



THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

Lincoln Chapter

Volume III

July 1995

Issue VII

Chapter Officers

President - Larry Schenkel
Secretary - Ann Reitz
Corresponding Secretary - Gladys Herstein
Program Chairman - Dale Dinges

1st Vice President - Dale Dinges

Genealogy Chairman - Shirley Robertson

2nd Vice President - John Stuertz
Treasurer - Lois Sorensen
Historian - Delores Schwartz
Membership Chairman - John Stuertz

Newsletter - Hugh Dobler

Publicity - Dale Dinges - John Stuertz

Scheduled Coming Events:

July 23-30, 1995 AHSGR Convention

Radisson Plaza Hotel
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

August 8, 1995 LLCGS (Lincoln Lancaster County Genealogical Society)

7:00 P.M.
Dick Administration Building (Lower Level) Union College Campus

August 19, 1995 PAF-LUG (Personal Ancestral File-Lincoln User's Group)

7:00 P.M.
Family Service Center 3100 Old Cheney Road

August 21, 1995 AHSGR Board Meeting

7:00 P.M.
Conference Room -AHSGR Headquarters Bldg.

September 16, 1995 - MEMBERSHIP MEETING WITH SPEAKER

St. Paul's United Church of Christ
Pot Luck Dinner(Bring your own dinnerware)

September 17, 1995 - AHSGR Board Meeting

Conference Room - AHSGR Headquarters' Bldg.

October 8, 1995 Presentation of Plaque to Jake Sinner

2:p.m.
AHSGR Headquarters Building

Editor's Notes:

This is your last chance to register for the Calgary Convention! If you haven't sent in your registration, you have just a few days left before the Convention begins! July 1st was the last day for American money! If you register now, it will be in Canadian dollars.

Calgary is situated just east of the Rocky Mountains, so the temperatures there are always moderate in the summer time. It gets cold there in the winter, with temperatures in the -40%, but we aren't going to be there then, so we won't have to worry about that! Not very far away is Lake Louise, the Jasper Ice Fields and Banff, with a mountain resort built for Railroad Executives at the beginning of the 20th century. Really a lovely place to visit, right in the heart of the Mountains, with the Banff hotel surrounded by high cliffs and mountain peaks!

Headquarters is still asking for help, from us! There are many things that can be done at headquarters from giving a tour of the facilities, to help with filing, copying etc. These are things that everyone, retired or semi retired can do. Why not call down to Headquarters and see if you can help?

A short time ago, Roger Welsch of "Sunday Morning", came to Headquarters to use some of our photographs in postcard form for use in a Nebraska segment for "Sunday Morning" The program was aired July 2, 1995, Roger is a German- Russian born in the North Bottoms of Lincoln. He attended the University of Nebraska and then in later life, became a professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in History. One of his teaching specialties was folk lore. He tells stories, about his mother, who scrubbed the sidewalk in front of their home morning, just as one method of keeping a clean home.

family, tears....by all of us listening. We told her that she need not continue but she insisted that we must know the story of the Germans who were so terribly mistreated".

Larwig heard of the early progress being made by Lutheran Hour ministries on a documentary by the persecution of Lutheran Volga Germans as reported in December 1994 issue of the Lutheran Layman. Al Admire of the Lutheran Hour Ministries staff made a second trip to Russia in early March, working on the production. Tentative title of the special production is " A Light in the Darkness"

SPOTLIGHT ON GERMAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Selected and edited by F. E. Becker

RUSSIAN GERMANS IN AMERICA: FROM THE STEPPES TO THE PRAIRIES

In 1940 there were 300,000 first and second generation Russian-Germans in the United States.

These were Germans whose ancestors had emigrated to Russia about 200 years before, in search of freedom to live and develop as they pleased. For over a century they had lived according to their old traditions , mainly along the Volga River and the Black Sea. Their prosperity was mirrored in the large tracts of land they owned, a well developed school system and cultural societies ensured a highly educational level - however that was all odious to adherents of PanSlavism. Toward the end of the last century, a government gathered force against any further spread of the Germans in Russia. The law governing colonists that had been passed at the time they had settled and had guaranteed them broad rights was repealed. All of a sudden their solitude was disrupted and their age-old customs and institutions were in danger. Many of them felt compelled to leave what they considered their new home and to emigrate once again.

In 1940, the number of Russo-Germans abroad was estimated at one million, about 120,000 of them had migrated to North America between 1870 and 1920, either alone, in families or in large groups. Many of them started a new life in United States or Canada, where the governments were interested in German immigrants, as the czars had once been, and they were accorded special rights and offered land. In Canada, an immigrant needed only ten dollars to be granted a "homestead" of 64 acres, which became his property after 3 years. The railroad companies in the United States needed workers and farmers to open up the back - country. Thousands of them found work in the beet fields by the sugar industry in Colorado, Nebraska, Idaho, Montana and California.

In 1883 the first settlement of Germans from the Black Sea was founded in South Dakota and called Odessa. It was 1884 when the Germans from the Volga district began to emigrate to Nebraska and Kansas. Spread out across the entire country, there were 1500 settlements that even today are reminiscent of the Old World in their layout and their homes. The people, also retained many of their customs, for instance, the women still wore the Russian babushkas, and the men, peaked hats and fur hats. More than half of these immigrants lived in the wide prairies between the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and the Rocky Mountains. There are districts in South Dakota where 99% of the land was owned by Germans from the Black Sea. Their familiarity with the Russian steppes enabled these Germans to become the most progressive farmers in the prairies. It was characteristic of these immigrants to settle together in large communities. In many states, their colonies were distributed among just a few districts while they retained strict religious separation between the Protestant and Catholic settlements as they had done before in Russia. Two thirds of the German Russians who immigrated between 1879 and 1920 were Protestant, the rest of various faiths, 10% were Mennonites.

Although only 5000 of the original Russian-German immigrants returned to the Continent - and usually not to Russia but to Germany- as a very religious and ethnic-conscious group they have been slow to assimilate in their new country. Even today, Russian Germans living in the United States are recognizable as a distinct ethnic group.

March 1995 THE GERMAN AMERICAN JOURNAL

There are four steps to accomplishment:
Plan purposefully,
Prepare prayerfully,
Proceed positively,
Pursue persistently"
(Author unknown)

**Continuing our thumb nail sketch of persons with:
The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia**

(We have finished with sketches of Staff Personnel, and are continuing with members of the local and International board of AHSGR)

RUTH MARIE AMEN

Ruth Marie Amen was born October 5, 1909 in Lincoln, Nebraska to Henry J. and Maria Barbara (Wacker) Amen at 247 "F" St. (she remarked in aside that she always glad to say how old she is, because the alternative is not so good !)

She was the youngest girl of 5 boys and 2 girls, all of them born in the same home.

The family continued to live at 247 'F' St., until her father had the home at 601 "D" constructed in 1920. She relates that the home was constructed entirely of quarter-sawed oak finish costing \$10,000. At the time she deeded the property to the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, this same home was valued at \$68,000.

Ruth attended Park School, from Kindergarten through the 8th grade. She also attended Lincoln High School for 4 years until her graduation in 1926. Ruth attended the University of Nebraska, graduating in 1932. During the intervening years when she graduated from high school and college, she was ill with pneumonia, losing out on a couple of years of schooling. When she resumed college, she had 13 hours of incompletes to finish.. All of her subjects were in Math, English and Latin.

It was during this period of illness, that her father sent her to the state of Washington to visit relatives. On her return, via Salt Lake City, she attended an organ concert, and became fascinated with the organ. This recital so impressed Ruth ,that in her second year out of school because of illness, she started to take organ lessons. This also changed her major from engineering to music.

She had always been interested in music (she gave a recital when she was 11 years of age, and had been playing the "pump" organ at Ebenezer Congregational Church from that time through her graduation from the University).

When she was a senior at the University, ready to give her graduation concert, she asked if the concert could be at First Plymouth Congregational Church, where she had been taking instructions from Wilbur Chenoweth, the organist at the church. She was told she could, providing she paid the church \$35.00 , which in the depression years was a large sum of money, but her father agreed, and the recital was held there.

Later she would also substitute playing the organ for Mr. Chenoweth, when he went on vacations or on other special occasions.

Her first job after graduation was at Hardy, Nebraska where she taught Math, Music and Latin, plus Physical Education for the girls. This was at the time of the depression That first year she received \$1100.00 Her second year, every one had to take a pay cut of \$150.00, she received \$950.00. Her third year, the school board gave everyone a \$50.00 raise, so now her salary was an even \$1000.00 Her fourth year, she went to Laurel, Nebraska to receive \$20.00 more!

During her teaching years, she also taught at Milliken, Colorado, a town near Greeley. Here she taught Music only, and had Trios, Octettes, and Choirs. On June 24th of this year she was invited to attend a reunion of these students at Greeley, when more than 60 former students were in attendance.

She also taught in Monroe, Michigan, where she became the Principal of an elementary school.

She returned to Lincoln in 1958 to pursue graduate studies at the University of Nebraska. She was asked to teach elementary education and social studies methods part time. Before the school year began, she was asked to teach full time. She felt she couldn't get her Master's Degree having worked with all the staff, so after 3 years at the University of Nebraska she attended the Colorado College of Education (now Northern Colorado University) at Greeley, to receive her Master's after graduation.

She went on to New York City, as Director of Program Development for Camp Fire Girls at the National Headquarters.

One of the interesting events while in New York was a program she was responsible for with the Horizon Girls (these are high school girls) going to the Caribbean. There were 1001 girls going on their own ship, debarking at three ports of calls. At each port 500 of the girls on board ship would leave and live with families who had girls of the same age for a week. 500 other girls from the Caribbean would also come on board and live with those left on board for that week. The trip lasted almost four weeks.

In 1968, Ruth came home to live with her father, who was a very capable and vigorous 92.

After her arrival she taught elementary education and social studies methods at Nebraska Wesleyan University

1968, was also the beginning of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia.

Ruth's family was known to David Miller, who asked her if she and her father would like to become members. Ed Schwartzkopf, from Lincoln was also asked. Ed and Ruth were asked to serve on the board; Mr. Amen as Honorary President. On weekends once a month, Ed, Ruth and her father would either drive to Greeley or fly to Denver, to attend these once a month board meetings.

The first AHSGR convention was held at Greeley in 1970, with less than 100 people attending.

The following year, the convention was held at Lincoln, which drew over 400 members.

Since then Lincoln, has had 5 additional conventions , the last one was the 25th anniversary, in 1994. Ruth chaired the planning of conventions from 1971 through 1989.

During her years in office, she has organized 30 chapters traveling as needed at her own expense.

David Miller was the first president of the Society, serving from 1968 through 1973. At that time, he felt it was time to relinquish this post, and Ruth then became the president until 1978.

After her term as president, the suggestion was made to have an Executive Director, as the Society was growing , and some one needed to be in the office. Ruth agreed to this post, and served for 11 years, retiring in 1990, when Elizabeth Wilson became the new Executive Director.

Ruth's love for music has led her down many avenues, which she delights in exploring.

Recently she was approached by Charles Burmeister, one of the members of the executive committee and Yong yan Hu, director and conductor of the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra to endow a chair for \$100,000.00 . In making her selection she chose a trumpet, because of her acquaintance with Dennis Schneider and her grand-nephew who also plays a trumpet.

In addition to this gift, she also donated \$100,000.00 to the Lied Center for Performing Arts, to go to their performance fund. One dedicated performance will be made possible each year, because of this gift.

Her third donation was to her first love, her church,. In honor of her parents , she is contributing \$250,000.00 for a two manual organ in the balcony at First Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ at 20th and "D" Streets.

What does Ruth do with all of her time?

Most of her week days are spent at 601 D St. When people come on tours, she loves to tell them about the heritage of the Germans from Russia. Displays about these people are at the home to help everyone understand the Germans From Russia.

Recently the Immigration and Naturalization Services constructed a large building here in Lincoln. At the present time they have over 300 employees, which is to grow to at least 600. They came to Ruth's home one day to ask about the Germans from Russia. During the conversation they asked if Ruth would come to speak to their group to which over 300 people attended.

During her talk, Ruth related that over several months time, she and a graduate student from the University of Nebraska had compiled a card file from the ledgers her father had kept about the people he had helped to come to the United States. These cards on a 5 x 8 card gave the ledger and page number of the 1600 names listed in this ledger.

Afterwards, a young girl in the audience came up to her and said, "I wonder, if by chance, your father brought my grandparents?" We looked at the card file, and there were her grandparent's names. Then later we searched the specific ledger and got the entire story of her grandparents as her father had written it down..

All in all, Ruth at 85 still enjoys life to its fullest which is evident when you see the sparkle in her eyes and the warm smile she gives everyone! She always has a very vibrant personality!

**Those who
bring sunshine to
the lives of others
cannot keep it
from themselves"**

=James Barrie=



**1995 AHSGR CONVENTION
JULY 23 - JULY 30 1995
RADISSON PLAZA HOTEL
CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA**

American Historical Society
of Germans From Russia
631 D Street
Lincoln, Nebraska 68502-1199

FORWARDING AND RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LINCOLN, NE
PERMIT NO. 69

Mr. & Mrs. Donald Schwartz
1000 Butler Ave.
Lincoln NE 68521