Panel Discussion

Our Recent Tour to Many of the Bergseite Villages in the Volga Region

On August 9, 2016, several dozen adventurous souls departed JFK airport in New York, bound for Moscow, then Volgograd. Others made their own plans to get to Moscow. Others were thwarted at the last minute by the ill-timed glitches of a domestic carrier (Delta Airlines). After arriving in Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport, members of the tour were put on a flight to Volgograd, a city which would define the beginning and end of our tour. After a brief rest in Volgograd we would climb aboard two large vans which would catapult us into a world of Russian villages built centuries ago by Volga-German hands. We would walk the land of our ancestors, see the houses, explore the ruins of churches, their bells long silent, taste the ethnic foods of the region, and visit places of culture and historic preservation. We would see fair roads, decrepit roads, and no roads. We would meet and transact business with the local population.

We commend both Brent Mai and Mila Koretnikov for their vision is providing so many with an opportunity to walk the land of Volga Russia as our ancestors did in earlier times. Thank you.

Our panel, made up of at least five tour members from the Pacific Northwest will give their thoughts and share their experiences with photos and video of this fantastic journey taken together. They’ll talk about the trip, and provide some insight into what the villages are like today.
Roger Haas
Roger Haas led the Oregon chapter from 2000 to 2001 and focused on bringing the membership quality programs, a well written newsletter and efforts to increase membership. The chapter Articles of Incorporation were filed with the Oregon Secretary of State on May 22, 2000 and the Bylaws were adopted by the Board of Directors of the Oregon Chapter of AHSGR on May 22, 2000.

Roger established a goal to increase chapter membership from 122 (in 1999) to 500 and reached out to members of the Germans from Russia Heritage Society (GRHS) to become members in both AHSGR and GRHS.

Roger would later become the founder and President of the Germans from Russia of Oregon and Washington (GROW) which he led until his passing on July 23, 2016 at the age of 82. The cause of death was a traffic accident in Montana.

A memorial service has already taken place in North Dakota.

Oscar Geiszler
Michael M. Miller received the message below, regarding Oscar Geiszler's passing, from his daughter Lorinda. As you may know, he was a member of the GROW board of directors and a founding member of the GROW Chapter. The passing of Oscar and our Grow Chapter president Roger Haas within a couple of weeks, leaves our organization with a large void to fill. May they both rest in peace. ~Larry Kuntz

It is with heavy heart for me to inform you that my father Oscar Geiszler passed away at 6:20 on August 16, 2016. He had a heart attack a week ago Monday and took a turn for the worst this morning and died from congestive heart failure. The family will be making arrangements tomorrow and I will forward the service information when it is available. If you could relay the message to the GROW members, the family would greatly appreciate it.
~Sincerely, The Geiszler family

Oscar was a former member of the Oregon Chapter and one of the founders of GROW. ~Steve Schreiber

October Chapter Meeting
In addition to the tour panel and question and answer session at the October general meeting, there will be annual elections for officers and directors held for 2017. If anyone is interested in participating on the board they can contact me, Steve Schreiber. We have at least 1 open position and possibly 2.

November Chapter Meeting
November will be the 45th Anniversary of the Oregon Chapter and we’ll have a program to celebrate that occasion.
Norka Film DVD - American Historical Society of Germans from Russia

The recent AHSGR Convention in Concord, California featured the premier showing of the long awaited DVD documentary, "Norka: A Passage in Time." This rare film footage was taken in 1928 by Heinrich Wacker (Henry Walker), who lived in Portland, Oregon at the time. It is a unique view into the lives of the Volga Germans.

Follow the link below to the AHSGR web store to order your copy!  

75th Anniversary

Tanja Schell shared information that August 28, 2016 marked the 75th anniversary of the infamous decree by the Soviet Russian government that initiated the deportation of all Volga Germans from the Volga area to the eastern parts of the USSR in the fall of 1941. There was a large gathering in Berlin, Germany on this day, remembering this event and its consequences for our people.

UNSpoken Law of Genealogy:

Law of Legibility
A record's legibility is inversely proportional to how much a genealogist wants to read it.

("Your great-great-great grandmother says to tell you you're barking up the wrong family tree.")
The Journey Begins

Preparation
Before I could even contemplate a trip to Russia, I needed to make sure my papers were in order. First, the passport. If your current passport expires within 6 months of your return from Russia, you’ll need a new one before you go. Even though I had a month to spare, I decided for safety sake to obtain a new one. In order to travel there, you also need to have a Russian visa. In order to get one, you need someone to vouch for you, like a travel agency, a hotel, a person, etc. The travel agency, Volga German Tours, provided most of the information needed for processing. Once I had the new passport and additional passport-type photos, I used a company recommended by Brent Mai, ItsEasy, to assist with the complicated application paperwork. I purchased their pre-check feature, so they could look over the visa application prior to my mailing it to them for processing. Lucky for me, they caught a couple of minor errors. I submitted the updated forms, included my new passport and new photos and several weeks later, the new passport was received with the visa inserted. I was now ready.

Knowing the flight from JFK to Moscow was going to be long, I decided to fly a day early and spend the night in Jamaica, New York, within a mile or two of JFK airport. The next day, rested, I checked out of the hotel and made my way to the airport. I couldn’t check in early so I ended up toting my luggage and carry-on around the terminal, checking it out, chewing up time, enjoying a latte. The flight from New York’s JFK airport on Aeroflot (Аэрофлот) airlines to Moscow was long but uneventful. I caught a connecting Aeroflot flight to Volgograd with other members of the tour. Volgograd is a very large city. For being large, it has a puny airport. We exited the plane via steps to the tarmac and walked to the terminal to retrieve our luggage to find that they have but one luggage carousel. It’s not hard to pick the wrong one. The carousel was a slow one at that. We sailed through customs and boarded our transportation for the ride into the city. All along the way, the roads were under construction, in preparation for the FIFA soccer games in 2018. We arrived at our 5-star hotel, the Hotel Volgograd where fine rooms and food awaited us after this long journey!

The next morning, Thursday, August 11, after a wonderful breakfast, we had an orientation session with Brent and Mila and received our identification and packets. The vans were loaded and we headed north for the villages, the first one being Dobrinka, on the banks of the Volga. I had an impressive photo taken of me with the Volga and distant cliffs in the background. My hand proved the water close to shore was warm. The impressive ruins of the church in Dobrinka spoke of better days gone by. Most homes were authentically German. Continuous gas lines adorned the exteriors of the properties, rising occasionally then dipping to allow for traffic to pass underneath.

The weather was extremely hot. We had a pilot car and two large vans. An additional van carried our luggage on to Zhirnovsk, our final destination while we were village hunting. Roads, for the most part might have been paved but there were enough potholes to suggest otherwise. I can't count the number of potholes we hit, dodged, slowed down for, reconstituted, etc. I remarked after the van turned around once that the driver must have missed one of those pesky demons and went back for it. We continued through Galka and Schwab, admiring the similar German architecture of these two villages on the banks of the Volga. We traveled inland to Holstein then over to Scherbakovka where we left as the sun was about to set. This left us with a lot of road to travel.

We continued on, risking the suspension system, underestimating the time to reach Zhirnovsk. After what seemed 500 miles over bad road, we pulled up to the Hotel Zhirnovsk about 10:40 pm to a crowd of Zhirnovsk well-wishers including teenage girls in costume who danced for us. Luckily the music was loud enough to mask our growling stomachs. After a wonderful reception where the crowd must have waited for our arrival for over 4 hours, we finally ate a fine multi-course meal at a nearby restaurant on chairs which seemed like they were still running the course of potholes. The chairs were fine. It was our equilibrium that was off.

We checked in to this only hotel in Zhirnovsk, called the Hotel Zhirnovsk, and prepared for sleep which we thought would come easily. It's an older Soviet style hotel with concrete floors and Spartan accommodations. It's the only hotel in town, I was told. Although people had initial problems, eventually all were worked out.
Mine was the lack of water in the sink in my 3rd floor room and lack of cold water in the shower. The explanation given was the sudden use of water on the 2nd floor from our tour group, lowering the water pressure to the third floor. After getting the handyman to my room late that night some water was restored to the sink. No cold water to the shower meant a sink bath in the morning. I've not been able to fit into a sink since infancy and this day was no exception. I did the best I could and it turned out OK.

The next morning, Friday, August 12, came early after a night with little sleep. On the way to the adjacent Pine Forest restaurant, I notified the front desk of my desire to have what I called my 'fire shower' repaired to the point where my flesh wouldn't peel off. The restaurant breakfast was multi-course and superb as were all subsequent meals we had there and at the Cherry Orchard restaurant in town. The same staff operated both restaurants while we were there. Food was prepared with great care and was varied enough to represent the many types of Russian cuisine common to the area, all in pleasant settings.

The group boarded two vans and headed off to the villages of Walter and Frank. Walter was more populated than I imagined and what Google Earth would suggest. Walter had a nice church and the building survives today. Frank is a large town with a mixture of paved, dirt, and combination streets. Both had many fine examples of Volga-German construction, mostly wooden with ornate embellishments on many. In Frank we stopped near the central park in town. Information was provided about the town while locals at a small open air market nearby watched with curiosity. In these two villages there were many examples of German style architecture consisting of a traditional house, a summer kitchen, and a courtyard with a gate large enough to drive a car or wagon through. We then visited the village of Kolb, stopping for a nice tour at the local school.

We drove back through Hussenbach where Mila translated for some guides who were present. It was decided to visit the Borel mill nearby. My feet gave out and the lack of sleep caught up with me. I with two others took the cargo van back to Zhirnovsk where we could rest and recuperate. I rested with great zeal, missing the concert and dance bands near the hotel. Later I felt refreshed and we three joined back up with the rest of the tour group for dinner at the Cherry Orchard restaurant.

Following a great dinner I returned to my room to find my cold water hadn't been restored to the shower. Not wanting a sponge bath the next morning I walked down to the lobby at midnight. The clerk was preparing for bed. I again asked her if she could have it repaired. There were language difficulties until I dropped my cold water shower knob onto the front desk which had fallen off into my hand in my room. All language barriers dissolved. The clerk got the handyman back and he replaced the whole assembly. Finally a working shower for the next morning!

On Saturday, the 13th, a great breakfast was awaiting us. Not only did we have the traditional meat slices, vegetables, breads, and a hard-boiled egg, they also served a sort of Blinha dessert, a type of pancake drawn up at the top and tied, capturing the taste of apple inside. The dessert looked like a medieval coin purse with drawstring. It was a fine addition to the breakfast. Afterwards we headed off towards Dietel, passing through to Kratzke, Merkel, and Grimm. The road sign announcing Norka came into view at noon. There was a historical building which contained information about the village and had a nice little library. Another talk by Mila was made out near the cemeteries. The sun was roasting everyone. Once over, we returned to the building for a nice picnic on its steps and among the shade trees lining a path away from the building. The tour had arranged for superb box lunches packed with sandwiches, fruit, beverages...a real meal. After lunch, most of the tour split off to continue towards Dönhof while four of us trekked by pilot car up onto the hillside overlooking the town to try to capture photos which would mimic those taken earlier in Norka’s history. Unfortunately, the passage of time had concealed many of the primary landmarks with trees and other vegetation.

Following Norka, everybody merged again in Dönhof. We took photos of local architecture and found a little market, stocked with everything we could conceivably need at the moment. That everything consisted of ice cream which was supplied by the tour and devoured with great enthusiasm. It must have been a surprise for the owners or locals who just strolled in to find so many strangers in their market, strangers without Russian language skills. Our long journey back to Zhirnovsk ensued. Another fine meal became history and bed awaited.
My Kautz Experience

It was early morning, Sunday, August 14. I was awake, contemplating the day's activities. THE day had come! My day to visit the birthplace of my grandparents, my great-grandparents, and those many generations preceding whose lives were altered by the actions of one man and his wife and several children who decided Russia would be a better place to live than in Germany. His name was Johann Philipp Frank and he was born November 5, 1719 in a little village just north of Heidelberg, a village known as Schriesheim. His wife, Anna Margaretha Will, had been a member of the Frank household staff. The trip to Russia was arduous. Anna succumbed to the rigors of travel and died along the route. Johann Philipp arrived in Kautz, with children on July 20, 1767. Son Johann Heinrich Frank, born 23 July 1759, eventually married in Hussenbach and began the Frank line there. Son Johann Philipp Frank, born 21 May 1756, is the line from Kautz from which most of my family are descended.

I prepared for the day, anxious for breakfast and an early start on my visit to Kautz. One disappointment I found: my GPS application on my phone which worked perfectly in the USA was completely useless in Russia. My attempts to acquire a smartphone application which worked with GLONASS, the Russian version of GPS, was stopped dead in its tracks by PayPal, which wouldn't accept the $3.99 payment either because I (an American with an American phone) was in Russia, or the currency conversion would have been taken place with Rubles, a no-no. I enlisted the help of Sergei Koretnikov during breakfast to see if he could load the same type of GLONASS-compatible application he has on his phone onto my phone. Despite his best efforts there was to be no GPS or GLONASS this day.

Breakfast was excellent, but rushed. Vera Nikishina, my new friend, guide, host, coordinator, etc., would accompany me as passenger in the tour's cargo van, first to Dietel to meet up with a local guide and his wife, then on to Kautz, a short distance away. By 9:52 am we were entering the outskirts of the sacred village. The sun was beginning to display its harsh rays upon the land. From Dietel, we encountered remarkably good dirt road, compared to the many hours of potholes encountered in the approach to many other villages in previous days. Along parts of the way, endless acres of sunflowers cradled the road with green and yellow. As we approached the remnants of Kautz, familiar outlines began to appear. The Karamysh River formed the northern boundary of the village and could be distinguished by the strong line of green trees and vegetation, adjacent to large hills immediately north. We saw people on horseback, "Russian Cowboys" tending their livestock on the high ground to the south.

Our van and accompanying cars left the road and headed a very short distance across completely flat harvested field to our staging site. This is where the van was parked and a point from which no normal vehicle could further move without either damage to its undercarriage or getting stuck. It had a commanding view of the landscape of the destroyed village. We discussed a point, near a lone tree, near where the village school and church would have been located, its bells long silent. It was noted that there would have been a spring from which villagers would have drawn water there on Main street. As we continued the discussion of the layout of the village, the sun continued its relentless display of power.

We ventured into the weeds to this one lone tree. Broken bricks near this tree told the story of a structure long since destroyed. Among these bricks Vera came across what appeared to be part of a stove, rectangular, with what appeared to be writing on it. It could have adorned the top of the stove as an insert. This was a remarkable find. We walked further north encountering a tantalizing hole which Vera determined to be the entrance to a cellar. Our guide's vehicle, a type of Jeep, was well suited for the terrain. Well suited doesn't mean easy. The terrain tested the limits of its capabilities with bumps, weeds, rocks, holes, and anything else which could have been thrown at it. We traveled near a point where we could exit to find a path down to the Karamysh. We did this. Our reward was the sight and sound of running water. It was not like the Volga, but a mere
speck of water which still ran free. My grandmother would have washed her clothes in this river. I marveled at the steep and laborious decline to river's edge. It's not certain that this was the exact point of my grandmother's access to the river but it symbolized the lengths villagers would take to keep clothes clean. Vera thought it would have been likely that horses would have been used to ferry larger amounts of water from the river back into the village. I was winded after returning up the steep incline to the vehicle.

Farther west, we encountered a mound overgrown with brush, cows intertwined, laboring to keep out of the summer's sun. We found a small trailer nearby with an individual who apparently took care of the herd. He had a campfire going and was surprised to see people who appeared to be showing an interest in his land. Next to the campfire, a large hole in the ground, covered by brush. Our guide began to clear away the opening. What became visible was remarkable! An entrance to a root cellar! You could see a rock arch at the entrance and darkness beyond. I had sandals on and didn't feel like getting closer to America through that route. Vera though, had no reservations whatsoever. Despite telling her that her niece, Tanja Schell, wouldn't approve, she maneuvered anyway towards the hole, grabbed my camera, and began her spelunking adventure. What she found was stunning. The camera gathered up all available light to reveal a root cellar, still functional, with at least two 'rooms'. From the video she took, I was able to extract photos of what she saw. Perfect 'rooms' with arched ceilings made of carefully-placed rocks. It's amazing that the energy that the Soviet displayed during destruction of the village was no match for the German villager's construction of arch ceilings of that cellar underground. It wasn't until after I returned home that I was able to view the jewel of a video which Vera had made. It has become one of my favorite and cherished videos of the tour. Thank you, Vera! I'm glad she didn't encounter a bear or badger down there. I would have tried to save her even if she hadn't been holding my camera.

After Vera completed the display of her spelunking prowess and we all were above ground, we bid our farewell to our herder who offered me a piece of candy. Very friendly people, these Russians. We ventured to the western part of the town where the Karamysh would have snaked a small tributary southward, to find a large open ravine with a dirt land bridge joining both sides. We marveled at the large rocks which appeared to be man made in an effort to bridge this tributary of the river. Later I stood on a mound high enough to get a view of the westerly layout of the streets and the mounds, perfectly in line. It would have been a much different sight, with houses, before the war and about 1962 when the Russians came in, bent on destruction.

The sun was taking a toll on all of us. With the guide's Jeep, we traveled approximately a mile back to the van on fairly good dirt road. The van contained my relief supply of water. We started to leave, knowing that the main tour group had left Dietel and was advancing on Kautz. As we departed, I found three pear trees growing near the road, still bearing fruit. I was so flustered with excitement and heat exhaustion that I violated my primary directive: get some dirt and rocks as artifacts, for me and for those at home who would later hold me accountable. It was then our convoys met. Brent and Mila and their attendees continued on for a tour of Kautz. I will be interested in seeing what was filmed during that part of the tour. Our driver, Vera, and I went on to Dietel where we spent a little time at a monument commemorating the founding of the village by Volga-Germans. We eagerly awaited return of the tour group from Kautz, knowing that lunch would commence at that time.

All in all, my trip to Kautz was bittersweet. It would have been nice to have used GPS-like coordinates to guide us to specific areas of the village. Before my trip, I had plotted the exact positions of landmarks and was ready to use them to help Vera and our other guide. But I received a very good tour of the village. I accomplished my main goal of actually visiting the village and seeing first-hand what the area was like and what it might have been had it not been for that war. But for Vera and our guide, I wouldn't have seen remnants of the village nor such wonderful sights as root cellars. My thanks to all who had a hand in the planning and execution of this remarkable visit. It has satisfied one entry on my bucket list. Do I have another list or bucket for Kautz? Maybe, probably not. However, I do envy Vera and her proximity to the land of my ancestors. My ancestors brought me to this land. My aunt Elaine Frank Davison who did so much research on this village and visited Kautz in 1991 with her husband George Davison, brought me to this land. They all would be smiling now knowing that we continue our journeys of genealogical knowledge every day with the purpose of passing that information on to those who are younger so that they never forget.
The Tour Continues Again...

Following lunch in Dietel on August 14, the tour continued on to Kratzke, the village requested by more than a few people in the tour group. I took video of Brent's presentation inside the church here. After Kratzke, we returned to the hotel and its restaurant in Zhirnovsk where, in addition to the dinner, a celebration of Michael Meisinger's birthday was held with song, cake, and flashing lights. Following up was a performance by a Russian singer with a great voice. He presented us all with music CDs of his work.

The next morning we turned in our very unique keys at Hotel Zhirnovsk, checked out, loaded our luggage, said our goodbyes, and headed back on the road. This time we traveled through Hussenbach, then over very bad road to Merkel, the village I just adopted as Village Coordinator for AHSGR. The Russian name for Merkel is Makarovka. In Merkel there are a small number of homes left standing along the main rut-filled road. There were people behind one house dealing with a stack of hay. A lone brick building adorned the landscape on the north side of the road. On the south side, vast evidence of mounds where homes once stood. In walking an area of brush there, I came across a very nice old bottle partially buried, filled with dirt. My new prize was not to be left unclaimed. I retrieved some Merkel dirt, took some additional photos, and joined the rest of the group for our continuing journey to the village of Bauer.

In Bauer I was able to get some video of the village itself from the van. After we stopped, I took a picture of a WWII memorial dedicated to the war dead from Bauer. These memorials are common throughout Russia signifying the great effort and sacrifice all Russians made to resist Nazi Germany's invasion. We parked at the Bauer School and were able to take a small tour through some of the classrooms. The road to Grimm followed. Grimm is a larger village, its population due in large part to the existence of a correctional and mental institution. Like in Bauer, Grimm has a very nice war memorial dedicated to those fallen during WWII. A school was present which was actively being used as a bottling plant for water. Some tour members were able to secure one or two oversized bottles.

We left Grimm and about 20 minutes later were in the village of Messer where most of the time was spent at its impressive church. Mike Meisinger, Randy Rupp, and Lynne Willmann are related to this village. The road then connected us to the large town of Balzer. Its war memorial was large and impressive. We took photos of old buildings and then were on the road again towards the village of Beideck where we encountered a large colorful church badly in need of repair.

The next village we encountered on our road toward Saratov was Schilling. Its view of the Volga is unrivaled. It had a nice little store where we were able to purchase some refreshments. Near the river is what appeared to be a nice, colorful, tidy, mental institution. Residents had free rein within the gate and fences.

Two hours later we pulled up to the Hotel Slovakia in Saratov, but one block from the river Volga. We checked in to fairly nice accommodations and dinner. After breakfast the next morning, we began our day's tour of the city. Parks, elaborate onion-topped churches, wide central squares, and German-influenced architecture were the norm. We encountered a long panorama of the city, very detailed in 3-D. It was very impressive!

Given a bit of free time, I spent mine at a nice Saratov bakery sampling Kuchen of the type, with prunes and crumbles, that my grandmother would have been proud to make. I also visited an Irish Pub whose basement access and green decor was exactly what you would find in Dublin. Apparently they were closed but the door was unlocked. I strolled in to encounter a couple of waitresses who were surprised at my entrance. They found that I used English and returned in broken English. I asked why they didn't speak Gaelic or English and their reply was that "this is Russia". They giggled as I left, closing the door behind me. I found a little store which sold me some pistachios and went across the street to a Kentucky Fried Chicken establishment where I purchased a strawberry milkshake. This was our meeting point where we gathered to return to the vans. After this day's tour, we returned to the Hotel Slovakia for a very nice lunch in the hotel's fine restaurant. I believe we ate dinner at the hotel that night then returned to our rooms to 'enjoy' disco music from our balconies from an establishment not far away, along the banks of the river.
The next morning, after breakfast, we hopped into the vans and traveled across the Volga to the large city of Engels where a very fine Volga-German archive is located. We were treated to a tour of the facility, live entertainment of all types, and cakes, candies, and refreshments. We were able to do shopping at stores which lined a very large central square with outdoor vendors and an amusement park. We then found a restaurant in town and had lunch. Afterwards, we traveled to Katharinenstadt (Marx) to visit the church there, currently under renovation.

The last stop today was the totally rebuilt church in Zurich. No expense was spared in its construction. It was very impressive! We were treated to a history of the church and to organ music which reverberated throughout its interior. Arriving back to the hotel late at night, we had dinner and prepared for departure south from Saratov the next morning.

I must say, of all the Volga-German houses and summer kitchens we encountered during our entire tour, none were more authentic or numerous as those found in Engels and Marx. Time spent in Saratov was most amazing. There is so much to see. A month in the city would have not been enough.

End of the Road --- Beginning of the Runway

On Sunday, August 18 after our breakfast at the Slovakia Hotel in Saratov, we stowed our luggage on the cargo van and began our long trek south towards Volgograd. The first village we encountered was Kamenka. We arrived about 11 am to the site of the majestic Kamenka church. Its magnificent spires graced the sky. While in this village, I was able to get photos of many of the houses along the route. Before noon we were already coming into Pfeifer, a village of interest to one of our tour members, Ron Beier. It was then onward to Kraft, a village with another war memorial and plenty of homes with photos suitable for framing. By 3:30 we were rolling through Kamysn. Heavy traffic and accidents in Volgograd delayed our arrival to the Volgograd Hotel until about 7:30. All in all, a very long and exhausting, but rewarding trip.

We checked into our rooms, tried to wash off some of the road dust, and prepared for what turned out to be a first-class hotel meal. Afterwards we were rewarded by a fine presentation by Alexander Spack, creator of the site "Geschichte der Volgadeutschen" (http://volgadeutsche.net/), a site I had posted to in the past. The site not only offers insight to the various villages, but also provides a forum for those with an interest in Volga-German subject matter. It is remarkable to have also seen Alexander and his son the previous month at the AHSGR convention in Concord, California. He and his son sat at my table for the final dinner Saturday night in Concord. He may have been surprised to see me again so soon in Russia.

The next morning after breakfast I was photographed in front of the building for the Committee of Transport and Road Management in the Volgograd Region. I wanted to talk to them about their lack of a plan for improvement of Volga-German village roads. Fortunately for them I couldn't schedule a meeting with them on such short notice. Besides, I wouldn't have been able to understand what they were saying in Russian. The only possible communication I might have been able to provide might be my extreme gyrations, flailing limbs, and fits on their conference table, simulating a van ride on some of their most pothole infested roads. They were spared those gyrations. The vans at our hotel just a block away were about to leave, hastening my return.

I visited a Russian Orthodox church in a park near the hotel, theater, and Road Management building. The church had three onion domes and was holding services. From outside one of its windows, I could hear the prayers and songs.
Our vans were prepared for the day’s journey and took us to one of Russia's most revered sites, the "Motherland Calls" memorial. The giant statue itself is erected on Mamaev Hill, one of the most important strategic locations during the battle for Stalingrad in WWII. At 52 meters tall and weighing 8,000 tons, it is so impressive and awesome, it almost takes your breath away. Throughout most of the memorial, and beyond into Volgograd streets, this statue can be seen and reigns supreme, calling on all Russians to resist the invasion of Nazi Germany with their lives, if necessary. We were witness to the changing of the guard of honor in the Hall of Military Glory of the Defenders of Stalingrad on Mamaev Hill. It is an impressive ceremony for which I have video near the eternal flame. Outside, oversize statues of war scenes left an indelible mark as to the sacrifices of so many Russians in the cause of victory. Walls of stone etched with lifelike scenes of actual events contributed to the impressive nature of the entire memorial. We had walked so far, had seen so much, endured so much sun, that I almost fell over in joy to see our vans at the END of the tour, knowing we wouldn't have to walk back to where we had entered.

We departed Mamaev to visit another Russian and Volga-German treasure, the Volgograd Archives. It was a site for which I had dreamed of seeing for decades. Finally, it stood before my eyes. It was all I had imagined. It had provided for me and my aunt, Elaine Frank Davison, all Kautz Lutheran church records (births, marriages, and deaths) from 1834 to 1918, with the exception of 50 years of births. For those missing records, I will attempt contact with other archives in the area. As a group, we were ushered into a reading room. In front of each chair was the name of a tour member and actual documents and books relating to his/her village(s) of interest. Volgograd Archive staff were very helpful and provided refreshments for our group. Upstairs we saw where records were stored, thousands of them. Such an impressive sight.

Later we traveled to the Volgograd State Panoramic Museum - Stalingrad Battle. We spent hours marveling at all the displays including depictions of actual battle scenes in 3-D. What an incredible place! On the site also is the last building, a flour mill, that was kept as a monument testifying to 200 days of fighting between the Red Army and Hitler's Army. It was kept as a reminder of the horrors of war. We returned to the Volgograd Hotel to freshen up, then were transported to a nice German Restaurant in Volgograd where we had a traditional German meal and live entertainment. The entertainment may have been slanted a bit toward Russia since I didn't hear much German sung. The music appeared to be more Slavic. All in all a great time here. All in all, a memorable and fulfilling day!

At almost 10 pm at the hotel we were given a substantial box lunch in anticipation of our flight to Moscow. We had to be in the lobby of the Volgograd Hotel with packed luggage at 2:45 am. Vans took us to Volgograd Airport, one worthy of any comparable U.S. town of 25,000 people. Although they take large jets, you have buses taking you across the tarmac to the plane where you enter up steps, like in the 1950's, their lone luggage carousel awaiting the next incoming flight. This for a city, one of 11 in Russia, hosting the 2018 FIFA World Cup. A new stadium is being built very close to Mamaev Hill and preparations are underway to improve the roads leading from the airport to the city.

My flights from Volgograd to Moscow to New York to Portland, despite lengthy layovers was accomplished in one day. That is in itself a marvelous achievement. A true heart-burner for Christopher Columbus. How he would think of his puny boat in this day and age?

What can I take away from this tour? It was brilliantly planned and executed. Thank you Brent Mai and Mila Koretnikov and staff for your hard work and dedication. Thank you for taking opportunities and making adjustments to the schedule as needed for the benefit of those attending. I cannot but marvel at the scenes passing by.
the windows of our vans, the endless hedgerows, the vastness of the land as far as the eye can see, the German architecture built into so many homes and buildings, the 75,692 potholes, the warmth of the Russian people, the anticipation of a warm bed at night, the wonderful food. Those who follow us in future tours should envy what we have experienced and enjoyed and should make it an experience not to be missed. Thank you my many comrades on the tour who provided such an uplifting environment of amazement and laughter throughout the journey. We now are a unique group of people who I hope will maintain contact over future years knowing we have a bond which is unique in this day and age.

Tour participants certainly have a lot of photos and videos and memories to absorb following tour's end. Many friendships were made. Many fine authentic Russian meals were consumed. Many kudos to all staff (hotel, restaurant, drivers, and guides) for a job well done. My personal thanks go to Vera Nikishina who went out of her way in welcoming the entire group to Zhirnovsk with music and dancing and who personally accompanied me through the ruins of Kautz in extreme heat and difficult ground conditions. My trip to Kautz was a success thanks to her. Thank you each and every one!

Apart from 10 days of jet lag (because I didn’t sleep well on planes), I had a very enjoyable time. I took many photos and video which will be shared with other participants. There may very well be a publication arising out of this adventure. AHSGR Oregon Chapter’s monthly meeting October 16, noon to 3, will consist of a panel of at least five tour participants, showing photos, videos, and sharing experiences gained on this remarkable journey. It should be one of the best presentations of the year. The location: Concordia University Library, floor 3, Portland, Oregon. If you have further questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me, Michael Frank, at dm48@comcast.net.

As I understand from Brent the subsequent tour to villages in the Wiesenseite, east of the Volga, went very well. Plans are underway in 2017 for 3 tours, 1 in June and 2 in August, grouping people with more common interests for less time on the road.
Two links posted by Alexander Spack. Great information!

AHSGR 2016 Convention in Concord, California:


Meetings with two groups of American tourists at the Hotel Volgograd in August 2016:

http://wolgadeutsche.net/spack/volg_08_2016/volgograd_08_2016_en.htm

The "Hidden Genealogy Web" Tips and Tricks

http://www.mytrees.com/newsletters/nlcenter/20160311/howto.html
by Cindy Carman

Newsletter Mailing Costs

The chapter incurs considerable costs in providing paper copies of this newsletter to chapter members. If at all possible, and you are able to view the newsletters electronically, please notify the newsletter editor (Michael Frank, at dm48@comcast.net, or telephone 360/601-7361), and we'll save some trees and $$$ in the process. Be aware that the electronic copies are in color, whereas the mailed copies are in black-and-white. Electronic versions are distributed many days before the paper copies are mailed. Another benefit is that you are able to increase the viewing size of the electronic version using the free software Adobe Reader. If you have a computer and printer, you can always print your own archival copy in color or black and white. Copies of past newsletters are also available for viewing or printing at the chapter website,

http://www.oregonahsgr.org/

Thank you to all those who have taken advantage of electronic mailings of this chapter's newsletters.
Some of the Volga-German Churches photographed during Tour 1 of the villages in August 2016.
AHSGR Oregon Chapter Membership Form

Membership fees are for one 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 (preferable). Yes ____ No ____
I want to receive my Oregon Chapter newsletter in the mail (paper copy)? Yes ____ No ____

In order for us to service 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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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**

Questions? Contact Jim Holstein at [oregonaahsgr@gmail.com](mailto:oregonaahsgr@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](http://www.ahsgr.org/membership.htm). (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.
September 2016

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AHSGR OREGON CHAPTER
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Portland, Oregon 97238-5218

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.

The Chronicle Unserer Leute (Chronicle of Our People) is published bimonthly by the Oregon Chapter of AHSGR.

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

Chapter Officers

President:
Steve Schreiber
Steven.Schreiber@gmail.com
503-774-9753

First Vice President:
Bob Thom
503-635-6651
bobthorn@hotmail.com

Second Vice President:
Vacant

Secretary:
Mary Burbank
360-263-5352

Treasurer:
Jim Holstein
503-367-1757
Jimholstein@gmail.com

Directors

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