AHSGR Oregon Chapter Newsletter
Chronicle Unserer Leute

Volume 47, Issue 3
July - September 2026

Mark Your Calendar

August Potluck and Meeting
Saturday, August 22
Saturday - September 19, 2pm
Program to be Determined
Saturday - October 17, 2pm
Program to be Determined

Catherine II, the Great
Empress of Russia

AHSGR Oregon Chapter
P.O. Box 55218
Portland, OR 97238-5218

oregonahsgr.org

Saturday, August 22
Summer Potluck Picnic - Noon

Come join us and enjoy some German from Russia fellowship as well as some delicious food. Bring your favorite potluck dish. Lela Miller has graciously invited us all to meet in the beautiful setting of her backyard. Emily Schmidt will be cooking Grebble for those who need to add a couple of pounds.

Address: 10201 NE 269th Street, Battle Ground, Washington.

We hope you are enjoying your summer!

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

Volga German Factoids

Pokrovsk: Virtually the entire Volga German population, hundreds of thousands, was forcibly removed to Kazakhstan, Siberia, and Central Asia; their republic was abolished and its name changed from Pokrovsk to Engels.

Church Funding:: The Russian government often paid for the construction of village churches, which were then "repaid" by the community through labor or materials, creating a unique State-community partnership.

Names in Exile: In some cases, families were only deported if the father was ethnically German; if the father was Russian and the mother German, the family could sometimes avoid deportation.

Monument Controversy: In 2011 a memorial to the exiled Volga Germans was opened in Engels; its construction and dedication sparked local controversy, with some seeing it as commemoration of victims of repression and others worrying about claims to property and memory.

Scale: Estimates vary, but roughly 350,000 to 400,000 Volga Germans were deported in 1941-1942, making them one of the largest single-ethnicity deportations of the Stalin era.

Earlier Repression: Even before 1941, starting in 1937, ethnic Germans across the USSR were increasingly targeted; by the end of 1941, about 800,000 ethnic Germans had been resettled internally, and by the end of the war the figure exceeded one million.

Geographic Reach: The Volga Germans were not the only group deported; Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and others were also removed in similar operations during and after the war.

Deportation Planning: Laventiy Beria, head of the NKVD, personally signed detailed instructions for deportations. These instructions varied by ethnic group and specified how lists, transport, and security should be organized.

Family Treatment: Whole families were deported together in many cases, but families were also split: men were often sent to labor battalions or Gulag camps, while women, children, and older people were sent to "special settlement" sites in remote regions.

Destination and Conditions

Main Destinations: Volga Germans were sent to remote areas of Siberia (Omsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Tomsk), the Urals, Altai, and especially Kazakhstan, where about half a million Germans in total ended up by wartime's end.

Special Settlement Regime: Deportees were classified as "special settlers" and placed under strict NKVD supervision; they were assigned to Labor, often in agriculture or forestry, and could not freely leave their designated area without permission.

Labor Battalions: Able-bodied men (17-50) and, from October 1942, women (16-45) were frequently transferred to "Labor Army" battalions, which functioned like Gulag camps in terms of work and living conditions.

Deaths: Many died during transport (due to overcrowding, lack of food and water, and exposure) and in the first years of exile due to starvation, disease, cold, and overwork; exact numbers are uncertain but losses were substantial across all deported groups.

Abolition of the Volga German Republic

The Volga German ASSR was officially dissolved in August 1941; its territory was transferred to the neighboring Saratov and Astrakhan oblasts.

No Restoration: Unlike some other deported peoples who were eventually allowed to return and partially rehabilitated after Stalin's death, the Volga German ASSR was never restored; the Soviet state refused to reestablish a national territory for Volga Germans.

Partial Return: After Stalin's death in 1953, some constraints were relaxed; many Volga Germans were allowed to return to the Volga region, but they did not regain autonomous status or large-scale communal structures.

Formal End of Special Status: In 1955, the Soviet government officially lifted the "special settler" status for many deported groups, including Germans, though many restrictions and social stigma remained.

Specific Cruelties and Patterns

Pretext of Sabotage: As with other ethnic groups, Volga Germans were collectively accused of sabotage, espionage, and collaboration without individual evidence; the state treated ethnic identity as proof of guilt.

Mass, Rapid Action: Deportations were organized in a very short time window, with local officials given only days of advance notice; this led to chaos, incomplete lists, and brutal roundups at dawn.

Life in the Lutheran Volga German Villages

Life in the Lutheran Volga German Villages, called Kolonien, was built around three pillars: faith, farming, and community self-rule. Most were founded 1764-1767 along the Volga River near Saratov after Catherine the Great invited German settlers.

Daily Life & Work
Agriculture first: Wheat, rye, tobacco, and sunflowers were staples. The Volga steppe was tough — drought, locusts, and harsh winters were common. Villages used the Mir system of strip farming at first, then shifted to individual plots. Spring and summer meant long days in the fields; winter was for repairs, crafts, and socializing.

Thrifty & self-sufficient:
Families grew gardens, kept livestock, and built everything from bricks to furniture. Women handled food preservation, spinning, and weaving. Many homes had neatly kept yards. Pride in ownership was a big deal.

Trades:
Each village had blacksmiths, millers, shoemakers, wagon makers. Larger colonies like Frank, Kolb, and Hussenbach became craft/trade centers.

Religion & Church
Lutheran villages dominated. About 25% of Volga Germans were Lutheran. Each colony was usually all-Lutheran or all-Catholic to avoid conflict. Church was the center: The church building was often the largest, most elaborate structure. Walter's brick church, finished 1894-1902, held 1500+ people, had a 60-ft steeple, five bells, balconies, pews — unusual for Volga churches — and a pipe organ. Bells ran village life: They called people to prayer, tolled deaths, sounded fire alarms, and guided travelers in blizzards by ringing all night. Seating was by gender: Men on one side, women on the other — the old German custom. Hymnbooks called Lieder were used.

Education & Governance
School = church: Every village had a school, usually in the prayer house at first. The Schulmeister taught reading, writing, and religion under the pastor's supervision. By 1914 there were 65 teachers' colleges training village school teachers.

Self-government
Each colony elected a Schulze (mayor) and council. They managed land distribution, taxes, and disputes. Russian officials mostly left them alone until the late 1800s.

Language
German dialects from Hesse, Palatinate, etc. were spoken at home and church. Russian was learned later for trade/official business.

Community & Culture
Villages named for leaders: Most colonies were named after the first Vorsteher (Mayor) or recruiter — Frank, Grimm, Norka, Walter, etc.

Architecture: Long, single-story timber or brick houses facing the street, with barns and sheds behind. Streets were wide and laid out in grid patterns.

Social life
Winter Spinnstuben (spinning bees), church festivals, weddings that lasted days. Confirmation was a major rite of passage at 14-15.

Endogamy
People almost always married within their own village or other Lutheran colonies. This preserved dialect and customs.

Church Organization
The Volga Lutheran parishes were overseen by a Provost in Saratov.
There were 539 Lutheran parishes serving 2500 congregations across the Russian Empire.
Pastors trained at the University of Dorpat (Tartu, Estonia). Notable Provosts included Karl Conrady of Grimm 1827-1857 and Christoph Heinrich Bonwetsch of Norka 1857-1870.

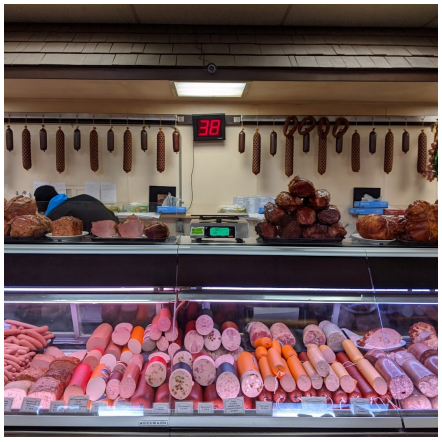
Big shift
Life was stable until the 1870s when Alexander II revoked their military exemption and Russification policies began. That triggered mass emigration to Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and South America.

Lutheran Church
Walter, Russia

Edelweiss Sausages And Delicatessen

3119 SE 12th Ave, Portland 97202
(503) 238-4411

Portland's best-known German deli and grocery
Housemade sausages, schnitzel
German imports: chocolates, pickles, mustard, breads



Otto's Sausage Kitchen & Meat Market

4138 SE Woodstock Blvd, Portland

A Portland institution since 1922.

Homemade sausages, hot dogs, and German-style deli fare.

Great for: smoked sausages, grill packs, German-style hot dogs.

Fressen Artisan Bakery

7075 NE Glisan St, Portland

German breads, pretzels, pastries, and café items. Great for: pretzels, rye breads,

German-style pastries.

Stammtisch

German Bar and Restaurant
401 NE 28th Ave, Portland, OR 97232
(503) 206-7983

Gartner's German Style Meatmarket

7450 NE Lombard, Portland, since 1912

Hilton Garden Inn

221 W 43rd St, Hays, KS 67601

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).

American Relief Administration

The American Relief Administration (ARA) was a U.S.-led humanitarian organization created after World War I to deliver food and other essential aid to war-torn Europe, and later, to Soviet Russia during its postwar famine. It was headed by Herbert Hoover, who later became the U.S. president, and operated from 1919 until 1923. In 1921, after a severe famine struck Soviet Russia, the ARA launched a major operation there, becoming one of the largest foreign relief efforts in the country's history. Under agreements with the Soviet government, the ARA set up feeding stations, especially for children, and transported millions of tons of food across vast distances.

The Russian operation continued until mid-1923. It was officially closed on June 15, 1923, after the Soviet government resumed grain exports, which the ARA viewed as evidence that the famine had ended and that continued large-scale aid was no longer necessary. The ARA is generally credited with saving countless lives during the post World War I crises, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe and in Soviet Russia during the 1921-1922 famine. Its total cost, including private contributions, was around $200 million, equivalent in modern terms to several billion dollars.

Beyond its humanitarian impact, the ARA helped shape the modern idea of large-scale, organized international relief operations and demonstrated how a mix of government funding and private philanthropy could be coordinated for global emergencies. Hoover's role in the ARA significantly boosted his public reputation and contributed to his later political success, including his election as president in 1928.

The ARA's mission in Soviet Russia differed from its European operations mainly in political context, legal constraints, scale and duration, and how aid was organized and justified. In Europe the ARA worked with governments and local partners in post-World War I reconstruction; in Russia it operated inside a hostile, ideologically opposed regime during a catastrophic famine, under a tightly negotiated agreement that gave it unusual autonomy but also created intense political friction.

The ARA entered Soviet Russia as the famine of 1921-22 threatened the survival of millions and the stability of the Bolshevik regime. Relief had to be negotiated with leaders who were suspicious of American motives and often portrayed the ARA as an anti-Soviet intervention, even through the operation was officially humanitarian.

This ideological antagonism made the Russian mission more politically charged and politically risky than the European one. In Russia, the ARA operated under a specific ARA-Soviet Agreement that explicitly granted control over staffing and distribution, freedom of movement for personnel, and political non-interference in exchange for efficient relief. This agreement gave the ARA a rare degree of autonomy inside a sovereign state, but it also required constant negotiation with Soviet authorities and produced frequent clashes over how relief was portrayed and used politically.

In Europe, the ARA operated from 1919 to 1922 in Europe and the Middle East, distributing over a billion dollars' worth of food across 23 countries, with a broad mix of wartime and postwar relief, including children's feeding programs.

The Russian mission ran from 1921 to 1923, longer than most European operations, and was overwhelmingly focused on famine relief in the Volga region and surrounding areas. It delivered hundreds of millions of tons of food and large quantities of medical supplies, with a particularly heavy emphasis on feeding children and adults in the worst-hit districts.

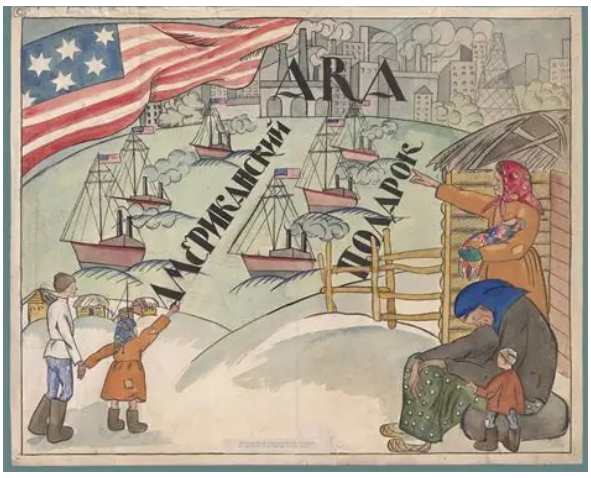
The Russian operation was more centralized around a single crisis (famine) and required a massive logistical effort across vast, remote territories.

In Russia, the ARA deliberately framed its work as helping "the Russian people, not the Soviet government." Herbert Hoover and ARA Leaders consistently emphasized that aid was humanitarian and not political, in order to counter Soviet accusations and American fears of "supporting communism".

At the same time, Soviet officials and some American critics accused the ARA of using relief to undermine the Bolshevik regime, making the propaganda battle in Russia far more intense than in Europe.

In Russia, the ARA's position was complicated by the presence of more ideologically sympathetic groups, such as the Friends of Soviet Russia (FSR) and the Society for Technical Aid to Soviet Russia (STASR), which promoted long-term agricultural reconstruction and were openly pro-communist. The ARA labeled them "radical" and contrasted its short-term relief mission with their long-term development agenda, creating a more fractured relief landscape than in Europe.

In sum, the Russian mission was distinguished by its operating inside a revolutionary state, under a special treaty, with a singular focus on famine, a heavier ideological struggle, and a more contentious relationship with other American relief actors.



Summer Kitchens Summer kitchens were a common and practical feature in many Volga German communities, both in the Russian colonies along the Volga and later in immigrant settlements across the American Midwest and Plains. Their purpose was largely the same across regions: to keep the main house cool and clean during hot seasons, reduce fire risk, and provide a dedicated space for the heavy, high-heat work of food preservation and large-batch cooking.

What a summer kitchen was

- A separate small building or a semi-detached room set a short distance from the main house.
- Typically outfitted with a wood- or coal-fired stove, large work tables, washtubs, and storage shelves.
- Ventilation and heat management were key: more windows, lighter construction, and sometimes screened porches.

How they were used

- Canning and preserving: peak-season processing of garden produce (pickles, sauerkraut, jams), butchering days' rendering and sausage making, and baking that heated the oven for hours.
- Daily hot cooking in summer: frying, boiling, and bread-baking moved out of the house to keep living quarters cooler and less smoky.
- Laundry and large clean-up tasks: boiling water for washing and keeping steam and mess out of the main dwelling.

In Volga German foodways

- The space supported labor-intensive staples associated with Volga German heritage—bierocks/pirok (meat-filled buns), strudels, noodles, pickled and fermented vegetables, and meat processing for Schlachtfest-style feasts—work best done in roomy, heat-tolerant quarters.

Community rhythm: gardens, hog butchering, and harvest created seasonal "campaigns" of kitchen work; the summer kitchen functioned like a household workshop to marshal family and neighbor help.

Why they mattered

- Heat, hygiene, and safety: separating open flames and boiling kettles from sleeping and living areas cut fire risk and kept insects, odors, and grease out of the house.
- Efficiency for big families: Volga German households were often large and intergenerational; the extra workspace handled bulk tasks and community cooking for church and festival days.

Cultural continuity: these kitchens helped sustain recipes, preservation methods, and communal work patterns that are still celebrated at regional festivals emphasizing Volga German heritage and foods.

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) _____
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**
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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

AHSGR Oregon Chapter
PO Box 55218
Portland, OR 97238-5218

You can also send dues & donations electronically via PayPal to our chapter email address:
oregonahsgr@gmail.com

The Oregon Chapter of AHSGR is a tax-exempt nonprofit 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).

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).
Please remit International dues directly to AHSGR headquarters at 631 D Street, Lincoln, NE. 68502-1199.

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Address

Address

City

State, Zip

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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Members can find the current schedule of chapter events and newsletters on our Facebook page at:
facebook.com/groups/AHSGR.Oregon/

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