



**Lincoln Chapter**  
**The American Historical Society of Germans From Russia**  
**NEWSLETTER**

VOLUME XXIII, ISSUE 3

May/June, 2014

*International Convention of Germans from Russia*  
*July 7-July 13, 2014*  
*Cornhusker Hotel, Lincoln, Nebraska*

## Tidbits from Larry...

Spring has finally sprung and once again it's time for the newsletter. Hopefully I'll remember to mention everything that's happened since the last edition.

One thing that has taken place is the annual soup supper. If you didn't get there, you missed a good time and some delicious soups. It was a social event for many who hadn't seen each other for some time. Proof positive: 200 or so eager eaters came and weren't in a hurry to leave.

Highlighted below is a list of volun-

It takes a lot of dedication to be a member of the board. I like to point out from time to time that board members receive no pay whatsoever for serving on the board and they pay for all of their travel, lodging and food expenses.

There are four meetings a year. Three of the meetings are held here in Lincoln and the fourth is held at the annual convention city. Board members are expected to attend at least three of the meetings. Thank you for your dedicated service.

Paul Loos	Becky Schenaman	David Loos
Rick Rekart	Pam Wurst	Judy Runion
Judy Lawson	Sharon Buckner	Karen Johnson
Barb Schmidt	John Weber	Ruby Weber
Don Weber	Susan Stoehr	Ed Barthule
Corinne Jacox	Jay Jacox	Renae Jacox
Nancy Borrell	Dale Dinges	Donna Day
Marilyn Wagner	Delores Kaufman	Sherry Pawelko

teers who helped make it all happen.

We could not do it without you! A big, hearty, "Thank You" to all of you. I hope you noticed that the Jacox family was there, volunteering in full strength.

Also in attendance were members of the International Board of Directors. They were in town for the spring meetings of both the Society and Foundation boards. Some of those board members came from as far away as Oregon and Canada.

Thank you also to Jay Jacox and Becky Schenaman for their stories on growing up GR. I find these stories every interesting and entertaining. I hope they do the same for all of you. Hopefully they will cause some of you to take pen in hand and tell us your story. You don't need to be an author; just write down your memories of family, friends, events, school days, etc. We all have a story, so please tell us yours. *(continued on page 2)*

### MISSION STATEMENT

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 International foundation of American Historical Society of Germans from Russia is responsible for exercising financial stewardship to generate, manage, and allocate resources which advance the mission and assist in securing the future of AHSGR.

## Just a Reminder

A General Membership meeting is planned for June 29th @ 2:00 pm at The Heritage Center, 631 "D" Street followed by refreshments. This will be one week prior to the convention, so plan to attend and learn all that has been planned and if you haven't offered to volunteer, it would be a good time to step up and do your part.



### Tidbits from Larry...

continued from page 1

Every so often we get a letter or email from people who are looking for a long-lost relative. I don't know if our newsletter articles do any good or not but I'd like to think they do.

Genealogy is difficult at times. For example:

My grandfather (biological grandfather, Jacob Schenkel)

My grandfather Kreick (Conrad) the only grandfather I knew and loved.

Grandma Kreick was first a Schreiber. I don't know what happened to her husband, but she came to America by herself with two sons, Joseph and John.

She married Grandfather Schenkel and they had a son, Philip, my father. Grandpa died from medical complications.

Grandpa Schenkel had three sisters, (I don't know where they came from). One of them married an Engleman, one married a Bridegam, and one married a Schwartzkopf.

I see one of our Chapter members name is Bridegam. Are we related?

We also have a member whose name is Geier. My mother's mother was a Geier. Are we related?

I once asked Ed Schwartzkopf if he knew any of his genealogy. He said he didn't but his sister was working on the Schwartzkopf side. Unfortunately, she died before I could talk to her.

Steve Schrieber, who lives in Washington, has some info about the Schrieber family, but the last time we talked, which was many years ago, he didn't have much on my part of the Schreiber family. Hopefully, he has more by now.

I wanted to talk to Henry Bridegam, but never got it done either before he passed away.

Oh, yes, I'm the great procrastinator.....

Until next time, enjoy the spring warmth and colors. Lincoln is really lovely this time of year. ☐



At left and below: Making butterballs for the soup supper: Judy Runion, Karen Johnson, Nancy Borrell, Sharon Buckner, Barb Schmidt, Ed Barthule, Ruby Weber, Judy Lawson, & John Weber.



Above: Bottle Washers!



Right: Chief Cooks!



# Confirmation

submitted by Becky Schenaman

The Easter season makes me think of Confirmation. My sister, Donna, and I were confirmed together at the old original Grace Methodist Church on 27th and R Streets here in Lincoln. The minister was Reverend Sandel.

Grace Methodist was a beautiful church with the most amazing stained glass windows. It had a pipe organ that took up the whole wall behind the pulpit. Reverend Sandel stood in a pulpit that almost reached the balcony. It was an ornate walnut carved piece. Donna and I sang in the choir.

We attended confirmation classes for a year along with Sunday school classes and on Sunday night we attended Christen Endeavor classes. These were a lot of fun as Reverend Sandel would not only teach class but he would teach us to pull taffy and take us on hay-rack rides out at Pioneers Park. It was a good way to spend a Sunday evening.

My Grandfather Bridegam taught

Sunday School at Zion Church on 9th Street. That is where my Dad and Aunt Minnie were confirmed. Their pictures hung in the basement along with the other confirmation classes. I do not know if they were destroyed in the fire there. Our Grace Methodist Church burnt down in the 1960s.

I am looking forward to watching the confirmation ceremony at Immanuel Church this year. It is a special experience for the young adults and a meaningful moment for the congregation.

I do not remember the questions Reverend Sandel asked me that day but I knew the answers and was proud of myself. One thing I do remember were all of the Palm branches and Easter lilies that decorated the altar.

We each received a corsage and a certificate from the church. We went home to one of Mom's good Sunday meals and enjoyed the rest of Palm Sunday.

I hope you all had a Happy Easter. ☐

## Genealogy Request

This request came through the AHSGR website:  
My grandfather, John Thiele, (wife, Gertrude) was born in 1874 and may have come through this area around 1900 to 1905. They were from the Rosch, Chernovits area of Bukovina. They eventually farmed at Melville, Sask. Canada in 1906. Any information that you may have will be appreciated.

Wilfred Thiele, thielewn@telus.net

**Plattdeutsch:** Der wo die Aaweid erfunne hot, muss nix zu dun gehabbd hawwe.

**Deutsch:** Der welche die Arbeit erfunden hat, muss nicht zu tun gehabt haben.

**English:** He who invented work, must not have had much to do.

## HERZLICHEN GLUCKWUNSCH ZUM GEBURSTAGL "Happy Birthday"

### May

John DeLair  
Bill Gettman  
Sherry Pawelko  
Dean Pawelko

### June

Ken Babcock  
Kevin Hergenrader  
Delores Kaufman  
Helen Schwartz  
Ruby Weber



## FROHLICH JUHRESTAG "Happy Anniversary"

### May

Jerry and Jolene McInnis

### June

Dean and Sherry Pawelko  
Larry and Norma Schenkel  
Bob and Marilyn Wagner  
John and Ruby Weber

## Unsere Leute Erinnyng "Our People in Memory"

Ralph Giebelhaus    Joyce Eisenman    James R. Griess

### Your Help is Needed

If you are aware of the death of someone who is a German from Russia, please give Judy Lawson, the Chapter Corresponding Secretary, a call. She would like to honor them by putting their name in the Newsletter. Judy's phone number is: 402-420-9580.



# The Story of "Why" You Are a German from Russia

submitted by Edith Riske

**Y**ours is a story of one group of courageous people in their untiring search for freedom and land. They helped to build new countries and new cultures from the undeveloped Russian steppes to the New World. Working from the land assimilating the best from the pioneering environment they built the fortitude and strong character that became distinctive of the Germans from Russia. They loved and cherished the whole family and were staunch in their religious beliefs and moral purposes. These were a hard-working people. These were and are your people.

Eighteenth century Europe casts the initial phase for the beginning of this portion of your heredity.

## The Story

The disastrous Seven Years' War, from 1756 to 1763, devastated much of the German land under Frederick the Great of Prussia. Widespread poverty and disappointment resulted.

The turbulence and conflict which plagued them at this time precipitated the vast exodus of Germans who wanted to find relief from their tribulations in their homeland and were willing to risk all and wander out into the wilderness of the world.

Our destiny began some years before this on May 2, 1729, to be exact, when a little girl named Sophia Auguste Friedrike was born to Christian August, Prince of the Prussian State of Anhalt Zerbst, At Stettin (now Szezecin, Poland). When she was fifteen, the Empress Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, invited her and her mother to Russia. The empress was searching for a wife for her sixteen-year-old nephew, the Grand

Duke Peter, heir to the Russian throne. The Empress approved the young girl on June 28, 1744. She was received into the Orthodox Church and renamed Catherine. The next day she was engaged to Peter, a delicate youth who still played with dolls and lead soldiers at sixteen. They were married August 21, 1745. The marriage was

became known as Catherine the Great. She reigned over her newly adopted country until 1796.

## Catherine the Great Manifesto for Immigration

One of her innovating projects was to fill the empty, fertile lands in Russia's vast stretches to the South and East, which were then lorded over by nomadic tribes. Her goal was to bring western culture and industry to Russia and what better source was there than the industrious peasants of her native land—Germany!

Carefully on December 4, 1762 she issued her first manifesto for immigration. As the Seven Years' War had not yet ended, and she had not added special inducements, no foreigners responded to her plea. Undaunted, on July 22, 1763, Catherine proclaimed her second manifesto to all foreigners, regardless of nationality and religion. To induce immigration to the uninhabited regions of Russia, she made many promises as

*Unfortunately, most of the immigrants were not prepared for what lay in store for them. Many had been misled and were victims of the ruthless and vicious tactics employed by agents of the colonization companies.*

*The German settlers endured many deprivations and severe pioneer hardships. Their trials commenced immediately upon leaving their native homes, as the ships that carried the immigrants to their new home were quite inadequate. The way proved to be extremely trying and the voyage hazardous. ...*

*...Many times, while seeking their final destination, they were confronted with the forlorn sight of barren waste – with the promised buildings nowhere in sight. Their feeling was one of bitter disappointment.*

unhappy. Peter remained a boy in body and mind. Their first child was born in 1754, nine years after the wedding.

Empress Elizabeth died in January 1762 and Peter, her nephew, became Czar Peter III. His weak-minded ways soon made him unpopular. He offended church dignitaries and preferred the company of Germans to Russians. But, his wife Catherine (the little German girl from Stettin) was well liked. She had accepted the Russian customs as her own.

In July 1762, the army placed Peter under arrest and declared Catherine, Empress of Russia. Several days later, Peter died after a scuffle with the guard. Catherine was crowned Catherine II in September 1762, and

follows:

- To all foreigners coming into the empire, the unhindered and free practice of religion according to the precept and customs of their church;
- The settlers shall not be obliged to pay taxes to the treasury nor to perform ordinary or extra ordinary service;
- The settlers shall not be liable, against their will, to any military or civil service;
- All the lands allotted to the settlement of the colonists are to be given to them for eternal time as an inalienable and hereditary possession, not however, as the personal

*(continued on page 5)*



## The Story of Why You are a German from Russia...

continued from page 4

property of any one but as a communal property of each colony. The area of the allotted by the crown, thirty dessiatine (81 acres) for each family, is to be inherited by the youngest son. The colonists are permitted, in order to improve and increase their farms, to buy areas of land from private individuals and indeed to acquire them as their property;

- If any of the foreigners who settle here and became subject to our rules should decide to depart again from our country, they will, of course, be granted the freedom to do so at any time. On condition that they pay into the treasury a portion of the assets they have acquired in the empire. After that, each one will be permitted to travel without hindrance where he pleases;
- Free transportation to Russia;
- Free interest loan of five hundred rubles (\$799.00);
- Full citizen rights;
- Freedom to make their own governing laws as long as they do not interfere with Russian laws.

The story which was to unfold eventually supplied Russia with a German population of around two million, including villages on the Volga, along the Black Sea coast, in Odessa, Bessarabia, Volhynia, the Crimea, the Caucasus and elsewhere on the Russian land. They were all united in a common goal—the search for new land and freedom.

### The Lure and Journey

Out of Catherine's golden allurements to the Promised Land arose a mass movement of Germans to Russia that lasted from 1764 to 1767. Over this four-year period, an estimated twenty-five to twenty-seven thousand people made their way to this foreign land to start their lives anew.

The Russian advertising campaign, conducted through ambassadors,

newspapers, professional enrollers and colonization companies (while not exactly efficient or accurate) enticed thousands to leave the security of their homelands for an unknown life in Russia.

Unfortunately, most of the immigrants were not prepared for what lay in store for them. Many had been misled and were victims of the ruthless and vicious tactics employed by agents of the colonization companies.

The German settlers endured many deprivations and severe pioneer hardships. Their trials commenced immediately upon leaving their native homes, as the ships that carried the immigrants to their new home were quite inadequate. The way proved to be extremely trying and the voyage hazardous.

To make matters worse, the Russian authorities were not at all prepared for the great influx of immigrants. The colonists were often delayed from nine to eighteen months on the entire trip to their proposed settlement sites.

Many times, while seeking their final destination, they were confronted with the forlorn sight of barren waste – with the promised buildings nowhere in sight. Their feeling was one of bitter disappointment.

It had already been decided that the main settlement site for the German immigrants of the 1760s was to be the Volga region. The first group arrived there on June 29, 1764, and founded the village of Dobringa on the west bank of the Volga River.

### German Immigrant Arrival

What greeted them was a small bit of woods and withered grasses about three feet high. A paradise had been promised and truly that is what awaited them – a LOST PARADISE. They reacted as they knew they must. They put their trust in God and with His help, they would survive. Some of them did. The German colonists set themselves to the task that lay before them.

The Russian government wanted all the immigrants to engage in agricul-

ture, despite the fact that many were merchants, artists and craftsmen. All were expected to go into the empty steppes and clear them for agriculture and the raising of unfamiliar grains.

Of the eighty-one acres allotted to each immigrant, the government designated that thirty-five acres would be used as farmland, fifteen acres for hay, fifteen acres for forest or trees and sixteen acres for the home, barn and garden. They lived in tents, caves and mud huts until they were able to obtain lumber to build homes.

From Saratov all the way down the river to Sarepta flourished a series of little colonies, all bearing German names. The people lived in little cities and the farms were outside the city. Our forefathers did not lose any of their Teutonic nationality and did not become absorbed in the surrounding population.

They preserved their ways, customs, language, and ideas. They intermarried only with Germans. Their schools were taught in German and they did take the trouble to learn the Russian language. They became master farmers and, in time, the vast and raw wastelands of the Volga River became a fruitful region through their toil and efforts. Altogether, one hundred three German villages were founded in the central region along the Volga during that first four-year immigration period.

The colonists had to deal with many inherent dangers of the strange new land in addition to the barrenness, sickness and famine. Mongrel robber bands attacked the Volga villages from 1771 until late in the 1780s. Vast numbers of the population were obliterated in this manner and economic disaster befell them again. Setback after setback, however, did not alter their goal. By 1793, hard work and relentless determination enabled them to rebound and enjoy some economic prosperity. Their contentment with living on the land was the driving force that produced each successful village.

*(continued on page 6)*



## The Story of Why You are a German from Russia...

continued from page 5

### More Immigrants, New Colonies

As time passed, other groups of Germans were also drawn to the open Russian lands in search of religious freedom. In particular were the Mennonites. They emigrated from their native Germany in 1789. Two hundred twenty-eight families founded the Chorititza settlement in the Ukraine. This establishment encouraged other Mennonites so that by 1824 there were fifty-seven Mennonite villages in Southern Russia.

On May 24, 1794, Catherine established the City of Odessa in the western part of the Black Sea region, which she had just won from the Turks. Early in the century, her grandson Alexander I renewed her vigorous immigration policy and invited settlers from Germany to occupy the vacant land in this area. With Alexander's encouragement and also the pressure of the Napoleonic War, hundreds of German families decided to come. By 1810 there were twenty-eight populated German villages in the Odessa district and twenty-nine other villages further east in the Crimea.

Additional land was also obtained from the Russian War with Turkey. Alexander I's 1813 manifesto promised special privileges to foreigners who would settle in the new region. Some 1,500 German families from Poland answered this call and founded colonies in South Bessarabia in the next two years. Still other colonies were settled in the next few years in the South Caucasus.

During the first half of the 19th century, the German colonists were settled and feeling secure in their villages. Catherine's pledges had been specifically renewed in documents issued by Alexander I in 1804 and 1813. The Russian government recognized the colonist's expanding land needs and had awarded additional land grants on which they founded daughter colonies. Generally, the Russian Germans were

prosperous and contented in their villages.

### Expansion and Turbulent Years

Beginning in the 1860s there was a tremendous expansion of settlers into the new areas of Russia where the colonists fought for the rented land and founded hundreds of new villages. During this period, numerous settlements arose in the western provinces of Volhynia. They were founded by the new stream of immigrants from Germany.

By this time, there were signs of trouble ahead. This discontentment began under Alexander II's reign from 1855 to 1881, during which he took measures to deprive the colonists of some of their special privileges. This process became blatantly obvious under Alexander III's rough measures. It broke into open hostility under the last Czar's extreme measures of economic discrimination. Those colonists who openly defied the orders befell confiscation of their property and deportation.

During the following turbulent years of strife and discord, the German colonists maintained their eternal solidarity. Once again faced with possible immigration, they called upon their undying faith and placed their trust in the hand of the Lord.

In 1871, the Russians issued a decree that repealed the provisions of the colonists' codes regarding local government and abolishing their special status. The real blow to the colonists' security was in the proclamation of January 1, 1874, which changed the military service. This law established compulsory military service for all classes thus repealing the colonist's exempt privilege. With the realization they could no longer live in Russia in the manner they preferred, many colonists began to search for a new country and home.

Supposedly having been secure, once again our German people were abruptly thrown into turmoil and transition. They had begun to think of pick-

ing up, starting over again and enduring the agonies and hardships of pioneering once more if they wanted true freedom. There was great unrest.

### Immigration Yet Again

In 1862, President Lincoln had signed the Homestead Act, which allotted 160 free acres to any immigrant willing to become an American citizen. In 1872, Canada made her reciprocal bid for immigrants in the Dominion Land Act. Finally South America was also issuing documents and promises to induce settlement. In 1876, the Argentine President passed a law that provided for free land to all immigrants. Along with these official government proclamations, railroad propaganda encouraged many colonists to immigrate to America.

As a direct result of the military service law, about eighteen thousand Mennonites immigrated to the Americas in the 1870s. Seventy-five hundred of these Mennonites settled in Manitoba, Canada. The remainder primarily went to Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Minnesota.

The Volga villages on the Bergseite (the hilly side of the river) had also sent delegations to the new world. In 1873, such a group from Baltzer recommended immigration. Several hundred Protestant Volga German families followed their advice and immigrated to Nebraska and Kansas during the years 1874 and 1879. Many came to Lincoln, Nebraska, which eventually became the largest center of Protestant Volga German population in America.

The Catholic Volga Germans, too, were concerned about the new Russian laws. A delegation from the meadow side of the river (wiesenseite) resulted in the immigration of about two hundred Catholic families to the Kansas area between 1875 and 1878.

Many German colonists were attracted to South America in their search for a new home. In 1876, a delegation from Saratov investigated

*(continued on page 7)*



### The Story of Why You are a German from Russia...

continued from page 6

Brazil and found it favorable. In the next few years, they established an organization that sent some thirty transports, of all sizes, to the Cuiaba area of Brazil. Some of these colonists later went on to Argentina in search of even more favorable conditions.

In the United States, the growing sugar beet industry during the 1890s demanded a tremendous labor force and the railroads were the outlet to and from the fields. Mass migration really began in the 1870s. By 1873 Germans from the Odessa region had established settlements in Sutton, Nebraska and various towns in the Dakota Territory. Encouraged by the good reports, the Black Sea Germans continued to migrate to the Dakotas from 1883 through 1890.

This area soon professed the largest concentration of the Black Sea Germans in the new world.

\* \* \* \* \*

Our ancestors suffered from anti-German propoganda directed at their economic prosperity. This was particularly strong at the outbreak of World War I, and was accentuated during the October revolution of 1917 that established the Soviet regime.

This brief history is presented here to enlighten those who perhaps do not know "Why" we are called Germans

from Russia. Some of the data was extracted from the holding of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia International Headquarters in Lincoln, Nebraska.

\* \* \* \* \*

*[This article was originally printed in the Southern California Chapter's Fall 1994 and Mt. Diablo Chapter's October 1994 newsletters. It was written by a distant relative of Edith Riske, Southern California Chapter. Permission to use this article was obtained from Jim Weibert, Sacramento Valley Chapter.]* □

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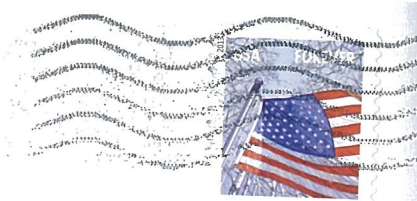
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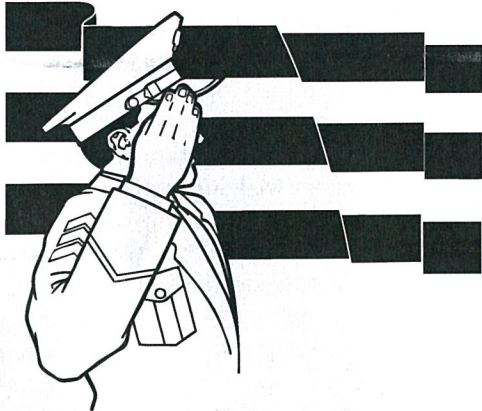
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### Memorial Day 2014

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## 2014 Calendar of Events

May 13	Coffee Club	9:00 a.m.	Stauffer's	48th & Hwy. 2
May 19	Board Meeting	7:00 p.m.		631 D Street
June 10	Coffee Club	9:00 a.m.	Stauffer's	48th & Hwy. 2
June 16	Board Meeting	7:00 p.m.		631 D Street
June 29	General Membership Meeting	2:00 p.m. (refreshments following)		631 D Street
July 7-13	International Convention			Lincoln, NE
July 21	Board Meeting	7:00 p.m.		631 D Street
August 12	Coffee Club	9:00 a.m.	Stauffer's	48th & Hwy. 2
August 18	Board Meeting	7:00 p.m.		631 D Street
September 9	Coffee Club	9:00 a.m.	Stauffer's	48th & Hwy. 2
September 15	Board Meeting	7:00 p.m.		631 D Street
September 21	General Membership Meeting & Picnic	4:00 p.m.		Antelope Park Shelter
October 14	Coffee Club	9:00 a.m.	Stauffer's	48th & Hwy. 2
October 20	Board Meeting	7:00 p.m.		631 D Street
November 7	Broda Dinner	5:00-7:00 p.m.	WSI Hall	1430 N. 10th St.
November 11	Coffee Club	9:00 a.m.	Stauffer's	48th & Hwy. 2
November 17	Board Meeting	7:00 p.m.		631 D Street
December 9	Coffee Club	9:00 a.m.	Stauffer's	48th & Hwy. 2
December 15	Board Members' Christmas Dinner			location to be determined
Jan. 11, 2015	Annual Membership & Business Meeting (Fellowship Hall, Potluck Dinner & Election of Officers)	1:00 p.m.		Immanuel Church 10th & Charleston