Braaten, who will be sharing NDSU's historic textiles and clothing items from the museum's extensive collection.

To RSVP and for the conference schedule, please visit https://www.german-russians.info/blacksea.

In Memoriam

Lillian Lawrence (née Schmer)

Lillian Lawrence, a long time Oregon Chapter member, passed away peacefully November 18, 2020. Lillian was born and raised in Portland, Oregon to Henry and Anna Schmer on August 17, 1927.

Lillian and her husband Jack raised four children, Diane Fuller, Nancy Barry (Randy), Jerry Lawrence and Janice Jackson (David) with eight grandchildren and nine great grandchildren. She is also survived by her brother Clarence (Nick) Schmer and two nieces.

Lill was a member of the OPEIU Local 11 as a bookkeeper for 10 years. Lillian loved raising orchids in a greenhouse Jack built for her, then began her thoroughly enjoyable obsession with collecting Barbie dolls. She then went on to a genealogy hobby which snowballed into several extended family histories.
Shirley Hurrell

Shirley Hurrell passed away on November 19, 2020, after having been in hospice for an illness. She had been an avid volunteer for the Center for Volga German Studies and for many years was the cheerful and lively greeter for the Oregon Chapter programs.

Though herself of Irish-French Canadian descent, Shirley married into Jack Hurrell's Volga German family in 1954 and became an avid researcher of Volga German history. She helped others in their research as a volunteer at CVGS. She was also a member of the Genealogical Forum of Oregon.

Thelma Wiest wrote a loving tribute to Shirley for the November/December 2015 newsletter. Please visit our website to read it.
https://www.oregonahsgr.org/newsletter.html

Roy Derring

Longtime member Roy Conrad Derring died on September 13, 2020, just two weeks shy of his 81st birthday. The youngest of five children, Roy grew up in Portland's Woodlawn neighborhood. His ancestral village was the Norka colony.

Though Roy didn't grow up in Albina with the rest of Portland's Volga Germans, his father Conrad would often let him tag along to tavern visits, where he'd hear the language of his father's countrymen being spoken over a round of beers. These memories helped develop Roy's interest in learning more about his heritage.

Roy was the artist behind our Oregon chapter banner, which he created by hand and presented to the chapter back in 1991. Roy was a self-taught multimedia artist who dealt antiques and collectibles; he had an especially revered collection of Hawaii and Tiki memorabilia.
As I write this, the first vaccines for Covid-19 have just begun distribution in the United States. It’s been nearly a year since the first reported cases on the West Coast, and I’ve spent the better part of that time pondering the myriad ways in which history repeats itself; reflecting on how humans have handled past health crises; marveling at our species’ resilience and our innate resourcefulness. But friends, I am grateful for science.

When I was a child, going to the doctor was only for absolute emergencies, and I can count on one hand the times I saw a medical professional (two of which being times I needed stitching up). That we were very poor was doubtless a large reason for it, but my parents continued to eschew routine checkups even after I’d grown and left the house, when they both had at least veterans’ benefits. My stubborn father, a second-generation Portlander from a Wolgadeutsche family, sought medical attention so infrequently that he didn’t catch the signs of liver cancer until he was a month from his deathbed. I only learned recently that this attitude might’ve been ingrained in his DNA, because Volga Germans generally didn’t trust highfalutin doctors, often opting instead for folk medicine known as Braucherei.

Though the term’s origins are hard to pin down, it seems to have come from High German words *brauchen* (“need” or “want”) or *gerbrauchen* (“using”).¹ Also sometimes known as powwow, these practices are still observed among our fellow ethnic Germans, the Pennsylvania Dutch.

Not to be confused with black magic (*Hexerei*), Braucherei utilized a combination of home-based...
remedies, folk magic, and Christian faith healing. To both German Russians and the Pennsylvania Dutch, Christian faith was inextricable from this type of magic; a cut potato rubbed on warts and boils would receive a uttered plea and prayer to God — a binding spell of sorts — before being buried in the soil. This was likely due to the fact that Hessen, whence many Volga Germans originated, had been the epicenter of witch trials and executions from the 15th to 18th centuries. Midwifery and other healing arts were considered to be forms of witchcraft, for which a woman often paid with her life. Weaving themes of Christian prayer and the Holy Trinity into simple herbal remedies and folk medicine were guards against accusation — it was impossible for a witch to utter the name of the Lord or abide the presence of a holy cross, was the common belief, so anyone doing these was surely no witch.²

Some people used talismans called Seetelja pinned to their mattresses or inside their undergarments. These were triangular, asafetida-filled sachets sewn from white cloth by a Brauche whose prayers imbued Seetelja with protection against hexes with every stitch.³ Herbalism was commonly employed for day-to-day healing. In the photo below (taken in 2006 in Norka), one plant was identified by Konrad Urbach as having been placed over cuts to make them heal quickly. However, in addition to that plant (known as coltsfoot in English), this photo shows other healing herbs such as the feathery leaves of yarrow, traditionally used to reduce fevers and a variety of

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² Loretta Kammerzell once said that her mother, Katherine Kniss (pictured here), was a healer. Photo courtesy of findagrave.com

³ Photo by Steve Schreiber
Other ailments; clover, used in treating feminine complaints; and what might be young, prickly borage or bull thistle leaves, both used for soothing skin conditions. The steppe was a great pharmacopoeia to its denizens.

Different healing techniques were consistent with widespread practices of the 18th and 19th centuries. Much as it was outside Volga German communities, bloodletting, known as Schreffing in the Volga German dialect, was used for fevers well into the 20th century, and was likely still practiced during the Spanish flu epidemic. For pain, opiates derived from the milky sap of poppies were as relied upon at the turn of the last century as they are now.

It’s interesting to ponder how our ancestors would have responded in such a pandemic as ours. Following are some members’ memories of how their families navigated the Spanish flu of 1918.

Notes:
Stories of the Spanish Flu

Some of our members remembered stories they'd heard of their families' experiences navigating the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918-19. Here are a few we gathered (some have been edited for clarity).

**Thelma Wiest**

Another family story that has been passed down from that time comes from my dad’s side of the family. His name was William Bartel. The true story is that his oldest sister was engaged to a nice young man (name unknown to me) and he died from the Spanish flu around 1918. This of course was passed down as a tragic happening to my aunt when she was just a young woman. My aunt, ended up marrying a very nice man and having three sons of her own. So things ended up turning out well for her. One of her sons was the music director at the Mennonite college, Tabor, in Hillsboro, KS.

![Thelma Wiest's grandparents (back row) and others wearing masks during the Spanish flu in 1918.](image)

**Robert Repp**

My grandfather Adam Repp was afflicted with the Spanish Flu about 100 years ago. It severely compromised his nervous system and balance for the rest of his life. He still went to work at Repp Bros., and never complained. Ever.

**Jim Holstein**

The story below was included within the memoirs written by my aunt Alvina (Holstein) Hinckley sometime before her death in 1982. Her parents (my grandparents) were Gottfred and Mary (Bischoff) Holstein.

I was born November 20, 1918. Just before I was born, mom got sick with the flu that was so bad during 1918 and 1919. She didn’t even know I was being born. The doctor didn’t think I would live, so he asked my Aunt Katie what name he should put on the birth certificate. She named me Againa (Agnes). My parents didn’t know this, so when they had me blessed, they named me...
Alvina. A few years ago, when I sent for my birth certificate, I found out that my real name was registered as AGAINA.

My dad had quite a time taking care of me and my older brother, as people were afraid to go where people were sick. Dad said he didn’t know what to do, so he would take the bottle out to the cow and fill it with milk and then bring it in to me. Dad never strained the milk. He was very worried that I may not survive. He said I got really thin. (I must have looked like a scarecrow.) One thing he said – he never had to wash diapers. He said I was so constipated, he just took the diapers out and shook them clean and put them on me again. But he said soon I started to gain some weight.

Mom got well, but dad said he couldn’t ever figure out why grandmother didn’t at least come and get the baby and care for it. People were so afraid of the 1918 flu. He said a German lady brought chicken noodle soup but wouldn’t even come to the door. Dad had to open the window to take in the food.

Dad never ever quite forgave mom’s folks for not helping him out when I was first born. My Aunt Mollie came and helped mom later, although the rest of the family didn’t want her to.
Recipe: Knoephla Soup for the Soul

Though this hearty dish is more closely associated with our Great Plains kin (especially those in North Dakota), a creamy chicken dumpling soup is perfectly at home on a Pacific Northwest table to take the chill off a gray, rainy day. It’s also a great way to use up leftover rotisserie chicken or roast turkey.

**INGREDIENTS**

**Soup**
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1 pound skinless boneless chicken thighs, cubed (or about two cups chopped leftover roast chicken or turkey)
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 ribs celery, diced
- 2 cups chicken stock or low-sodium broth 2 cups whole milk or half and half
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced

**Knoephla**
- 1 egg
- 1 cup warm water
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt (or 1 tsp kosher salt)
- 2 ½ - 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

**INSTRUCTIONS**

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, melt the butter with the oil and cook the chicken for about 5-10 minutes or until browned evenly. Add the onion, carrot, celery, and garlic, and cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the stock, the milk or half and half, and the potato. Cover pot, reduce heat to low, and simmer for 30 minutes or until the potato is tender. Taste and add salt and pepper accordingly.*
While the soup is cooking, mix all of the knoephla ingredients with a fork in a medium-sized bowl until a shaggy dough comes together, then knead a few times until a stiff dough is formed, adding more flour as needed. Divide the dough into 4 parts, and divide those parts in half to form 8 portions of dough. Roll the dough into ½” thick ropes and trim into ½” lengths to make bite-sized dumplings. (Note: this recipe makes a LOT of knoephla — you can freeze half of them for later on a sheet pan lined with wax paper.)

Add the knoephla to the soup and simmer over medium-low for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Sprinkle on the parsley and serve.

*I make and pressure-can my own chicken stock and never salt it until I’m using it, so I end up adding more salt to my dishes than if I were using store-bought broth. I add about 2 teaspoons of freshly ground black pepper because I like creamy soups and chowders with lots of pepper. Your mileage may vary!
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 __________

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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
---------|---------

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Annual Dues:  $25.00

Annual Donation:  $

Total Enclosed:  $

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

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PLEASE NOTE: Additional dues are required for membership in the AHSGR International Organization. (See www.ahsgr.org/membership.htm for current International membership levels and dues.) Please remit International dues directly to AHSGR Headquarters at: 631 D Street, Lincoln,
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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 bimonthly 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 Follow us on social media: facebook.com/groups/AHSGR.Oregon