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Welcome to the May-June issue of Chronicle Unserer Leute.

As I research my own genealogy, I am constantly surprised by the strength of my ancestors. But researching this issue’s installment of the Volga Germans’ history has made me realize that this culture defined true strength. I cannot imagine not having to build an entire life from scratch and doing so in the face of such adversity and severe hardship. As a technology-loving Millennial who isn’t more than 20 feet from her cell phone at all times, I’m not ashamed to admit that these revelations have put my own feelings of exhaustion to shame.

In short, I have been changed by what I have learned from this, and I could not be more proud of being descended from such strength and resilience.

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.

Albina Innocence

Young girls of Volga German descent in Albina in the early 1900s. The only known person is Helen Goebel who is standing the back row, second from the left. Photograph courtesy of Lillian Lawrence (née Schmer). Source: www.volgagermansportland.info
Upcoming Events

Saturday, July 7 – 2:00pm to 4:00pm
Tips for Genealogical Research with Dr. Fritz Juengling

George R White Library & Learning Center
Concordia University, 2811 NE Holdman Street, Portland

We are honored to have professional genealogist Dr. Fritz Juengling from Family Search joining us while he is in town for an appearance at the Genealogical Forum of Oregon. Dr. Juengling will present a class about thorough and efficient genealogy research, which is based on 30+ years of his own research and some years of working as a Research Consultant at the Family History Library.

Dr. Juengling received his Bachelor’s degrees in German Studies and Secondary Education at Western Oregon University, his Master’s and Doctorate in Germanic Philology with minors in both English and Linguistics at the University of Minnesota. For his graduate degrees, Dr. Juengling was required to demonstrate competence in English, German, Medieval Latin and two other modern languages. He has taught German, English, Latin and Old English (Anglo-Saxon) at the high school and university levels. He is an Accredited Genealogist® for Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Sweden through the International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists, and certified by the Verband deutschsprachiger Berufsgenealogen. Dr. Juengling is a German, Dutch, and Scandinavian Research Consultant at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Monday, July 30 to Thursday, August 2
49th Annual AHSGR Convention

Hays, Kansas

Please see pages 12-13 of this issue for a full description of what to expect from this year’s convention.

What would you like to see?

Our members told us they want to have more personal programs about local members. But to deliver on that request, it takes our members being willing to be the ones sharing.

Please contact us at oregonahsgr@gmail.com if you would like to share stories about your family, family history, genealogical research experiences, or anything else during a future chapter program. You can always pair up with a friend or relative if you don’t want a whole program to yourself.
Building Paradise: Overcoming hardship to create a prosperous life

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

A term that many German-Russians know well is ‘heimweh’. While the closest English translation is ‘homesickness’, this is not a strong enough word to describe what ‘heimweh’ truly means. It is a deep longing for the land, people and life you left behind. It is a concept that our ancestors would understand many times over throughout the generations, starting with their decision to settle on the Russian plains.

After over a year of travel and familiarization with the Russian language and customs, our German ancestors first moved in with local Russian and Ukrainian serfs – peasants of the lowest class who were forced to be bounded labor for local nobility. This experience influenced the adoption of many new traditions, but it was far from a happy time for all involved. The serfs were resentful of the Germans’ presence in their land and the privileges they were afforded by the Russian Government that they themselves didn’t possess. This resentment would only grow as time progressed.

Given this strained relationship and their strong desire for independence, the first priority for the German settlers was to build temporary housing. These structures were crude timber huts with very little protection from the elements. Trees were few and far between, so they turned to burning straw, grass, dried dung and reeds to keep warm. The land was also very hard and difficult to cultivate. With limited tools at their disposal, they were forced to use axes to chop deep holes in the soil to plant seeds. Their diets were meager as they worked toward building their own crops, consisting mainly of cabbage soup and millet gruel.

Poor living conditions coupled with near constant droughts that hindered their farming efforts resulted in several epidemics of smallpox and pneumonia that would kill hundreds of the early settlers. Many settlers were also kidnapped by nomadic tribes and forced into slavery. All said, almost a quarter of the first generation of German settlers died.

Still, they were determined to build a better life for their families. It took a great many years to build permanent homes, which were single-story long houses built in the ‘shotgun’ style of wood or mud and wattle brick. The houses themselves were ingenuously built: They faced the south and have limited windows on the...
north and western sides to minimize the cold winds coming inside. During the winter, heat from the main kitchen would radiate through the house. All cooking during the hot summer months was conducted in a separate structure in the back of the house. Underneath the eaves of the roof was where they would store grain, seed and other farming implements during the winter months. This style of building so perfectly suited the environment and needs of German-Russian families that we can still see remnants of it in German-Russian settlements around the world.

As freedom of religion was the primary attraction for settling in Russia, it comes as no surprise that faith would be at the heart of our ancestors’ lives. The vast majority of German-Russian villages were built around one religion. They considered it an honor to help build the church, which was usually a tall and impressive structure that acted as a symbol of their people’s hope and faith. Parishioners were happy to pay taxes to the church and tend to its gardens. No work was ever conducted on Sundays – including during the harvest – and church celebrations, feast and functions wove the social fabric of these communities. In fact, it was relatively rare for people to mingle or inter-marry with neighboring villages, particularly those from other religions.

By uniting together, our German-Russian ancestors were able to build thriving farming villages in the ‘mother colonies’. The next generation then went on to build more villages – colloquially known as the ‘daughter colonies’. By the late 1800s, their population had grown to over 1.7 million inhabitants and their villages contributed greatly to the Russian economy. Most importantly, the German-Russians fell in love with their new home and viewed it as paradise on earth after over one hundred years of resilience.

Unfortunately with the ascension of Czar Alexander II to the Russian throne, it would not stay this way for long.

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Be sure to check out Part 3 of this series in the next issue, where we will explore the challenges our ancestors faced as they settled in America.
Vale, Arthur Flegel (1917-2018)

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Arthur Flegel. Arthur passed peacefully in his sleep on March 16, 2018 surrounded by family and friends at the age of 100 years. He had a large, loving family of three sons, nine grandchildren, fifteen great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren.

Born August 6, 1917 in Bentley, North Dakota, Arthur was the son of German-Russian immigrants. He spent his early years in Kansas and Colorado, and moved to California after graduation. Arthur was instrumental in founding the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR) in 1968. Together with his wife, Cleora, he assisted with starting the Golden Gate Chapter and held the chapter’s monthly board meetings in their home for many decades.

He served as the AHSGR’s international president from 1981 to 1984 and has assisted countless individuals with his research and genealogical work over the years. In 2014, Arthur donated his personal library to the AHSGR headquarters in Lincoln, Nebraska, where it is preserved as the Arthur and Cleora Flegel Library.

Arthur’s family has requested that in lieu of flowers, please make donations in memory of Arthur to the Rotary Club of Menlo Park Foundation, or The Arthur E. and Cleora Flegel Living Legacy Fund within the endowment of the International Foundation of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia. To donate, visit: www.ahsgr.org/?page=FlegelFund

Arthur Flegel celebrating his 100th birthday in July 2017. Photo courtesy of Irene Searles Photography.
No. 2 Soldatentod tells the story of a soldier’s death on the battlefield with gruesome depictions of the dead scattered under the moonlight. The song was the second of three Volga German songs performed by tenor Bryan Pinkall as part of his doctoral recital titled “Wir wollen Deutsche bleiben” performed on Saturday, February, 25, 2011 in Missouri. Of this performance, Pinkall said:

“The phrase ‘wir wollen Deustche bleiben’ – or ‘we want to remain German’ – was a phrase that the Volga Germans used to solidify the importance of their ancestry in the face of this horrific slaughter. They were influenced by many cultures and governments but they desired to peacefully live in their agricultural society with a simple but vibrant Germanic society. Knowing their sacrifice and that their struggle, known as the Forgotten Genocide, completely obliterated their world, I too feel that it is important to keep at least this small portion of their story and culture alive.”

You can listen to Pinkall’s hauntingly beautiful rendition of No. 2 Soldatentod on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=y29mGzqCcdM

Visit the Center for Volga German Studies

Do you need help researching your German-Russian lineage? Try the Center for Volga German Studies at Concordia University.

The CVGS has a wealth of information available about our rich culture. If you don’t have much experience with researching your genealogy, that’s okay: Roger Burbank and the other dedicated volunteers can help you access pedigree charts, pictures, books and more to help you discover more about your ancestors. And who knows - you may even meet a distant cousin!

Roger is usually at the Center on Thursdays from 10:00am to 1:30pm, and he is also happy to make arrangements for a different time as required. To make an appointment to receive assistance, call Roger Burbank on 360-263-5352 or email burby9@yahoo.com.
Johann Georg “George” Wacker and Magdalena “Lena” Sauer were born in 1863 – on 8 July and 13 April respectively – in the German settlement of Norka, Saratov, Russia.

Not much is known about George and Lena’s childhoods or their early adult lives. We do know that they were married on 28 May 1884 when both were just 21 years old and were known to have been very much in love. This was, perhaps, first evident by the birth of their first child, Margaretha who was (rather scandalously for that time) born just one month after their marriage on 25 June 1884. Unfortunately, Margaretha only lived for three short months.

George and Lena’s second child, Jacob was born soon after on 17 May 1885. Jacob would also pass away at just five years of age from unknown causes.

Luckily, George and Lena would go onto have three healthy children over the next decade: Heinrich “Henry” (b. 23 September 1890), Johannes “John” (b. 16 July 1892) and Amalia Magdalene “Molly” (b. 4 March 1896). As political tensions mounted in the Volga colonies and the German settlers watched liberties systematically removed, George and Lena made the brave decision to leave Russia with their children. George was determined that his sons would not serve the required seven years in the Russian Army as he had been forced to do. They had heard about a prosperous land far away whose streets were paved with gold and decided that they wanted to give their children a better life in America.

Since they could not leave Russia without permission from the authorities and the approval of the townspeople, George and Lena packed up their family and fled in the dead of night. To complicate matters further, Lena was heavily pregnant with the couple’s sixth child. Indeed, it was said that this child, Christina Elizabeth was born in a haystack during their escape on 23 July 1899.

In 1900, the Wackers arrived in Canada and then passed through Ellis Island. New entrants were required to receive a Smallpox vaccination and as was common in those days, the Wackers feared that this vaccination would kill their infant daughter. It is said that baby Christina along with many other infants at the time was passed from family to family at Ellis Island to avoid receiving the vaccine.

It is not known how long it took the Wackers to travel from New York to Oregon, but they eventually settled in north-eastern Portland and purchased a home at 393 Stanton Street near the corner of Union Avenue (now NE Martin Luther King Boulevard). The lot held the family home, a chicken house and a barn where the headquarters of George’s new garbage collection business was housed. George also had a 90 pound bulldog named Cappy to keep watch of the property and business. The business was initially run using a horse and wagon, which was later to be replaced by a truck. Upon George’s retirement, it was passed down to eldest son Henry.
The family home on Stanton Street became the center for many memories over the years. George and Lena had their final two children there in 1905 and 1907 respectively, a daughter named Anna Margaretha and an unnamed infant boy who was stillborn. At least one of Christina’s children, Glenn Lavon was also born in this house on 1 March 1920. Soon before Glenn’s birth, George had encountered a tall, lanky gentleman that people referred to as “Slim” and was very amused by this nickname. When a very large baby Glenn was born thereafter weighing in at over 10 pounds, George took one look at him, laughed and said, “Ach, Schlimmy!” thus bestowing Glenn with his lifelong nickname of “Slim” despite always being of a stocky build.

George and Lena’s children gave them 12 grandchildren whom they loved very much. All of the grandchildren referred to George and Lena as “Bubbo” and “Muno” and despite learning very little English their entire lives, the couple had no issues communicating with their large family. It was said that George was partial to Glenn’s older brother, Carlyle “Bud” and often gave him little favors. Whenever this would occur, Lena would always find something similar or better for Glenn. Lena was reputed to be a fantastic cook who excelled at making coffee cakes and breads, her speciality being bierock (cabbage bread). Holidays were spent surrounding the Wackers’ large kitchen table piled high with an array of delicious foods.

George and Lena were devout Christians and immensely proud to be Americans. They greatly admired Reverend Johannes “John” Hopp of the Zion German Congregational Church, who helped them and many other German immigrants find housing, manage their finances and overcome language barriers while they settled into the community. They attended church every Sunday for the rest of their lives and were very active within their church community. They shared a special bond with the many other immigrants from Portland’s “German Town” including the Repp’s, Miller’s, Sauer’s, Pauley’s, Hesler’s, Kniss’s and Hopp’s.

On 7 January 1930, Lena passed away at the age of 66 after suffering from an unknown illness for quite some time. George was overcome with grief at the loss of his wife. Daughter Christina and her family moved back to the family home after Lena’s death to care for George. However, nothing could mend George’s broken heart and he joined his wife on 3 June 1930 only months after her death.

They are buried at Rose City Cemetery in a shared plot with their youngest daughter.

Family photos of George and Magdalena Wacker with their children Henry, John, Amalia, Christina and Anna Margaret (middle right only) in Portland, Oregon, in 1901 (left) and 1916 (right).
Recipe Corner: Volga German Bierocks

For the dough:
- 2 1/4 teaspoons active dry yeast
- 1/4 cup lukewarm water
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/3 cup butter
- 2 tablespoon sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 eggs
- 4-4 1/2 cups white all-purpose flour

For the filling:
- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 cup onion, diced
- 4 cups shredded cabbage
- 1 teaspoon caraway seeds
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh dill
- 2-3 tablespoons dill pickle brine (or water)

Bloom the active dry yeast for 10 minutes in the lukewarm water. Scald the milk (bring to barely a simmer—180 F on a thermometer), then set aside and add the butter, sugar, and salt. Stir until melted and combined, then cool until lukewarm. In a large bowl, combine the yeast and milk mixtures. Beat in the eggs, then slowly add in the white all-purpose flour, mixing until you’ve formed a soft dough. Turn out on a floured surface and knead for about 10 minutes, until smooth and elastic. Turn dough into a buttered bowl and lightly cover with plastic wrap. Set in a warm, draft-free spot for around an hour to 90 minutes or until doubled in size.

Meanwhile, in a large pan, evenly brown the ground beef over medium heat, then the diced onion and shredded cabbage. Sauté for 5 minutes. Add the caraway seeds, garlic, and chopped fresh dill. Cook 10–15 more minutes, until cabbage is tender. Stir in the dill pickle brine (or water) to deglaze the pan. Season to taste. Cover and remove from heat.

After the dough has risen, punch it down, and let it rest for 10 minutes. Divide dough into 10 balls. Roll each into a circle, about ⅛ inch in thickness. Scoop ¾ cup of filling onto a dough circle, then tightly pull up the edges, pinching to seal. Place, seam side down, onto a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Repeat for the rest, leaving 2 inches of space in between each bierock. Loosely cover bierocks with a kitchen towel and leave in a warm, draft-free spot for 20 minutes.

Preheat your oven to 375 F. When the bierocks are nice and puffy, gently brush with melted butter. Bake for 20–25 minutes. Cool slightly before serving.

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We are very proud to announce that graduate student Heather Viets was recently awarded a scholarship by Oregon AHSGR for her incredible work on a thesis about Portland’s Volga German community.

We caught up with Heather to find out more about this wonderful project:

**What inspired you to write your thesis about the Volga German community in Portland?**

When I was in college at the University of Oregon, a student in my Russian history course mentioned that she was interested in the class because she was a Portland Volga German. Volga Germans were never mentioned in any of the course material, so I had no idea what the student was talking about. When I went home, I did a quick Internet search and came upon Steve Schreiber’s website, The Volga Germans in Portland. I didn’t think much about the Volga Germans again until I was in grad school in Portland a couple of years later and didn’t know what topic to choose for my thesis. I had many interests, but I wasn’t committed to any particular field in history. One day, I remembered the obscure topic I had encountered a couple of years before: the Portland Volga Germans. I realized it was a great subject for a thesis because it was local to Portland and there were no academic articles or books on the topic yet. Having an open mind about my thesis allowed me to recognize that a little-known subject like Volga German history represented the perfect opportunity for me to conduct original research and introduce a new topic into academic history.

**What was the most surprising thing you discovered about this rich culture during your research?**

I was surprised to discover that many Volga Germans continue to seek more knowledge and understanding about their history and community today. Rather than simply reflecting on their history like a story that concluded long ago, many community members bring their story to the present each day by actively researching and carrying out new projects.

**What are your plans from here?**

I plan to turn some of my thesis material into an academic article on the Volga Germans. Also, one of my goals is to visit the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia in Lincoln, Nebraska. Aside from continuing Volga German research, I hope to have a career based in writing and editing.

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Heather Viets’ thesis, ‘Little Russia: Patterns in Migration, Settlement, and the Articulation of Ethnic Identity Among Portland’s Volga Germans’ will be published online with open access in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database in 2018.
Work is underway to bring the AHSGR International Convention to Hays, Kansas the week of July 30 - August 2, 2018. The last time the convention was in Hays was in 2007 when we had over 600 people attend the week-long convention. This year, the convention will be held at the Fort Hays State University Memorial Union since Hays, at this time, does not have a convention site. Although the convention site will not be in a hotel, we do have shuttle service from the hotel to the campus for those who need it free of charge. The hotels that we have on standby are:

- Baymont Inn and Suites, 3801 N. Vine St.; 785-625-8103; $69 plus tax
- Days Inn, 3205 Vine Interstate 70, 785-628-8261; $74.69 plus tax
- Holiday Inn Express and Suites, 4650 Roth Ave., 785-625-8000; $129 plus tax

Please be sure to use the local Hays phone number when making your reservation.

Registration will begin on Monday, July 30 from 8:00am to 4:30pm. In addition to the convention program, three tours will be on offer:

**Volga German Village Tour – Monday, July 30**
Tour one will take people to four of the original six Volga German villages that were settled in Ellis County in 1876. Those attending the tour will visit the beautiful churches that were built after the Volga Germans arrived in the area and also the church cemeteries were the Iron Cross grave markers are used. Beautiful folk art which was once used at the time and is actually now slowly coming back to Ellis County. To wrap up the tour, a traditional Volga German meal will be served in Munjor, Kansas. The tour is limited to 60 people. Cost: $40.00

**Ellis County Historical Tour – Monday, July 30**
The second tour of the day, starting at noon, will be the Museums of Ellis County including the Ellis County Historical Society, which includes the Volga German Haus, Sternberg Museum which houses the famous “fish with-in a fish”, the Bukovina Museum in Ellis, Kansas and conclude with a stop for Ellis Country refreshments! Cost: $28.00

**Artesian Tour – Tuesday, July 31**
The third tour will take place on Tuesday afternoon. Two Hays breweries will be visited and Pete Felton’s Stone Gallery. Pete is the gentleman who carved the immigrant stature for AHSGR in Lincoln a number of years ago and sits on the complex. Cost: $28.00

There will be no short supply of speakers at the convention this year. Those scheduled to speak include Olga Litzenberger, Michael Wanner, Alex Herman, Lee Macklin, Eric Schmaltz, Peggy Goertzen, Ulrich Mertins, Brent Mai, Tanya Nyberg, and Maggie Hein.

Talks will consist of DNA, Area Dialect, German Origins, Panel Discussions, Authors, Learning...
Cyrillic, Dutch Hop Music, cooking classes, movie night, children’s day and much, much more.

All the regular features will also be there: Kuchen breaks, quilt raffle, research room, book store, and a silent auction. This year we will have a children’s day at the Ellis County Historical Society where children ages 5-14 will be introduced to many activities such as butter churning, sauerkraut making, leaning to dance the polka, games such as Bunnock and the Ellis Country favorite card game, Durak, cooking grebble, storytelling, leaning german and day to day life of a German Russian child. Activities are broken into 30-minute sessions and each session has one instructor and a helper. Registration for this event starts at 8:30am and the program go until 3:25pm with a 30-minute lunch that will be provided.

To pull off such a grand event in Ellis County we are going to need many volunteers. If you are willing to help, please be sure to mark your convention registration form or contact myself at 785-656-0329 / krupp@ruraltel.net or Judy Hoffman at kansasjudy@yahoo.com. You may also contact AHSGR headquarters in Lincoln.

Registration packets will be going out in May, but for those who just can’t wait registration fees are as follows:

**Full Week Registration, Early Bird (by June 15)**
- Members: $100.00
- Non-Members: $120.00

**Full Week Registration, Standard (after June 15)**
- Standard, Member: $125
- Standard, Non-Member: $145.00

**Daily Fees**
- Monday, Member: $25
- Monday, Non-Member: $30
- Tuesday, Member: $40
- Tuesday, Non-Member: $45
- Wednesday, Member: $40
- Wednesday, Non-Member: $45
- Thursday, Member: $66
- Thursday, Non-Member: $75

To top off the week there will be a banquet with Key Note Speaker Alex Herzog and a polka dance featuring the Polka Kings!

Put your registration in the mail and watch our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ahsgr.org for information as it becomes available.

Examples of hand-sewn Volga German quilts you will see at the AHSGR Convention.
### June

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Notes:
- AHSGR Convention
- Tips for Genealogical Research

August:
- (August 1) AHSGR Convention
- (August 2) AHSGR Convention
Membership fees are for a calendar year that renew 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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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
facebook.com/groups/AHSGR.Oregon