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Welcome to a rather late edition of Chronicle Unserer Leute.

I could not, in good conscience, give you a newsletter that didn't include a thorough look at the biggest event of the year: The AHSGR Annual Convention which was held in Hays, Kansas from 30 July to 2 August. So, late the newsletter had to be!

To be honest, I'm rather jealous of those able to attend. As you will see on page 13, the event was filled with all of the best parts of our shared heritage – good food, great company and a passion for learning and discovery. I would like to send a special thank you to Becky Kiser from the Hays Post for allowing us to re-publish her fantastic article about the festivities.

As I looked through the myriad of photos from the convention, I was reminded of another instance where I felt a deep connection to my Volga German ancestors. In November, I finally lived out my dream to visit New York City. I could think of no better day to visit Ellis Island than Thanksgiving, so my husband and I set off on the (rather chilly!) ferry to visit the place where so many of our families' modern histories began. As someone who has also travelled far from home to make a life on foreign shores, words cannot describe the connection I felt to my ancestors as I walked those halls. I could almost feel my great-great-grandmother and her family – their sorrow at leaving loved ones behind in Norka, but their joy and excitement at seeing their new homeland almost within their grasp. It was an experience I will never forget.

It is, perhaps, fitting then that families and hope are strong themes for this issue. In addition to Becky Kiser's account of the AHSGR Convention, you will also find installment three of the history of our German-Russian ancestors and an opinion piece about DNA testing on pages 5 and 10 respectively.

As always, please feel free to contact me on devon.lasalle@gmail.com if you would like to contribute a story, photograph, recipe or any other part of your German-Russian heritage with our readers.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

On July 22, 1763, Catherine the Great issued her second manifesto. For many Germans, who were weary from years of war and extreme taxation, the promises were too good to pass up: An exemption from military service, freedom of religion, exemption from paying taxes for thirty years, land of their own and travel expenses paid by the Russian Government.
Do you recognize these people?

Do you have old German-Russian photographs you can’t identify? Are you hoping to stumble upon photos of your own ancestors?

A new group on Facebook has been created for that exact purpose. Germans from Russia Unidentified Photos already has over 150 members and a number of photos waiting to be reunited with their families. While this photograph has no identifying marks, it is believed to depict the Nazarenus or Spomer families in Denver, Colorado or Lincoln, Nebraska.

You can find the group at: www.facebook.com/groups/1801523156603655

Stand, brothers and be strong.

German-Russian folk song Auf auf ihr Brüder und seid stark (Stand, brothers and be strong) tells of the excitement, apprehension and sadness experienced by our ancestors as they set off for America:

“Stand, brothers and be strong. The day of our farewell is here. The heart is beating heavily in our hearts, and we will travel over land and sea, to free America.”

“At Russia’s borders we take the earth in our hand and kiss it with gratefulness to our dear fatherland for the food and drink given us.”

“And when the waves surge around our ship, we will calmly sail forward, for God is here and God is there, and he will not forsake us.”
Upcoming Events

Sunday, August 26th: 17th Annual GROW Summer Picnic
Willamette Park West Linn – 12th Street, West Linn

Germans from Russia, Oregon and Washington (GROW) invites members and friends of Germans from Russia to our annual pot-luck picnic. Bring whatever dish you want to share along with utensils, plates, etc. Food will be ready to eat around noon. We will be in the main shelter near the water play feature. We’ll have some music and a lot of time to visit with others with our common ancestry and those interested in the Germans from Russia.

Friday, November 2nd – Center for Volga German Studies CVGS) Research Workshop
Concordia University Portland Library – 2811 NE Holman Street, Portland

The Center for Volga German Studies (CVGS) will be presenting a one-day workshop, sponsored by the Concordia University Library! The workshop will include information about evolution of the Center and how workshop participants can access the Center’s resources to learn more about their heritage. Additionally, workshop participants will have the option of returning to the Center on Saturday, November 3rd, to work individually or in small groups with CVGS volunteers. We will be posting additional information about the agenda and registration on our Facebook page in the coming months. In the meantime, we hope you will include this fascinating workshop in your future plans!

A long journey

The second big leg of the journey to America for our German-Russian ancestors was by steamship.

The German steamship SS Schiller brought the first Volga German scouts to America.

Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.
Difficult Decision: Looking to America

This five-part series will examine the rich history of our German-Russian ancestors, from the brave decision to leave war-torn Europe to building a legacy in a country ‘whose streets are paved in gold’.

With the ascension of Czar Alexander II to the Russian throne, life as our ancestors on the steppe knew it would be changed forever.

In 1871, Alexander II stopped any new German immigration into Russia by repealing his predecessors’ open door policy. From that point forward, the freedoms that Germans living in Russia had experienced for several generations were slowly taken away. They were immediately reduced to the status of Russian peasants and were now subject to the same laws as this class. Tax exemptions that helped them build prosperous farms and businesses were abolished, adding pressure on families to cope with the new financial strain.

Eternal freedom from military service was soon redefined to mean that the German-Russians were exempt for the first 100 years of their settlement in Russia. As a result, many young men were drafted into the military from 1874. While some pacifist denominations such as the Mennonites were allowed alternative forms of service such as forestry and medical work, this was not the case for the majority of young German-Russian men subject to the draft.

By the time that Alexander III ascended the throne in 1881 after the assassination of his father, all remaining privileges enjoyed by the German-Russians were abolished.

For many families, their sons facing military service was the last straw and many families began to look for a future beyond Russia. Word soon spread of a land far across the sea ‘whose streets were paved with gold’ thanks to information provided by a small number of German-Russians such as Rev. Wilhelm Stärkel from Norka who had lived in America for a short time before returning to Russia. They told stories of rich soil, open spaces and wonderful opportunities available in America thanks to the Homestead Act of 1862 that allowed anyone who had not taken up arms against the United States to apply for acreage.
From the early 1870s, many German-Russian families made the brave decision to leave Russia behind. Between 1872 and 1914, over 300,000 people obtained passports and made plans to leave their villages for America. Those wishing to leave were first required to apply for permission to leave the colony by the village Gemeinde (council). They would then be given authorization stating that they did not owe any debts, which was required to obtain a passport from the Russian Government.

The prospect of building a new life was exciting, but it was also a time of great sorrow. The German-Russians knew that their move to America would ultimately mean saying goodbye to their Russian homeland and the families that remained forever. As the time of immigration grew near, many villagers would treat their loved ones' departure as a kind of death. Immigrants took their last communion rites and received blessings from the pastor. Crowds of friends and families would gather to say goodbye, singing songs of mourning and openly weeping at the loss as their loved ones' wagons disappeared from view.

The first big leg of the journey to America was a train trip across Europe. Upon arriving at European ports along the Atlantic such as Bremen, families would be loaded onto passenger ships heading to New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia. The majority of German-Russian families were settled in steerage, the cheapest accommodation available. The journey across the sea took two to three weeks depending on the route taken and conditions in steerage were appalling. Overcrowding was commonplace, as were lice and disease.

For many, the first glimpse of America was one of confusion and even fear. No one had explained the symbolism of the Statue of Liberty to the German-Russians before their arrival. Many children were frightened by the 'big lady with horns growing out of her head'.

Ellis Island was equally confronting for immigrants of all ages. Suddenly, the immigrants were subjected to a series of tests and health screening by people who they could not understand. Translators were on hand to assist families with processing, but this did little to calm their fears.

The requirement of vaccination was a particular concern for many families. It was common for babies to be passed between families waiting in line in an effort to avoid having them vaccinated for fear of the medicines killing them.
The food and customs they encountered during their time at Ellis Island were particularly puzzling. They were provided with meals during their time that consisted of standard American foods that were completely foreign to the German-Russians. There are stories about how they would spread their ice cream on bread and remark to each other about how bad the ‘butter’ was.

Once the German-Russians were processed through Ellis Island, it was time for another train ride west. Most Volga Germans settled on the Great Plains in Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado. In time, some of those families would then move further west to Oregon and Washington after hearing of its cooler climate and rich soil. Black Sea Germans preferred the Dakotas and provinces in Canada.

The journey to America was long and treacherous, but the German-Russians could see the potential for a bright new future on the horizon.

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Be sure to check out Part 4 of this series in the next issue, where we will find out how our ancestors were able to build thriving communities in America and, in turn, help shape the future of the land we call our home.
Our Ancestors: Milton Herbel

by Bob Budz

I discovered that my real father, one that I had been unaware of, was a Volga German. I was 70 years old before I discovered the truth... a dalliance between my mother and a Soldier in San Diego begat me.

The man was Milton Herbel of Marion, KS. In fact, when I was 2 (1947), my mother packed us up and we moved to Marion to live with Milton for 6 months. Obviously I have little memory of that time.

It was a long time coming, but I finally put some facts together and discovered my true heritage... in part, thanks to National Geographic’s Genome Project DNA testing and much internet searching. I have connected with a step sister in Colorado.

Milton had married her mother (who already had two children). He had no known biological children other than me. This woman, Jan, and I have become like close family. But I yearn for more information on blood relatives.

I know that my grandfather George immigrated to the U.S. in 1898, grandmother in 1892. Both were from Saratov and/or Driespitz.

The attached photos were emailed to me by my shiny new step sister. One is on his tractor at home in Marion County.

Another photo of importance is of course the “Dad and Bobby” picture. That was captioned in my mother’s hand.

Lastly, there is one of my mother, Milton, and baby me! Wow. (Frank was in the Merchant Marines at the time.)

When I first found and contacted my step sister (last year), she said, “I’ve been waiting 50 years for your call!” She had found out about me, but didn’t know my last name or therefore how to contact me.

Amazing stuff, this history search.

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If you would like to share your ancestors’ story, please contact Editor Devon LaSalle on devon.lasalle@gmail.com.
Recipe Corner: Eben Kloese

Eben Kloese, or Strawberry Dumplings, were a popular sweet dish in many German-Russian communities. Recipe and photo contributed by Susan Jones.

Ingredients:
4 cups flour
2 eggs
1 cup hot water
4 boxes strawberries, washed and sliced
1 cube butter
½ pint cream (or sour cream)
Sugar
Bread crumbs (optional)

Mix flour, eggs and hot water. Remove from bowl to floured board and knead until most of the flour is absorbed. Cover with cloth or waxed paper for 30 minutes.

Divide dough into fourths. Roll as for pie dough (about 1/8in thick).

Cut dough into 4in squares. On each, place 1 tablespoon strawberries, sugar to taste and ½ teaspoon dry bread crumbs (optional). Bring four corners of square into center, pinching edges securely to hold berries.

Drop dumplings into salted boiling water. Bring to boiling point again and cook on low heat for 5 minutes or more. Drain and serve with melted butter and cream. Ham, sauce or bacon is particularly good with this when served as a main dish.

In the 1890s, the "Russian" bakery workers at the Portland Cracker Company were actually Volga Germans. Photo courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society.
More to ancestry DNA than ethnic make-up

by Devon LaSalle

One of the most interesting yet contentious advances in recent technology is the advent of ancestry DNA testing. Once the stuff of science fiction, DNA testing has become the go-to Christmas and birthday gift for friends and family. People gleefully share their ethnicity percentages on social media, and countless ‘unboxing’ videos with surprise and excitement can be found on YouTube.

In turn, there is also a great deal of controversy surrounding this shiny new toy. A quick Google search will bring up article after article about the so-called dangers of ancestry DNA testing. Many others refute the authenticity of such testing kits, claiming that the differing results between testing companies well and truly lump ancestry DNA testing in the ‘fake news’ category.

While I tend to believe most of these stories are sensationalist, they do pose some interesting questions. I myself have taken an ancestry DNA test that I have uploaded across multiple websites. I have noted the differences in ethnicity percentages across different testing companies and wondered what this means. News stories that pop up with startling regularity discussing the alleged dangers of ancestry DNA testing have also made me wonder what I got myself into.

In an effort to get some answers, I reached out to a number of popular DNA testing companies. While most of them declined the opportunity, I had the pleasure of speaking to Rafi Mendelsohn from popular genealogy company MyHeritage about ancestry DNA testing.

MyHeritage was started over 15 years ago as a family history company. Since then, it has amassed over 95 million users worldwide who have built an impressive 41 million family trees. Their databases contain 80.9 billion records, with over 150 million records across 54 collections for German ancestry alone.

In recent years, MyHeritage has also branched out into ancestry DNA testing. In addition to offering their own testing, users can also upload tests from other testing providers to MyHeritage for free.

Mendelsohn says that it is common for people to become confused by the differences in ethnicity percentages between testing companies. He says that this occurs because every testing company has a different size base group of DNA tests which your results are compared to.

My ancestry DNA ethnicity results and matches on MyHeritage.
“[MyHeritage] have 1.3 million people on the MyHeritage DNA database,” he says. “Before we launched, we undertook a ‘founders’ foundation project. We worked with 5,000 people around the world that have a specific connection within an area or ethnicity. What we were able to do by testing those people is we were able to pick up and identify those genetic markers that are connected with specific ethnicities. 99.9% of our DNA is all the same, but it’s that 0.1% that differs and that’s what we look at.”

In addition to the size of the base group, Mendelsohn explains that differing results often occur because some testing companies may not have a base group for certain ethnicities at all. In these cases, the testing company will assign that DNA to their base groups that most closely resemble those DNA markers.

“For example, if your test comes back with a percentage of Sephardic Jewish DNA, some companies don’t have that ethnicity. If they don’t have that ethnicity, they will then attribute that DNA to a similar ethnicity that has the most similar genetic markers to that ethnicity.”

He says that depending on the markers, this DNA could show up as a broader region relatively close by such as Eastern European, or even a completely different region in some cases such as English, Irish and Welsh.

What about the pitfalls of ancestry DNA testing?

Mendelsohn says that people are right to question how their DNA samples are to be used. Some testing companies do own your DNA sample, and if their sole business is DNA testing then their primary revenue stream might be solely from selling your DNA to services such as medical research facilities. He encourages people to read the fine print before buying.

Mendelsohn also says that companies who don’t stake claims to your DNA sample do exist, and that most companies will destroy your sample upon request even if they do.

 “[MyHeritage] make it clear that we don’t own your DNA. It’s your DNA and we don’t own any of your data or share it with anyone else. You have control over your test and what happens to it. For example, if you don’t want to have matches and have them shared with others, you can switch that off. If you want to have your swab destroyed, you can contact our customer care line and we will destroy that sample. We’re not looking to make money off DNA tests and the data. We’re interested in getting more people interested and excited in genealogy rather than making money off your DNA.”

When all is said and done, Mendelsohn encourages people to try DNA testing and to look beyond ethnicity percentages.

“Don’t look your DNA results, be confused and just give up. Having the ethnicity percentages is good, but it’s one half of your DNA story. The other half is your matches. Thanks to ancestry DNA testing, you can connect with all of these people you are related to. With some, you can quite easily see where you fit into their family tree. In other cases, you can work with them find out where you fit.”

Mendelsohn also says that people can form a new appreciation for their family history and the cultures that make up their ethnicity, sparking a new passion for genealogy. “What we’re finding is that a significant proportion of people taking their DNA test who didn’t previously have any interest in their family tree now want to find out more about who they are and where they’re from. Many of them then go on to build their family tree. We’re even seeing people...”
take DNA tests and make decisions on where they can take their next vacation!"

This is my story. Taking an ancestry DNA test turned a mild curiosity about my family’s history into a full-blown fascination with genealogy. In the years since taking the test, I have done hours of research into my own family tree and have helped others discover their own.

But the most precious gift has been the connections I have made with family. Thanks to ancestry DNA testing, I have met many distant cousins I would have never known otherwise. I have been able to confirm some branches of my family tree and refute other claims with their help.

Moreover, the relationships I have built with these wonderful people have changed how I view my family history. This experience has inspired me to look outside of myself and learn more about the cultures of my own genetic make-up. It has given me an appreciation of the differences and similarities between all cultures.

In this day where so much of society gives into fear of each other’s differences, as far as I’m concerned this can only be a good thing.

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You can read some of the amazing stories that have resulted from MyHeritage DNA testing at: stories.myheritage.com
It was perfect polka weather Wednesday morning for Kindertag, a youth heritage outdoor day presented in connection with the 49th annual international convention of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia underway in Hays.

More than 350 people from across the United States as well as Canada, Germany and Russia are attending the four-day convention headquartered in the Fort Hays State University Memorial Union.

Themed “The Storm,” participants are learning about life in the Germanic colonies of the Russia Empire as the 1917 Russian Revolution began. They’re also looking for and sharing information about their German-Russian ancestors and heritage.

The international society is headquartered in Lincoln, Nebraska, where the 50th anniversary will be celebrated in 2019. Executive Director Sherry Pawelko describes herself as “100 percent Volga-German, from both sides of the river.”

“We represent all different regions of settlements where German people were in Russia, including the Volga (river) area and of course, there are a lot of Volga-Germans in the Hays area,” she said.

“We have a rich heritage and we don’t want to forget it.”

According to the society’s website, the Germans from Russia story begins in 1762 with the Manifesto issued by Catherine the Great. By the end of the 19th century, there were about 1.8 million Germans in Russia. In 1872, the Germans in Russia began to emigrate to the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Argentina.

The society focuses on research. “We want to be here for future generations to do research, to find out about their families and their heritage,” Pawelko stressed.

One of the rooms in the Memorial Union is entirely lined with reference materials, computers and internet connections to aid in that research.

The future generations were also doing some research of their own at the Ellis County Historical Society Museum in downtown Hays.
Educational activities showed how Germans from Russia lived, many of them on farms or in rural villages. The nearly 60 children learned from local volunteer Mary Kay Schippers how sauerkraut and butter were made, how clothes were cleaned before the advent of electricity and where eggs actually come from.

After the chores were done, children and adults enjoyed leisure activities including dances and games.

Munjor residents Sarah Leiker and her daughter Brooke, who was wore traditional German garments, taught the young participants how to polka.

“They were really good,” Brooke said.

Hays resident Jerry Braun organized a rousing game of Bunnock, “The Game of Bones,” which originally used horse knuckles tossed between two teams trying to knock down all their opponent’s “bones” with the fewest number of throws.

“Bunnock began as a pastime by those in Russian military service and the soldiers brought it back to their families,” Braun explained. Today, Bunnock tournaments thrive in Canada, he added. It’s one of four countries where the Germans in Russia began to emigrate in 1872, along with the United States, Brazil, and Argentina.

Another popular game was Durak, the card game of “The Fool.” “You must lose your cards to win,” grinned Braun, “and the last player with cards is the Durak or Fool.”

Sylvan Grove resident Jana Wehrman brought her daughters Emma, 10, and Eastin, 8, to learn more about their dad’s side of the family.

“We homeschool our two girls and this is a good way to start our school year,” Wehrman said as she watched Schippers demonstrate life on the farm in the old days.

“We live on a farm but they’re learning what it used to be like for their grandmas and grandpas. They weren’t sure about the sauerkraut,” she laughed, “but they were excited to learn about some of those traditions.”

Photos courtesy of the Hays Post.
Wehrman is a former science teacher at Sylvan Grove High School and uses those skills in homeschooling her young daughters.

“Last week we looked up where Germany is. We talked about their great-grandparents and how they got to the United States. Eventually in this school year, we’ll probably do a unit on Europe.”

Concurrent sessions at the convention include DNA analysis, ethnic clothing, religious persecution, folklore, religious architecture, music, and authors discussing their books related to German-Russian stories and history.

Area residents Tom Haas, Leo Dorzweiler and Ray Breit translated a German conversation into the local dialects spoken in Munjor, Catherine and Pfeifer.

Tours of historical and cultural sites were offered to the Volga-German “villages” in Ellis County and their famous limestone churches built by immigrants.

Pawelko was especially excited to tour the studio of Hays limestone artisan Pete Felten.

“We have a copy of Felten’s statue that’s in Victoria in Lincoln, and so that was pretty thrilling to see the original.”

They also have toured the Bukovina Society Museum in Ellis and the Ellis County Historical Society Museum.

Sam Brungardt along with Charlie Dorzweiler, who recently opened Das Essen House restaurant in downtown Hays, held cooking demonstrations of traditional German dishes including potato and dumplings and Christmas cookies.

“It’s just been a little something for everyone,” Pawelko said with a smile. “Kevin Rupp (Hays) and Leonard Schoenberger (Ellis) of the AHSGR Sunflower Chapter have just been incredible in organizing this.”

Also assisting with the convention are the Kansas Northeast Chapter and the Golden Wheat Chapter, along with the Hays Convention and Visitors Bureau. It continues through Thursday.

The international convention was last held in Hays in 2007.
Presentations at the convention. Photos courtesy of the Hays Post (right) and Sherry Loos Pawelko (left).

Time for food! Making Kase Maultaschen (sweetened cheese-filled pockets) and Kuchen. Photos courtesy of Sherry Loos Pawelko.

Visiting the cemetery at one of the Volga German village churches in Ellis County. Photos courtesy of Sherry Loos Pawelko.
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:

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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:

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)

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, Nebraska 68502-1199.
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:

- [www.oregonahsgr.org](http://www.oregonahsgr.org)
- [facebook.com/groups/AHSGR.Oregon](http://facebook.com/groups/AHSGR.Oregon)