



AHSGR Oregon Chapter Newsletter Chronicle Unserer Leute

Volume 47, Issue 2
April - June 2026



Mark Your Calendar

Saturday - April 18 2pm

Donna Tetrault

Saturday - May 16 2pm

Wayne Garman

May 2 Richard Scheuerman

August 5-7 AHSGR Convention

AHSGR Oregon Chapter Chapter Dues

A Friendly Reminder.

For those who have not yet submitted their 2026 yearly chapter dues of \$25, see page 15 or remit to our Treasurer, Jim Holstein. Thank you.

American Historical Society
of Germans from Russia
Honoring our Past
Embracing the Future



Catherine II, the Great

Empress of Russia

Our April 18th 2026 presentation will be given by our chapter president, **Donna Tetrault**. The topic will be her recent trip to Argentina with Brent Mai's tour group last January 28 to February 11. This should be a very interesting presentation. Tour to Germany will continue May 23 to June 6.



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MOBILE RESEARCH LIBRARY AVAILABLE AT ALL OUR CHAPTER MEETINGS. THERE ARE MANY PUBLICATIONS OF GENERAL VOLGA-GERMAN INTEREST FOR OUR MEMBERS.

If you have ideas or articles which you would like to see published or topics you would like to see presented at our monthly meetings, please contact any officer, board member, or me, the newsletter editor: Michael Frank (dm48@comcast.net).

May 2, 2026

Richard Scheuerman is speaking at the May meeting of the Eastern Washington Genealogical Society. Where: The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague Avenue, Spokane, Washington. Doors open at 12:30. The meeting is from 1-3 p.m. The meeting is open to the public. There is no cost to attend.

Richard will be speaking about his exciting experience in Russia in the 1990's assisting AHSGR acquire primary source Russian archival materials about the Germans in Russia, e.g. the emigrant registration lists, census lists, etc.

Call Sally Petersen (509/434-4651) for more information. Also, a table could be reserved for dinner if people are interested.



**AHSGR Convention
Hays, Kansas
August 5-7, 2026**

Volga River

The Volga river in Russia originates in the Valdai Hills of western Russia. It is Europe's longest river, stretching about 3,530 kilometers (2,194 miles) entirely within Russia. Known as Russia's national waterway, it flows southeast into the Caspian Sea, passing major cities like Nizhny, Novgorod, Kazan, Moscow, Samara, and Volgograd. The Volga drains a basin covering 1.36 million square kilometers, supporting nearly half of Russia's population through its fertile lands and reservoirs. It receives over 200 tributaries, mainly from the left bank, and forms Europe's largest delta near Astrakhan, rich in wetlands and biodiversity. Fed mostly by snowmelt (60%), it experiences seasonal floods but is now regulated by dams.

The river flows in Russia through [forests](#), [forest steppes](#) and [steppes](#). Five of the [ten largest cities of Russia](#), including the nation's capital, [Moscow](#), are located in the Volga's drainage basin. Because the Volga drains into the [Caspian Sea](#), the Volga does not naturally connect to any of the world's oceans.

My August 2016 trip to Russia included stops in Schilling (top), and Dobrinka.



Schilling lay on the Bergseite (west of the Volga), about 34 kilometers east of Norka and near other colonies like Beideck.

[Dobrinka, Lipetsk Oblast, Russia](#) (right)

Dobrinka was founded on 29 June 1764 by the Government as a Lutheran colony. It was the first Volga German colony to be founded and the site selected was along the Dobrinka River where it enters the Volga River.



Volga German Revision Lists vs Census Lists

Revision lists and census lists for the Volga Germans are related but not identical, and they were created for different purposes and in different time frames.

Core Differences

Purpose

Revision lists: Tax and military lists; they enumerate people liable for head tax and military service, especially males.

Census lists: General population counts intended to list everyone, not just taxpayers, such as the 1798 colony census and the 1897 Russian Empire census.

Coverage of Population

Revision lists: Exclude groups exempt from taxation (certain nobles, clergy, etc.), so not strictly “everyone in the village.”

Census Lists: Aim to include all residents, regardless of tax status, so coverage can be broader.

Time Periods used for Volga Germans

Revision lists: Ten “revisions” of the Russian Empire, with Volga Germans appearing from the 3rd Revision (1767) through the 10th (1857).

Census Lists: For Volga colonies, key examples are the 1767 “First Settlers Lists,” the detailed 1798 colony census (with agricultural data), and the 1897 Empire-wide census (survives only in fragments).

Content and Genealogical Value

Revision lists: Give names, ages, relationships within households, and often show who died or moved between one revision and the previous one; later lists (1811, 1834, 1850, 1857) explicitly compare current ages to the previous revision, letting you track men across multiple generations.

Census Lists: Also list household members with ages and relationships, but may lack the explicit “change since last list” column; the 1798 Volga census is unusually rich, adding economic and agricultural data by family.

Terminology in Volga German Research

Many English-language publications and websites call revision lists “census records,” which can be confusing, but technically they are tax/military revisions of earlier rolls rather than modern-style censuses.

Volga German guides typically group both together under “census lists” but distinguish between numbered Russian Revisions (1767-1857) and separate population censuses like 1798 and 1897.

Practical Implications for your Research

To reconstruct families 1767-1857 in the colonies, revision lists are usually your main serial source, because they show multi-generation households and link to previous revisions.

To see a fuller snapshot of the community and its economy, the 1798 census is especially valuable; the 1767 “First Settlers” lists are critical for identifying founding families.

When a source is labeled “census” for a Volga village in 1811, 1834, 1850, or 1857, it is almost always a revision list, not a general census in the modern sense.

If you tell me what colony and time frame you’re working on, I can suggest which specific revision or census publications and online sets are most relevant.



High German vs Low German

High German and Low German differ mainly in geography, sound changes, and mutual intelligibility. High German (southern uplands) underwent major consonant shifts and became the basis of Standard German, while Low German (northern lowlands) preserved older Germanic features and is closer to Dutch and English.

Below is a structured breakdown of the key differences, grounded in linguistic research.

Geographic Basis

- High German (Hochdeutsch)
- Spoken in the southern uplands: Bavaria, Austria, Switzerland.
- “High” refers to elevation, not prestige.
- Includes Central and Upper German dialects.

Standard German is derived from High German dialects, especially those of Saxony and Thuringia.

- Low German (Plattdeutsch / Niederdeutsch)
- Spoken in the northern lowlands: Hamburg, Bremen, Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony.
- “Low” refers to the flat northern plains.

Sound System Differences

The High German Consonant Shift (major dividing line)

High German underwent a major historical sound change called the High German consonant shift, which Low German did *not*.

German Dialects of Selected Volga German Villages

Villages listed are based upon AHSGR Oregon Chapter Membership

Norka Norka had a Hessian High German dialect variant, different from the village of Frank's speech. The dialect differed from neighbors like Huck and Frank, sparking friendly rivalry. Church schools taught Hochdeutsch (standard German) as a second language alongside the everyday dialect. The Norka dialect, a Hessian-based Volga German variety, is largely extinct or severely endangered among descendants today. Post 1941 deportation and global migrations fragmented communities, accelerating language shift to English, Russian, or standard German.

Frank Volga Germans in Frank primarily spoke dialects associated with High German (Hochdeutsch), reflecting their origins in central and southern German areas. Church schools taught standard High German, distinct from neighboring colonies' dialects.

Walter Volga Germans in Walter primarily spoke Low German dialects. These colonists, recruited from the lower Rhine-Hessian regions like Hessen, the Palatinate, and Westphalia, used Plattdeutsch (Low German) in daily life, similar to dialects heard in Pennsylvania Dutch communities. High German served formal purposes like church services, education, and records.

Brunenthal was a Volga German daughter colony founded in 1855 near the Volga River in Russia, settled by Lutheran and Reformed families from mother colonies like Walter, Norka, and Grimm. Church schools taught standard High German (Hochdeutsch) as a second language alongside the everyday Low German dialect.

Huck Volga Germans in Huck spoke a Palatine Rhine Franconian dialect, common among those from Hesse and the Palatinate, which evolved in isolation with minimal Russian influence.

Kautz Its residents spoke a dialect typical of Volga Germans from nearby Lutheran villages of Norka, Hussenbach, Frank, Walter, and Kolb.

Kolb Residents spoke dialects from western and southwestern Germany, such as Hessian or similar regional variants, preserved due to village isolation. Residents of Kolb maintained German language and customs for generations until many emigrated in the late 1800s, fleeing Russification policies.

Warenburg High German showing South Hessian and Palatine dominance per genealogical and linguistic records.

Balzer Its residents spoke West Middle German dialects, primarily Hessian and Palatine Rhine Franconian varieties. These dialects shared traits with Pennsylvania Dutch.

Dietel Its founding families originated from the Palatinate, Württemberg, Hamburg, Saxony, Mecklenburg, and Alsace, bringing West Middle German dialects typical of Volga Germans. Church use was High German.

Hussenbach Volga Germans spoke a distinctive dialect blending 18th-century High German (especially Palatine and Hessian influences) and a unique vocabulary for local farming life.

Anton Founded in the 1760s by settlers primarily from Hessian and Hanau regions in Germany. Its residents spoke a distinctive dialect blending Central Franconian and other German low-dialect features.

Beideck was a Lutheran Volga German village founded in 1764 by settlers mainly from Isenburg, Darmstadt, and Hanau regions in Germany. Its residents spoke a dialect typical of Volga Germans.

Galka Its settlers, primarily from regions like Hesse and the Palatinate, spoke a distinctive Volga German dialect rooted in Central Franconian low dialects.

Grimm Named after its first mayor, surgeon Gottfried Heinrich Ulrich Grimm from the Netherlands. Its settlers, mainly from German-speaking regions, spoke a preserved low-German dialect with Reformed influences.

Kraft Its residents primarily spoke a Central Franconian-based low German dialect typical of Lutheran Volga settlements,

Holstein Its settlers, mainly from Hessian and Franconian areas like those near Darmstadt, spoke a Central Franconian-based low German dialect with conservative features preserved through isolation.

Schilling As a major port colony handling massive cargo, its residents spoke a Palatine-influenced low German dialect typical of Lutheran Volga settlements, with conservative features from its southwestern German origins preserved through isolation.

Johannestal Settled by ethnic Germans primarily from Hessian and Swabian areas of Germany in the late 18th century. The dialect spoken there, like most Volga German varieties, was a mix of Franconian (especially Hessian and Lorraine) and Swabian influences, often referred to locally as “Platt” or simply “Deutsch”.

Rothammel Residents primarily spoke a distinctive Volga German dialect, a variety of Plautdietsch or similar Low German forms influenced by regional German origins, used in daily life, church, and schools until the 1941 deportations of Volga Germans.

Neuburg Residents spoke a distinct Volga German dialect rooted in 18th-century Low German (Plautdietsch influences) from migrants’ origins in Hesse, the Palatinate, and Rhineland, preserved through isolation and used in homes, churches, and schools until the 1941 deportations.

Rosenberg Settled by migrants from mother colonies like Grimm, Balzer, and Galka.

Mariental Dialect close similarities to those of Rothammel and Neuburg due to shared Catholic origins in the Rhineland, Luxembourg, and Palatinate.

Oberdorf A daughter colony of Volga Germans, around 1852 by settlers primarily from mother colonies like Norka, Grimm, and Kutter.

Pfeifer The German dialect spoken in Pfeifer belonged to the South Hessian group, common among Volga Germans.

Rosenheim Residents spoke the typical Volga German dialect, a preserved Central Franconian (Pfälzisch) variety from their Hessian, Palatine, and Rhineland origins, with minimal Russian influence due to community isolation. Volga German featured Dutch-like tones and unique words, often sounding like a German-Dutch mix to modern ears. It persisted in U.S. speech islands like Kansas Volga communities.

Schuck Similar to Rosenheim.

Schwed Schwed was a Lutheran Volga German mother colony founded by 24 families originally from Sweden, Saxony, Nuremberg, and Danzig areas. Residents spoke a Central Franconian (Pfälzisch) dialect, with subtle Swabian influences drawing from Hessian, Palatine, and northern German roots brought by early migrants. High German religious use, similar to patterns in U.S. descendant speech like Milberger, Kansas.

Stahl Residents of Stahl spoke the characteristic Volga German dialect, a Central Franconian (Pfälzisch) blending Hessian, Palatine, and northern German elements from 18th-century migrants, preserved through isolation. Traits are echoed in descendant U.S. communities like those in Fresno, California, from Stahl and nearby Straub. Many Stahl families traced roots to Denmark before Russia immigration, contributing subtle Low German flavors to local speech alongside dominant Franconian patterns. The settlement shared linguistic and cultural ties with neighboring Wiesenseite (villages east of the Volga) colonies like Straub, maintaining High German for church use.

Stephan Established by 31 families from regions including Darmstadt, Prussia, and Württemberg. Like neighboring Lutheran colonies such as Stahl and Rosenheim, Stephan's Volga Germans spoke a Central Franconian (Pfälzisch) dialect rooted in 18th-century Hessian and Palatine origins. Stephan shared parish ties with nearby colonies, fostering dialect uniformity across Wiesenseite Lutherans while blending subtle Württemberg speech elements from founders.

Straub residents spoke the standard Volga German Central Franconian (Palish) dialect, primarily from Hessian and Palatine origins, with features like simplified grammar, Dutch-like sounds, and minimal Russian language intrusion due to isolation. High German was spoken in church services.



Volga German Mills in the Bergseite

Volga German mills were key features in Bergseite (hilly side) colonies west of the Volga River, where settlers often brought milling skills from their origins in Germany. These wind or water mills processed grain in farming-focused villages west of the river.

Volga German colonies on the west bank of the Volga river (Known as the Bergseite or “hilly side”) hosted numerous water-powered mills, particularly flour, oil, and textile mills, due to streams flowing toward the river. Shcherbakovka (also called Deutsch Scherbakowka or Mühlberg, meaning “Mill Mountain”) stood out with up to 34 mills along a local stream about five miles from the Volga; these included flour mills grinding grain, oil mills pressing sunflower seeds, and spinning/weaving operations powered by a major spring and canyon waterfalls.

Shcherbakovka lay west and south of its counterpart Russian village (Tscherbakowka) on the Volga, in the Saratov province near Kamyshin, roughly 95 miles south of Saratov. Its mills earned the “Muehlberg” nickname from the dense cluster of waterwheels in a steep canyon feeding into the Volga.

Bergseite Context

Villages like Kraft (modern Verkhnyaya Gryaznukha) on the Gryaznukha river hosted mills among specialized trades like metalworking and pottery. Historical records from 1862 note Kraft with two mills alongside six factories, supporting its 2,531 residents.

Norka stands out as one of the prominent Bergseite colonies with the most documented mills. By 1855, the Bergseite hosted 157 mills total, including those in Norka, reflecting the region’s milling boom.

While exact per-colony breakdowns are scarce, Norka had at least six windmills for grain and six oil mills by 1898, plus major water-powered operations like Peter Sinner’s large multi-story mill (built 1899, employing 20) and others owned by families like Giebelhaus, Weidenkeller, Hefeneiders (three mills). Key colonies: Norka, Balzer, and Kraft.

Broader Context

Volga Germans dominated flour milling across colonies, owning the four largest mills region-wide despite being a population minority. These west-side Lutheran settlements founded from 1765 onward, leveraged hilly terrain for hydropower, boosting textile (**sarpinka**) and grain processing industries.

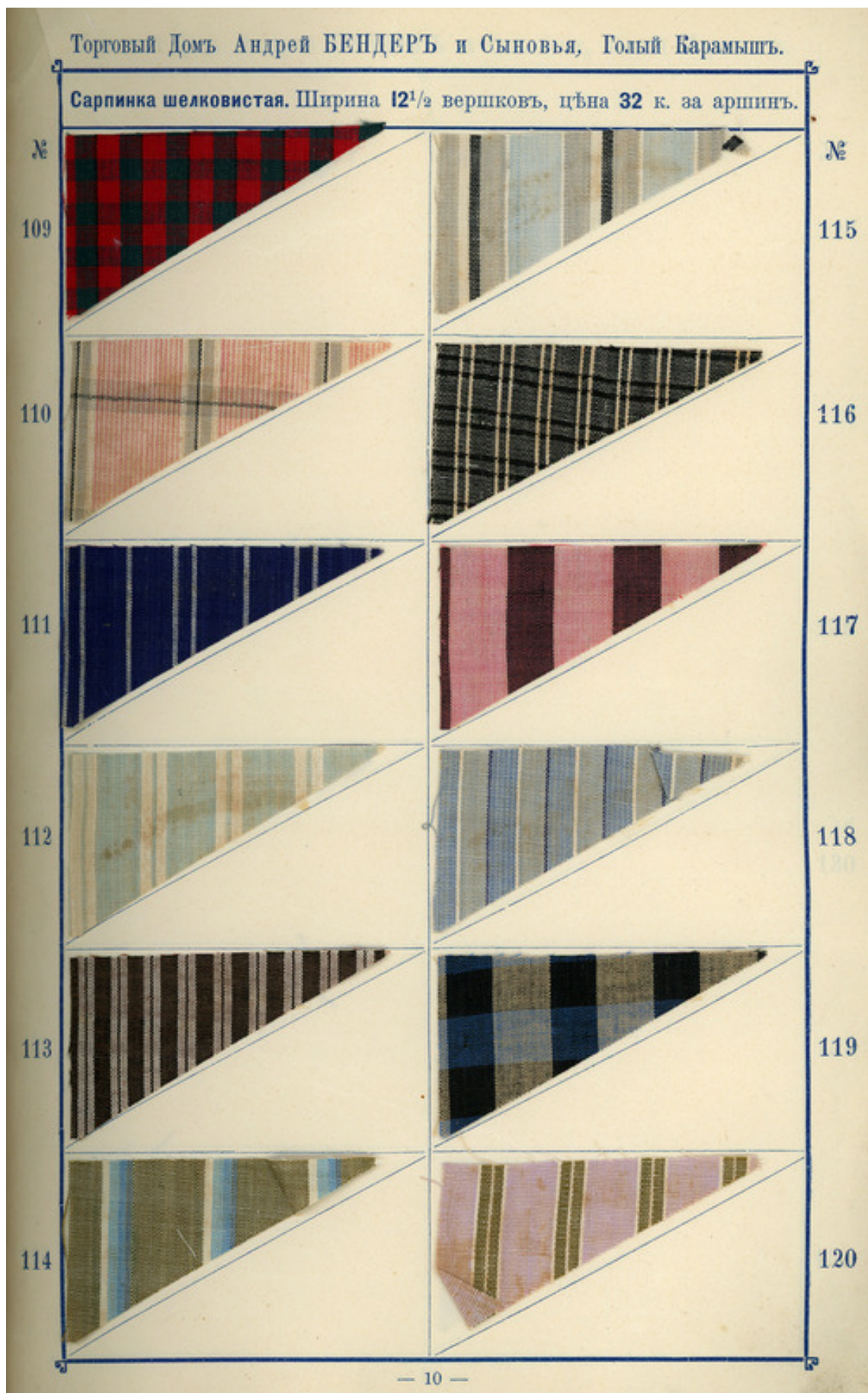
Volga Germans dominated large flour mills in the Saratov region due to their advanced technical skills, entrepreneurial drive, and favorable initial privileges. They owned 17 of the 50 largest mills and produced 45% of the province’s flour by 1872.

Sarpinka was a fine, high-quality gingham fabric woven from pre-dyed cotton yarn, prized for its sturdy yet lightweight build and named after the Sarpa River near Sarepta. Its distinctive checkered or striped patterns, often in indigo blue and red with linen mixes for men's shirts, set it apart as a regional staple synonymous with reliable calico throughout Russia.

Key Traits

Material and Weave: Cotton yarn dyed before weaving created even, vibrant checks; finer than typical coarse home spuns, with a smooth durable finish from hand-loom craftsmanship.

Production: Cottage industry process—spinning, sarping, dyeing, and weaving at home—ensured consistent quality, unlike factory mass-produced English calicos that undercut it later.





**Georg & Catherine Elisabeth (Ostwald) Fuchs (Fox)
Kautz, Russia, 1903**



**Catharina Elizabeth "Dinis" Frank
Aunt "Dinis" and Grandchildren
per Wilhelm Frank, born 1897**

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 **2026**

Name(s) _____
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I want my Oregon Chapter newsletter delivered electronically. Yes _____ No _____

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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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Additional dues are required for [membership in the AHSGR International Organization](#).

(See <http://www.ahsgr.org/membership.htm> for current International membership levels and dues).

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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.

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