AHSGR Oregon Chapter Newsletter
Chronicle Unserer Leute

Volume 37, Issue 6
November/December 2016

Mark Your Calendar
Saturday, November 5 - 10 am
Oregon Chapter Board Meeting
Sunday, November 20 - 2 pm
Oregon Chapter anniversary
German Russians in Oregon
Saturday, December 3 - 10 am
Oregon Chapter Board Meeting
Saturday December 17 - 2 pm
Annual Christmas Program
Saturday, January 7 - 10 am
Oregon Chapter Board Meeting

Catherine II, the Great
Empress of Russia

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

Oregon Chapter 45th Anniversary

On November 20th we will celebrate the 45th Anniversary of the Oregon Chapter. The first organizational meeting was held on April 25, 1971 and the Oregon Chapter became one of the first chapters of AHSGR International on November 21st of that year. Not many organizations last for 45 years and I’m sure that our ancestors would be proud that we’ve kept their story and traditions alive. I will share a short presentation on the history of the German Russian settlement in Oregon and the Oregon Chapter of AHSGR. We will also take time to honor a list of distinguished people who have been selected for our Lifetime Achievement Award. These people helped found the chapter and carry it forward over four and a half decades.        - Steve Schreiber

Sunday, November 20, 2016 - Oregon Chapter Program - 2 pm

Annual Christmas Program

Be sure to mark your calendars for our annual Christmas Program which will be held at St. Michaels Lutheran Church (across the street from the Concordia Library) on Saturday, December 17th at 2:00 pm. Loretta and Harold Kammerzell have organized a wonderful program featuring music and entertainment that you won’t want to miss.

Special Feature :
In this issue, Kathy Bartels Stahlman, a Bergseite tour participant reflects upon and chronicles the August visits to numerous Volga-German villages. Many of our Oregon Chapter members have ties to these villages. Enjoy!

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President’s Message for Nov/Dec 2016 Newsletter
Steve Schreiber, President

I hope that you are all enjoying the fall season. It is a good time of year to reflect and give thanks. I’d like to start by thanking Linda Duffield, Michael Frank, Carole Hayden, Doug Sharp and Doug Zier, for sharing their stories, photos and videos from a tour of some of the former Volga German colonies this past August. It was wonderful opportunity to see the places our ancestors once lived and give thanks for all they’ve done for us.

At our October meeting, we also held our annual election of Officers and Directors. These are the people who keep our chapter active and bring you programs, a great newsletter, an informative website and Facebook page, manage our finances and much, much more.

For 2017 the following Officers and Directors will be serving the chapter:
Steve Schreiber, President (term ends 2017), Bob Thorn, 1st Vice President (term ends 2018), Vacant, 2nd Vice President, Jim Holstein, Treasurer (term ends 2017), Mary Burbank, Secretary (term ends 2017), Roger Burbank, Director (term ends 2017), Michael Frank, Director (term ends 2018), Harold Kammerzell, Director (term ends 2017), Joan Porter, Director (term ends 2018), Lee Ann Schlager, Director (term ends 2017), Ed Wagner, Director (term ends 2017).

Many thanks to Thelma Wiest and Herb Felmly for their service to the Oregon Chapter over the past years. We’re sorry to see your board participation end, but we are very grateful for all you’ve done.

I’d like to welcome our newest board member, Joan Porter, and thank her for volunteering to help lead the organization in the years ahead. We have an open position for 2nd Vice President. If you are interested in joining the board, please contact me.

We said farewell to our one of our dearest members, Lois Klaus, in September. Lois was a longtime member of AHSGR and the Oregon Chapter. She served as Secretary and Treasurer of the chapter for many years. Lois also shared her talents playing the piano at many of our events. Her dry sense of humor was legendary. When we needed something done, and done right, Lois could always be counted on. She will be dearly missed. Ruhe in Frieden (Rest in Peace).

Along with several other members of the Oregon Chapter, I recently attended the memorial service for Roger Haas. Roger was President of the Oregon Chapter of AHSGR from 2000 through 2001 and later founded Germans from Russia Oregon and Washington (GROW). Roger was well known for his energy and enthusiasm for all things German Russian. Our thoughts are with his family.

On November 20th we will celebrate the 45th Anniversary of the Oregon Chapter. The first organizational meeting was held on April 25, 1971 and the Oregon Chapter became one of the first chapters of AHSGR International on November 21st of that year. Not many organizations last for 45 years and I’m sure that our ancestors would be proud that we’ve kept their story and traditions alive. I will share a short presentation on the history of the German Russian settlement in Oregon and the Oregon Chapter of AHSGR. We will also take time to honor a list of distinguished people who have been selected for our Lifetime Achievement Award. These people helped found the chapter and carry it forward over four and a half decades.

Our Lifetime Achievement Award members include:

Please let family members of our award winners (who may not be current members) know about this special recognition. We’d love to have them at this event.

Be sure to mark your calendars for our annual Christmas Program which will be held at St. Michaels Lutheran Church (across the street from the Concordia Library) on Saturday, December 17th at 2:00 pm. Loretta and Harold Kammerzell have organized a wonderful program featuring music and entertainment that you won’t want to miss.
We’re working on scheduling a number of excellent programs for 2017. If you have topics you’d like to have us cover, please let me know.

AHSGR International in Lincoln, Nebraska has announced a number of very positive membership changes. You’ll find more about those changes in this newsletter.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for your membership and support of the Oregon Chapter of AHSGR. We exist because of the interest shown by people like you.

I wish you a wonderful holiday season and look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming programs.

Alles gute,

Steve Schreiber
Oregon Chapter President

Upcoming Chapter Presentations - 2017

January 22 (Sunday)
Norka film
Installation of Officers and Directors

February 19 (Sunday)
Discovering my Burbach Family Origins in Germany
Roger Burbank

March 19 (Sunday)
Letters from Russia
Tanja Schell

Researching European Ancestry

Researching your European ancestry can be a little difficult, especially when you don’t speak the language. You may ask “How do I get started?” or “How do I read the records of my ancestors?” While the Family History Library has great expertise for helping guests who come to visit, not everyone is able to plan a trip to Salt Lake City. The Library therefore has created many free online “how-to” guides to help you research your European ancestors or learn how to read the vital information from your ancestors’ records. Included in each “how-to” guide is instruction on the particular record or language, an activity to test your knowledge, and an answer key to see how you did. Check it out on the FamilySearch Wiki.

How To Guides for International Research
https://familysearch.org/wiki/
HEAR THE VOICE OF ANCESTORS

a close translation of the newspaper article from the Cyrillic:

“Hear the voice of ancestors, breathe the air that they breathe, walk through the land on which they lived, meet sunrises and sunsets, into Zhirnovsky district came descendants of Russian Germans from America itself. People overcame the world to visit almost all the former German villages in the Volgograd and Saratov regions”.

"In Frank lived my Grandpa", tells one guest Delbert Amen. "Then he emigrated to America. Nice to visit the motherland of my ancestors, much better (tour) than imagined." "Very glad that I came, long about this I dreamed", admitted David Nigro. "Grandparents were born here. I was brought up on stories about their life, their childhood. They left from here over a hundred years ago. Now, I’m finally able to see with my own eyes the places about which so much is heard."

Of course, delegations of the descendants of the German colonists arrived in our country before. This is not the first visit. But for the first time such a large group of almost forty people. The tour was produced by a tour operator "Volga Bureau of Tourism". The routes were based upon the interests of the participants. Local historians and enthusiasts in the study of the history of this Province talked about and showed the local attractions.

“Understand that here once were huge, thriving settlements, people lived in prosperity and well-being. And now here was left almost nothing. It's like a lost civilization.”

Ruins of church in Kratzke visited by the tour group.
УСЛАВЬТЕ ГОЛОС ПРЕДКОВ

Почему отцам нужно рассказывать о предках, как они появлялись на земле, как они дрались, по каким местам они уехали? О том, что за ними охотятся джунгли или океаны? О том, как они строили и строили домашние уюты? О том, как они заботятся о своих детях? О том, как они сохраняют традиции и культурные ценности? О том, как они преодолевали препятствия и преображали сложные ситуации? О том, как они служили обществу, которые они создавали и на которых они строили свое будущее? О том, как они изменяли мир и мир изменился на их глазах? О том, как они находили силы и волю для продолжения жизни?

Вот обязательно, когда вы погружаете внимание на предков, вы сможете получить нечто важное для текущей жизни. О предках, которые оставили портреты, отпечатки, фрагменты истории, которые остаются в библиотеках, в музеях, в книгах. О предках, которые оставили следы, которые остались на страницах книг, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые остались в письмах, которые о...
Volga-German Tours - Roundtable
A discussion primarily of the August 9-20 tour to Volga-German Villages west of the Volga

The Oregon Chapter’s Volga-German Roundtable was held Sunday, October 16 at the Fine Arts building on Concordia University’s Portland campus. It was well attended. The Roundtable consisted of Linda Duffield, Michael Frank, Carole Hayden, Doug Sharp, and Doug Zier. Linda was also part of tour 2 (east of the Volga). Carole and husband Dave vacationed in Moscow immediately following Tour 1. Despite initial technical difficulties with the Fine Arts building, the Roundtable was able to answer many questions about the tour.

I believe any tour attendees you ask will comment that the 2016 Bergseite tour was a very good experience and opened a lot of eyes about current life in the villages.

Some of the main points brought out in the session:
Road conditions from the primary highways in the Bergseite to individual villages were poor. We sometimes pulled off the main roads to dirt roads parallel to the highway to avoid even rougher conditions. Pedometers registered sometimes over 46,000 ‘steps’ caused by the van’s vibration from potholes.

August was the time for watermelon stands which were frequently found alongside primary highways. Watermelons were plentiful. Sunflowers as far as the eye could see were prevalent. We also found pottery stands selling lawn statuary along the way.

There was normally not a lot of time spent in any particular village due to the distances needed to travel between villages and the poor road conditions which limited speed.

There were no dedicated rest stops with proper facilities along the primary highways, apart from truck stops, cafes, and 7-11 type facilities. There were long stretches along these primary highways with no facilities. Trees and other ground cover provided relief to families who valued privacy from the main road. These trees and ground cover had provided privacy many times previously for many others.

Almost all of the oldest wooden houses in the villages had no paint, had plain corrugated metal roofs, a small 2-digit number designating address, and a satellite dish. Ornate woodwork adorned the outside window frames. White lace curtains were often found in the windows. Many had the typical large gate with courtyard enclosing other structures and garden. Most of the oldest houses faced away from the street.

Natural gas pipes snaked above ground throughout some small villages, sometimes through houses. The route of the pipes occasionally allowed for tall vehicles and farm equipment.

In some food markets, the abacus was still in use. Absent our Russian language verbal skills, the proprietor would also use a calculator to display to us the cost of items we purchased.

Those Oregon Chapter members who wish to receive photos of their village(s) from the tour, please contact Michael Frank (dm48@comcast.net). All requests will be fulfilled in the order in which they are received. Photos and video from the entire tour are also available (size = 18gb).

Rock samples are available from the following villages: Beldeck (2), Dönhof (5), Grimm (2), Holstein (2), Huck (2), Kolb, Kraft, Messer, Moor (2), and Zürich. For a donation to CVGS, they can be acquired. First come, first served. Limit 1 per person. Contact Michael Frank for details.
Lois Klaus
Lois Kathryn Klaus, 82, died at Portland Providence Hospital on the morning of September 2. Lois was preceded in death by her mother, Leah; father, Jacob; and sister, Ruth; and she leaves behind her niece, Lynn Huber.
Lois was a lifelong resident of Portland, graduating from Jefferson High in 1952 and working as a legal secretary for Miller, Nash for 47 years. She was a member of Ebenezer Congregational for many years and attended Glenfair Evangelical Church, where she shared her passion for missions. She volunteered countless hours at Portland Rescue Mission, Shepherd’s Door, and Albertina Kerr’s. Among the many organizations with which she was affiliated were the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, the Christian Women’s Association, Monday Musical, and the Beatrix Potter Society. During her life she enjoyed spending time with friends, playing organ for church, traveling, and making various handcrafts.
A funeral service was held at Ross Hollywood Chapel on Wednesday, Sept. 7. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Lois’ honor to the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia or Portland Rescue Mission.

Mary Jane Wagner
A member of our Oregon Chapter AHSGR, Mary Jane Wagner, passed away September 11, 2016.

Darlene Vanderbeck
Passed away August 29, 2016 in Marquam, Oregon.

Florence Bauder
Best Wishes to Florence Bauder for a speedy recovery from a car crash on October 5.

Don Ginter
Irene Ginter, Don’s wife, let us know that Don is homebound with kidney disease. If you care to drop him a note or short phone call, it would be appreciated. 360/892-8327. Ginters: 21711 NE 189th Street, Brush Prairie, Washington 98606.

From the Internet
If you have a picture of Russian text, and want to convert it to a computer file for electronic translation, a good website to use is: www.free-ocr.com. Upload the picture, select the language (Russian), hit START. The Russian text will be copied to a download file. It’s limited to 1000 characters per pass. From the file created, you can translate to English using one of many translation programs, including Bing Translate. It works for other languages also.

Multilingual Electronic Keyboard (learn your Cyrillic letters...): lexilogos.com/keyboard/russian.htm

This database contains an index to cemetery and burial details posted on Find A Grave. Corrections and additions to memorials can be submitted on the Find A Grave site. When viewing a record in this database, you can navigate to the corresponding memorial on Find A Grave by clicking "Go to website" or clicking on the Find A Grave URL. Once viewing the memorial on Find A Grave, corrections can be submitted by clicking the ‘edit’ tab.
TOTAL RECORDS: 137,136,268

Norka Information - norkarussia.info/education.html
KATHY BARTELS STAHLMAN

A gifted chronicler of the tour to Volga-German villages August 9-20, 2016. See her Facebook posts with text and Volga-German photos at:
https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=kathy%20bartels%20stahlman

Norka:
Norka (now the Russian town of Nekrasovo) was once a thriving community, with about 14,000 residents in the 1910s. Now it is a mere shadow of its former self. Our guide said that there are about 2,000 people officially living in the town now, but she thought it really was closer to 1,000 now. Our tour members with ancestors from Norka had a detailed map with family names and locations of their homes, and they headed off to see if the homes still were there. Sadly, most now were just empty lots. We toured the old parsonage, which is now the local museum and town library. The building sits at one end of the local park; the other end has a bust of Lenin and a monument to Norka residents who died in WWII (some German names were included on the monument). A local resident pointed out where the old church and cemetery used to be, and told us that the ruins we had seen next to the old parsonage were those of the old school. We walked along 2 streets near the park and saw several old Volga German homes and an old brick power plant. Some of the nicer homes had been declared "community buildings" by the Soviet government. I looked at Google Earth later, and it showed that there were quite a few buildings in the town. Still, we did not see anyone out and about.

Frank:
We didn't get to spend much time in Frank. The town is near the main road, and there was much more activity here than we'd seen in the colonies we'd visited earlier. We saw some farms as we approached the town, but it looked like much of the land is not currently being farmed. Indeed, we saw abandoned farm equipment along the roads in the town, and the equipment we did see in use looked very old. We spent a bit of time in the center of town, near the old parsonage and school. There is a park where the church once stood, and a stand displaying a bell from the old church is across the street. We saw only a few Volga German houses in the village.

Walter:
We were pleasantly surprised to see a mostly intact church building in Walter. It sits prominently on a hill, and was visible from several miles away. We could only tour the exterior of the church, as well as the new cemetery. The church is now being used as a granary, but the boarded up entrance to the church allowed at least a glimpse of what a beautiful interior the church once had. The church was built in 1902, and, sadly, was used as a church for less than 30 years. The cemetery, about 1/4 mile from the church, was overgrown with weeds, and nearly all of the graves were Russian Orthodox.

Hussenbach:
We drove through this colony several times, as it was on the road to Zhirnovsk. Hussenbach seems to be doing fairly well; we saw many people out and about. We even stopped in the well-stocked market there to get snacks & drinks.
We stopped near the center of town to see the park, which was where the Lutheran church once stood. At one time there was a statue of Jacob Hussenbach, the settler after whom the colony was named, but now there is a statue of Lenin there. The town school sits right behind the park. Across the street from the park is the old village clinic. It was continuously used from 1905 until 2015 when a new clinic was built. The old clinic served as a hospital during WWII. I don't know what the building is used for now.

We spent most of our time at the Borel Mill near Hussenbach. The Borel family built the mill in 1892, and it is a huge red brick building. We were allowed to go inside and up the steps to the other levels, and it was eerily empty. The mill was in operation until it sold in 2015, and the new owners chose to melt down and sell off all of the equipment. They were more interested in using the mill and the property granaries for storage. The equipment was still usable when the property sold, but now it is too expensive to run the mill, mostly due to the cost of shipping the flour (& sunflower oil) to the market. We found some discarded flour labels at the bottom of the stairwell, and I took one. My cousin's paternal grandparents were from Hussenbach, and as farmers they probably did business with the Borel mill.

Kolb:
Our only destination in Kolb was the primary school. We were impressed with the beautiful, well-tended gardens on the school grounds. A history teacher invited us in and gave us a tour of the school. He was especially proud of the local history museum in the school. We were pleased to see that they had quite a few photos and artifacts from the Volga German period.
Balzer:
Balzer is a thriving community. Its population now is about 23000, nearly double the population of the colony during the Volga German era. The city is now known in Russian as Krasnoarmeyisk, literally meaning "red army", but I do not know if there is a large military presence here. Balzer's Reformed church no longer stands; it was built about 1850, & its last church service was in 1935. The building was deemed "not good enough" to serve as a school, and it was torn down. We had a bit of trouble finding where the old church stood, and had to ask a long time local resident to help us locate the site. There are many Volga German buildings in the old part of Balzer. While we were in the downtown area, a local woman asked us to visit the Balzer museum. Unfortunately, we didn't have time to see the museum, so instead we posed for a group photo with the residents to document our visit to their community.

Grimm:
We spent time wandering around the town, taking photos, while some of our tour members headed off with our guides to more thoroughly explore the town of their ancestors. We parked next to the old general school, which was run by the Russian government. My notes indicate that it was built in about 1867, and it is still in use - but not as a school. There currently is a water bottling plant in the old school, and several of our tour members were able to go in and see the operation. They were given bottles of the water, but, after seeing how it was bottled, I'm not sure anyone was eager to drink it. Grimm has a high security prison and a psychiatric hospital, so there are jobs to keep residents living in the town. Some of us went into the small stores in the town, which included a food market and a general merchandise store. We saw several Volga German homes along the main road in Grimm. The World War II monument was along the main road, as was a statue of Alexander Suvorov, a writer and military hero. There was a red brick cast iron factory on the outskirts of town, but it appeared to be abandoned now. I'm not sure why, but I didn't take many photos of Grimm. Some of our tour members took more photos of the town.

Beideck:
The Beideck Lutheran church stands on a hill right off of the main road through town. It was built in about 1907 as a stucco over brick structure. We could look around the exterior of the building, but the doors to the inside were locked. Our tour leader, who has never seen the inside of the church, told us that a section of the church originally to the right of the main entrance has been removed in recent years. The old church was used as a school after the church was closed in 1934, and supposedly it is being used as a community building now. There is a nondescript brick building behind the Balzer Lutheran Church, but we couldn't tell what it was. However, the community's World War II memorial was next to this building, and, unlike all the other memorials we have seen on our trip, the gate to the monument was locked. The church was our only stop in Beideck, but some of our tour members took a side trip into town to see some of the old German homes.

Dobrinka:
Dobrinka was the first Volga German colony founded (29 Jun 1764), and the first we visited on our trip. It is a beautiful location, right next to the Volga River. There is a lot of rich farmland in the area, but little of it is being used. At one time there were over 5000 people living in the town, but now it is much smaller. We saw some activity in the village; people were planting & taking care of gardens on both sides of the church ruins. It was nice to see that some of the current inhabitants are taking pride in the rich history of this colony.

Huck:
Huck (which rhymes with "duke") is not far from Norka. Its location near the main road has helped it remain an active little town. There was abandoned farm equipment near the turnoff to the town, so it appears that the town's farming industry is hurting, as it is in most of the towns we visited. There was a very pretty Russian Orthodox church in the town, and nearby was a 3-story Volga German red brick school. The school, built in about 1897, was still in use relatively recently, but now all we could see inside was trash and rubble. A local guide took us to the town springs, which the original settlers found in 1767. The water was cool and sweet - and no one got sick from drinking it.

Kautz:
There was very little to see in Kautz. The once vibrant community was bulldozed by the Soviet government in the 1960s when it was determined that, with Dietel nearby, there was no reason for Kautz to exist. There was a very small cemetery in the town, overgrown with weeds, but it looked like one of the graves had recently had a new marker installed. Other than that, there were just mounds of rubble, overgrown with weeds, where homes had once stood. A member of our group was able to more thoroughly explore Kautz, the colony of his ancestors, which was a very moving experience for him. Thanks go to our tour coordinators who were able to arrange this for him and others members of our tour group!

Merkel:
There doesn't seem to be much in Merkel anymore. There were farms in the area (sunflowers seemed to be the main crop), but we saw very little in the town itself. There was one wood Volga German house, and the old brick parsonage was still standing. There was nothing left of the old Merkel church. We saw quite a few mounds of rubble along the road, ever-fading evidence of homes that used to shelter our Volga German ancestors.
**Messer:**
Messer’s beautiful Reformed church, built in about 1912, sits in ruins. It must have been as magnificent inside as it was outside, but the weed-infested interior has covered all but a few traces of the beautiful workmanship. The grandparents of one of our tour members attended this church for a couple of years before they immigrated to the US. He had the opportunity to explore more of Messer, and to get a feel for the town his ancestors left over 100 years ago. With the help of some local residents, he was able to locate where his ancestors lived. However, it must have been a bittersweet experience; the houses had been torn down long ago and replaced with Soviet era apartments and storage units. Two red brick Volga German buildings, the school and church parsonage, were next to the church. Both were in relatively good shape and looked like they were still being used. There were other Volga German buildings in Messer, but I didn’t get any photos of them.

**Galka:**
This is where my grandfather’s family lived from about 1797 to 1852. There are very few Volga German houses left in the colony, and we did not see any people while we were there. There were a few newer homes, and we were told that Germany donated money to build the homes. In the 1990s, Germany was dealing with reunification and the influx of many former Germans from Russia, and to encourage these Germans from Russia to stay in Russia they built homes for them in the former colonies. Today, at least 95% of the current residents of Galka, and the other Volga German colonies, are Russian.

**Merkel:**
There doesn’t seem to be much in Merkel anymore. There were farms in the area (sunflowers seemed to be the main crop), but we saw very little in the town itself. There was one wood Volga German house, and the old brick parsonage was still standing. There was nothing left of the old Merkel church. We saw quite a few mounds of rubble along the road, ever-fading evidence of homes that used to shelter our Volga German ancestors.

**Schilling:**
Schilling, founded in August 1764, was one of the earliest Volga German colonies. It is a beautiful village, situated on a cliff right next to the Volga River. Although the German colonists farmed, fishing was also a very profitable profession in the village. The proximity to the Volga River made Schilling an important port as well. There are still many Volga German buildings in the old part of the town, and the ones we saw were still being used. At one time, the wooden Lutheran church (built in 1883) stood on a hill above the Volga River, and it must have been visible from the Volga River for several miles. The church was torn down in the 1990s, and a partially built white building sits on the site now.

**Kratzke:**
In its heyday, Kratzke was a very busy town. It had a large sarpinka (excellent quality woven cloth) factory that at its height employed as many as 700 people. The factory was built sometime in the early 1900s, and was torn down within the past 20 years. Numerous houses which originally were located near the factory have also been razed, leaving behind nothing but foundations and mounds of rubble as evidence that productive Volga Germans once lived there. The Berschauer family owned a profitable mill in Kratzke. They built a large house in Kratzke in 1908, but the family only lived there for a few years before the property was seized by the Soviet government soon after the Russian Revolution. There was another building right next to the Berschauer house, which may have been a dorm for some of the mill employees. Kratzke’s one-story Lutheran church, constructed of wood in 1899, still stands. The former church was converted to a movie theater during the Soviet era, and more recently was used for hay storage and as a barn. It is rapidly deteriorating. Across the street from the church is the old parsonage, also in ruins. An overgrown white-stone circular driveway leads to the entrance of the parsonage, evidence of the pride the former residents had in their colony and church. The nearby new cemetery, also overrun with weeds, is the final resting place for Russian Orthodox followers as well as a handful of Protestant Volga Germans. There were Volga German era houses in Kratzke, but the town was eerily quiet during our visit; I don’t recall seeing residents along the streets while we were there. It was a startling contrast from what Kratzke must have been like 100+ years ago.

**Bauer:**
We only planned a brief stop in this colony to see where the old Lutheran church had been, but we were graciously invited into the school to use the restrooms and see the classrooms. We were especially interested in the German classroom, because German is the only foreign language taught in the school. The Bauer school has between 40-50 students in a building meant to educate many more. It was a sad tale we’d heard before, that the area needs more jobs to keep the town residents from moving to the larger cities.

**Holstein:**
Holstein colony is relatively isolated, but there are a lot of melon farms in the area. There aren’t many homes here, but at least one is occupied by a Volga German. Lidia’s parents were deported to Siberia in 1941, and she was born there. The family was allowed to return to Holstein in 1956. Her father had spoken only German before then, but once the family returned to Holstein they never spoke German again. "We are Russians now," is what Lidia told our interpreter.
Kraft:
During the early 1900s, Kraft had over 6000 residents. It was a thriving community, with mills, schools, shops, and a lot of farming in the area. Today it has about 600 people. The Lutheran church, built in about 1865, no longer stands, but there are still Volga German houses in the town. The old school, with a newer addition, is still being used to educate the town’s children. We were invited inside to see the local history museum. It was an especially moving experience for one of our tour members – her parents had attended school here. The museum displayed artifacts from the Volga German era as well as the Soviet era. A teacher told us that a few Volga Germans still live in Kraft, and directed us to the house of one of them. No one was home. Outside a nearby home, we talked to a 92-year-old Volga German woman who vaguely recalled our tour member’s Schultz family. She pointed out a couple of homes where the family once lived, and we were able to take photos there. As was often the case, people came out to see what we were doing in their quiet little town. A woman approached us, and when we explained that we were Volga Germans, she spoke German with us. I asked her about a couple of families, and was elated that she recognized the family name of my grandmother, who came from a nearby colony. It would have been interesting to ask her more questions, but our bus was ready to leave for Volgograd.

Moor:
There is very little left in Moor. We stopped by the old German school, and saw the new village school (which has about 35 students). Moor is not very far from the much more vibrant community of Balzer, which might explain why few people today choose to live in Moor.

Pfeifer:
Pfeifer was also a Catholic colony, and is not far from Kamenka. Its Catholic church, St. Francis of Assissi, no longer stands. The only remaining part of the church is a church bell, which was removed and hidden by a parishioner before the church was torn down. Indeed, the bell now is displayed on a stand across the road from where the old Catholic church once sat. A school still operates in the village, but it has only 25 students. The town’s population is dwindling because there are very few jobs in the area. We walked along the road with our guide and interpreter, and struck up a conversation with an older woman and her granddaughter. They very kindly invited us to their home to see their garden. We were very excited to have the opportunity to see how some of Pfeifer’s residents live. The garden was well tended and had vegetables that would make any gardener envious. As we looked around the courtyard of the house, we saw an assortment of items stashed in several rough sheds and blanket-covered lean-tos. Just as my ancestors did, the family kept old items instead of throwing them out – because they might be useful someday. The women invited us into the house, which was an wonderful treat. We entered through a door in the courtyard, where lace curtains served as a screen from insects. The room was a family room and pantry, and it looked like it was an addition to the original house. The pantry had a small refrigerator, vegetables in bins, small appliances and kitchen items, and a cabinet with their nice dishes. The next room was the kitchen, and this was a special day for the family – their little girl was turning 2. A teddy bear cake sat on the kitchen table, and some helium balloons hugged the ceiling. The kitchen was quite large. It had a small gas stove and oven, and a lot of cabinet space. I also noticed a flat screen TV on the wall. We did not get to see the rest of the house, but I did notice a large refrigerator/freezer in the hallway that probably led to the bedrooms and bathroom. We guessed that this family was doing fairly well.

Once again, we were moved by the kindness of the people in these small villages. To invite a group of strangers into their house and to show us how they lived was unexpected and touching. We wished them the best as we headed back to our bus.

Dietel:
We received a wonderful welcome in Dietel! We parked at the local community building where school girls performed a traditional dance and presented us with welcome bread and salt. The bread was delicious! Just across the parking lot is a park, which is where the old church was located. We saw the World War II monument as well as a statue of Lenin in the park. Dietel erected a commemorative monument in the park honoring the original settlers of the colony. We were told about a woman, Maria Reichel, a Volga German, who lived in the colony from about 1956 until her death at the age of 100 in 2015. Maria was very proud of her heritage, and shared it with the residents of Dietel. We walked along a road in Dietel and saw some Volga German buildings. There was a small factory where sarpinka (a fine quality woven cloth) was made. There were also several Volga German houses along the road. As has been true for so many other villages, there are very few jobs in the area to keep the people from moving to larger cities. We had the opportunity to tour the local museum. It had a large display of Volga German artifacts, including Bibles, certificates, a spinning wheel, sewing machine, and the like. The museum also had other displays, including one from the Soviet era, which were very interesting. We visited the Dietel springs, which I think was located between Dietel and Kautz. We hiked down to the well, but we all declined to try the water; we had seen cows just downstream and just couldn’t be sure about the purity of the water. We were served a wonderful lunch in the school (or community building) cafeteria which was prepared by local women. I can’t say enough about the people in these colonies, how they have gone out of their way to welcome us and share their culture with us. Much of the credit also goes to our trip coordinators and guides - thanks everyone!
Dönhof:
Dönhof sits on a hill, surrounded by rich farmland. As we approached Dönhof, we saw quite a few newer homes. Historically, the town's residents worked as farmers, craftsmen (blacksmith, tailors, weavers, etc.), and workers in the numerous taverns. I don't know what jobs are in the area to support the residents now. We had the chance to walk around the central part of the town, and we saw many Volga German houses, brick as well as wood construction. Many people were out and about in Dönhof; the residents were quite curious about our presence in their quiet little village. I have to admit that we were quite a sight, 30 people wandering around the neighborhood taking photos of mostly mundane, everyday scenes. Another woman and I tried to chat with an older woman who had watched us as we walked along the road. There was an obvious language barrier, but she seemed to understand that we were Volga Germans. With sign language, she indicated that they all went away. We tried to ask her if any came back, but I don't think she understood us. We ended our visit to Dönhof by having an ice cream bar in the little shop, and we were surprised at how limited the selection of items was. We were intrigued by the abacus sitting on the counter, and wondered if the shop employees really used it to add up the bill for the merchandise.

Saratov:
Saratov is a beautiful, old city. It was founded in 1590 as a fortress, and predictably it sits on a hill overlooking the Volga River. There are many old buildings in Saratov, and some appear to have been designed by German residents. The city was not destroyed in World War II as Volgograd was, so it retains much of its original character. We toured the historic part of the city, seeing German Street and all of its ornate buildings, a large city park, mansions built by wealthy German merchants, the city square with a diorama of Saratov's history, the Russian Orthodox churches, the museum, Saratov State University, and more. Right next to our hotel is a beautiful Russian Orthodox Church, which was built in about 1695; our hotel sits where the old convent used to be. The city has a tiered walkway along the Volga River which is a beautiful place to walk, bicycle, or just sit and watch the river.

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**Oregon Chapter Membership**

Ancestral Villages Represented

Norka (47), Frank (15), Walter (7), Hussenbach (6), Kolb (6), Huck (5), Dietel (4), Kautz (4), Beldeck (3), Brunnental (3), Grimm (3), Rosenberg (3), Schönfeld (3), Warenburg (3), Yagodnaya-Polyana (3), Alexandertal (2), Anton (2), Balzer (2), Dobrinka (2), Friedenstal (2), Galka (2), Messer (2), Molotschna (2), Neuberg (2), Odessa (2), Pfeifer (2), Rohrbach (2), Schilling (2), Bauer (1), Cobadin (1), Dobratcha (1), Dönhof (1), Dreispitz (1), Ellscowka (1), Erlienbach (1), Fischer (1), Friedrichsfeld (1), Furstenwerder (1), Gluckstal (1), Gnadenfeld (1), Grossliebenthal (1), Herzog (1), Hoffnungsthal (1), Holstein (1), Kaminska Gorka (1), Kleefeld (1), Kraft (1), Kuban (1), Kutter (1), Laub (1), Lichtfeld (1), Merkel (1), Neu Dönhof (1), Neu-Weimar (1), Oberdorf (1), Peterstal (1), Pragenau (1), Rosenheim (1), Stephan (1), Straub (1), Wiesenmüller (1)

Members’ Hometowns

Portland (29), Vancouver (8)

Jacksonville Beach, FL, Boise, ID, Long Grove, IL, Spanish Fork, UT

Aurora, Beaverton, Bend, Columbia City, Cornelius, Damascus, Eugene, Gaston, Gresham, Happy Valley, Hillsboro, Keiser, Klamath Falls, Lake Oswego, Milwaukie, Mt. Angel, North Bend, Oregon City, Salem, Scappoose, St. Helens, Sunriver, Tigard, Tualatin, Welches, West Linn, Wilsonville, Woodburn

Battleground, Bellevue, East Wenatchee, Kelso, La Center, Longview, Lyle, Olympia, Pasco, Ridgefield, Spokane, Underwood, Woodland
New Volga-German-Russian Map
Displayed at the Center for Volga-German Studies

Check out the new map at the Center for Volga-German Studies. Created by Alan Wambold, he used two late 19th century Russian military maps as the base map for the project. Many other maps and Google Earth were used to supplement the information on those maps. He used a report of the Russian 1897 Census, data from the CVGS website, Fred Koch's book The Volga Germans, and the Russian Wikipedia and sources for population data.

He is one-quarter Volga German. His great-grandparents came to the US in 1907 and eventually settled in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. His great-grandfather Wambold was born in Dietel in 1862 and my great-grandmother (surname Nickel) was born in Warenburg in 1878. They lived in Wiesenmüller before coming to the US. His Dietel names in addition to Wambold are Mill/Mühl, Foos, Schad, Michel, Dietel, Hetzel and Stahlmann. He recently discovered he is also descended through Dorothea Obermüller from Merkel, who married Friedrich Mühl. If you have any information about the Obermüller family he would very much appreciate hearing from you.

This oversize map is unique in that it also displays Russian villages and towns and their proximity to Volga-German villages. According to Brent Mai, some of our Volga-German ancestors had moved into nearby Russian villages prior to WWII.

Alan Wambold looks at the map he designed which was displayed at the recent Volga German Conference in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Courtesy Markgraf photo.
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 **oregonahsgr@gmail.com**

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# November 2016

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The American Historical Society of
Germans from Russia is an international
organization dedicated to the discovery,
collection, preservation, and the
dissemination of information related to
the history, cultural heritage, and
genealogy of Germanic settlers in the
Russian Empire and their descendants.

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